Inqola Masondosondo! For a New Sociology of Civic Virtue

Ari Sitas

It was only used for the special gatherings to taste the fruit of the harvest. The pot was made of dark clay and decorated with intricate light-blue lines. Each line, the elders explained, told a story. And in those gatherings everything was solved—the hurricane was tamed and the absence of rain was given a name and the dead were given a meaning.

The pot was eventually broken. For decades people tried to remake it: they used dark clay and light-blue paints, they dug deeper than a goldmine for the right consistency; they even used twigs, sackcloth and diamonds; they even stole old pots from museums. They failed. The hurricane lifted cows off the fields, the drought parched the soul, the dead were meaningless.

The new pots were wonderful to look at.[1]

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The amasi bird was taken from the homesteads.

The men had to leave and work in the holes where the walls are singing. The elders aged even more. The children were declared dead before they were born. The women walked up and down the fields collecting insects and thorns for the pot.

In the palaces, they cut the amasi bird up to see which parts made it wise. They took notes about its soft feathers and soft bones; they separated each tiny piece of its small head, they placed its scrawny feet on washing lines and put its beak in bottles of vinegar. They nodded to each other. We can make many of these from coal or rubber.

Ari Sitas
Faculty of Social Science
University of Natal, Durban
Private Bag X10
Dalbridge 4014, South Africa
sitas@nu.ac.za

[1.] The final version of the parables included here was drafted by me. Their elements were developed through a number of experimental workshops with community, labour and student groups between 1991-6.

Parable 1: Constructed through two workshops with cultural workers in COSATU/ Culture and Working Life Course and students from the Sociology Honours programme 1991-2.
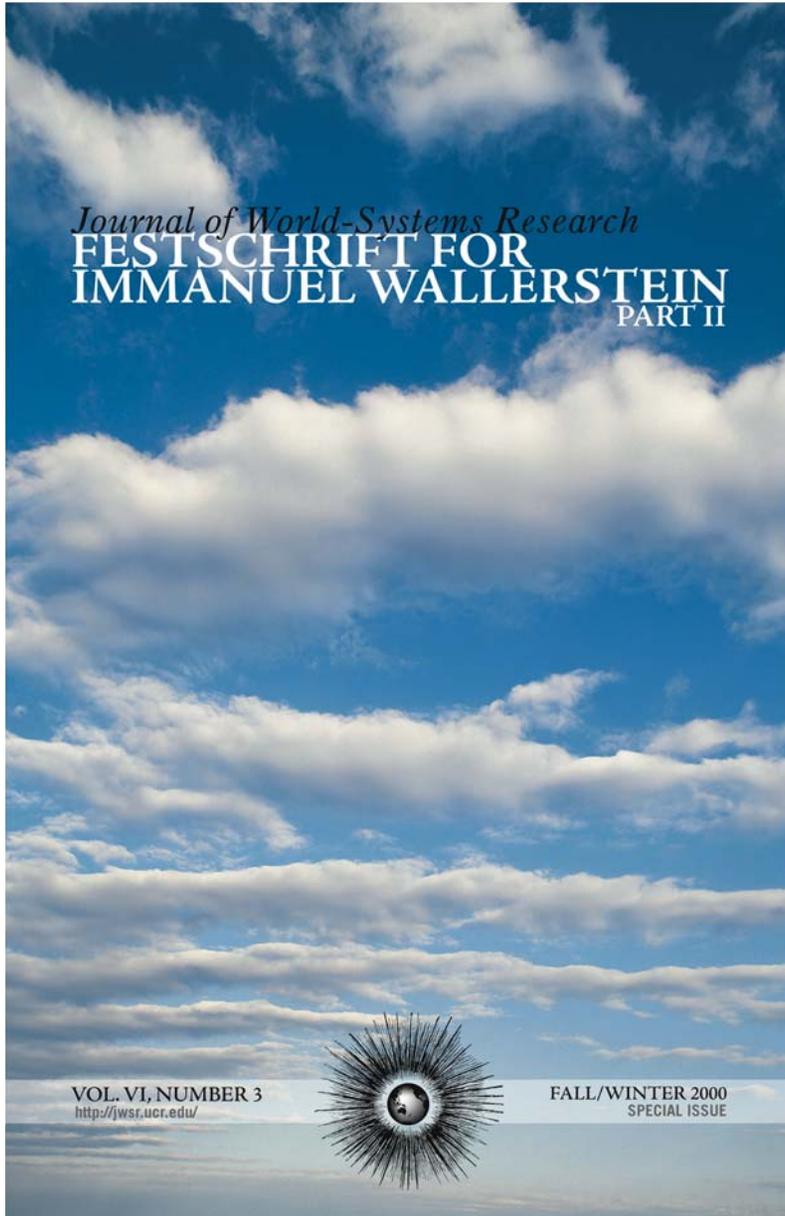
The man with the cart walked over the hill to the homesteads. He was shouting—"cheap, cheap amasi bird and chips, five bob, try some tasty meat on bone.[2]

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The story began long ago…it is old. Older than my body, my mother's, my grandmother's.

For years we have been passing it on, so that our daughters and granddaughters may continue to pass it on. The story never really begins nor ends, even though there is a beginning and end in every story, as there is a beginning and end to every teller…I would say, that knowledge for knowledge's sake is sickness. Let those who are sick with sickness pass on the story.

<p style="text-align:right">–Trin Min Ha (1991: 1-2)</p>

I.

The "pot" was beautiful as long as it was a part of the gathering and the parable asks us to yearn for those gatherings which used to give the dead some meaning; the amasi bird has been taken, has been studied, has been eaten.

The parables are about wisdom, knowledge, sociology. About a disjuncture from the communal, from the "undistorted" communicative practice into a dead world of science, of, in the words of Trin Min Ha, a modern "sickness." They echo some of what Habermas (1978, 1984) meant by undistorted communication where the life instinct and the knowledge interest coincided; they capture the feel of a socio-natural balance, an organic community that eco-feminists (Mies & Shiva: 1991) might venture and portray. They are polysemic and pedagogic. They are all these big Greek words and more. The pot, the gathering, the bird and their relationship to meaning, challenge us to think of what this process, modernity, in all its imperial airs has done to us.

Trin Min Ha takes us further into a gathering in a Chinese village where, "people have decided to get together to discuss certain matters of capital importance to the well-being of their community." She describes how no one ever "open(s) the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter.

[2.] Parable 2: Constructed by the COSATU/Culture and Working Life Course *ibid.* It is a re-working of the traditional Nguni tale of the Amasi Bird. For another reconstruction see Sitas, *Tropical Scars*, Johannesburg:1989.

For the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to emerge, people approach it indirectly by postponing it until it matures, by letting it come when it is ready to come. There is no catching, no pushing, no directing, no breaking through, no need for linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes…The story circulates like a gift; an empty gift which anybody can lay claim to by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess." She gives as through such descriptions a discursive, narrative communalism that learns how to know in a community of immediacy.

As the parables indicate above, I cannot share Trin Min Ha's ideal-typical, tranquil, communal heaven. The spaces that the parables occupy, and, research in rural settings I have worked with, speak of broken homes, conflict, misery: in a previous essay, *Exploiting Phumelele Nene* (Sitas 1996), the sense of an oppressive, discordant peasant life, ravaged by powers-that-be, seems to be the norm, rather than the exception. The sense of wandering through landscapes where women gather insects and thorns for the pot, of lack and struggle has to be my starting point. Unlike the man with the cart, I cannot appear as selling cheap sustenance. Dragging my *inqola masondosondo*, I will have to make these parables part of a dislocative technique to create a new interaction that is called sociology beyond a difficult "dualism" that marked its heart and nature.

The dualism: firstly, that sociology is a value-free and sometimes value-laden study *of* society. Or secondly, that it is a component of *praxis*: that it is committed to emancipation. In a Hegelian sense, in these unHegelian times, I am asking for a qualitative leap, an *aufhebung*, that does not invalidate the two qualitative moments, that sublates them beyond the "of" and the "for" to create a sociology "with." A sociology that is in dialogue with communities and their cultural formations, a dialogue that involves a joint project of discovery—a sociology in and of the public domain, indeed a science of civic virtue.

II.

Let us go to the palaces where the bird has been torn up and studied: the relationship between the "researcher" and the "researched," between the producers of knowledge, the "experts," the "scientists" and ordinary folk needs to be problematised once more, in the context of our democratic revolution

in South Africa. In this "puzzlement" that needs to follow, we need to reflect on the notion that our value is related to the distinctive application, some craft or technique that pertains to scholarship that differs from the common-sense beliefs of everyday life or to use the Greek word "doxa."

For some time now the social sciences and social scientists have been deeply respectful to people; we have been convinced that the "researched" is different from a piece of chalk. We also learnt to disagree with Friedrich Engels (1971: 112ff) that we were not just matter-in-motion or that life was a "mode of existence of proteins." (Although, I must admit, he was not so "far off" as now we can be test-tubed as an aspect of genetic engineering.) The "researched" talked back, argued, resisted its classifications and pointed out that the researcher, professor sir, or madam, was also part of the field, part of its domain. Nevertheless, social science recognised the difference of its subject—it dealt with conscious, goal-setting, purveyors of data or stories. Since the emergence of modern epistemic formations (Foucault:1970, 1974) people appeared to us, through the social sciences, as labouring, living and speaking creatures. Their statements and stories were gathered and taken to places, away from the din of ordinary life, where they were processed into reliable forms of knowledge.

The methodological debates in social science have gone down two paths: one argued that however more complex our activity was, and however more difficult society was in comparison to a scientist's laboratory, human activity could be studied in the scientific way through rigorous techniques and verifiable processes. The other disagreed: human activity was meaning-centred and intentional (Winch,1958, Ryan 1970); it therefore differed from the lives of molecules, so it needed forms of understanding peculiar to the task. Enter Wittgenstein (1967), Gadamer (1987) and the phenomenologists. On occasion social theorists like Habermas (1988) attempted building bridges to connect the two—on the one hand the field of "instrumental reason" that called for scientism, on the other, purposive-rational activity of the lifeworld, that called for a theory of communicative action. These approaches corresponded respectively to the world of work and the world of social interaction. What is common to both is the methodical distance from the "researched" and a commitment to the study *of* society.

Through this little word, "of," I am indeed grouping together the entire tradition as it is scripted by Therborn(1976) in his magisterial *Science, Class*

and Society and, for that matter, Gouldner (1971) in his defining, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology.* The systematic study *of* society forms part of an extractive mode, an extractive relationship to the social. Its greatest systematisation occurred in the United States during and after the second world war following the prowess of the Columbia University "moment": through Lazarsfeld's (1956) establishment of the Bureau of Applied Social Research and when the amassing of large-scale representative data was institutionalised. The ability to create a substantive research base, the methodological innovations in quantitative technique that followed, the perfection of systematic cross-tabulations, fuelled too by Merton's insistence on middle-range theories, developed a grand overview of society (Crothers 1987), what C. Wright Mills (1974) was to castigate as an expert-driven, policy-bound, abstracted empiricism.

Lazarsfeld's impulse was deeply democratic: against the biased, interest-driven, sociology of elites he thought he was developing a method which allowed for the representative voice of the public to surface, as voters, consumers, victims of mass culture and so on (Jay 1974). Nevertheless, his work brought a *scientism* of society to a new level of sophistication. Detractors like Goffman (1975) later, who, insisted on a micro-ethnographic, qualitative craft that explored the public and private worlds of everyday life, shared still, a common ground with the scientists: the qualitative approaches garnered better, more reliable understandings *of* society. There was always a distinction, through craft or science, from the social, or better, a withdrawal, a retreat, a separation, a space through which the discipline and its discourses spoke, wrote, predicted,and understood. And this distance was also physical, material, and institutional. It was embedded in the modern university.

No doubt, within the intellectual spaces created in universities, sociologists criticised sociological tenets, demanded critiques of the dominant structures, pronounced the need for reflexive methodologies and by the 1960s demanded connections with social movements outside the universities. Academic Marxism and Neo-Marxism (Anderson 1976) became major concerns of the social sciences creating in most cases imagined affinities with an imagined working class.

Such challenges were felt in South Africa despite Apartheid controls and were fuelled by Area Studies scholars (Marks and Rathbone 1982) in

the metropoles of the world who had been inspired by Neo-Marxist ideas.. Here, such academics, at first white, defined a new "we," a new "subject of knowledge," whether it was made up of social historians or sociologists who created a lot of energy and researched. Quite early on such scholarship was confident enough to constitute itself as a community: it argued that "we knew very little about...therefore we need to study XYZ."(see Bozzoli 1979, 1987) In short, despite its "meta-altruism," to coin an awkward expression, for an insurgent proletariat or peasantry, the new critical schools were within the traditions of the... "of ." People were more than pieces of chalk, more than purveyors of stories or data. They were *also* a revolutionary force and they needed to be studied.

III.

Let us in turn, move away and visit the spaces where people gather insects for the pot: a sociology *for* liberation that attempted to link theory and practice, praxis if you wish, emerged with Marx's critique of political economy. Marx's ideas more than any other intellectual's, through their insistence on the need to focus on the social relations of production and his practical commitment to the transcendence of capitalism, created the space for the development of (a) intellectual formations within the networks of political activism that respected theory, and (b) a move away from the sites of elite recruitment, e.g the academy, the university, the college to communicate with a vast number of ordinary people through political education classes, trade union gatherings and so on. Much of the theory of Marxism and its elaboration has relied on the written word, the pamphlet, the book, the manifesto, the monograph. Of course, with the institutionalisation of dialectical materialism in the so-called Eastern bloc, the propagation and circulation of Marxist writings became widespread too. But in the West and its colonies, it subsisted on a reading culture and a market for ideas. As mentioned above, it was only during the 1960s that such ideas were framed within the universities of Europe and the United States.

In each major city of the first world, political parties, intellectual avant-gardes, reading and writing networks, journals and some magazines and newspapers nurtured intellectual cultures that were distinct from university traditions. The encounter between these traditions and third world scholars, and for instance, the encounter as well between such scholars

and Afro-American sub-cultures and subaltern literatures, created part of the ideational disturbance that was the source of anti-colonial nationalism. These ideas, theories, writing and discourses were always at a distance from institutions of colonial domination. Whether we speak of Cabral or Mondlane, Senghor or Cesaire, Fanon or Nkrumah (Davidson 1973), and so on, each biography will point to encounters with intellectual formations outside the universities. For example: in both Senghor's and Cesaire's case, the Parisian society they encountered shaped their notions of race and Negritude; but what was crucial here were not only Cultural Anthropologists' musings about the Native Mind, but also right-wing discourses and literatures on the "earth" and "land" and Communist Party discourses animated by Stalin's theory of the "national question;" not only courses on French culture but also the discourses of existentialist vanguards. (Markovitz 1969)

The majority of black intellectuals in South Africa, all the way up to the 1960s were trapped in three ways—firstly, save a few remarkable exceptions (Couzens 1979), they accepted the infernal binaries of sociology and anthropology—theirs was a past that was pre-modern, pre-capitalist, their struggle for nationhood was a simultaneous commitment to modernity. Secondly, they accepted the ahistorical notion of an African society, an African culture, a tribal Bantu-dom; and thirdly, their exclusion from civic life was fought on a liberal humanist ground of inclusion. It was only a small number of left-inspired black intellectuals and writers mainly from the Communist Party of South Africa or later the Non-European Unity movement who tried arguing against the grain: that the African past was about real, evolving historical communities whose evolution was stunted and that modernity and socialism had to enhance African traditions.

In the late 1960s the BCM started demanding and celebrating the "pot" and its traditional "gatherings." It demanded the return of the amasi bird (Couzens and Patel 1982), back to the homesteads; it argued for black self emancipation. By framing modernity as a degeneration and celebrating the "pre-modern" as having its own potential; by resisting through and celebrating the past; thirdly, by rubbishing European modernity and the modernisers it developed a systematic post-colonial critique. Its ideas led to robust intellectual formations *outside* the universities—the university for its own part kept these "ideologies" at a distance. BCM ideas were at the heart of the Soweto insurrection (Pityana 1991), followed in tandem with working class

community initiatives which revived urban histories of resistance, a keen interest in Marxist ideas and demanded new forms of communitarianism, demanding that the gatherings be reconstructed even if they had to be made of twigs and rags.

As I argued in the *Waning of Sociology in the South Africa of the 1990s* (Sitas 1997), the emergence of an anti-apartheid, emancipatory discourse was more complex than the binary opposition between the Academy and the Rest. Its intellectual discourses traversed both—the important difference though was that such intellectual formations sustained despite university disciplines and found their meaning and problem-contexts outside the Academy. Nevertheless, the pressure to *identify* your positioning or "positionality" was immense. The contortions between those who spoke for the "of" and those who serviced the "for" were painfully felt.

The debates between these binary poles of feeling were less about theoretical competence. They were rather about geographies of "positioning." Let me explain: imagine a map with a barricade, a border, a moat in the middle; on the one side of the map let us place the space where the amasi bird was taken, on the other let us place the fields. Each area can be divided into a further three according to positional claims. This is the kind of voicings we will get: (a) my distance from the "fields," their struggles, their noise and din has been a virtue. My craft, my science is uncontaminated by immediacy, and through it I have guaranteed my work's excellence. (b) I cannot help the distance, my class/race/gender has given me the educational capital to be here. Although I wouldn't mind having a closer engagement with the fields, I am not *of* them. My work must be judged in its own terms. I am doing the best I can, given my limitations. I *was* there, I was forced out by the field's intolerance, the bloody-mindedness of its organisations, by the risks (or I was chased out by the system etc). Although not a virtue, any excellence is due now to that precise distance.

On the other side of the border, there can be the following voicings: (a) my commitment to the struggle of emancipation is total, and there is no way of analysing the "social" without total involvement in its din and noise, and ugliness. (b) I can't help my presence here, my class/race/gender, my educational disadvantages place me here; my excellence comes from being with the people. (c) I *was* there, but could not come to live with the distance, their

arrogance, bloody-mindedness, their lip-service to emancipation made me go.

In pure mathematical terms there could be 30 debates generated out of these "positionings" and in real terms the normative implications have been aired many times in the discussions between sociologists themselves and between sociologists and others. Many in South Africa (I include myself in this generalisation) had to live with the positional splits and the shifting moral grounds that they implied. If we can imagine reference and status groups behind each one kind of voice the intricacy of any validity claim becomes obvious. I would like to argue though, that we are beginning to experience doubts and are living through processes that might allow for the overcoming of some of the dilemmas.

IV.

Since the 1970s many of the certainties about emancipation and the ability of centralised vanguards of political movements to *think* for people and define "truth," "correctness" or fortitude have been questioned; and so have the claims of central planning departments or "uni-focal" university research centres. The geography of reliable claims has been dispersed throughout the social landscape.

Secondly, there has been a shrinkage of and an implosion of claims within the university system itself—it cannot claim to be the only producer of reliable knowledge, discourse and or technology. The new network society (Castells1996), the creation of corporate-based capacities, of specialist NGOs and consultancy groups, of research capacities within social movements, of hundreds of specialised micro-projects, has caused a proliferation of claims to reliability. But also, within the confines of the "university" itself, scientificity is being questioned *sui generis*. Starting from post-structuralism, we have been faced with a lack of confidence in the project of science: as Immanuel Wallerstein argued in Social Justice and the Sciences (1997), cultural studies in the humanities and complexity theory in science have shaken the enlightenment and modernist traditions and their methodologies to their intellectual core.

Thirdly, especially in the areas of study where human beings are classified and "texted," marginal voices are beginning to be heard. Although many

of these voices hint at a neo-biological essentialism—women can only speak about women, gays for gays, whites for whites, with the dangers of a *reductio ad absurdum*—nevertheless, the debates they raised about empathetic dispositions have brought with them the vexed question of ethics, norms and their distortions back into sharp focus.

In our context, there was a proliferation and sometimes an irruption of situational knowledges that challenged the certainty of social analysis. Since the 1970s various streams of activism insisted on a quasi-Maoist/Freirean strand to "learn from the people" because people were agents of knowledge production and popular wisdom. A number of participatory methodologies were tried and tested, developed and put to the service of the vast mobilisations that were occurring against apartheid and South Africa's ruling class. But as the transition turned attention towards policy, many were attracted to international/ participatory methodologies—viz participatory rural appraisals and new ways through which research was done. The recognition of communal forms of knowledge (see anthropologists like Geertz (1973), social historians like EP Thompson (1980)) and their importance, ways of drafting new data found their day.

At some point though, the learnings, the facts, the measurements, were gathered and taken out of the field, there was a withdrawal into the institutional milieu, with its own micro politics. Although in other words, the sites of "of" and "for" have been dispersed or to use post-structuralist jargon, "decentred," there continues to be a dialectic of withdrawal: back to the shrine and into the streets, back to the site where knowledge is funded for, back to the voices.

It seems to me that our democratic revolution allows us to change the contours of the landscape.

V.

Let us return to the place where they cut the amasi bird up to see what works it: the institutional grounding of knowledge is usually ignored in debates about scholarship. The epistemic machinery, the labour process for the production of knowledge is embedded in institutional arrangements and milieux of innovation. The liberal idea that there was a critical community of rational scientists who in freedom and equality applied their minds to new discoveries was challenged by Kuhn (1970)—instead of these rational communities he pointed to disciplinary paradigms, with their ideological and cosmological blinkers rather than their creative open-ness. From there it was a small step to the work of Feyerabend (1982, 1988) and Haraway (1989) who claimed the unfreedom of science and its totalitarian aspects. Feminists like Haraway defined these spaces as complexes of "techno-science" producing metanarratives of truth and power.

This conception of knowledge production can also be given a sociological ground too: that these places are the recruiting grounds for society's elites; or Bourdieu (1986, 1990) argues that they are the sites of the "class reproduction of society;" they are the institutional underpinning of fields that provide a minority with the educational or "cultural capital" to rule others. If one stirs the Loren Baritz (1974) claim that their social scientists are "servants of power," by omission or commission and finally, if one follows Adorno (1991) and Foucault (1974) in claiming that in their design, such institutions as the "administered society" or as "disciplinary regimes" constitute power itself, then the distance between the spaces where the "amasi bird was cut" become disciplinary fortresses.

The reading of the university as a repressive, modernist institution only tells part of the story. There is another dimension to this: the epistemic formations of modernity occurred within and in the process that transformed a monastic educational order in Europe. Whilst on the one hand they preserved a conception of educational space as a "retreat" from the worldly, they had to, *contra* the church, demand individual autonomy and protection. Undoubtedly the growth and expansion of universities added to them all the features of a modern organisational bureaucracy. These cloisters of "uncontaminable experimentation," and of ranking the life-chances of new elites were at the same time areas of contestation and after struggles, of free expression, or in principle claimed to be such areas which opened up space for such claimants. Indeed our struggles within our institutions were about broadening such freedoms and making the place accountable to democratic challenges outside their walls.

Usually the South African debates about democratisation, about broad transformation forums remained formalistic—there was a demand for representation in the councils, there was a demand for redress in terms of disadvantage, there were demands for changed forms of governance, there were pressures to get the trade unions and the communities involved in

structures, there were proposals to create spaces for student participation. There has always been the dilemma that scholarship is not governance and sociology/ social science could never be decreed by committees. What is ignored usually is the heart of our new revolutionary educational philosophy that is being put in place and a simulatneous, global weakening of the university as the only citadel and arbiter of wisdom and knowledge.

Our democratic revolution, in its educational philosophy breaks with the past: the idea of a university as an area of elitist withdrawal is challenged through the NQF-system; a system that links education and training in a continuum of articulated access-points. For some it envisions learning to occur through a series of "book-ladders" leading from shopfloor, training centres and so on, to the highest forms of education (i.e. degrees). Whereas such an image can be seen as a move from the "low" to the "high," from the bottom to the "apex," it could also be seen differently. It seems to me that here lies its revolutionary kernel: it provides an impulse to create multiple sites of learning and knowing, of working and qualifying. Such a new approach, apart from opening access, also (to use Heideggerian jargon) allows sociologists a "being-for-others" as well as being-for-oneself. Although the "framework" is at the moment very functionalist in its restrictive outcomes-based approach, it can open up the space for new moral pedagogic communities. For the first time, the value-systems embedded in the grassroots movements of this century, from Gandhi's ashrams to the shop-steward movements, the principles, that is, of available, accountable and selfless education can also be procured.

A normative bent about projects of ethical participation and learning has a deep history in KwaZulu Natal; it was inscribed as a tradition in the local scene and was the result of a primarily local, oral culture of networks that provided grounds for intellectual work and critique, research and questions. All these were born at first as responses to the colonial moment—the Gandhian movement here insisting on "ashrams" and communes as forms of self-sufficient economic activity—Phoenix settlement and the Tolstoy farms were responses to the system of indentured and capitalist exploitation. They sustained themselves as networks despite Apartheid.

These moral communities, which were a real financial disaster, were at the same time part of the oral, transmitted symbolic capital down the generations, all the way to the resistance of the 1980s; on the other, principles of the Satyagraha campaigns, non-violent militant resistance, moral high ground, non-collaboration, martyrdom; they fed into networks leading the African National Congress; on the other side, African responses, the Ethiopian and Zionist movements, their communal and patriarchal forms, their symbolic granary have been very active as well; influential too was Luthuli's inclusive African-ness, his combination of Christianity and tradition and mass defiance and later, Biko's and Turner's legacies: the former, a collective Afrocentric project for emancipation that spawned significant cultural movements; the latter, a participatory democratic socialism that demanded the transformation of work, fed into each other and defined the preoccupations of local intelligentsias. Most of them, with their emphasis on process, reciprocity and equality, had their energies committed outside the university gates.

Every woman or man involved in the educational, intellectual and cultural sides of the liberation movement in South Africa must have felt the potential for new ways of researching and knowing, teaching and learning. There was a glimpse of the future—a sociology in dialogue, a joint exploration of meaning, values and knowledge that existed in an ideal, undistorted framework. But everyone too must have felt that alongside, usually in each person's life there were the noises of war, violence. Indeed, the participatory, non-violent traditions co-existed with the sounds of Shakan, warlike, Umkhonto we Sizwe-inspired responses to a violent state. Praxis was distorted in three ways—that these learning communities had to become vehicles of struggle in a process that involved violent revolutionary ferment; secondly that in the final instance the sociologist either had to make herself/ himself an organic intellectual who had to use such learnings instrumentally, strategically, or go back to the university, the place where they kept the amasi bird in brine and by definition use the engagement with the "out there" for keeping her/his job, getting promotion. Thirdly that identification was more important than validity, efficacy, apodictic power. The *"with"* was always displaced as an instrumental *"for."*

VI.

At the moment the above discussion has to be about the prospects of the "possible." The reality of institutional power, status groups, the closed mental models of faculty members, the lack of resources and goodwill are

problems. Most of my claims will be looked at as an argument for "extension", "outreach" and therefore "marginal and inessential vices." I hope though that a commitment to an undistorted pedagogy which is at the same time a dialogue with cultural formations in society becomes a necessary vice.

In *Beyond Afropessimism* (Sitas 1997) I argued for a sociology that was like the poetic metaphor of an "inqola masondosondo," a mobile, patched-up oxcart made of trinkets and tarnish and stuff we have managed to assemble through our third world contexts. As I argued: "indeed, oral poets, izimbongi in the growing labour movement of the 1980s used the expression 'inqola masondosondo' to describe and praise the organisations they were building. They invoked ox-carts, both vulnerable and patched-up, made of many things but for a purpose, a mission, a struggle; their wheels turned, perhaps not as smoothly as we want, but they worked; and they fed people. Such an image, I feel begins to capture our task: it is universally comprehensible but arrogantly local. And finally, it is neither pre-modern, modern or post-modern, it could be all of them at once, and at once communally accessible."

A similar image was invoked in the second introductory parable at the beginning of this essay. "The creature who comes over the mountain where the amasi bird is cut, who sells amasi-bird meat and bone, cheap-cheap." The latter is a detestable solution, much of the sustenance it brings cheap-cheap from the hills and towers of knowledge, made of coal or rubber, or the real thing has in its womb the distortions of power: its skills, its professionalised, commoditised forms of knowledge embody the most cynical trade between the academy and the poor and powerless. It takes back to people what they supposedly lack since the "system, apartheid and ruling classes" have expropriated their homes, their brains, and their capacities. Such roguery flogs diplomas and certificates, facts and findings at a price—a heavy price.

Let us return to Phumelele Nene's painful (Sitas 1996), peasant past: she had left her area because of socio-economic pressures. The area, its power-structures, its demands and its poverty flushed her out. In the essay her narrations about her poverty and fears, her interests and beliefs spoke of a place of torment—a countryside which, like in the second parable above, was materially and culturally decaying. She did not stay on, to gather insects for the pot, she rather walked to the bus station and rode to the city, for good.

Our democratic revolution permits new ways of relating to, learning from and helping a surviving peasantry, to the struggling Nenes "out there." Already 10kms south from Phumelele Nene's place a decentralised nursing programme is working with the health-care delivery systems and with educational issues in the countryside; 23kms north there is a water scheme undertaken by the Ministry of Water Affairs and the Umgeni Waterboard; they are delivering taps and training; 30kms in the same direction in the town there are trade union linked educational programmes; somewhere in between these cardinal points, the churches have a training and development programme for youth who are HIV/AIDS sufferers. Around that world a local council is coming into shape and land restitution researchers are scouring the area. If our educational commitment to multiple-sites of learning and knowledge has its way all these initiatives together with our sociologists and the scientists can be brought together in a multi-purpose educational and resource centre which can coordinate delivery, education and research. Then, in dialogue with the real producers we can ask, why did Phumelele Nene's crops wilt? Our inqola masondosondo will find a resting place. Perhaps then, we will have an example of how a sociology *with* can overcome a sociology *of* and *for*, keeping the best of both and finding a new way.

A concluding gesture has to revisit the parables we started from. A sociology *"with"* as opposed to one of the "ofs" and the "fors," will not only get its questions from literature reviews and academic disputation. It will also have to get its value from a logic of practice: asking questions and solving problems within distinctive interactions with communities, in new learning spaces. Such spaces can never recreate the pot and the gatherings of the harvest but they can give the absence of rain a name and worry about the cows lifted off the fields by hurricane Demona. Such spaces will have to develop new pedagogical and methodological ways and their own "parables."

Parables after all preserve sediments of knowledge and allow for intergenerational transmissions. Parables as constructed here must be seen as part, however humble a part, of the knowledge-generating process. They demand the transformation of research experiences into narrative structures. They are part of a creative/cognitive process as *this* creativity seeks a double outcome—(a) a new encoding of knowledge for its sedimentation and transmission (b) a conjecture, that invites a process of disproof, discus-

sion, research, growth. It was Karl Popper after all who made us conscious of the non-necessity of induction and, that imaginative conjectures would also "do" as hypothesis-forming instances.

Secondly, our experience here made us aware that hypotheses and research questions were not produced through literature reviews, but through interactions that crossed the "moat" that separated our libraries and the world. Through the use of parables I am opening up the possibility for popular forms of participation. Thirdly, by opening up such popular forms, we can invite others to help constitute a cooperative way through which we hypothesise/discuss/act. But this invitation takes others in the various communities away from providing their experiences, their "bit" in the grind, but asks them to create generalities that are common to all. Therefore, although they *can* be used as case-studies or examples, they can be *more* than that: they are discursive props in generating reliable insights and peculiar sedimentations of the "real."

Is it peculiar then to ask whether new gatherings can also find new ways to give names to new solutions?

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