

Public sociology: South African dilemmas in a global context¹

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Thirteen years ago I returned to South Africa at the invitation of Blade Nzimande to address what was then ASSA – the Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa. Much had changed since my previous sojourn to South Africa in 1968. It was then 1990, Nelson Mandela had just been released from Robben Island and the ANC had been unbanned. My two teachers, Harold Wolpe and Jack Simons, both prominent intellectuals of the liberation movement, had just returned to South Africa. I, at least, had benefited from their exile but they had been sorely missed in South Africa. At Wits a talk by the mythical Harold, renowned among other matters for his daring escape from jail, was advertised as: “Harold Wolpe – Live.” While I was in South Africa, that July, I also witnessed the (re)launch of the South African Communist Party to a tumultuous crowd in Soweto. Notwithstanding escalating violence in the townships and civil war in Natal, the winter of 1990 was surely one of the more optimistic moments in South African history.

The optimism was reflected in the 1990 ASSA conference itself. Held at Stellenbosch, it was not huge but it was active. I was struck by the engagement of sociology, much of it Marxist, with the issues of the day – the vibrant labor movement, the expansion of civic associations, violence in the township, the civil war in Natal, poverty, health and education. Everywhere there were sociologists acting as organic intellectuals of the home-grown liberation movement. How different South African sociology was from the hyper-professionalized American sociology!

Between liberation sociology and market research

Much has happened in the last 13 years. The negotiated transition from apartheid led to the first democratic elections in 1994, the climax of a century of struggle. Nelson Mandela became the first President of South Africa, and then stepped down to make way for Thabo Mbeki. From secretary of ASSA Blade Nzimande became General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, while Doug Hindson, President of ASSA in 1990, now runs a consulting company. Sociologists have made their way into the world of politics and

1. Address to the South African Sociological Association, June 29th. 2003. This paper would not have been possible were it not for ongoing dialogue with Eddie Webster, both about the changing face of South African sociology and the peculiarities of American sociology. My direct experience of South African sociology has been largely based on my participation in the SWOP unit at Wits and more recently with Peter Alexander and his team of global ethnographers at Rand Afrikaans University.

business. The alliance of SACP, Cosatu and ANC has held, but the promise of a socialist South Africa has been shelved. Instead of nationalization and planning, privatization and markets rule the roost. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) gave way to Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), with its embrace of global markets. The neoliberal trajectory of South Africa over the last decade is familiar.

In an eerie echo of the times, my teachers – Jack Simons and Harold Wolpe, both stalwart socialists – died within six months of each other: Jack in July 1995 at the age of 88 and Harold in January 1996 at the age of 70. With them also died a particular type of sociology, what I will call a *liberation sociology*.¹ Driven or escaping into exile, the one in 1965 and the other in 1963, they became part of the intellectual wing of the liberation movement. From his academic post at the University of Essex, Harold Wolpe became a leader of South African Marxism in exile, placing class struggle and racial dynamics within their specific historical and structural context. His theoretical work was always carried on in close connection to the goals of the liberation movement, something he continued to do when he returned to South Africa to head the Education Policy Unit at the University of Western Cape. He departed, deep in critical research on the place of higher education in the new South Africa.

Jack Simons was Harold's senior by 18 years. He was a long time member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of South Africa, for which he received repeated banning orders. Together with veteran trade unionist and communist, Ray Simons, he wrote *Class and Color in South Africa 1850-1950* – a classic history of South Africa from the standpoint of its black and white working class. It was written while Jack and Ray were in exile, first in Manchester then in Zambia. After teaching at the University of Zambia until 1975, Jack took off at the tender age of 68 for the camps in Angola where he taught Marxism to the young recruits of Umkhonto weSizwe, the armed wing of the ANC. This was, indeed, liberation sociology of a special kind. For both Harold Wolpe and Jack Simons the liberation movement dominated their lives, infusing their sociology with originality and urgency. But this uncompromising engagement, they both insisted, called for a critical distance.² Although the struggles against apartheid are very different from building a just and egalitarian post-apartheid South Africa, both intellectual warriors have much to teach us in the way of combining ruthless critique with unquestioned loyalty to a cause. Their critical engagement is still an inspiration for what sociology might be.

I cannot say I have followed in the footsteps of my teachers. Over the last 13 years my critical engagement has not been with a liberation movement but with something more mundane – professional sociology. I have done this by tangling with the lived experience of

1. Edward Webster talks of 'social science of liberation' and 'social science within liberation', and the contradictory position of the academic, caught between the exigencies of political struggle and the need for autonomous spaces for critical reflection and theoretical development. Webster, 'The State, Crisis and the University: The Social Scientist's Dilemma.' *Perspectives in Education* vol. 6(1) (July, 1982), pp.1-14.

2. See, for example, Wolpe, 'The Liberation Struggle and Research', *Review of African Political Economy*, No.32, April, 1985, and Marion Sparg et al. (editors), *Comrade Jack: The Political Lectures and Diary of Jack Simons*, *Novo Catengue* (STE Publishers and African National Congress, Johannesburg, 2001).

workers, focusing on the costs of Russia's market transition, trying to deflate neoliberal mythologies. I fled Hungary's nouveau capitalism in 1990 to begin a sojourn through what were still Soviet factories – interrupted all too soon by the collapse of the Behemoth in August 1991. It was a dramatic moment when Boris Yeltsin stood on top of a tank, refusing to bend before the old guard's last hurrah. So began a new epoch for Russia and the world. Since then Yeltsin has gone and Putin arrived. Under the whip of market Stalinism Russia's economy declined more rapidly and more continuously than anyone anticipated, whether measured in terms of GDP, investment, employment, life expectancy, poverty or any other index. Except for a small new entrepreneurial middle class, the remains of an old bureaucratic class and the obscene wealth of the 'oligarchs', life outside the communist prison was worse than within. My research turned from the disappearing industry to the expanding realm of exchange (barter, trade, banking) and from there to the desperate strategies of survival and the retreat of society.

As society goes, so goes sociology. After flourishing in the 1920s, sociology disappeared with Stalinism, only to reemerge tentatively first under Khrushchev and then again under Brezhnev in the late 1950s and 1960s. After 1968, repression saw sociology losing what autonomy it had secured, becoming an adjunct of the party state. Only with Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* did sociology come out of hiding, flourishing with the resurgent civil society that swept the Soviet Union into the dustbin of history. As in South Africa, so in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s sociologists were deeply engaged with the expansion of political and economic rights through environmental, civic, nationalist and labor movements. But the boom was short lived. After the Fall, postcommunist Russia fanned the embers of the market until it burst into flames, and civil society beat a rapid retreat, taking sociology with it. As higher education was turned into an expensive commodity – pay as you learn – fledgling departments of sociology disappeared into business schools. Independent sociologists could only eke out an existence by setting up ephemeral consultancies for market research and opinion polling. There are a few courageous exceptions, such as the European University in St. Petersburg. But, for the most part, from being servants of the party state, sociologists became servants of 'free' markets and 'liberal' democracy. Always weak, professional sociology has all but withered on the vine, and what remains usually operates as an appendage of Western universities and foundations.

So here we have two poles – on the one hand, liberation sociology engaged with communities of struggle, and on the other hand, market research pandering to the interests of the day. Where does South Africa today sit with respect to these opposed visions of sociology? How does South Africa's legacy of liberation sociology meet the pressures of an urgent social and political agenda of post-apartheid South Africa, and how has it responded to the overweening influence of the United States (and also Western Europe) in world sociology today? I first address the hegemonic global context, and specifically US sociology, and then its intersection with the trajectories and possibilities of South African sociology.

United States: hyper-professionalism

There is a strange idea within American sociology. It is the idea of public sociology. Here in South Africa it is taken for granted that sociology should speak beyond academic frontiers, should address matters of national moment. You don't need to give it a special name. In the United States, however, the strength of an inward looking professional sociology called forth a critical alternative. Even if he did not use the term 'public sociology' it was implicit in C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* with its celebrated denunciation of professional sociology as 'abstracted empiricism' and 'grand theory'. Instead, he called for a sociology that connected historical biography to social structure, a sociology that turned personal problems into public issues.

Others have followed this line of criticism. Thus, Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* laments the replacement of the public intellectual by the professional scholar, no longer interested in the big issues of the day, but in boosting his *curriculum vitae* with peer reviewed articles. The lament has a real foundation – half a century of university and especially social science expansion has subjugated the intellectual to academe. But the lament is also misguided in that we cannot turn back the clock. Nor would we want to, especially if it means returning to university education for the privileged few. In fact the situation is not as bleak as Jacoby maintains. Today there are many more public sociologists – we might call them specialist public intellectuals – than in the 1950s era of repressive conformity, the supposed golden age of the public intellectual. Even if it is stronger than before, public sociology is nonetheless a weak force that needs to be bolstered, not in opposition to but in collaboration with professional sociology.

Institutions of a professional sociology

The expansion of higher education in postwar America brought nearly half of high school leavers into various levels of further education – from private research universities at the apex to four-year public research universities, private liberal arts colleges, 4-year state colleges, and two-year community colleges.¹ Sociology is taught at all these institutions with the result that some 25,000 BAs are awarded each year.² At the same time around 600 PhDs in sociology are awarded every year by over 200 PhD degree granting departments. American PhD programs are similar in structure, calling for three to four years of course work, followed by qualifying examinations in 3 or 4 areas of specialization, in turn succeeded by the dissertation proposal and research which can take anything upwards from a further three to four years. The average total time to complete a sociology PhD is around 7 years. Every 3 years *News and World Report* conducts a reputational evaluation of PhD granting departments. Departments avidly seek to promote themselves in these public rankings, as they affect the recruitment of faculty and students, as well as the garnering of resources from administrations and funding agencies.

1. In 2000, 43% of the population between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in some form of higher education.

2. The numbers of BAs hit an all time high of 35,491 in 1973-1974, after which they declined to 11,968 in 1984-1985. Since then they have climbed steadily to 25,598 in 1999-2000, overtaking both economics and history.

To teach sociology at the university level it is generally necessary to have a PhD degree. There is an elaborate academic market place for new PhDs, who are evaluated by their credentialing institution, their academic sponsors, and their research and teaching record. Jobs are ranked by income, teaching load and prestige of institution. If the new PhD is lucky enough to land a job, the next major hurdle arrives 6 years later with advancement to tenure. At this point a faculty person's academic record is scrutinized by peers from the home institution (both inside and outside the department) as well as from other institutions, who are asked to write confidential letters of evaluation. Occasionally, departments consider the number of citations received by a candidate's publications. Tenure decisions are supposed to take into account both service and teaching, but how important this is varies with the place of the institution in the academic hierarchy – at the very top the research record outweighs every other criterion.

At different points in a career, sociologists may move from one department to another, but always subject to the same rigorous evaluation process. Over the years conditions of work have become more and more unequal both between and within institutions. Thus, teaching loads can vary from as light as 2 or 3 courses a year in a prestigious private research university to 8 courses a year at the community college level. Equally, salaries are correspondingly unequal, reaching into the \$150,000 a year range at the top to \$30,000 a year at the bottom.

The American Sociological Association was founded in 1905. Today it has 24 full time staff and a dues-paying membership of some 13,000, the majority to be found in universities. The 4-day Annual Meetings are attended by 5,000 people, participating in over 500 panels. There are 43 sections within the Association, serving different fields of specialization. The Association sponsors 9 official journals, a monograph series and a monthly newsletter. The journals are themselves ranked by their prestige, partly corresponding to a coefficient of effectiveness tied to the number and place of citations of their articles. Beyond the Association there are a range of some 200 other sociology journals that cater to different interests, often critical of the content of the professional journals.¹

Thus, the sociology profession is a complex, hierarchical organization with a jealously guarded autonomy that often makes it self-referential and insular. Of course, employers, whether university or research institute, set limits on that autonomy. Self-regulation is the greater the more prestigious the institution. Sociology itself occupies a lowly place in the hierarchy of disciplines – below economics alongside political science and anthropology. Its standing fluctuates with changing levels of student enrollment, which have been increasing of late, and with its legitimacy in the corridors of state and economic power, which has been falling with the rightwing tilt of politics.

Only in the context of such an elaborately organized profession can we appreciate the significance of public sociology. Advocates for a public sociology, such as C Wright Mills, Alvin Gouldner and interestingly quite a few Presidents of the American Sociological Association (including in recent years Herb Gans, Lewis Coser, Amitai Etzioni, Joe Feagin and William Julius Wilson) have accused professional sociology of dwelling on the trivial rather than the 'big issues' of the day, on method and technique at the expense of substance, for

1. Stephen Turner and Jonathan Turner, *The Impossible Science* (London: Sage, 1990), p.159.

encouraging prosaic rather than original research. Perusing the two flagship journals of the profession – *The American Sociological Review* and *The American Journal of Sociology* – one might see the merit of such accusations! The articles exhibit a surprising conformity in their structure – the posing of a question rooted in a literature review that establishes the potential contribution to knowledge, the methods and data the author will use and then the execution, topped off with implications for further research. Submissions to journal articles are evaluated by 3 or more referees who take their task very seriously. Journal editors choose the referees and are beholden to their reviews. Only when there is unanimity among the referees, often after several revisions, will the article be accepted. The process imposes a damper on innovative, unconventional and critical research, especially as the rejection rate for the two major journals is between 90 and 95%. Indeed, it is surprising that so many original and creative pieces actually make their appearance.

As I have said, there are many other journals beyond the high prestige journals, which are hospitable to the unconventional, and often with a wider readership. They give a much-needed dynamism to the field. Just as important in this regard is book publishing, which is subject to a less stringent review process and more sensitive to market factors. Increasingly university presses are under budgetary pressures to publish popular books, and are less willing to publish brilliant but esoteric monographs for very narrow clientele. Ironically, the commercialization of book publishing is promoting a more public sociology – although popularization can also attract the superficial, the ephemeral, and the parochial.

The division of sociological labor

There are other signs of sociology's growing commitment to its public face. The American Sociological Association has for a long time been publishing monographs on policy questions related to schooling, immigration, crime, affirmative action and so forth. The ASA has also recently taken public stands on policy issues – making a statement on the continuing importance of race as a factor in American life and presenting an Amicus Brief to the Supreme Court in defense of Affirmative Action. Even more significant was the launching of the magazine *Contexts*, that aims to bring sociology to audiences beyond the academy. Short articles, written by leading sociologists on topics of general interest and based on sociological research, are presented in attractive magazine format. Issues include articles on genocide, genetic technology, human rights, street people, vanishing Jews, immigrant education, teen sexuality, falling crime rates, declining religious faith, pop culture, slavery reparations, women in Eastern Europe, modern Muslims, child care in Europe and a series of photo essays. *Contexts* puts to rest the idea that professional sociology is all about angels dancing on pinheads or the latest statistical technique. As politics in the United States moves rightwards – eroding civil liberties, eliminating welfare, reducing funds for education and health and at the same time increasing war expenditures and reducing taxation of the wealthy – so sociologists acquire a greater sense of urgency to communicate their ideas and findings to broader communities. For example, over the last decade public sociologists, led by Amitai Etzioni, Alan Wolfe, Robert Bellah and Philip Selznick, have organized a communitarian movement that seeks to find a middle road – a Third Way. Fighting against statist and market solutions to social problems, they bring together moral

issues founded in a concern for community. More radical public sociologies also exist but their audiences are correspondingly limited.

Mind you, there is not much evidence that even the communitarians have any discernible effect on social policy. If anything, the US government is ever more impervious to sociology's alarm at the destruction of public institutions – from schools to health and welfare – at the deepening inequalities and urban poverty. In an era of republican government policy, sociology reaches an *impasse* while public sociology desperately tries to ignite public conversation about the degradation of society. The distinction between public and policy sociology is an important one. Policy sociology hires itself out to a client or is sponsored by a patron who defines a range of important problems, restricting the autonomous input of the sociologist. Policy sociology applies expert knowledge to specific social problems, whereas public sociology stimulates open debate as to what the problems are and how they might be tackled. Public sociology brings alternative values to the table. It is the conscience of policy sociology, questioning the givenness of ends and the appropriateness of means. One measure of its success is the galvanizing of social movements, which might in turn affect policy.

There are many public sociologies. Those who complain about its demise usually think in terms of writing or speaking through highly visible, national media, such as the op-ed for *The New York Times* or public television. They are still working in the paradigm of the elite public intellectual. They ignore the vast terrains covered by grassroots public sociologies working with all manner of voluntary organizations, neighborhood associations, religious congregations, trade unions, social movements, and so on. The two types of public sociology – the one working through media and therefore mediated and the other organically connected to publics and therefore unmediated – are not opposed but complement and sustain each other. Both, however, depend on professional sociology for its expertise, its accumulated wisdom, its historical and comparative contextualization, its theoretical frames and, of course, the legitimacy it bestows. Equally, professional sociology lives off the challenges brought into its midst by contact with live social issues, witness the social movement theory that sprung from the civil rights movement, development theory that sprung from anti-colonial struggles, and the metamorphosis of sociology brought about by the women's movement.

So far I have spoken only of three sociologies – professional, policy and public – but there is also a critical sociology which drives the connection of professional to public sociology. Critical sociology is the conscience of professional sociology, uncovering the assumptions and values upon which it rests and by so doing always suggesting alternative foundations. Critical sociology discloses the connection between sociology and the world it studies, demystifying claims to pure science, demonstrating the futility of a completely self-referential system of knowledge. With its interest in values, critical sociology lays the basis for public sociology's engagement with audiences beyond the academy. However, critical sociology is first and foremost an academic sociology, nurtured by a community of intellectuals that might span several disciplines, whose *raison d'être* derives from an in-grown professional sociology.

The discipline as a contested field

The table below summarizes the four sectors of the disciplinary field. It presents the four sociologies as the product of a cross-classification of audience and knowledge. The first dimension distinguishes between academic and non-academic audiences. That is relatively straightforward. The second dimension distinguishes between instrumental and reflexive knowledge. Instrumental knowledge is concerned with the orientation of means to a given or even unstated end. In the professional sphere that is how research programs grow, by assuming foundations and concentrating on puzzle solving. In the policy world problems are defined by clients. The sociologist has to solve them, or more likely justify a solution already decided. Reflexive knowledge, on the other hand, promotes a discussion of ends or values, whether these be in relation to professional or policy sociology.¹

Table I The Disciplinary Field of Sociology

Audience / Knowledge	Academic	Extra-Academic
Instrumental	PROFESSIONAL	POLICY
Reflexive	CRITICAL	PUBLIC

There is more to be said about this table than space permits, but a few points are particularly pertinent. First, we have distinguished between four types of sociology, leaving open the relation to concrete sociologists who often find themselves in more than one sector at a time. Sociologists in the university have always at least one foot in the professional sector, although they may simultaneously occupy other sectors. They may shift backwards and forwards between types, and their careers can be seen as a trajectory from one type to another. Often sociologists practice public sociology only after they have received tenure, reflecting its low esteem among those who control their careers. Many, of course, never practice public sociology at all, but they contribute to it indirectly by promoting other types of sociology.

Second, we should see these four sociologies as interdependent. I have already alluded to the way professional and public sociologies are in symbiotic relation, but the same can be said of the relation between critical and professional, policy and professional, policy and public sociologies. We might say that the four sociologies form an organic division of labor which produces a vibrant discipline when they are in continual interaction, when each type has a relational autonomy with respect to the others. The flourishing of each is the condition for the flourishing of all. We should beware therefore of tendencies toward insulation. In the United States professional sociology tends toward self-referentiality in the same way that policy sociology is always in danger of subordination to the client. For its part critical sociology often turns towards obscurantism, dogmatism and ideology, just as public sociology may pander to popularity if it forsakes its connection to both critical and profes-

1. The scheme is parallel to Jurgen Habermas's distinction between lifeworld and system. See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vols 1 and 2* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987). It also has some affinity to Talcott Parsons' famous four function AGIL scheme (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency).

sional sociology.

Third, although interdependent, these 4 sociologies are also in contradictory relations. It is not difficult to see why, if one examines the type of knowledge, the basis of legitimacy and the mechanism of accountability. Thus, professional sociology tends to develop an abstract body of knowledge, seeking scientific legitimacy, accountable to a community of peers, while public sociology is of a dialogic character, relevant to some public to which it is answerable. Or take policy sociology, which calls for concrete knowledge, legitimated by its effectiveness, and accountable to a client as opposed to a critical sociology which rests on foundational knowledge, rooted in a moral vision accountable to a community of intellectuals. No wonder sociologists whose primary identity is professional sociology are so disrespectful and even hostile toward all the others, but particularly critical and public sociologies.

Just as generative interdependence can be disrupted by insulation, so contradiction easily leads to domination. In the United States, professional sociology wields enormous power, first and foremost because without it there can be no other sociology. Its very existence assures critics there is something to criticize, while it offers techniques, theory, knowledge and legitimacy to policy and public sociology. Dependence is one basis of its domination, but it also wields its power in more overt ways. Professional sociology, in collaboration with policy sociology, defines who can legitimately practice sociology and receive its rewards. Insofar as critical and public sociologies subscribe to alternative grounds of legitimation and are accountable to other than academic audiences, they are easily banished to margins of the discipline, or expelled altogether. Professional sociology has good reason to excommunicate them because the one threatens to expose the arbitrariness of pure science while the other threatens to politicize and discredit it. Even policy sociology can be suspect, although it always has the virtue of bringing in material resources.

When professional sociology exercises its supremacy in an uncompromising way, public sociology can only be carried out as a private activity and without even invoking the name of sociology. The power of peer review, the demands of publication, the surveillance of teaching, and the control of careers suffocates the critical sociologist no less than the public sociologist. There was a time when American sociology broadly fit this despotic model – when structural functionalism was at its height in the 1950s, when consensus was the theory and the practice of the discipline, when the apostles of a messianic science prevailed. That collapsed both under its own weight as well as through the invasion of outside forces. Fragmentation is the order of the day. Many sociologists turn their envious eyes on the regimentation of the economics profession with its undisputed disciplinary core. But there are advantages to the multiple foci of American professional sociology, not least that it gives space and leverage to public and critical sociology. Today professional sociology's domination is more enlightened, or one might say hegemonic, permitting the challenge of critique and an open engagement of public issues. It makes sociology a more responsive, and active discipline.

The fourth point, therefore, is that this scheme allows us to map the history of sociology and, moreover, how sociology varies from one national context to another. The hier-

archical configuration of the four sectors and their interaction are shaped by forces internal to the disciplinary field but no less by forces beyond that field. This four sector model offers a lens through which to discern the specific character of any national sociology. Thus, if American sociology is hyper-professionalized, as I alluded earlier, we may say that Russian sociology has been hyper-marketized, which means it is heavily weighted in the policy quadrant. What about South Africa?

Trajectories of South African sociology

I believe this framework is relevant to South Africa in at least three ways. First, as an abstract template of universal categories it illuminates the history of South African sociology. It delineates the dilemmas, contradictions, tensions, and tendencies of the present and maps possible trajectories into the future. Second, the models of hyper-professionalism of the United States and of hyper-marketization in Russia provide comparative reference points for a South Africa sociology. Third, there may be pressures both from within South African sociology and from without to emulate (or reject) such alternative models. That is, professional and policy models may be real global forces at work in shaping South African sociology. Let me deal with each in turn.

A brief history of South African sociology: from instrumental to reflexive knowledge
My reading of the history of apartheid sociology suggests a movement of its center of innovation broadly through the four sectors outlined above, in anti-clockwise direction from policy sociology to professional, critical and public sociology.¹ Table 2 below sketches this history.

The dawn of South African sociology is usually put after the First World War when, in the English speaking universities, it was intertwined with social administration and social work. If at the English speaking universities sociology had a practical character, at the Afrikaner universities it had a more philosophical character. Thus, as is frequently pointed out, Verwoerd developed his ideas about apartheid while teaching sociology at Stellenbosch. Subsequently, at Pretoria University, Cronje and Rhodie would design the National Party's program for the fateful election of 1948. If sociology in the English-speaking universities was closely connected to social policy, at the Afrikaans universities it provided the ideological foundation of a future policy.²

1. For the early history see Edward Webster *et al.*, *Sociology: The State of the Discipline* (National Research Foundation, 2000); Charles Crothers, "Sociology and Social research in South Africa," pp.43-58 in Teresa Cruz Maria e Silva and Ari Sitas, *Gathering Voices: Perspectives on the Social Sciences in Southern Africa* (Proceedings of the ISA Regional Conference for Southern Africa, Durban, 1996); Fatima Meer, "Sociology in Apartheid Society (1950-1980)," Paper delivered at the World Congress of Sociology, Montreal, 1998.

Table 2 The Trajectory of Apartheid Sociology

Audience / Knowledge	Academic	Extra-Academic
Instrumental Knowledge	PROFESSIONAL (1950-1970) Cilliers brings Structural Functionalism Formation of SASA (1967) Whites only	POLICY (1920-1950) a. Ideology (Afrikaner Nationalism, Verwoerd, Cronje and Rhodie) b. Social Work/Social Administration
Reflexive Knowledge	CRITICAL (1970s) Formation of ASSA (1971) Development of a South African Marxism, Black Consciousness	PUBLIC/LIBERATION (1980s) Dialogue with social movements, focus on industrial sociology and labor, gender, violence, education, popular culture.

During the first two decades of apartheid, opposition was muzzled and sociology developed as a rather conservative profession at both English and Afrikaner universities. The leading figure was Cilliers, who brought American structural functionalism from Harvard – a framework admirably suited to upholding the *status quo*. Emblematic of this period, although coming toward its end in 1967, was the creation of the South African Sociological Association (subsequently known as SASOV). Open only to whites, SASOV was born in contentions that never left it. This then was the era of professional sociology's quiet ascendancy. It was also when the HSRC (Human Sciences Research Council) was created as a policy arm of the apartheid state.

It was in the 1970s that South African sociology took a turn toward a critical posture, but ironically, it came on the coat tails of a new turn in Afrikaner Nationalism, the outward looking policy of the Vorster regime. This afforded sociologists the opportunity to create a new organization, the Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa (ASSA), still dominated by white South Africans, but also admitting blacks. Its first meeting was in Lourenco Marques in 1971, where blacks and whites could more freely exchange ideas. S.P. Cilliers was ASSA's first president. Because ASSA was a multi-racial organization, it quickly attracted the more liberal and critical elements in sociology.¹ Further afield, South African sociologists in exile, such as Wolpe and Simons, were developing new Marxist paradigms to understand the history of South Africa and the specificity of apartheid. In England, there developed an original South African Marxism, derived from an imaginative application of the then fashionable French Marxism of Althusser, Balibar, Godelier and Poulantzas. Through this lens Wolpe and his colleagues saw race as epiphenomenal to underlying structures, the famous articulation of modes of production! In seeking to understand how social formations were reproduced, they focused on the organization of the dominant classes, so different from the work of Jack and Ray Simons who focused on the racial for-

2. The early Afrikaner sociology might, therefore, be better understood as an oppositional or critical sociology.

1. For an excellent account of the histories of SASOV and ASSA, see Albert Grundlingh, 'Structures for Sociologists: A Historical Perspective on Associations for Sociologists in South Africa (1967-1991),' chapter 4, Pp. 52-78 in Romm and Sarakinsky (eds), 'Social Theory,' (Johannesburg: Lexicon, 1994).

mation of subordinate classes. Meanwhile at home the Durban strikes unexpectedly exploded onto the political scene in 1973, followed by the Soweto uprising of 1976. Blacks had found their own radical voice to break through the repressive apartheid order. A new industrial sociology, rooted in the analysis of the labor movement, flourished in academic debates and in pages of the new *South African Labor Bulletin*¹

From this critical stance, sociology moved into the trenches of urban warfare and the maelstrom of social movement unionism. In the 1980s we might say that critical sociology infused Marxism into public debates about the anti-apartheid movement – its relation to the apartheid state, to the African National Congress and to the Black Consciousness Movement, about the relation between trade unions and community based organized (UDF), and so on. We get public sociology of a ‘special type’, what we can call ‘liberation sociology’, since it was so directly focused toward a singular goal – the end of apartheid. It had its own internal tensions and contradictions², which we can once again dissect along our two axes – knowledge-type and audience. In working with a liberation organization (ANC, trade unions, SACP), should sociologists surrender their intellectual autonomy and bind themselves to the organization, or should they engage in constructive criticism from without? Should sociologists develop an instrumental or a reflexive engagement? Thus, Harold Wolpe’s incisive critiques often landed him outside the inner circles of the ANC, while Jack Simons was more careful not to cross the boundary. The other, related, division concerned the audience: whether sociology should be directed toward enfranchising, giving voice to and galvanizing the oppressed, i.e. to produce ideology, or whether sociology should analyze the balance of forces to better elaborate a feasible strategy of struggle, confining discussion to the cognoscenti.

Of course, not every sociologist was involved in liberation sociology; there were still the more genteel professional, policy and even critical sociologies outside the movement but what was unique about the 1980s was the rise of such a ‘trench’ sociology. Thus, we see how each phase of South African sociology adds a new moment, resignifying rather than displacing what already exists. The public sociology (liberation sociology) of the 1980s evolved out of and merged with the critical sociology of the 1970s, itself a reaction to the failings of professional sociology of the 1950s and 60s to come to grips with the exigencies of anti-apartheid struggles. The policy moment continued throughout but in two disconnected branches – the one serving the apartheid structures and the other serving the burgeoning anti-apartheid movement. Still, over the history of South African sociology the center of innovation shifts from an instrumental to a reflexive sociology.

Dilemmas of the post-Apartheid era: from reflexive to instrumental knowledge

What happens to sociology after apartheid? In his Presidential Address to the South African Sociological Association in 1996, Ari Sitas paints a bleak picture. The new democratic dispensation has been accompanied by the decline of left hegemony, the siphoning off of

1. Edward Webster traces the ebb and flow of industrial sociology as a reflection of the threat posed by labor, especially African labor, to apartheid. See Webster, ‘Servants of Apartheid’, pp.85-113 in *Apartheid and Social Research*, edited by John Rex (Paris: Unesco, 1981).
2. See Webster, ‘The State, Crisis, and the University’.

sociologists into corporations and government, the plummeting of material conditions in the academy, the rise of professionalism, experts and consultants, and the ascendancy of problem-framing by policy structures and international collaboration. 'What seems to be happening is an intellectual version of the Third World's relationship to the IMF or the World Bank; we are borrowing cultural capital from the most inappropriate sources to service appropriate needs ... We are beginning to become, mediocre imitators'. Webster offers a more positive picture by outlining the challenges facing South African sociology: globalization, political compromise, new conditions of knowledge production, and an Afrocentric approach to culture. Delineating the challenges does not gainsay the difficulty of meeting them¹, made all too clear in Webster *et al.*'s *Sociology: The State of the Discipline*.

The cornerstone of anti-apartheid sociology was its public face that depended on close engagement with burgeoning civic organizations and trade unions. Whether the result of the upward mobility of leaders or of the neoliberal offensive, South Africa has witnessed the demobilization of civics and trade unions, rendering sociology increasingly rudderless. Less affected by the assault on academia and situated between the university and civil society, NGOs have often assumed the mantle of public sociology. It has been left to oppositional intellectuals, some of them ex-sociologists such as Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane, to galvanize poor people's movements, building alliances such as the Anti-Privatization Forum. An academic sociology has yet to congeal around these new movements.

Behind public sociology were not only diverse movements and organizations, but a lively critical sociology, inspired by Marxist and anti-colonial theories with socialist aspirations. Over the last decade Marxism has waned internationally and nationally while anti-colonialism has given way to the more nihilistic postcolonial theory that finds its home outside sociology in the humanities. The government's turning away from socialist agendas has not been met with a critique of national reconstruction, a dissection, for example, of the class interests at work in government policies, the subject of one of Wolpe's last papers.²

Public and critical sociologies are only as strong as the professional sociology that supports them. Following the lead of World Bank disquisitions on higher education, the government has imposed a 'structural adjustment' on the social sciences, demanding that they be 'cost-effective', by turning to vocational education and supplying specific skills rather than a critical intelligence.³ In her address to the South African Sociological Association, Tina Uys paints a grim picture.⁴ Restructuring has fragmented disciplines into smaller units or 'programs' on the one side and absorbed departments into schools of social science on the other. Centralization of higher education, the creation of common standards, the

1. Webster, 'The Sociology of Transformation and the Transformation of Sociology in Southern Africa', *Social Dynamics* 24(2) (1998), pp.117-129. Sitas continued his defense and valorization of local experience and culture in 'Beyond Afropessimism: Identity and Development in a Globalizing World', pp.171-182 in *Gathering Voices*.

2. Harold Wolpe, 'The Uneven Transition from Apartheid in South Africa', *Transformation* 27 (1995).

3. See C.L.S. Chachage, 'Higher Education transformation and Academic Exterminism', *Codesria Bulletin*, 1 & 2 (2001), pp.3-10.

4. Tina Uys, 'In Defense of South African Sociology', Address to SASA, June 29th, 2003 (p 1 this issue.).

merging of universities, as well as the withdrawal of resources, have effectively undermined sociology. Disciplines are under assault from an ever more voluminous administrative apparatus intent upon regulating their every move. Energies, already in short supply because of the scarcity of qualified teachers, are dissipated in bureaucratic tasks far removed from the university's mission. The pressures of reorganization and dwindling resources have increased the workloads of academics in South African universities.

At the same time that sociology is eroded and fragmented through restructuring, its research endeavors are subject to external criteria of evaluation. The newly created National Research Foundation (NRF) has extended the natural science model of evaluation to the social sciences. Sociologists, along with other social scientists, will now be rated on their international standing, itself measured by letters from peers in foreign universities and publications in 'international' journals. The power of American sociology, that I have described above, comes home to roost, shaping alien research agendas that are divorced from pressing national issues. South African sociologists are being asked to compete with Western sociologists on their hyper-professionalized and lavishly funded terrain.

Sociology is subject to a pincer movement: internal fragmentation and external benchmarking. It can survive only by selling its wares in the market place, setting up consultancies for corporations, government agencies, NGOs and the like. To make ends meet sociologists scramble around in the policy world, trying to find contracts that will provide research opportunities for their postgraduate students as well as research leave for themselves. They sell their expertise not to the highest bidder but to any bidder. This side of academia is, of course, reminiscent of the Russian Road.

Table 3 The tendencies of post-Apartheid Sociology

Audience / Knowledge	Academic	Extra-Academic
Instrumental Knowledge	PROFESSIONAL a. Centralization/restructuring b. External Evaluation c. Divisive Fragmentation	POLICY a. Vocational Education b. Commodification of Research
Reflexive Knowledge	CRITICAL a. Waning of Marxism b. Afropessimism	PUBLIC a. Ebbing of civil society b. NGOs at Interface of university and society

An externally driven professionalism and a market driven research agenda creates an ever deeper divide between the historically white universities, whose comparative advantage lies in professional and policy sociology, and the historically black universities, whose comparative advantage lies in their proximity to local communities and therefore to a critical and public sociology. Increasingly, the former monopolize the diminishing research funding while the latter concentrate on vocational education. The best talent is drawn off into privileged sectors, and from there into government agencies and corporations. In effect the South African system of higher education recapitulates the hugely stratified system of the United States, but it does so in a resource poor context.

Table 3 above summarizes the tendencies of post-apartheid sociology. It has been

forced to shift from a reflexive engagement with publics and a critical engagement with societal goals to a defense of the very idea of sociology, defense against the twin pressures of deprofessionalization and commodification. We are witnessing the instrumentalization of sociology, turning it away from an interrogation of ends to an obsession with means, often means of its own survival. The post-apartheid state sees itself as representing the general interest and, therefore, sees sociology as an instrument in plans for national reconstruction. It has little patience for public and critical sociologies that articulate the disparate interests to be found in society. The assault on sociology becomes part of a broader offensive against an active society.

New research programs for a new South Africa?

If American sociology is defined by its professionalism and Russian sociology by its market orientation, South African sociology has been defined by its engagement with public issues. That is the distinctive legacy of apartheid sociology. But how can it be preserved in the face of the challenges just outlined? Certainly, not by reenacting the past or lamenting the eclipse of liberation sociology. The post-apartheid era is not about destroying an old regime, but creating a new one. It calls for a very different sociology, one that forsakes the singular goal of liberation for the infinitely more complex exploration of alternative trajectories, and for determining their conditions of possibility.¹ It requires new research programs that critically examine the social bases of different development strategies. Such research programs in turn depend on autonomous spaces for reflection and debate, for undertaking research and analysis. They require sociologists to collaborate with each other and develop shared assumptions, questions, and theories. In short, they call for a professional sociology that will give strength, legitimacy, and credibility to a public sociology. Only from such a professional sociology can a critical sociology evolve, one that interrogates assumptions and stimulates connections to various publics. Policy sociology will also have its role to play, drawing on and contributing to professional sociology, while providing a mirror for public sociology to define itself. Each of the four sociologies adds strength to the others.

A South African sociology must also hold the negative forces of globalization at bay. These forces are not self-acting but are selectively brought into play by national institutions such as the attempt to deplete higher education's independent research function, or the National Research Foundation's policy of distributing what research funding exists on the basis of the researcher's 'international' standing. While a South African sociology cannot be bench-marked to United States sociology, I am not advocating the opposite – a particularistic sociology that buries its head in local sands. It is one thing to be embedded in national publics, national issues, but it is quite another to attempt an impossible and dan-

1. In this regard the work of the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) at the University of Witwatersrand is noteworthy for its attempt to bring all four sociologies into concertation in developing a new research program. See, for example, Sakhela Buhlungu 'Democracy and Modernisation in the Making of the South African Trade Union Movement: The Dilemma of Leadership, 1973-2000'. PhD thesis, University of Witwatersrand; and Karl Von Holdt, *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2003).

gerous insulation from the global. The hegemony of American sociology cannot be contested by dismissing it tout court but by undertaking what Edward Said has called a contrapuntal analysis, that is identifying what is universal in its particularity, separating the chaff from the grain. There is much to be recuperated from American sociology, much that can be appropriated for a national research program - techniques of research, paradigms of theorizing, critical moments and substantive findings. Still, that recuperation must be made on terms defined by South African priorities. It is a recuperation that must develop in alliance with other sociologies of the South, aiming ultimately toward a viable alternative or counter-hegemonic public sociology rooted in national and transnational civil societies.