SOCIAL RESEARCH IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

INAUGURAL LECTURE

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INTRODUCTION*

Quite frequently it is said of South Africa that it is a veritable dream laboratory for social research. It offers opportunities to study tribal and modern cultures, Eastern and Western cultural influences, problems of urbanisation, migration and change, and more than one clearly articulated nationalism. Obviously, it also represents a post-colonial society with marked economic and social inequalities, thereby offering a researcher challenging opportunities to investigate the phenomena of class, pluralism and racial oligarchy; studies which would be relevant to many other similar, if less-dramatic, situations elsewhere in the modern world.

These opportunities and challenges, which in the past have attracted a modest but steady stream of social scientists bent on research, appear to be attracting more and more interest in very recent times. It is significant that in one British university, for example, a separate Centre for Southern African Studies has been established, not only to stimulate research but also to offer post-graduate degrees on Southern Africa.

Despite the compelling, if often tragic research possibilities, no one should assume that a social scientist can trip lightly into any South African community and engage his or her research fancy with no other care than to obtain exciting results. Today, virtually no research can be conducted in a moral vacuum. Social research in South Africa is often strained by as much conflict and contradiction as the society itself, and this will become clear as I proceed.

Particularly in recent years, sociological research in the west has become the topic of vehemently critical analyses by sociologists themselves. A range of theoretical and methodological stances has emerged, each one of which is roundly attacked by, and vehemently defended against, some or other group of critics. Sociological theory has its *right wing*, its *old left wing*, its *new left wing*, its fence-sitters, and some would aver, its anarchists, dilettanti, escapists and covert fellow-travellers as well (not to mention its high priests, pimps and prostitutes)[1]. With such intensity and feeling are the verbal daggers wielded that it is often easier for one sociologist to communicate

* This lecture had to be slightly shortened in delivery.

with an engineer or a poet than with another sociologist. My impression is that these tensions within the discipline are already becoming and will increasingly become compounded by the tensions in our own arena of study — our society. This is simply because different theoretical positions in the discipline relate to different political positions vis-à-vis South Africa's major problems. This may be a disturbing statement for anyone who quite naturally expects a *science* to be *value free*, and it requires elaboration. I will touch on this point again in due course.

The political situation in South Africa produces many practical problems for researchers, particularly in sensitive areas of study. I do not propose to dwell on these difficulties since most of them are fairly obvious anyway, and can be summed up in just two words — partisanship and permits. Rather, I would like to consider some of the alternative research orientations in social science in South Africa, particularly as they apply to a university-based research institute, and then to discuss areas of research in South Africa in which the need for new insights is compelling, and where, to my mind, the methodological and theoretical challenges are particularly interesting.

USES AND ABUSES OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

In his preface to a book of readings entitled *The Relevance of Sociology*, Jack Douglas writes *The problems we face in the world today are increasingly* social *in their origins, and we can only solve them by reconstructing our social lives . . . The complexity of social problems in a technological and urbanised world makes the effective application of sociological knowledge to our social problems the crucial determinant of our society's future.*[2] If one allows the assumption that a sociologist need not *personally* apply his knowledge in practical affairs, few sociologists today would be in principled disagreement with the view of Douglas. Although many sociologists deliberately remain uninvolved in community conflicts or social problems (or claim to be uninvolved) few argue that sociology is a discipline to be pursued purely and simply *for its own sake*. There is, and always has been, a sensitivity to the major problems brought about by social conflicts, social change, social inequality or social deviance. My assessment of expectations within the discipline of sociology would be that while many sociologists would recommend a dispassionate, uninvolved personal orientation for the social scientist in an attempt to preserve scientific objectivity and to maintain a certain *scientific image*, most would expect the topics of social enquiry to be such as to provide society at large or groups in particular

with useful knowledge. Even though a major primary aim might be the establishment of scientific laws or generalisations in regard to social action, the expectation would be that such laws should ultimately be relevant to social policy in some way or another. Thus one can claim, *at the very least*, that the work of an Institute for Social Research should be attuned to, or sensitive to the major issues in the community or society in which it is located.

This is particularly true of research institutes as opposed to teaching departments. The primary institutional role of a lecturer is still that of teaching. A research institute, on the other hand, is accountable to the university, and indirectly to the community at large, in a different way. Having worked in our own Institute for Social Research for nearly ten years, I can say that I have detected myriad pressures, some subtle, others less subtle, for the Institute to justify its existence by producing *useful* work. Also, one notices when one looks at university institutes in the social sciences in Britain, Europe and America, that most of them are problem or issue orientated: international affairs, development studies, labour studies, urban studies, planning studies, etc. etc., are fairly typical foci of interest.

At the very least (I use the phrase again deliberately) I would agree that an Institute for Social Research should have an *applied* focus. As a matter of fact, I find, in practice, that we have little choice. Other than our one government funding agency, virtually all sponsors of research are interested only in applied studies. The community exerts a powerful influence as well. Each year scores of enquiries are received from business executives, churchmen, missionaries, service organisations, and trade unions, usually involving requests for facts and figures, or advice on how to conduct simple research, or in order to commission research itself. In all humility, I can say that our Institute for Social Research, in this sense, is one very active public relations arm of the University.

However, along with many other sociologists all over the world, I am deeply troubled in many instances that some of the types of *relevance* the more influential groups in the community encourage can add up to, at best, a massive irrelevance to the real problems in our society, and at worst, a type of complicity in perpetuating these problems. My question, then, is: are we relevant enough, and in the right ways?

In recent years, more and more sociologists, not all of them young radicals either, have looked at the habits of their own discipline and delivered trenchant criticisms of the activities of mainstream sociologists. Much of their vituperation has been directed at theory (which is not of immediate concern here) but a great deal has been aimed at

habits of research. Early on, C. Wright Mills set the tone when he described the American empirical tradition in sociology as *miscellaneous studies of academic leftovers* . . . (resulting in) *unrelated and often insignificant facts of milieu.*[3] This state of affairs had arisen partly because many sociologists experienced a dominating need to appear scientific, with the result that techniques, co-efficients, correlations and mathematical models had become more important than subject matter. Indeed, for some, the choice of socially important or relevant subject matter was considered unseemly for an objective, value-free scientist.

Gouldner, who has perceptively related trends in social science to the surrounding social and cultural milieu, holds that modern, western middle-class utilitarian culture tends to exert pressure on social science towards a practical, useful, theoryless empiricism, which in turn leaves a conceptual vacuum, ready to be filled by the common-sense concerns and practical interests of clients, sponsors and research funders.[4] It is precisely in this way that sociology has laid itself wide open to the accusation that it services established interests in the community. The great gulf between grand theory and rootless empiricism is what promoted Marshall to note that sociologists chose either *the way to the stars* or the *way to the sands.*[5]

Today, sociology as a part of academic life is so fully accepted that relatively fewer sociologists feel the need, figuratively, to don white coats and posture as *exact* scientists who would undertake any study for anyone as long as it afforded an opportunity to flex technical muscles. Also, the notion that sociologists can maintain a value-free position has been effectively challenged. After Gouldner had published his now famous essay *Anti Minotaur*,[6] the attacks on the claim of scientific objectivity *as a total stance*, became a tirade.

There is no doubt that a sociologist must strive hard for scientific objectivity in gathering data and interpreting it in terms of statistical standards (if appropriate) and in the light of a theoretical framework. However, the selection of problems for study and the application and expression of research findings need not and cannot be constrained by attempts at objectivity. In fact, more and more sociologists, to quote Jan Loubser, have *come to the conclusion that, whatever we do, values, like poverty, will always be with us and the sooner we admit it, the better* . . .[7] Work in the sociology of knowledge has shown us how frequently sociologists' own cultural and occupational background subtly and imperceptively shapes their definitions of the meanings or implications of social facts and social relationships. A sociologist cannot be completely objective since, to put it simply, he or she is involved in what is being studied and may share the same or

similar types of common-sense definitions of social situations as those of the people being studied. If the sociologist denies his own subjectivity in the situation in a pretence at value freedom, he leaves himself vulnerable to all manner of biases of which he will not be aware — he becomes a *victim* of a research situation infinitely more complex than that of the natural scientist whom he may wish to emulate.

Then what has the sociologist to do? Become openly partisan in commitment and run the risk of a loss of intellectual freedom and of backsliding into disguised polemics? Many sociologists today favour openly-acknowledged partisanship. Gouldner, however, suggests alternatives which I, for one, consider worthy of exploration. For Gouldner, one form of objectivity is what he terms *personal authenticity* — the cultivation of sufficient self-insight and integrity to be open to social facts which might contradict personal values and commitments. Another he terms *normative objectification*, which, briefly, entails adopting the stance of a judge and evaluating a social situation in terms of values which the sociologist makes explicit to himself and others. But these two prescriptions say nothing of the values themselves, and it is precisely the nature of the values which will enhance or demean the stature of the social scientist. Gouldner answers this by pleading for a commitment to humanitarian values which transcends factional loyalties and sectional partisanship. He says *Granted all standpoints are partisan; and, granted, no one escapes a partisan standpoint. But aren't some forms of partisanship more liberating than others? Isn't it the sociologists' job to look at human situations in ways enabling them to say things that are not ordinarily seen by the participants in them? . . . to make . . . a contibution the social sciences cannot and should not be impartial toward human suffering . . . At the same time, however, an empty-headed partisanship unable to transcend the immediacies of narrowly-conceived political commitment is simply one more form of market research. It is to* (human) *values, not to factions, that sociologists must give their most basic commitment.*[8]

Jan Loubser, in a recent address, pleaded for an essentially similar commitment to a code of human values.[9] Sociologists are very far from anything approaching agreement on a code of transcending values, but I firmly believe that not a small part of our collective energies and intellectual discourse should be directed at critically exploring our commitments with a view to aspiring beyond the political and ideological horizons of our societies and our times. This should, however, never lead to any disregard of the importance of the grass-roots community issues in which even the most transcendent values find their everyday references.

The orientation might be open to charges of sentimentality. It also

involves an approach akin to loving or at least inderstanding one's enemies; a prescription which has failed very dramatically in our social and political history. Yet, I fail to see how a social scientist can possibly understand or explain present-day South African society, for example, unless he or she combines a deep and committed feeling for the plight of the underdog *as well as* an understanding grasp of the collective interests, fears and anxieties of the overdogs. I do not believe that it is possible to understand a group by observing them through a curtain of hostility. As Gouldner, once again, says, we have to see that *men — superiors as well as subordinates — may be powerfully constrained by institutions, by history . . .* [10] Our necessary commitment (in my view) to the interests of the underprivileged in South Africa does not entitle us to degrade the humanity of the privileged or anyone else. If we do, our commitment to humanity is suspect. Also, our capacity to understand and explain — a large part of our calling as sociologists, in other words — will be crippled without our even being aware of it.

THE PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH INSTITUTES

In a research institute, even one within a university structure, the pressures towards shallow empiricism are very great. Organisations functioning in the community experience problems and needs for research data, many if not most of them mundane. Research can be useful in providing a patchwork of disparate solutions to unconnected problems. Financial needs, unfortunately, dictate that not all this type of research can be avoided. How else in our situation can funds be accumulated for more broadly relevant and worthwhile studies? However, no one respects odd job work in the long run, and our major task is to preserve our sense of an appropriate research calling despite the bread and butter problems. This can be achieved, particularly if our colleagues take every opportunity of criticising our research programme from year to year. This might be the greatest benefit of being situated in a university. If social science can help in preparing a route-map for communities, it is sad indeed that research institutes are compelled to patch the punctures of travellers who may be going in the wrong direction.

The picture is not altogether gloomy, however. That seasoned British sociologist, D. G. MacRae, tongue in cheek, but with more than a hint of seriousness, formulated several *laws* of social research. His observations, reflected in his first law, are that *the more a social investigation costs, the less valuable it will be.* He added the rider — *if the research is financed by a non-academic source, the pay off will be*

even less.[11] I needn't mention the *ceteris paribus* clauses, but seriously, here lies a part of the solution to the dilemma. Provided, but only provided, a research institute is adequately staffed and does not have to find money for the salaries of all research assistants, very worthwhile work can be undertaken on shoestring budgets.

Given the tendency to expect of research institutes the undertaking of very large multi-facetted semi or quasi official projects, MacRae's other laws are worth quoting. *The second law is that the more eminent and the more public the committee approving, supervising or conducting the research, the less valuable it will be. The third law is that the more expert and detailed the preplanning of research, the less valuable it will be. A committee of methodological or statistical experts is usually fatal. The fourth law . . . is that piloted research and research with a steering committee, is particularly banal.* He adds, in the context of Britain *a maritime nation loves such metaphors, and it is of course essential that, properly piloted and steered, the Queen Elizabeth II should arrive at Southampton. It is, however, worth remembering that Southampton has already been discovered.* MacRae blames the sponsors who expect reports that *will trouble no one's mind, likely to be conformable either to policy or to fashionable expectation . . . Massive instrumentation, plus a record of dullness is recognised as good in itself.* He quotes the currently fashionable research on the effects of television. *The researchers, more and more massively, go on. The instrumentation becomes heavier and like some extinct dinosaur creeps more and more heavily under the weight of its armour . . . more and more troops are committed to futile battle — only this is a battle where there are no wounds* (or victories) *only medals.*[12]

Obviously there are exceptions to these observations and MacRae realizes this. I also accept that research institutes are the proper places for larger projects, which sometimes are necessary. But his warnings should caution us to avoid scrupulously any research programme and other arrangements which do not allow individual scholars a great deal of freedom and resources to pursue their own individual research interests by their own lights. I have noticed that the most productive and exciting institutes are those which generously accommodate the enthusiasm of individual academics. Administrative research and committee projects should be kept to a minimum. We must also be firm in insisting that sponsored projects allow full scope for individual creativity and for pursuing those inspired hunches which have contributed so much to the advancement of our insight.

My views should not be seen as excluding all applied projects for sponsors in the community. Very often sponsors require research

which is both relevant to wider positive community concerns and which is intellectually demanding. Where this happy coincidence of interests occurs, as it often has, a research institute can only gain by grasping the opportunity. Provided the staff in a research institute have a clear conception of their goals and broader commitments, there are many ways in which the short term interests of many sponsors can be served without any injury to the integrity of the scholars involved. Each project should be assessed on its merits. A decision to undertake no sponsored research, in a less dramatic sense, can mean a loss of freedom in the same way that a decision to undertake only sponsored research would.

WHERE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES LIE

By now it should have become apparent that I am unashamedly in favour of a policy of *relevance* in the work of a social research institute. This can also be seen as a policy of broad informal accountability, in a sense; accountability not to any group of sponsors, interest group or institution, but to a wider *community of concern* in our society. This community is largely academic, but certainly not exclusively so. It is most definitely not any single political group or ideological faction. It is black and white, Afrikaans and English-speaking. It has no corporate identity or group coherence but is simply an aggregate of people whose ideals for a better society are matched by notions of the importance of the closest possible approximations of truth.

But now I must be more concrete about the nature of the research which I consider to be important. This is difficult in the extreme, because no clear boundaries can be drawn around what is important and significant and what is not. It is easier to exclude than to include. I would have few qualms about condemning outright a study of ways to sell soap powders to subsistence peasants, for example. (Of course, now and again a project has one guessing: I once read of an elaborate content analysis of the drawings on an extensive sample of toilet walls in Britain — this type of thing might just be very revealing or a monumental waste of time). My own list of what I consider to be important areas of research undoubtedly reflects personal preferences, and should be seen as such.

To my mind, in South Africa, research (or much more research than has been conducted hitherto) is required in the following areas, some of which have relevance to South Africa's own problems, others to issues of wider significance: (There is no order of priority in my listing)

(i) *Development studies* in depressed or underdeveloped areas, and for sociology in particular, research into problems of *community organisation and development at the local level.*

Virtually on our doorstep in Natal we have the economically depressed, poverty-ridden and to some extent socially atomised areas which constitute the African Reserves or *Bantustan* of KwaZulu. Whether one is in agreement with the policy of Separate Development or not, there is a compelling responsibility on humanitarian grounds, to assist in the development of these depressed areas, and social scientists can play an important role.

However, this area of research is one in which the social scientist finds himself in a situation of considerable ideological tension. The ideological and value conflicts are such that it is probably beyond the human capacity of the researcher to be completely objective; and attempts at political value freedom will be misunderstood in any case. Therefore, if the researcher is committed to the goal of human development, he must acknowledge the ideological implications of his goals in the present political context. The ideological strain derives, inter alia, from markedly contradictory assumptions in regard to African reserves held by social scientists of differing ideological persuasion.

One sincerely held view of these reserves is that their relative underdevelopment derives mainly from the lower degree of technological sophistication in the traditional culture of the indigenous peoples. This view guides the social scientist, inter alia, towards a critical evaluation of traditional peasant economic attitudes, farming practices, land tenure, social organisation, and the difficulties of attracting investment into areas of poor social and economic infrastructure. An opposing view is that the relative underdevelopment of these areas is not unconnected with the advanced development of areas of white control in Southern Africa and that it cannot be seen in isolation from racial inequality in the country as a whole. This view tends to guide the social scientist towards a critical evaluation of the quality and extent of land demarcated for African ownership from colonial times to the present, the (consequent) overcrowding and over-grazing on this land, the relative exploitation of migrant labour from these areas (which are seen as *reservoirs* of cheap labour for the white controlled economy) the relative underexpenditure by the central and provincial governments on economic and social infrastructure in the reserves and the function of such areas in providing a justification for the exclusion

of Africans from rights and privileges in white-controlled areas.

My own conclusion is that the second view is closest to what is fundamental and important in the situation. Perhaps the greatest danger in helping to encourage the rather limited economic development possible in the reserves is that one thereby assists in propping up an unjust system with little ultimate viability. Yet there is a danger in the second view-point inasmuch as it can predispose social scientists to spurn research aimed at facilitating more or less any sort of development at the local level in the reserves.

Furthermore, one cannot lightly ignore the pressing present needs of the African populations for even minor improvements in their daily circumstances. In considering the possibilities of local development the negative implications of some traditional tribal practices and values are important.

How does one resolve this dilemma, which seems in a sense, to boil down to a choice between limited reform in a context of white paternalism on the one hand and a type of neglect on behalf of ultimate black *liberation* on the other? My own view is that a social scientist can attempt to formulate an approach which is both a compromise and a transcendance of the dilemma. Research connected with local development in such areas can be an attempt at combining the aim of short-term ameliorative reform and the longer-term goal of facilitating community coherence and organisation for *self-help* in the pursuance of those economic, social and political goals which the African community, on reflection, might consider to be most important. Whether my conclusions are right or wrong can be debated, but these thoughts serve to illustrate the value strain in which research in this area has to be conducted.

(ii) *Studies of the social and human implications of urban growth, city size and the impact of technology in the cities.*

In this area of research I consider that the social scientist has a particular responsibility. This derives from the fact that communities can become so accustomed to circumscribed living, pollution, boredom, and stereotyped patterns of leisure that they lose standards of comparison. The example of one British town has been quoted where consultants investigating the effects of a huge overhead freeway found that residents virtually under it hardly noticed the effects, so blighted, noisy and congested were the surroundings in other respects. One resident actually welcomed the freeway because the lights at night enabled him to garden. The same commentator quotes the experience of George

Orwell investigating the appalling conditions under which the unemployed in Wigan lived in the 1930's. When Orwell asked one resident how long things had been so bad, the reply was *since the newspapers in London told us.*[13] The task, therefore, is not simply more stereotyped mechanical research, but rather an active reflective exploration with people in urban communities of the effects and quality of the environment.

(iii) The third area on my list is difficult to describe briefly. It is an area which has hardly been touched in social research. Yet it might eclipse many established areas of research in importance. I would express it as *studies of the perceptions and evaluations by people of the quality of their everyday lives*, in material, non-material and subjective spheres of existence. Of particular importance, to my mind, would be the ways in which institutions, social relations, occupational roles and, particularly, the almost universal phenomenon of social stratification affect morale and the sense of personal adequacy among individuals and groups. I have conducted a brief and to my mind inadequate study of the impact of social inequality on self-confidence among whites in Durban.[14] The results, which suggest a hierarchy of feelings of personal worth corresponding to socio-economic position, have reinforced my conviction about the need for much more research in this area.

(iv) The fourth area for research on my list relates to South Africa's major social and political problems. It can be variously labelled race relations, ethnic pluralism, structured social inequality or the study of institutional racism. Whatever one calls it, it has a vital importance for the future of South Africa and, as we all know, insights gained here are perhaps increasingly relevant in many other places in the world as well.

Although I would enjoy listing my choice of further areas of importance for social research, I think that the four areas I have outlined give some idea of my own priorities. In view of limitations of time, I would like to turn finally, to a closer consideration of only one of the four areas — South Africa's divided society.

RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA'S DIVIDED SOCIETY

My impressions abroad have been that South Africa has acquired a symbolic significance for widely-varying groups of people; a significance which is additional to the unfortunate realities of our situation. It has often seemed to me that the continued existence of blatant, massive, thoroughly institutionalised and legalised inequality

in our country has come to be a symbol of what people in minority groups fear in their own societies and communities. Our problems are serious enough as it is, and with the added nuances of this, shall we say, displaced significance, it is perhaps understandable that some reactions border on the hysterical. Whether South Africa fully deserves it or not, and in very many ways I think it does, our society has come to be viewed as a benchmark of injustice. These reactions may even be more prevalent in the Western liberal arts academic community than among laymen. I can confidently predict that the appearance of analyses, accounts, and polemical writings of and about South Africa will increase over the next few years. Such writings will influence policy on South Africa for good and for bad. (The British *Study Project on External Investment in South Africa* is currently preparing for a large international conference precisely in order to influence policy as regards investment and economic relations). External policy, increasingly, is becoming a factor in change in South Africa. We need only think of the new sports policy as one small example.

One clear characteristic of much overseas writing on South Africa is that it lacks sufficient empirical information. Historical data is fairly readily available, but information on present trends is rather tenuous, superficial and impressionistic. Since social scientists in South Africa are *on the spot*, it is perhaps part of our responsibility to see that those undertaking analyses of South Africa have adequate facts available; that such work can be grounded in reality. Over and above this responsibility, however, is the responsibility, as I see it, to expand our own society's political and social self-insight. The mass media, politicians, academics, private organisations, the business community, the churches and a host of other groups in South Africa are to some degree or another self-consciously grappling with the problem of change. The wisdom of their efforts depends to a great extent on adequate research. Academic researchers should not be found wanting. I see two distinct but intertwined needs in this regard.

A. Diagnosing the Situation

While each of us might be convinced that he or she knows exactly why our society is the way it is, the fact that there are very fundamental disagreements between different schools of thought indicates a need for a great deal more historical and current factual evidence. Not that all people are likely to be persuaded by such evidence; the relationship between personal political beliefs, cultural background and theories about our society is a fascinating field of study in itself. Nevertheless, more evidence and reasoned argument might bring

about greater effective co-operation between groups who share a desire for change.

Without mentioning names or going into the finer nuances, one can distinguish four broad conceptions of our society held by different groups in the intelligentsia (not necessarily academics), each with different *implications* for change. Firstly there is the conception of South Africa as a single oligarchical system with ethnic and cultural segments hierarchically ordered in terms of material privilege, social status, and political power. What is important here is the notion of a single system with a powerful dynamic of inequality and differentiation, deriving mainly from economic conflict and competition, and from cultural and racial antagonisms.

Secondly, there is a view of South Africa which emphasises the notion of different social systems (nations or societies) brought into various forms of contact by the colonial process. In terms of this view the inequality in the society as a whole is an outgrowth mainly of the technological and cultural differentiation which existed prior to various contacts during the colonial past. Black people are often still seen as belonging to less-developed cultures.

Thirdly, one can distinguish a view which is in essence fairly similar to the second view, particularly as regards the origins of the system, but where the emphasis is placed on an absence of a shared value-system in the society and a lack of elements integrating different population groups. As Cilliers describes it, it is a state without a nation.[15] Loosely following arguments similar to those of de Schweinitz,[16] the lack of democratic rights is ascribed to the functional impossibility of shared decision-making in an absence of broad value-consensus or agreement between ethnic groups on common social and economic goals. The second and third viewpoints both tend to emphasise the importance of conflicting or at least incompatible group identities in our society.

Lastly, we find views of the situation which tend to be more psychologically orientated, in which the nature of the society is seen as the outcome of ethnocentricism, prejudice, racialism, stereotyping of groups, and other social psychological forces which create hostility, social distance between groups and patterns of discrimination. Among some people there is the assumption that these traits are particularly prevalent among Afrikaners, and consequently most blame is heaped upon them.

I have attempted a simple broad classification of viewpoints, both semi-popular and academic, and obviously my four categories conceal a great deal of internal variety. My own view is that the first model contributes most to our understanding. However, I concede

that there may be elements in all four basic viewpoints which can contribute to a total understanding and which research can assist in isolating. My own feeling is that at present, analyses of the South African situation are somewhat overconceptualised and more than somewhat under-researched.

In this connection my own views are similar to those of Professor Marshall when he quotes Burgess as noting that *many . . . social scientists appear to consider a conceptual analysis of society as if it were a substitute for research.* Marshall himself adds that the over-elaboration of concepts may lead into a bog from which there is no easy escape.[17] I am not in any sense minimising the absolute importance of a conceptual or theoretical framework; I am merely arguing against the extreme position in which a social scientist, in Marshall's terms again, finds it *easier to move the concept slowly towards reality by building into it more and more qualifications . . . than to test its usefulness by genuine empirical research* or finds it *easier to use facts for illustration than for demonstration.* Precisely this is characteristic of far too much writing on South Africa.

More historical research is needed, but we also require much more evidence on the nature of the operational definitions of their various social identities and social realities of ordinary men and women in all groups. John Rex warns us that attitudes and sentiments which might originate as moral justifications or rationalisations of, say, an underlying economic conflict, can come to acquire an independent causal significance of their own.[18] Therefore, history cannot tell us all, and we should not in a cavalier spirit erect conceptualisations of society which are significantly at variance with the implication of popular conceptions and common-sense definitions of groups involved in the social action. Humility is an excellent quality in a scholar and empirical research is one way of exercising humility.

Furthermore, as I have already indicated, some of the different theoretical conceptualisations are closely related to political views and notions of appropriate policy. The people with different viewpoints, whether black or white, are antagonists in the political arena, even though there seems to be a widespread desire for significant change among the *intelligentsia* in all groups, whether they be radicals, pragmatists, pluralists, separationists, or liberals. Deep commitments to these positions goes along with a resistance to the assumptions and arguments of the opposing camps. My experience, however, is that empirical information, provided it is not shallow and partial in content, has greater persuasive impact than argumentation. I might be optimistic, but I believe that honest research of the right sort can play some small part in encouraging the long-anticipated

emergence of broad cooperation between *verligtes**, black and white, English and Afrikaans-speaking.

B. Assumptions Regarding Change

Just as there are different assumptions about the nature of our society, there are widely-varying basic views regarding the most appropriate approaches for improving the situation. Time allows me to mention only two examples of broad conceptual approaches, and the possible relevance of research for each.

Firstly, there is what I term the *protest* orientation, which appears to incorporate the assumption that the hearts and minds (attitudes) of whites will be moved by exhortation or moral condemnation. Very often one also finds this combined with the assumption that the consequences of policies or collective behaviour on subordinate groups, i.e. the black people, reflect exactly the way the whites are consciously motivated — the notion that since some policies have a destructive effect, those responsible for the policies (i.e. white voters or leaders) must be motivated in evil ways. Since all men, underdogs and overdogs, are powerfully constrained by institutions, and men act in terms of interests rather than planned consequences, these assumptions are not necessarily true. Research which can faithfully depict the flavour and intent of attitudes, sentiments and motivations in our society might convince some people that they often accuse or condemn others for sins which the latter did not necessarily intend — the consequence being a complete breakdown in communication. The conclusion of the American social scientists, Lipset and Raab with reference to extremist right-wing movements in the United States might be apposite: (right-wing extremist movements) *are not composed of evil-structured types called extremists, but of ordinary people caught in certain kinds of stress.*[19]

I would hypothesise that because of popular myths and perceptions, significant proportions of whites in South Africa are *survival* rather than *domination* orientated, even though domination is an inevitable consequence. Since this has such importance in regard to the prospects of changing everyday attitudes, the significance of empirical explorations of political sentiments at this level cannot be underestimated.

Another important viewpoint is one which is implicit, for example, in a paper which seems to have aroused considerable interest both here and in Britain, and which has definitely had an important in-

* *verligte* — topical Afrikaans word for an enlightened, progressive individual.

fluence on the thinking of British social scientists. I refer to the article of the Oxford scholar, Frederick Johnstone, entitled *White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today*.[20] The thesis expounded in the paper, all too briefly, is that because the relations between industrial development, apartheid (as applied in practice as opposed to its theory) and the *core structure of white supremacy* are essentially collaborative, an underlying coincidence of interests exists between capitalism and the major white political establishment. Manifestations of a conflict of interest between the two are superficial and marginal to the maintenance of white supremacy. The conclusion which emerges is that given the fact that pragmatic but circumscribed concessions in regard to the availability of black labour have become a permanent feature of policies, economic development constantly reinforces white supremacy and that government policies mediate in the process. In drawing this conclusion Johnstone refutes *conventional wisdom* which would have it that economic growth will lead to an amelioration of inequality and a weakening of the structure of white domination. The viewpoint in regard to change which this implies, and which is widely supported is that evolutionary improvements in our situation are unlikely, and that any significant change will be that which radically redistributes economic and political power. It also implies that encouragement of development or investment in South Africa achieves little other than strengthening white supremacy.

I accept the basic theoretical views in which this analysis is grounded, partly because of the fact that they alert one to interactions of interests which are not obvious and which are very often obscured by non-relevant or superficial trends in the social and cultural interaction in a community. However, Johnstone's conclusions, the importance and significant implications of which no one can deny, are not adequately supported by empirical evidence. In many ways it is an *ex post facto* analysis: since X has been the outcome of process Y in the past, X will continue to be the outcome in the future. This is not necessarily true, since all manner of intervening variables might change. It is an analysis which is content to infer proof of *underlying* motives and interests from (past) economic and political consequences, instead of regarding such inferences as hypotheses for empirical verification. The analysis is also oversimple since it assumes certain major variables to be *inactive* whereas in the passage of time they might be stimulated, inter alia, by the very process of economic growth, to intervene in the determination of social consequences. Here one thinks particularly of changes in the orientations of blacks and the emergence of new interests among whites; for example the

increasing importance for white businessmen of future affluence and mass-consumption by blacks.

It is precisely in vitally important areas such as the field of study which I have just outlined that social scientists in South Africa, in my view, have a key role in providing the empirical evidence which will discourage over-simplification in secondary analyses of our society.

IN CONCLUSION

The emphasis I have placed on relevance in sociology and my choice of examples of what I consider to be priority research in connection with South Africa's problems might have suggested to you that my overwhelming concerns are in the fields of action research and policy studies only. However, part of my interest in the examples of research which I have suggested is due to the theoretical attraction which such studies hold. Here again I can only fleetingly suggest some of these theoretical interests.

South African society and the type of study I have discussed offer admirable scope for the further exploration of processes of status and cultural group identification. While economic interests are vitally important in understanding South African society, cultural group identification appears to have an independent significance. We have found, for example, that an important influential minority of white Afrikaners in Durban have as little interest in white domination and are almost as unprejudiced as the English-speaking liberals, yet they cling fiercely to notions of race separation and cultural autonomy for its own sake.[21]

More basically, one of the greatest methodological challenges in this regard is to attempt to untwine any basic identity-group centred dispositions of men which might exist from their more highly articulated nationalist or other group-linked ideologies, and from their material and political interests. History and the development and interplay of social institutions, economic interests and culture might very well define the social content of group identities and the thrust of group goals, but I consider that lurking behind the powerful overlays of history and culture may be certain more basic predispositions. The advance of sociology as a discipline able to offer stable cross-cultural and inter-temporal generalisations could be crucially aided by enquiry at this level. I must confess that I, unlike many fellow sociologists, have not been able to reject, for all social phenomena at any rate, W. G. Runciman's recent assertions that sociological generalisations are ultimately grounded in a type of social psychology.[22]

What I have said about the possibility of *basic predispositions* does not mean that I generally hold the theoretical view that the nature of man should be understood in terms of inchoate, unreflective and involuntary need dispositions at a psychological level. Although I cannot elaborate here, briefly, I would hypothesise that certain typical consequences of self-awareness and concepts of identity in men might provide near-universal encouragement of certain (but only certain) needs relating to basic aspects of prestige and group-identification. More generally, however, I consider that we cannot overlook the fact that the massive results of social structure are recreated day by day by mundane acts and sentiments of ordinary people. Our understanding of social *order*, social *structure*, and social change can only be enriched and deepened if it is firmly grounded in the primary realities of everyday life.

In somewhat similar vein, studies in the field of race relations in South Africa afford, to my mind, a valuable opportunity of exploring the way in which social and personality factors combine in the shaping of social attitudes. Percy Cohen, the British theorist, has hypothesised that certain social attitudes may be *malleable*, that is easily shaped by influences emanating from the regularities of the social environment. Since these attitudes among actors in a social situation would be little more than a reflection of social values and action patterns in that social situation, they need not warrant particular study by sociologists. Other attitudes, he posits, may be less *malleable* and will as it were, resist the social environment. He makes specific mention of those attitudes which are influenced by personality and meanings acquired in the early family environment, and attitudes which, to use his terms, *are linked with powerful 'primordial' effects and motivations*[23] — or to put it plainly, gut-level fears and anxieties. Such attitudes, he avers, warrant independent study, and, in my view, should be considered in relation to popular racial ideologies, among other things.

My tendency to flirt with what might be seen as social psychology can be a hazardous undertaking in theoretical terms. However, most of the time I feel strongly urged to hold theoretical sociological abstractions in focus only as long as I feel necessary (which may not be long enough) so that I can hasten back to a level where, to paraphrase the sociologist George Homans, I can bring live men and women back in. With that confession I thank you for your patience.
13th June, 1973.

NOTES

[1] For the best recent exposition of 'stances' in sociology see Alvin W. Gouldner *The Coming Crisis in Western Sociology*, London, Heinemann, 1970.

[2] Jack D. Douglas (Ed.): *The Relevance of Sociology*, New York, Appleton Century Crofts, 1970. Preface vii.

[3] C. W. Mills: *The Sociological Imagination*, London Oxford University Press, 1959.

[4] Gouldner, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

[5] T. H. Marshall: *Sociology at the Crossroads and Other Essays*, London, Heinemann, 1963, p. 14.

[6] Alvin W. Gouldner: 'Anti Minotaur: The Myth of a Value Free Sociology' in Douglas (Ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 64-84.

[7] Jan J. Loubser: 'The Values Problem and the Role of the Sociologist in Society: Towards a Humanistic Sociology'. Address given as guest speaker at the 3rd Congress of the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa, Lourenco Marques, July, 1972, p. 5.

[8] Alvin W. Gouldner: 'The Sociologist as Partisan: Sociology and the Welfare State' in Douglas (Ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 112-148.

[9] Loubser, *op. cit.*

[10] Gouldner, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[11] D. G. MacRae: 'Stand: Laws of Research', *New Society*, 10.2.1972, p. 297.

[12] *Ibid* — Words in parenthesis my own.

[13] Peter Hall: 'A Time and Place', *New Society*, 15.6.1972, p. 574, p. 595.

[14] L. Schlemmer: 'Social Status, Perceptions of Personal Adequacy and Morale' *Sociology Southern Africa*, Durban, Association for Sociology in Southern Africa, 1973, pp. 157-188

[15] S. P. Cilliers: 'A Sociological Perspective on the South African Situation'. Paper read at a Public Meeting of the Institute of Citizenship, Cape Town, April 1st, 1971.

[16] Karl de Schweinitz (Jnr): *Industrialisation and Democracy*, London, Collier-MacMillan, 1964.

[17] Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[18] John Rex: *Race Relations in Sociological Theory*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970.

[19] S. M. Lipset and E. Raab: *The Politics of Unreason*, London, Heinemann, 1970.

[20] Frederick A. Johnstone: 'White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today', *African Affairs*, Vol. 69, 1970.

[21] L. Schlemmer: *Privilege, Prejudice and Parties*, Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1974.

[22] W. G. Runciman: *Sociology in its Place, and Other Essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1970, Chapter I.

[23] Percy S. Cohen: 'Social Attitudes and Sociological Enquiry' *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 17, 1966.