

THE QUEST FOR A MORE HUMAN SOCIETY - A DIFFERENT SOCIOLOGY?

INAUGURAL LECTURE
DELIVERED AT RHODES UNIVERSITY
on 17 May 1989

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MA, BD, D Phil (Pret)



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Mr Vice-Chancellor

Please allow me to express my sincere appreciation to you as Executive Head of this institution and through you to Senate and Council for the honour to have been appointed to my present position.

I regard it as a privilege to be associated with Rhodes University and with its Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. It is a Department with a very proud history and all over South Africa one will find women and men in leading academic and in policy making positions who at some stage have either been students or staff members in this Department.

I want to pay tribute to all of them tonight. We owe it to them to restore this Department to one of the leading Departments of Sociology in the country.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Mr Vice-Principal, Colleagues, Students and Friends
Exactly ten years ago the present Dean of Arts began his inaugural lecture by defining sociology as the science of making the self-evident incomprehensible. My lecture tonight will be an effort to indicate that the comprehensible is not always what it seems to be - not always self-evident. And it is often not what it seems to be (i.e. self-evident), because we do not really comprehend what is at the basis of the phenomenon.

In posing the question as to whether a "different sociology" can assist us in moving towards a more human society, I am not pretending to offer a new methodological approach that will open the doors of knowledge. This evening's presentation is supposed to be an indication of what sociology should be all about - that is to strive for a more human society.

My lecture tonight deals essentially with one concept, and that is the concept "change". The quest for a more human society implies change and the focus on a so-called "different sociology" is a focus on how

meaningful change can be brought about.

If I have to give a synopsis of what I intend covering in this lecture, I can summarise it as follows:

1. I shall start off by referring to the fact that sociology as a discipline originated as an effort to explain and to understand change. A "different sociology" will likewise attempt to provide an explanation and a key to understanding change.
2. I shall then turn to the question "What is sociology supposed to offer?" This will be an indication of what I regard to be the theoretical basis for a "different sociology".
3. The last part of my presentation will be a focus on how the "different sociology" should be implemented as well as what the consequences would be of a "different sociology".

1. The origin of sociology and the need for a "different sociology"

Change may be considered one of the most fundamental experiences of human existence. No wonder that the reflection on change occupies a very prominent position in the way people (particularly Western people) interpret their life-world. The idea of change or progress forms the basis of other key concepts - concepts such as liberation, justice, equality, communality, etc (all concepts related to a "human society" - my topic for this evening).

The origin of sociology (and most of the other social sciences) can be directly linked with the culmination of (up to that stage) largely unknown and complex social changes in Western Europe. A series of events which started about 200 years ago, changed the total life-world of the Western world. The Industrial Revolution and the culmination of a series of political revolutions - the French Revolution (1789-1799) being the most significant one - collectively contributed to a new way of life.

Within this period of rapid and drastic change, sociology as a discipline was founded. The urge to explain why and how the character of the total life-world in the West had changed so drastically was not unique in itself. What can be described as new and unique as far as the origin of sociology as a discipline is concerned, is the fact that a need was felt to use theorising and application to understand, in order to do something about the effects of social change.

The experience of social change therefore underlies the origin, development and practice of sociology. The collective effect of large-scale industrialisation, urbanisation and political revolutions culminated in a series of changes to which explanations had to be given. And the founding fathers of sociology responded to this call, albeit in retrospect with shortcomings and sometimes even with naivety (cf. Roxborough 1979).

A further aspect that gave momentum to sociology as a discipline in the

mid nineteenth century, was the ever increasing contact with other nations and the accompanying experience of other societies during the period of active colonisation of so-called non-Western societies. The introduction of alternative ways of life seemed to inspire people to view their own society from a new angle or perspective.

But, in spite of one and a half centuries of sociological activity, numerous problems still exist centring on the inability of sociology to provide comprehensive and convincing answers.

In South Africa the situation is that the predominant analytical models within the social sciences, often fail to provide a satisfactory elucidation of our total society. Sociology, like the majority of disciplines dealing with aspects of the social reality, departs from an overwhelmingly Western basis. This results in a large part of the South African society never really having fallen within sociology's field of study.

That sociology as a discipline will have to contribute extensively to analysing, questioning and explaining of the South African reality, is without question.

Just as the origin of sociology as a discipline can be directly linked to the culmination of complex social changes in the Western world during a particular period, so it will be argued that the large-scale, complex and far-reaching changes taking place in present day South Africa demand a "different sociology".

On almost all levels of societal existence aspects of the social reality are changing in South Africa. In the areas of labour, politics, the economy, education, religion and family life (to mention just a few) very significant changes are taking place. As was the case with the changes in Europe that gave rise to the origin of sociology as a discipline, the changing reality in South Africa is demanding a discipline that can bring about understanding. In this sense I regard

it as significant that the bicentenary of the beginning of the French Revolution (a significant event in the origin of sociology) will be celebrated in eight weeks time. In celebrating important milestones in the quest for a more human society, we should not lose sight of equally significant changes that are currently taking place in our own society.

And as sociology originated in Europe as a result of the culmination of unknown and complex social changes related to industrialisation, urbanisation and democratisation, in the same way will the changes related to industrialisation, urbanisation and growing political awareness in our own society ask for a "different sociology".

2. What is sociology supposed to offer?

Since the first sociological analyses by the founding fathers of the discipline, there has been a substantial movement or debate as to what sociology as a discipline is supposed to provide. As it will not be possible to even touch on the surface of this development history, I shall only deal with my own conception of what sociology is supposed to be, should sociologists want to contribute to a more human society.

2.1 The right to live in a meaningful life-world

Sociology, perhaps even more than other social sciences, has to reflect an awareness of the right of all people to live in a life-world which is meaningful to them. This is in accordance with one of the most basic articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of UNESCO which proclaims that everyone has the right to live. It not only rejects outright all destructive or violent actions which may influence a person's life, but it also focuses attention on the possible damage that social structures and organisations can inflict upon the integrity of a human being.

With the awareness of the right of people to live in a life-world that is meaningful to them, comes the fact that people contribute actively to the constitution of such a life-world. To live in a world containing meaning does not imply a static conception of social reality: it presupposes an active dialogue between people and their overall reality.

2.2 Sociology as an act grounded in consciousness

People have the ability to create a world of meanings and in order to understand the social reality within which people live, sociology needs to come to grips with the way in which the participants themselves experience social situations. Sociology must therefore be grounded in consciousness. To state that sociology has to be grounded in consciousness, implies the existence of an awareness of the basic dialectical relationship between people and their society.

In contrast to the assumption that sociology can only be practised as an objective and factually orientated science, I shall defend the viewpoint that sociology will have to rely on the creative, interpretative processes characteristic of the giving of meaning by the individual, in order to obtain knowledge and understanding.

2.3 Sociology as the understanding of the living together of people

Sociologists should thus strive towards an understanding of human experience: people's experiences of other people, of their physical surroundings, and of other uncontrollable aspects of reality. The concept "society" implies that people live together with other people within a given context. (Cf. the Dutch word "samenleven" and the Afrikaans word "samelewing".) The living together of people refers to their experience of other people (cf. Hoefnagels 1976:14-27). The sociologist will have to understand what contributes to the fact that people are able as well as compelled to live together with other people. In this regard the sociologist has to indicate what elements in society constitute obstacles to living together or even make it impossible (cf. Berger and Kellner 1981).

2.4 Sociology as the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of relevance or meaning structures

The sociologist thus has to acknowledge a multiplicity of relevance or meaning structures. She/he has to be able to listen to divergent accounts, based on divergent reality frameworks and has to be able to retell them as reliably as possible (Berger and Kellner 1981:65-77).

Acknowledging the multiplicity of relevance or meaning structures as well as acknowledging the potential that the living together of people can be different or "better", the sociologist is called upon to reflect constantly on the tension between what is and what ought to be. The sociologist has to realise that the social reality he/she perceives from outside, is not necessarily what it seems to him/her. Understanding the social reality is dependent on interpretation, and interpretation is often very difficult, because human meaning in

reality often appears to be hardly accessible to others.

As a result of the difficulty in accessibility, the sociologist has to realise that the interpretation of meaning brings about an immense responsibility. People have the right to live in a meaningful world and a misinterpretation of what meaning is perceived to be for a particular group, can lead to a situation in which meaningful life is hardly possible. To say that the sociologist's contribution must lead to the identification of obstacles for the real living together of people, is to underline the fact that the sociologist's contribution should not be separated from understanding and hope.

2.5 Sociology as visions of transformation and hope

Understanding and hope will have to go hand in hand. In trying to understand and to identify what the obstacles are in the living together of people, the sociologist will have to keep hoping that mechanisms can be established by means of which one can improve one's circumstances. In this sense the sociologist will have to cling to visions of transformation and even salvation (Berger 1976:33). The sociologist's analyses and efforts to explain and to understand will have to be tuned in to the aspirations of people. Her/his understanding and identification of obstacles will have to be synchronised with what is defined as being desirable by those within the situation.

2.6 Sociology as based on hope, esteem and freedom

Esteem will therefore have to be regarded as an important component of the sociological enterprise. Esteem implies that all people's value will be respected and that every person will have to be treated as a worthy individual. Esteem goes hand in hand with freedom, which in this sense implies the opportunities to realise one's human potential. Esteem and freedom must be accompanied by the striving for fulfilment of the basic human needs experienced by every human being. The focal point of people's expectations will have to be reflected in the sociologist's work.

All these aspects imply that very special care will have to be taken of the way in which knowledge of the social reality is obtained. This is where the real need for a "different sociology" lies: there is a desperate need for more reliable, viable and useful information. Understanding of human experience, the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of relevance or meaning structures, the interpretation of these meaning structures as well as the fact that in explaining and identifying obstacles for the living together of people, reference is being made to the elements of hope and esteem - all these aspects require the sociologist to rely on and be actively involved in the experience of the situation.

2.7 Sociology as the experience of social reality

This is the methodological key to the sociology that I am propagating. Understanding of social reality implies that one has to rely on the experience of this reality. Experience in this context implies a dialectical process/a reciprocal relationship. On the one hand the sociologist is confronted with people living in a particular situation and on the other hand he/she tries to understand what this existential involvement means to them.

2.8 Sociology as a focus on the accessibility of meaning

The rationale for an interpretative understanding of society and the possibility of understanding the meaning that other people attribute to their life-world is found in the principle that each form of human meaning is potentially accessible to others - that there is something like a shared humanity (Berger and Kellner 1981:24).

This principle forms one of the most important points of departure for a sociological analysis as proposed in this way. The sociologist's active search for understanding will have to be an empirical search - related to empirical observation and empirical analysis.

2.9 Sociology as an act of interpretation

The central factor lies in the act of interpretation. The

confrontation of the sociologist with any research problem calls for interpretation. She/he must observe, calculate reliability, assimilate and accommodate viewpoints. He/she should thus interpret the meanings of others through a complex interaction and interpenetration of the meaning structures (Berger and Luckmann 1976:42).

This act has a methodological consequence, namely that sociological concepts can never become models or representations of reality to which meaning can be attributed from the outside. The constitution of meaning must take place by means of the typifications already inherent in the situation, with due allowance for the fact that all situations carry meaning. The aim of the sociological interpretation is to enlighten as clearly and plainly as possible such meanings already present in the situation. To realise this aim one first of all has to identify the meanings and thereafter relate them to other meanings and meaning structures. This relationship will lead to the creation of a meaning framework (Berger and Kellner 1981:52).

In striving towards a society where the expectations and hopes of people are valued in principle and accommodated in practice, the first step will be to identify

... those factors that limit the attainment of a more human condition in any given social context (Olshan 1983:15).

After listening thus far, you may want to point out that I am working with an unrealistic, almost utopian vision of the ability of the individual to understand, to react, to resist, to reciprocate, to be actively involved. You may want to ask: but what about the existing social structure that came into being over long periods of time and due to the contributions of an incalculable number of individuals? Is the factual existence of the social structure not being neglected when the individual constitution of meaning, understanding, experience and other forms of externalisation is emphasised?

2.10 Sociology as acknowledging the structuredness of the social reality

Apart from the human potential for active participation and collective constitution of a total life-world, one of course has to acknowledge that an overall reality also exists. The overall reality, of necessity, places certain restrictions on the individual. It also brings into play particular conditions and generally accepted control mechanisms. The concept of social structure refers to the particular part of the social life-world concerned with a degree of organised patterning and regularity. Meaningful coexistence is only possible when this form of structuredness is present to a significant extent.

The existing structuredness of the social reality is indeed recognised. But the main thrust of the argument is that an individual is not powerless against his/her own society. Social reality is constituted by individuals, it is maintained by individuals and it is continuously adapted by individuals. There is no such thing as social change as an independent variable - as if social change exists as an entity in itself, a power to which individuals are completely handed over.

Broad social change can of course be initiated on the macrolevel, especially if a society is subject to far-reaching structural changes. For change to be desirable, the individuals involved in the changes must be able to associate themselves with the grounding, practical realisation and proposed result of the process of change. Only when change links up with the convictions of those involved; only when it takes place in terms of their definitions of needs; only when changes occur within the boundaries of acceptability can it be regarded as desirable change. The quest for a more human society is inextricably linked to the principle that change should be accepted and be regarded as desirable by the majority of the people (the majority of individuals).

Effective social reconstruction normally takes place over longer periods. To qualify as changes leading to what can be defined as

"desirable", these social changes will have to be the result of individual condonation, group consensus and an ever-increasing democratic consent. A collective consciousness is formed in this way.

Alvin W Gouldner (1980:104) uses the analogy of society with a musical performance which stops when the players stop playing and whose melody depends on the activities of all the players. In this way the conception of society as an ongoing meaningful enterprise is expressed (Hölscher and Romm 1990:109-110).

The constituted character of social reality as a structure of meanings is summarised by John O'Malley (n.d.:115):

Man signs himself into his world, which takes shape as world for him in his signing there his signature - himself. Thereby, it becomes for him sign of himself ...

By referring to society as an ongoing meaningful enterprise, a particular anthropological position is introduced. This is the conception of a person as "homo dialogicus".

This conception of a person refers to a person's capacity to question and reconstitute those meanings which have become taken for granted as rigidified certainties in society. This implies that people can question a given situation, that they are open to alternatives, that they can make choices, and that they can revise their life-world in the light of their understanding of alternative positions (Hölscher and Romm 1990:110-111).

2.11 Sociology as a disclosure of the rigidification of meaning

A characteristic of a person as "homo dialogicus" is that she/he is able to accept opposing positions as an inevitable aspect of her/his existence. A lack of ability or scope to come to terms with opposition (i.e. different/opposing positions) can and will lead to a

rigidification of human existence. This rigidification of human existence amounts to dehumanisation of social reality; it amounts to a society where participation, involvement and experience are not possible.

2.12 Sociology as a disclosure of undialectical consciousness

The rigidification of human existence and the dehumanisation of social reality can also be called alienation. Alienation is "undialectical consciousness" (Berger 1969:85) which occurs when there is no opportunity for opposition with an open mind. Dialogical consciousness is a precondition for development towards a more human society. The introduction of new structures, laws, conventions or constitutions per se will not lead to a more human society. New structures can facilitate dialogical consciousness, but they cannot in themselves guarantee a human social existence. It can therefore be stated that:

A society which constantly eliminates or denies opposition reflects a basic undialogical consciousness on the part of its members and can thus be seen as a dehumanised society (Hölscher and Romm 1990:111).

Any observer of the South African social reality has to admit that the sustained and protracted state of emergency and all the other repressive measures that have been in operation over decades under the banner of "being necessary for security reasons" have taken their toll. Very little scope for a dialogical consciousness amongst the people of South Africa exists. Repression of most forms of dialogical consciousness has to lead to a dehumanised society. And it is this issue that a "different sociology" will have to address. The situation that we find ourselves in, demands that we work towards a "different sociology" - a sociology that has as its aim the restoration of meaning.

In attempting to answer the question posed in the heading of this section (what is sociology supposed to offer?) a number of concluding

remarks can be made. These remarks provide a summary of the theoretical basis for the "different sociology" that can assist in the search for a more human society:

- Sociology will have to add to its overwhelmingly Western ontological, epistemological and methodological heritage an element of dialogical encounter. Our overwhelmingly Western heritage should be complemented with an indigenous component.
- The sociological enterprise will have to be practised with a concern for general human well-being, peace and freedom in the broadest sense of the word.
- Sociology as a discipline has to promote in the long term a desire in individuals and groups to work towards a specific way of life, a specific conception of reality, the establishment of a political will and full participation.
- Sociological insight should be used to promote and to create a meaningful life for everyone.
- A fundamentally humanist view of sociology which simultaneously underlines the reflexive nature of social reality, of theorising and of social change, is without doubt superior to the aim of trying to develop and to formulate a single, universal theory.
- What is needed is an openness in the theoretical debate as well as an openness in application. Sociological insight has to be implemented in the search for sources of knowledge that can provide the basis for a more just, sustainable and participatory involvement of the people within the situation that has to be studied (cf. Shiva 1985:1).
- A "different sociology" does not imply that the approach should be an exclusively or even predominantly practical or applied one. An extreme emphasis on application and grass roots practices without sound theorising, is dangerous. To work with unexamined assumptions and axioms leads to theoretical prejudices that can be as rejectable as pure ivory tower speculation.

But how can the "different sociology" materialise? In order to provide a methodological basis for the "different sociology" the underlying

principles of interpretative methods will have to be assessed. In the following section I shall briefly focus on the methodological contribution of a hermeneutical approach. A hermeneutical approach provides most of the important aspects of interpretative analysis.

3. Hermeneutics and the "different sociology"

As a method, hermeneutics concerns itself with the interpretation of experiences. The principal task of hermeneutics is to know what is known.

3.1 Hermeneutics as a translation of meaning

The concept of hermeneutics literally means translation, or the unwrapping or recovering of meaning. As a scientific principle it was originally concerned with the interpretation of texts, the meaning of which was confused, incomplete or unclear (Anderson 1986:63). This very same principle applies insofar as the methodological basis for interpretative sociology attempts to provide guidelines to discover (uncover) the underlying meanings of

- ° all human actions
- ° various spheres of knowledge
- ° frames of reference
- ° interpretations
- ° ideological conceptions, etc.

Hermeneutics attempts to penetrate to the meaning and to get an understanding of the original intention by systematically deciphering this meaning. It demands that we should place ourselves in the position of the person/people who created the original meaning or way of doing things. The placing of ourselves in the position of others implies a constant movement from the parts that we can understand, to the whole that is the world which people in a specific situation have created.

The assumption is that our knowledge of this world can be gained through a hermeneutical interpretative procedure, based upon the possibility of imaginatively recreating the experiences of others. We have already seen that we know the nature of other people's constructions by analogy with our own constructions of social reality. In order to understand why and how people are acting as they do and what their aspirations and frustrations are, we have to be able to

reconstruct in an imaginative way, their constructions of reality (Anderson 1986:68-70).

Due to the sensitive (and often pretentious) nature of this act, our reconstructions have to be checked and rechecked. And the only way to do it is to maintain an open dialogue. Our hermeneutic understanding constantly has to bridge the gap between our familiar and taken-for-granted world and the unknown world of the other party. It implies a constant movement between the interpreter (sociologist) and the text (the world of the people to be understood).

The hermeneutic understanding referred to above, takes place by means of language. We experience our everyday lives by means of our conceptions. There can be no understanding outside of our language (cf. Berger and Berger 1972:58). The notion of a text and the effort to reconstruct the text's meaning serve to illustrate the way in which our understanding takes place. The reconstruction of meaning can only be established by means of dialogue, and on this aspect (i.e. the aspect of dialogue) we need to attach greater emphasis.

A hermeneutic approach takes as its point of departure human creations and creative ability, for it strives to bring the words and actions of people into the centre of discussion. And with the words and actions the intentions, hopes, fears and sufferings are highlighted (cf. Bleicher 1982:69-79). This takes place in the dialogical relationship between the people from the outside (the sociologists trying to uncover meaning) and the people within the situation.

It becomes a dialogue or dialectic between question and answer; a dialectic of interpreter and situation (the so-called text). Understanding by means of dialogue has to be seen as a continued process of interpretation. The discourse can never be merely an analysis - it is a sympathetic construction, a creative projection, of what meaning might possibly be (Thompson 1983:133).

3.2 All understanding is prejudicial

Hermeneutics as the methodological basis for the "different sociology", refers to the principle that our descriptions of the social reality can never provide an "objective" account of the world. The philosopher-social scientist Hans Georg Gadamer emphasises the fact that all understanding is prejudicial (cf. Bleicher 1982:70). Assuming that all knowledge is prejudicial, the important requirement for knowledge is that the knowers should not only recognise their prejudices but should also recognise that these prejudices shape their vision of the world (Hölscher and Romm 1990:126). The sociologist's recognition of the prejudicial nature of her/his knowledge, is precisely what encourages her/him to be "open" to alternative viewpoints.

It is by virtue of every knower's recognition of the necessary prejudicial character of his (or her) knowledge that a process of dialogical encounter between knowers, in which each party is "open" to a consideration of alternative viewpoints, becomes possible (Hölscher and Romm 1990:126).

3.3 Dialogical interventionist strategy

This strategy is called the dialogical interventionist strategy and it presupposes an openness towards considering alternative interpretations. It can be further elucidated by referring to it as methodological intersubjectivity. Methodological intersubjectivity implies that the sociologist as an active subject will have to confront the meanings of other subjects who are, as is the case with the sociologist, themselves engaged in giving meaning to their life-world.

Methodological intersubjectivity is based on the idea that sociologists can understand the social reality by critically considering how different people (themselves in dialogue with others) interpret the so-called factual situation.

Should the sociological enterprise rely on hermeneutics and the accompanying principle of methodological intersubjectivity, it speaks

for itself that acceptable social change (i.e. change in the desirable direction) will not be attained by means of models designed by so-called experts. Acceptable (desirable) social change will have to be firmly based on human well-being, and in terms of this premise the hermeneutic approach will focus on ways to uncover the people's own definitions of human well-being. The common people, with the guidance of truly concerned opinion leaders, will use their own knowledge as the starting point. In the words of Orlando Fals Borda (1985:3-4):

Through the contribution of their wisdoms they are creating a new and more comprehensive paradigm in which practical rationality combines with academic and Cartesian ratio, and where the means to produce knowledge are seen to be equally as important as those of material production ... Such extended participation ... at all levels of society (the true democratization of power) are nourished by an existential idea of vivencia or Erlebnis: that is, learning how to live and let live.

The hermeneutic approach relies on the principle of humans being at the centre of the analysis. The sociological enterprise will be associated with the creation of a condition for the realisation of everyone's personality - a condition related to meaning and the giving of meaning. The sociological enterprise can therefore be associated with visions of transformation and salvation - reflecting the aspirations of people.

Sociology defined in this way is not possible without participation. The idea of participation will therefore have to be elaborated on as a key concept in the move towards increased humanness.

4. Participation

To state that consciousness, the constitution of meaning, dialogue, intersubjectivity and hermeneutic understanding should be seen as a basis for the sociological enterprise, brings one to the concept of participation. Real participation takes place when people are consciously involved, are involved in the constitution of meaning and are part of an intersubjective enterprise. A discussion of what real participation entails, should start by seeking answers to the following questions:

- ° What precise meaning must be attached to the notion of conscious involvement at different levels (social, political or economic)?
- ° What does participation as a conscious involvement really mean in the context of the sociologist's active relationship with people in a specific community, factory, trade union, co-operative or political grouping?
- ° What kinds of decisions must be taken through participation and by what means?
- ° What are the characteristics of those activities and modes of doing things that lend themselves more easily to conscious participation than others? How can these activities and modes of doing things be used to work towards full participation on all levels? (Ghai et al. 1977:25-26)

4.1 Participation as liberation from scientific manipulation

Participation of the "people within the situation" will lead to the liberation of the people from scientific manipulation where outsiders presume "to know better" and "to provide the answers" to the mishaps of the community. Participation, thus conceived, refers to the

... breaking up of the traditional relationship of submission and dependence, where the subject/object asymmetry is transformed into a truly open one of subject to subject in all aspects of life ... (Fals Borda 1985:2).

The search for a more human society and for more accurate and

consistent explanations of the social, economic or political realities, implies the involvement of those people who have up to now often been the "object" of analysis.

4.2 Participation as breaking the monopoly of knowledge

Participation means a breaking of the monopoly of knowledge. The essence of participation is the fact that it can be considered to be a process of freeing the creative forces of those who are often exploited, enabling them to come to grips with their own problem (Hall et al. 1982:14-24).

The effective participation of large numbers of people does not imply that they make the decisions and draw up the agenda for research and analysis. Decisions by the masses are rare and have still to be subjected to the scrutiny of dialogue, dialogical intervention and methodological intersubjectivity. Ideas and initiatives are almost always the product of an individual which then find acceptability by a larger group and eventually by a society (cf. Chileshe 1985). It is not the creative initiative of the masses that provides the ultimate answers. Greater participation by as large a group as possible can, however, lead to the following:

- ° The immediate and direct obstacles in living together can be identified so much more easily when the people are involved in articulating the problem.
- ° Communication across the boundaries between the various layers in any society can be overcome when as comprehensive a coverage of the whole spectrum can be involved (villagers, unemployed people, educators, opinion leaders, etc).
- ° An awareness of and commitment to the problems, as experienced by the community, will start from within.
- ° A movement towards the liberation of the human creative potential and the mobilisation of human resources will be more direct.

(Cf. Hall et al. 1982:21-25.)

In short, the concept of participation relies on the principle that an

"improvement" of the existential life-worlds of people can only be pursued by delving into the essence as defined by the people within the social context in which they operate. Participation in terms of a definition by the people within the social context, implies some form of cooperation. And experience has taught us that through joining forces people have always been able to reach specific objectives more easily (cf. Kruijer 1987:35-36).

But what exactly does participation imply? And to what extent will a participatory approach be at the basis of the "different sociology"?

5. A participatory approach as the consequence of a "different sociology"

5.1 The argument in brief

I shall now draw together the various lines that I have taken in my argumentation thus far.

I began by pointing to the fact that the experience of large-scale societal changes underlies the origin, development and practice of sociology as a discipline. The changing reality in South Africa is likewise demanding from the discipline of sociology to bring about understanding of the far-reaching changes that are taking place in South Africa at this stage.

People have the right to live in a life-world that is meaningful to them and they are able to contribute actively to the constitution of such a life-world. In striving to understand the living together of people, the sociologist has to interpret - he/she has to give an interpretation of the multiplicity of relevance or meaning structures. Social reality is constituted, maintained, as well as continuously adapted by individuals. As soon as a lack of ability or scope to come to terms with different/opposing positions becomes evident (i.e. as soon as individuals are no longer able to become engaged in dialogue with their overall reality), there is a real danger of a dehumanisation of social reality i.e. a rigidification of human existence (or alienation).

Given this broad description of the nature of the social reality, the question as to what sociology should be like, was addressed in terms of the following aspects:

- Sociological insight should be used to promote and to create a meaningful life for everyone.
- It should promote the will to work towards the desirable way of life, the establishment of a political will and full participation (i.e. it should be actively involved in disclosing the fatal effects

of an undialectical consciousness).

Hermeneutics (as the method for the interpretation of experiences; the method to unwrap/decipher meaning) has been proposed as the basis for the effort to get to more and better knowledge about the social reality. But this method cannot be applied without participation - participation between the sociologist as subject in the search for understanding and the people within the situation (likewise subjects). Participation in this sense means a breaking of the traditional monopoly of knowledge.

From what I have covered thus far it should be clear that real participation, involvement, engagement and encounter by the sociologist on the one hand and by the people who are the supposed beneficiaries of research, on the other hand, will have to lead to a conception of social science practice that differs from the existing paradigms in the social sciences.

The paradigm that can form the basis for the "different sociology" will have to draw from each of the existing paradigms (cf. Mouton 1990:387-388). It will have to quantify and to measure, it will have to interpret and to assess the deeper meanings and it will have to take a critical stand. But it will have to go further.

The new paradigm has to lead to real power sharing between the social scientist and the people involved in the research. For the people research will become

... a mutual activity involving co-ownership and shared power with respect both to the process and to the product of the research (Reason and Rowan 1981:489).

The exercise of power means to make choices (Berger 1976:255). Power can be defined as the capacity of an agent or agents to secure a specific outcome through their intervention in the course of events

(Thompson 1983:68),

To bring about change in terms of the different paradigm is not only a desirable aim of research and sociological practice. To bring about change becomes an intrinsic dimension of the sociologist's work (Mouton 1990:389).

5.2 Democratisation and emancipation

According to Johann Mouton (1990:401-402) two concepts come to mind in this regard: democratisation and emancipation. Democratisation implies a conscious effort to equalise the power balance between researcher and research subject. The "researched" has to become a member of the research team. An authentic involvement, equality and dialogical encounter have to follow.

5.3 Accountability and responsibility

Emancipation implies accountability and responsibility. It also implies empowerment (cf. Mouton 1990:402). The sociologist has to become involved in the community to such an extent that her/his active presence will make a difference in the everyday lives of the people in that community.

Up to now the Sociology Department at Rhodes University has not been able to materialise much of what has been said so far. A relevant, community-directed Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology will have to play a significant role in shaping people's consciousness.

6. Application

Three areas that come to mind in which active participation can be sought, are the areas of education, workplace participation and religious participation. There are, of course, many other areas. To bring this somewhat theoretical presentation closer to reality, I shall conclude by very briefly referring to how participatory action research can be materialised in the areas of education, the workplace and religion.

6.1 Education

We all know that educational aims cannot be separated from political aims. As sociologists we should become more involved in analysis of the current educational situation in our immediate surroundings. We should become involved in participatory action research that might lead to alternative educational systems. A participatory approach (of sociologists as well as of the people) will have to stress community participation. The propaganda against "people's education" will have to be re-evaluated, because "people's education" based on community participation can provide a momentum for transformation that can lead to a society where the real living together of people can become a reality (cf. Veronica McKay 1990:320-330).

It goes beyond reasoning that the substance of "people's education" will form an important part of the debate. If not, "people's education" will be nothing but a reactionary movement without proactively contributing to community involvement and community participation.

"People's education" involves a process of making people conscious - of shaping a dialectical consciousness. It involves a process whereby the community can become aware of its ability to take control of its destiny. It is only when a community is able to take control of education within that community that they are able to participate in the transformation of their life-world (cf. McKay 1990:328). In this regard sociologists can play an important part.

6.2 Workplace participation

Industry is a very important sphere as far as a participatory action approach is concerned (cf. Johann Maree 1990:272-278). Not only do people spend a large proportion of their daily lives at work, but the workplace also provides an education in managing collective affairs that cannot easily be paralleled elsewhere (Pateman 1970:43). In societies undergoing rapid and radical social change (like South Africa), the participation of workers at the workplace can provide a positive spill-over to the broader political area and to democracy as a whole.

Workplace participation can provide a stimulus for the more comprehensive participation that can lead to a remaking of society (Greenberg 1983:208).

6.3 Religious participation

A third area of participation that provides the sociologist with an application of participatory action, is religion. Membership of a religious community is more than often an important contributing factor to the broad existential base from which people organise their life-worlds. Religion can play a role in the process of social change in a society since the members of a religious collectivity will normally relay its role and function back to their own existential positions.

If the broad life-world of the individual is interpreted as one in which injustice, oppression, hostility, suffering and need feature prominently, it can be assumed that the religious collectivity which finds itself in this environment will reveal elements of this injustice, oppression, suffering and need in its religious manifestation. Religion could in this manner become a mechanism towards liberation from and redemption of the somewhat dire social, political and economic situation.

For those groups defining their own existential position in society as a placing marred by injustice, religion becomes a mechanism for

channelling their desire for a better dispensation. By becoming involved in the pinpointing of those structural characteristics in the society which could threaten, complicate or hamper the process of the group becoming aware of its own identity, the sociologist is applying the principle of participatory action.

These three examples of research areas where the principles of the "different sociology" can be operationalised, only serve to emphasise the applicability of this approach. Not only are there specific demands to reconsider the methodological bases of our discipline, but there is also a definite need for increased involvement of the people when it comes to taking the first steps towards a better life.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen

From what I have said tonight it should be clear that we still have a long way to go. Should we be able to involve people in taking care of their own life-world, we would have made progress towards a more human society.

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