

**UJ Sociology, Anthropology & Development Studies**

# **W E D N E S D A Y S E M I N A R**

Hosted by the Department of Sociology and the  
Department of Anthropology & Development Studies



**Meeting no 1/2010**

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in the UJ Council Chamber, Kingsway campus**

## **What are the gaps in our thinking about development?**

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Chair: Technology Innovation Agency

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## WHAT IS THE MISSING LINK IN OUR DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES?

### Introduction

It is a privilege to be invited to your university to share some ideas about our understanding of our society and the challenges it faces as well as the opportunities presented to us as we march into the future as a constitutional democracy. Sixteen years may sound like a long time, but for a society in transition it is but a short time. We have much to celebrate about the achievements of the last decade and a half. But we also need to have the self-confidence as a nation to talk about why the whole seems to be less than the sum of the parts in our performance as a society.

It is good to see that you have had a vibrant seminar program in your department over the last ten years - 250 seminars run up to middle of 2009 is quite an achievement. You have resisted the temptation of undervaluing the Humanities and Social Sciences. Too many young people imagine that prestige comes only from being in the natural sciences and commercial disciplines. Prof. Monica Wilson, one of the finest Anthropologists that South Africa was honored to call its citizen, reminds us that: *"....the study of society is a condition of existence for modern man (sic). If relationships are not understood, in some measure, the large society cannot operate. Economics, politics, sociology, anthropology are not luxuries today, but a condition of effective organization"* (Wilson, 1971:22).

South Africa needs to pay a lot more attention to the understanding of social relationships to enable it to operate better and harness the benefits of our legacy, learn the lessons of history to inform our present and to shape our future. In this talk I would like to focus on why I believe that Social Science is the missing link in our development approach as a changing society:

- The role of social scientists in generating the type of conversations that could lead to the level of understanding of the self, of relationships with fellow students and colleagues as well as relationships in the wider society.
- What impact has social science had on addressing the practical problem of how to combine political unity and freedom, common values and toleration in a society aspiring to unity in diversity in a post-apartheid society?
- To what extent is the contribution of social science significantly impacting monitoring and evaluation of our policy performance as a

society undergoing momentous changes in areas such as migration and international relations?

### **Understanding Social Relationships**

My experiences with the Dinokeng Scenarios process<sup>1</sup> over the 18 months 2008-2009 reminded me most vividly about the critically importance of creating safe open spaces for reasoned strategic conversations as South Africans. Here we were in mid-2008 as 35 South Africans anxious about the future of our country, yet struggling to find a common language to speak about our fears, joys, pains and hopes as a changing society. The colour divide, the political party divides, the sectoral divides, as well as ideological divides, made conversations difficult. We had first to move out of our comfort zones – physically (living in a tent camp in the bush), emotionally and intellectually in four workshops and facilitated conversations to begin to hear one another. We also had the benefit of “*Jungian synchronicity*”<sup>2</sup> to hold these workshops at Dinokeng, a place of rivers, where ideas flowed together like rivers to form a stronger stream.

Despite the commitments in our widely acclaimed Constitution that enjoins us to unity in diversity, we are not yet able to speak of ourselves unselfconsciously as South Africans. We remain locked into conversations of the deaf because we have yet to develop the capacity to listen to one another without downloading what we think is “the agenda” of the other. We struggle to speak to one another without finger pointing or fear of retribution should we say something that might upset those who have the power to make our lives difficult at the personal, professional, institutional and wider social levels. Levels of trust are low in most social interactions across our society.

We need to draw wisdom from a much wider set of sources than we tend to do, to help us understand ourselves as individuals, families, communities

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<sup>1</sup> An Old Mutual/Nedbank sponsored Scenarios mapping process 2008/09

<sup>2</sup> *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, C.G. Jung, Recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe, Fontana Press, London, 1995. Jung speaks of synchronicity as a phenomenon of coincidences that reflect some collective unconscious influences on visions, premonitions or decisions that are not necessarily understood at the time they occur.

and society. Anthropology has much to contribute to help us make sense of our experiences in relation to those of other societies. Professor Monica Wilson's observations in this regard could be of great value. First, that "*social change has often been a shy crablike movement*" (1971:1).<sup>3</sup> We have tended to be impatient for more rapid change despite the difficult starting point in our democracy. Second, South Africans have yet to come to terms with tensions between the cultural approach to communication, rituals and symbols, value systems that derive from small-scale society elements of our citizenry on one hand, and those from people who have adopted large-scale societal values, on the other.

Large-scale societies in contrast to small-scale ones accept and celebrate specialization, diversity and competition. Small-scale societies emphasize interconnectedness and interdependence of people across time and space: past, present and future generations. Increase in scale means increase in freedom of choice, but obligations to kin and family across generations can be constricting of those choices and limit the ability of individuals to compete with one another. Competition and merit based decisions are not uncomplicated in a society that undermined the ability of the majority of the population to compete effectively and be rewarded on merit. Apartheid unfortunately delegitimized merit in the eyes of many black South Africans through its affirmative action in favour of white people. Acknowledging these tensions is essential to enabling open conversations. Failure to understand these tensions often leads to a conversation of the deaf between black and white as well as between generations.

Antjie Krog, the author, poet and journalist confirms the risks of conversations of the deaf in her latest challenging book, Begging to be Black<sup>4</sup>. Antjie anchors her analysis on her experiences as an activist, a journalist at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as her study of the life and times of King Moshoeshoe, the founder of the Basotho nation. She reports on the comments of white people on the TRC asserting that there is something wrong with black people for being prepared to forgive even before forgiveness is asked. "*You see they are not like us; they can't even hate properly*" (2009:206). She concludes that white people were prepared for revenge from black people, but not forgiveness. The generosity that

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<sup>3</sup> Monica Wilson, Religion and the Transformation of Society: A Study of Social Change in Africa Cambridge University Press, UK, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Antjie Krog, Begging to be Black, Random House, SA, 2009.

informs the humanity (*ubuntu*) of black people in being willing to reconcile is seen as a sign of weakness by some white people.

Contrast the reported comments on the TRC by white people with Antjie Krog's report on what one of the Gugulethu Seven Mother's had to say about the imperatives of forgiveness: *"This thing called reconciliation ...if I am understanding it correctly ...if it means this perpetrator, this man who killed my son, Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back .....then I agree, then I support it all... ....We do not want to return to the evil that perpetrators committed to the nation. We want to demonstrate a humanness (ubuntu) towards them, so that (it) in turn may restore their own humanity"* (2009:210).

Antjie Krog draws on her own life experiences, the life and times of King Moshoeshoe and the TRC experiences to propose that *"the Western moral self is created in the self, but through conversations with the self; the African moral self is also created in the self, but through conversations with the community. The scary thing though is that if that community is distraught or brutalized (due to collective social pain), or if the self is disconnected from its community, it degenerates"* (2009:267).

We need to interrogate this proposition honestly in order that we may confront our prejudices and presumptions about one another as individuals, communities and society as a whole. Is there such a thing as "Western moral self"? If there is, how different is it from the "African moral sense"? Is there a singular African moral sense? How much of "the African moral sense" is ascribable to distinct African philosophical thought and how much is a reflection of small-scale society cultural facets?

Inequality and inequity in societies create social pain and shape the quality of social relationships. Psychologists have now been able to demonstrate that pain inflicted on the psyche is as devastating as physical pain, if not more so. Of all the assaults on the psyche humiliation seems to be the worst. Humans are wired for connectedness and interdependence within families, communities and societies. Any disruption of these relationships inflicts pain and leaves those marginalized vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty. Unacknowledged social pain makes our journeys of transformation difficult for both those in positions of authority and those lower in the hierarchy of our institutions.

Research over the last 30 years has thrown even more light on the subject of social pain. Measures of the level of discomfort in social relationships can be done by tracking the levels of blood pressure and heart rate readings during conversations as demonstrated by the work of James Lynch in the USA<sup>5</sup>. People who occupy a lower status to those whom they communicate with in the work place and general society show significant increases in levels of their blood pressures and heart rates with each encounter. In the USA these patterns have been linked to the higher morbidity and mortality rates amongst African-Americans who suffer disproportionately from high blood pressure and heart disease. Similar patterns are emerging amongst indigenous Africans in South Africa who have migrated from small scale societies in rural areas to towns where they occupy low status jobs, live in poverty and hold low societal positions.

What role do you see your department and University playing in advancing our self-understanding? How much field work is being done to speak directly to those involved in the unfolding drama of social change at all levels and to make the systematic observations that should form a basis for better understanding of our realities? What contribution can, and are you as a University making to open conversations about these complex issues of social pain and its implications for a society with a legacy such as ours? Are you helping your students and colleagues to confront the tensions and pains that often manifest as labeling or mistrust?

### **The Political Unity/Common Values Dilemma**

We have tended to underestimate the practical problem of translating the values set out in our National Constitution into political unity in action in day to day encounters. How do social scientists explain the rise in violence against women and children despite the Bill of Rights that entrenches gender equality and the rights of the child? How do we explain the brutal institutional (as in Home Affairs treatment of asylum applicants) and physical violence against foreign nationals that has largely gone unpunished despite South Africa being a signatory to the UN Conventions on the Rights of Migrants and their Families? How do we live in harmony in a country

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<sup>5</sup> James Lynch, The Language of the Heart: The Body's Response to Human Dialogue, Basic Books, NY, USA, 1985.



with divergent views on traditional customs that seem to contradict the values enshrined in our National Constitution?

Take gender based violence. According to the MRC in 2005, one in nine women reported cases of sexual assault. In addition the same report estimates that a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six hours. The 55,114 cases reported to the South African Police between 2004 and 2005 are seen as a gross understatement of the level of the problem. Media reports regularly remind us of the growing problems of domestic violence, abduction, abuse and murder of children as well as unspeakable violent rapes, including those in our prisons across the country.

Interviews with some of the victims and perpetrators indicate that there is a huge gap in understanding of what constitutes gender based violence. A young man who is now HIV positive and used to routinely abuse his sexual partners had this to say after counseling: *"If a woman says no, as a man, you think –especially if she is someone you've been in love with or somebody you've paid lobola (dowry) for – you think she is sleeping with someone else and you'll force yourself on her. I didn't even think of it as rape. To me it was the right thing to do – because she is mine' I have to sleep with her. Now I know that "no" is no and I do not have to question it because if she doesn't feel like it, she doesn't feel like it<sup>6</sup>."*

Such views are widespread as indicated by a 2004 national survey of boys and girls between 10 and 19 years of age. It was found that 58% of them did not view *"forced sex with someone you know"* as sexual violence. Another 30% of all respondents agreed that *"girls do not have a right to refuse sex with their boyfriend."* The idea of women belonging to men as partners and wives, which violates our human rights Constitutional principles, lies at the heart of the problem of gender based violence.

This ownership based relationship framework is justified on the basis of "tradition and custom" by men in many of the patriarchal cultures making up our diverse society: Afrikaners, Jewish people, Muslims and other Asian people, indigenous Africans and many others. The more vulnerable the men in such patriarchal communities, the more likely it is that the abuse of women and children would be widespread. Monica Wilson suggests that *"the stress on tradition is greatest when a remnant is standing against the*

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.alertnet.org/the news/newsdesk/IRI/031833bb059d7e7cca41e471bbe3c>

*tide of change, struggling to maintain what to them are sacred customs of the ancestors*"<sup>7</sup>. We need to interrogate this suggestion based on field work amongst ~~so~~<sup>the</sup> many cultures then, but how relevant is it today? Why are we not seeking ways to understand the irony of our transforming society where women and child abuse has reached such alarming levels? It is not surprising that our society has such a high (5.5m) HIV prevalence rate.

Sadly, many higher education institutions remain tolerant of sexual harassment and violence against women. How safe are women and other vulnerable students from abuse in our institutions of higher learning? How focused are our institutions on educating, challenging and supporting young people to think differently about gender relationships and not hark back to indefensible "traditions and customs"? Do orientation programs create spaces to talk about respect for the values of the Constitution and how are these incorporated in the lived reality of campus life? What policies and structures have you put in place to articulate and establish agreed frameworks for social relationships respectful of the unity in diversity principle? How do your curricula, teaching, research and other academic activities reflect the values we hold dear? What incentives and disincentives are in place to encourage your students, staff and other stakeholders to ensure that University of Johannesburg graduates, staff and other associates are known for their exemplary values and behaviours?

### **Social Science and Reflective Evidence-based Public Policy**

Our society is characterized by a growing gap between laudable public policies derived from our acclaimed Constitution and implementation that makes a difference in the daily lives of ordinary South Africans. The establishment of the Monitoring and Evaluation Ministry by the Zuma government signals recognition of this gap. What is the role of Social Science in addressing this gap?

Our nation continues to suffer from inadequate data especially related to issues that matter for the poorest and most vulnerable citizens. Statistics South Africa has yet to inspire confidence in the reliability of its analytic data and outputs. To what extent are academic institutions focusing their students and researchers on the importance of fieldwork, data collection and analysis? South Africa must rank amongst the richest societies in which to

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<sup>7</sup> Wilson, M, 1971, p32.



do empirical multi-disciplinary studies that should enable us to document and analyze our society in transition. We ought to be the place where experts are developed and nurtured <sup>about</sup> ~~about~~ the complexities of social change in diverse societies.

University of Johannesburg is in a unique position to be the place where everything about Johannesburg is documented, analyzed and reported on. How many people, of what age, class, gender and place of origin live in the inner city? What have been the most important trends in changes to settlement patterns over the last decades? What legacy of apartheid geography is being addressed by spatial development in the new South Africa with what impacts? I cannot imagine a more exciting research agenda.

Take the issue of migration that is a feature of an increasingly interconnected world. South Africa is a magnet for migrants from the rest of our continent by virtue of our economy being a third of the GDP of Africa. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. How are academic institutions engaging in this issue to ensure that South Africa is not branded as a xenophobic society, but one that leverages its Africanness to demonstrate Africa's capacity for success? Where are the facts and figures to show what benefits can be derived from a more progressive migration policy in a country with scarce skills shortages? What lessons can we learn from Canada, Australia and the USA who have built their economies on the talents of people from all over the world?

Antjie Krog quotes an academic giant, A.C. Jordan, in this regard: "<sup>it</sup> *is the specific task of the intellectual in a society to advocate for the stranger – to insist on responsibility for the stranger as constitutive of the collectivity itself.....To avoid the disasters of the past....the figure of the stranger ought to be continually reinvented*"<sup>8</sup> How have you risen to this challenge of being advocates for the stranger? Remember that we too were, and continue to be strangers in our sojourns in time and space. Strangers are not just the friends you do not know, but they are part of the collective that allow us to call ourselves human beings. How is this advocacy on behalf of the stranger reflected in what and how you teach?

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<sup>8</sup> Begging to be Black, pp185-186

### **Conclusion**

I remain convinced that ours is a country of enormous opportunities and possibilities. The question for each of us is what we as individuals and members of families and communities are, and intend to do to translate those opportunities into lived realities in our daily lives. Social scientists have a special task of helping us to understand ourselves as we navigate the complex changes our society is undergoing. You dare not fail.

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3/2/2010, UJ