CHAPTER 3
SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The social science production associated with any society varies in terms of characteristics such as its quantity, scope, subject-matter, quality and usefulness. The amount and other characteristics of social science research production is shaped by a wide range of features of that society and its institutional structures. Broad influences are exerted by the general cultural orientations held in that society and by those areas of its political economy which relate to social science research production. Closer to the actual sites of social science research production, its output profile is also shaped by the structures of knowledge production, the range of disciplines included in them, the orientations and competencies of its staff, by the supporting infrastructure (eg communication facilities, computer equipment, publishing arrangements) that is available to them, and by the nature of the audiences they interact with. Amongst these audiences a major one often is the policy establishment, which may be an active supporter and user of social science information.

Within the broad framework provided by this sociology of 'knowledge-production' perspective, I will provide an overview of the role that sociology has fulfilled in the production and use of social research in the South African context. I will discuss sociology as it presented itself during later phases of the apartheid social formation and especially the issues facing it in the contemporary situation, and will also try to project forward what its future role might be. There is a very considerable literature which describes and debates the role of sociology in South Africa (eg van Staden and Visser 1980; Morris 1992, Olzak, 1990 and Bozzoli's reaction 1990), although this is often in various ways limited in being fragmentary, fugitive and polemical. Accordingly, I have attempted to supplement the account drawn from the discussions with data drawn from several sources (these included data on theses, sociology department staff and programs, research centers, and on characteristics of journal articles: space precludes formal presentation of this data).

Sociology has a reasonably long history in South Africa, compared to many other settler colonies (where sociology was often not established until the 1950s) or indeed societies other than French Germany and USA: in terms of timing perhaps the Canadian experience is closest. Sociology began in the 1920s and was reasonably widely established during the 1930s (Pollak, 1968).

Alongside this was the establishment of some governmental means for the support of social research. This breach-head established by this vanguard was considerably widened during the post-war period with sociology becoming generally available in university departments, and eventually universally available.

'Afrikaner Sociology'

By the later years of the apartheid era (eg the early 1980) there tended to be two rather different tendencies: sociology practised in Afrikaner-speaking universities pulled in rather a different direction than that in English-speaking universities, although there was also a small interstitial overlap category. This split was reinforced and aggravated by organisation into two separate sociological societies, with separate sociology journals.

'Afrikaner sociology' was considerably shaped by various intellectual trends within Afrikaner culture. In some part this included a more European ('wissenschaften') way of organising social knowledge than was common in English-speaking universities (where an 'Anglo-Saxon' range of disciplines was deployed). In the Afrikaner approach, the boundary between humanities and social sciences was less sharply drawn, with strong links with social philosophy and theology being clearly apparent. Paradoxically, sociology also related to a cluster of strong interests in rather more practical social sciences: such as criminology, demography, planning, social statistics and practical theology.

Afrikaner sociology was complexly involved in both the support of, and opposition to apartheid. One thread certainly involved the development of intellectual justifications for apartheid, or suggestions about social engineering to achieve this aim. As in other social movements, 'Afrikaner nationalism' was shaped and driven by a strong intellectually-developed ideology (although this involved considerable ongoing debate and revision over time, and was far from uniformly held) and many members of its core (the broederbond and related organisations) were intellectuals. Some of this impetus arose out of the education of several sociology professors (eg Cronje) in Holland and Germany in the early and mid-1930s and their interest in neo-Fitchian social ideologies which emphasised 'volk' and 'nation' as primordial social units (see Coetzee, 1990; Norval, 1996). It is far too simple to read these approaches as a Southern-hemisphere rehearsal of 'Nazi social nationalism', although there were certainly some shared ideas. Within this approach, Cronje's involvements were considerable and later Verwoerd as Minister of Native Affairs and then Prime Minister was prominent in the effective development of major features of apartheid (although in the case of Verwoerd this was clearly in his role as a professional politician rather than as a sociologist). Linked to the vigorous espousal of ethnic Afrikaner nationalism was a fervent anti-communism, and

a corresponding nuanced and ambivalent support for capitalism, especially a 'welfare/workfare- orientated state capitalism with a particular South African flavour. However, this was but one major thread in Afrikaner sociology, with a wide range of ideological positions being spanned.

Another major characteristic of Afrikaner sociology tended to be what C.W. Mills would unhesitatingly have recognised as 'abstracted empiricism', which shaded into 'market research' for the apartheid state. This approach combined rigorous attention to high methodological standards with attention to a range of topics which 'critical sociologists' might well consider 'trivial', or 'ideologically-burdened'. Such topics included concerns about the 'social engineering' issues which arise in the context of a modern society, such as the provision of housing and parks, recreation patterns, student dating patterns, geographical mobility etc. Rather more ideologically-charged topics such as race relations were usually shied away from. Some social research was more polemically-charged and led to sharp methodological criticism (for example, in the mid-1980s, some of the survey work on attitudes to sanctions and voting support for the IFP carried out Professor Schlemmer has been accused of fitting its sample and questionnaire designs to suit preferred outcomes). One criticism of much of this research is that it tends to adopt race as its central explanatory variable, and this is done without clearly raising problems with the measurement of this variable and its simplistic deployment as a powerful causal influence unrelated to other variables which also shape social and economic life (Taylor and Orkin 1996). To some extent this tendency in data-analysis might be excused not only as a reasonable sociological approach in a society so riven by race, but also as a result of the methodological limitations of under-trained and un-sophisticated data-analysts (not to mention quanto-phobic reading audiences), although the deeper theoretical limitations pointed to by this criticism surely remain.

In a somewhat related stance, other Afrikaner sociologists were involved in 'abstracted theoreticism' with (what might seem to others to be an exaggerated) concern for locally reproducing and commenting on sociological theories emanating from the American and European centers of sociology. There was some exegetical work, although seldom of high quality and much glossing for classroom use. One interesting example of this involves a reader on 'development studies for South Africa' (Coetzee and Graaf 1996), which consists in a large number of chapters reviewing the articulation between each of a different theoretical approaches and 'development'. But the reality of life for the majority in South Africa seldom intrudes: an indicator of this is that in the index there is not even a single entry for 'poverty', and a scan of the text reveals no obvious substantial discussion of what surely is a prime issue in South African sociology. It does not seem too speculative to opine that these two 'abstracted' modes of inquiry may well have been acceptable ways in which sociologists might combine a social concern and sociological interest

with an avoidance of any clear confrontation with the dominant ideology and with state power.

Ministers and government departments were guided in part during their policy deliberations by webs of contact with Afrikaner academics, and these included sociologists in appropriate policy domains (discussions include Hofmeyr and Muller 1988, Prinsloo 1993). In addition, the Broederbond was active in policy development and drew on the same or overlapping networks of advice. Government departments did not seem to build up strong in-house research units. However, there was a considerable investment in the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), as a centralised organisation for developing social science knowledge. In 1987 the HSRC obtained its own purpose-designed building - a 13 storey pink-coloured skyscraper occupying most of city block in downtown Pretoria. By this time the organisation had acquired some 1000 staff, including some 450 professional social scientists. Although the organisation asserted independence from the apartheid state and denied that its social research supported it, the HSRC was widely regarded as broadly supportive of the regime in power, and much of its social research work could be seen as 'market research' in the service of that state. It seems difficult not to read such a stance from a photograph of its governing body, proudly displayed in its publicity material - of 11 councillors pictured in 1993 10 were male, with one black African, and all the others have clearly Afrikaner surnames. The exact reasons for state support of social science to the extent delivered through the HSRC have yet to be excavated by detailed historical research, but it seems quite possible that it was implemented in some part out of a genuine concern to obtain appropriate (but also sympathetic) social science advice in the organisation of the society, as well as perhaps to sop up unemployment amongst social science graduates. The HSRC tended to concentrate on low-level local social research efforts and mainly published through in-house sources. The concerns of the HSRC researchers were mainly those of the Afrikaner population or more broadly the white population, with relative inattention to the black sector (see for example, debate in Morris, 1992). An example of the type of research work carried out by the HSRC was a decade-long programme supporting methodological research: this produced various volumes - many of which provided a local rendition of American social research methodology of two decades before, and the highest selling volume of this programme was on 'practical theology' (ie: how to write good church sermons). But despite a very high expenditure there was utterly no increase in locally-based knowledge about the operation of field-research in South Africa (eg what the acceptable level of response-rate in a local survey might be or how this might be increased).

The HSRC might almost be regarded as an institutionalised version of a rather longer-standing South African mode of the production of social knowledge. Ashforth (1990) has christened the string of Commissions of

Inquiry set up in South Africa to examine social issues as a 'Grand Tradition'. These commissions covered a wide range of issues, but especially the 'native question'. As in the British tradition of Royal Commissions of Inquiry, these committees not only carried out research but were also deeply involved in a public participation exercise (through receiving submissions from the public, and in the course of touring), and not only produced policy suggestions but also attempted to 'legitimate' these by attempting to rework public conceptualisations of the issues they were concerned with. Indeed, the HSRC itself on occasion set up smaller Commissions much along the lines of those in the 'grand tradition'.

'Oppositional Sociology'

In English-speaking universities there was a range of modes of inquiry. Some hewed to some of the tendencies to be found in Afrikaner sociology, such as carrying out empirical surveys into community life and settlement patterns. (Such approaches have also been characteristic of the early development of sociology in other settler colonies: see Crothers, 1996.) Such empirically-orientated, a theoretical research work was underpinned by a characteristically South African pattern of considerable support for university-based (and financially supported) social research units: for example, at the University of Natal (UND) there has been a social research unit for some 50 years (although its name has changed from time to time). This tradition of sound empirical research was supported by careful teaching in social statistics. On occasion, the empirically-orientated sociology flowered into major debates such as the work on ethnicity and pluralism which emerged with the 'Durban moment' of the 1960s (stimulated by Leo Kuper and others, and including the work of Fatima Meer). Another empiricist trend was 'struggle sociology', in which various of the repressive tendencies directed by the apartheid state were documented (an example of this was the 'surplus people's project' during which the forced removals of black African settlements was recorded.)

Field-work in particular, and more generally publication of critical sociological accounts, were often closely prescribed by the apartheid state and its intellectual and security police. Access to areas occupied by blacks (especially over-night) required the permission of, and was monitored by, the state. Research on topics held to be sensitive to the security of the state was heavily (and sometimes fatally) attacked and savagely censored. Radical critics were harassed and the concern to suppress communism (ironically perhaps) led to postal authorities cutting into the flows of books and scholarly publications. Under these conditions pursuit of empirical social research into topics indicting sympathy for black Africans often required considerable courage and sometimes deviousness (much appropriate material is contained in Rex 1981, see also Merret 1994).

In turn, the overseas imposition of 'sanctions' and efforts to isolate South Africa meant that the advent of overseas visitors slowed to a trickle and South African sociologists travelling or studying overseas often felt stigmatised by their origin: the net result was a high degree of isolation in terms of both ideas and flows of personnel and South African sociologists became gradually more and more isolated. The obverse of this trend was the gradual building up of 'scholars in exile'. The South African diaspora led to the aggradation of South African sociologists in various overseas sites: including Maputo in Mozambique, London and elsewhere in Britain and in North America. These ex-patriates combined with a considerable interest from other Africanists means that the social research production on South Africa includes a high volume of book and article material published from overseas. On the other hand, this partial exposure to the intellectual trends current in cosmopolitan centers of sociology seemed to have done little to broaden the attention-span of South African sociologists onto African countries other than South Africa. There has been, and continues to be, little contact with sociologists throughout Africa, or even in the remainder of southern Africa.

A major predilection of English-speaking South African sociology has been theoretical analysis of the relationship between Capitalism and apartheid. A series of increasingly more sophisticated accounts of this relationship have been progressively provided. Earlier accounts tended to emphasise the positive reinforcement apartheid provided capitalism through the supply of a very cheap labour-force where many of the costs of the reproduction of the workforce were borne by those areas of relatively undisturbed African settlement which served as 'labour reserves'. However, later accounts have been more inclined to emphasise the extra costs, especially in undergirding the costs of oppression, which apartheid imposed on local capitalism. Although there are various streams of thought involved with these macro-sociological accounts, a major source is Marxism. The accounts were not merely historical but were also pressed into service in endeavouring to analyse the likely future trajectory of social change in South Africa.

Nevertheless, into the 1980s the sociologists in mainstream sociology departments remained fairly conservative politically, and a particular South African interest in 'industrial sociology' developed to study the work situations in capitalist firms. Much of this work involves commentary on trends in employment and unemployment, workforce characteristics and working conditions using official sources and sociological surveys, but there has also been much description, commentary on, and theorising concerning institutional and organisational structures and industrial relations arrangements. This industrial sociology movement was developed in part as a form of support for the (largely black portions of) trade union movement and provided a 'legitimate' channel for the study of, and advocacy on behalf of, the black African working class (and associated class fractions).

In English-speaking universities, and in their 'scholarly associations', there was a broad range of expertise, broadly lumped into a quasi-sociological orientation, and broadly welded together in their oppositional stance towards the apartheid regime. Many of those both formerly and currently occupying sociology lecturing jobs have been trained in social history (especially of the History Workshop stream of work: which has developed its own local institutionalisation). Other sociologists have come from a background in (South) African studies or broadly (South) African history, or from a broadly 'political economy' stance, and they have often associated with left-leaning oppositional social economists and also geographers. This broad 'multi-disciplinary' intellectual grouping was supported by organisational arrangements since ASSA (Association of Sociologists of Southern) Africa) provided a 'conference-providing' home for a wide range of social scientists whose formal training (let alone their disciplinary loyalty) only lightly touched on formal or technical sociological material. Some South African sociologists though, especially ex-patriate ones, have made considerable contributions to sociology in general (eg the work of John Rex). A major feature of social knowledge on South Africa is the extent to which major studies are fed-in from outside sources.

Other Components in the Social Knowledge Production System

Another component of the knowledge production 'system' in South Africa has been agencies centred in the NGO/voluntary sector (eg see van den Berg, 1995). These range across a myriad of different types from university-based dedicated research units, through policy development 'independent' organisations to Community-based organisations (CBOs) which are actively working in community settings and deploying some appropriate social research techniques in tasks such as 'needs assessment', 'program evaluation' or 'social impact analysis'. Much of this research work and attendant policy development work has been funded by overseas donors. These have included Scandinavian, German, Dutch and North American governments. There are of course various sensitivities involved in the provision of foreign aid: whereas another country feeding one's citizens is only morally acceptable in a country racked by flood or famine, it is quite acceptable (even considered morally uplifting) for another country to fund locally-based social research (or to assist more generally in capacity-building for research and education). Such support also allows the donor country to be subtly and indirectly oppositional without being too blatant about their stance. In turn, the research communities of the donor countries may (at least in some cases) derive some benefits (such as access to field data) from their country's charity. But in any case, during the international isolation of South Africa during the later apartheid period there was very little choice: income flows to the oppositional voluntary sector was the

only morally feasible option. The social research from these sources varies in quality and in the extent to which it can be drawn on for wider scholarly concerns, through secondary analysis. However, this sector is the site for some methodological innovation: such as in the widespread deployment of participative research methodologies.

There was also some internally-funded quasi-oppositional research foundation activity. A prime example of this was the Urban Foundation which was set up with capitalist funding. The Urban Foundation became a major research and policy-development institution, examining a wide range of issues relating to urban settlements. This area of attention was devoted to a major and immediate threat to the urban white capitalist class (and also to the middle and working classes) of the possibility of a substantial spill-over of the residents of the dangerous formal and informal settlements into the areas where they lived. The intellectual framework they deployed tended to be rather more sympathetic to solutions which might fit in with capitalist interests, than other sites of policy thinking and research.

The historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs) have also been historically disadvantaged in terms of sociology and social research. Fairly recently creations, designed to provide a flimsy appearance of even-handed treatment of all racial groups, the HDUs were originally controlled by cadres of Afrikaner senior staff, and were poorly equipped in terms of libraries, research-support infrastructure and in the qualifications, experience and resilience of their staff. With the partial exception of the very long-established University of Fort Hare, historically-black universities have not the site for the development of an indigenous sociology (see some chapters in Rex 1981, also Nzimande 1994).

The role of black Africans in social research (even in the more liberal English-speaking universities) tend to be that of middle-'man' between the white social researchers and the research subjects. Few rose above the rank of research assistant or were able to participate as intellectuals with a voice of their own. Irrespective of who has used them, there has been little employment of 'native' concepts to fructify local sociology. Africanist sociological concepts have seldom been taken up and pressed into service to enhance social understanding. At best a few illuminating local terms might be appropriately applied where appropriate. A few texts with a supposedly 'nativist' South African viewpoint have appeared, but none have been entirely successful and some are quite misleading in their claims. More recently, attempts have been made to capacity-build amongst the HBUs, and several programs have been instituted through the HSRC to enhance social research. However, building up a supportive 'research culture' and the necessary institutions and experience to carry out social research is clearly a long-term effort.

Interestingly, sociology seems highly attractive to many black African students. Along with psychology and economics/business studies very large

numbers enrol. Some of the reasons are clear enough: without an adequate secondary school grounding in either mathematics or in English (or Afrikaans) black African students are seriously disadvantaged in taking up either science and mathematics based subjects or in language based humanities studies. This leaves the social sciences as a major target area: moreover, a range of disciplines often perceived to be user-friendly. Why sociology should be popular amongst the social science possibilities is less clear. It may be that anthropology is seen as stigmatising the subject-peoples it studies as 'primitive' (indeed South African anthropology has been lashed by searing debates concerning its internal racial arrangements). This may be seen as a major opportunity for sociologists to build up their teaching numbers and set up career-lines in sociological consultancy for their students. However, much these possibilities seem ideal in the abstract, the reality too often is that sociology staff are too often crumbling under the pressure of student numbers. There is insufficient flexibility in university structures to transfer resources to where the student demands are steepest, and where they have most recently arisen. Serious interest in reformulating university teaching structures and moving them far more in the direction of providing rather more directly employable graduates with well-skilled competencies may make enhance effectiveness of teaching in the long run, but it imposes the heavy immediate burden of the 'transaction costs' required to reformulate university teaching. As a result, continuing to conduct sociological research becomes correspondingly difficult.

The capitalist sector of social research should not be entirely forgotten. Market research has long existed in South Africa. Under recent conditions, with the re-opening of local markets to overseas interests, the growth of a black middle class and general expansion of black consumer expenditure, the market research industry has had a distinct fillip, with large areas of consumer attitudes now opening up for commissioned market research. To a lesser extent than some other countries, market research companies do broader political and attitudinal research. Certainly the media is far less attentive, than in other countries, to the results of such research when it is carried out. So polling data on party electoral support and other attitudinal studies sometimes gets an airing, but it clearly not seen as a matter of high public interest. There seems to be no interest in knee-jerk polling-measures of immediate public reactions to public events, as in USA for example. Such public interest polling research that is carried out probably tends to remained interred with the polling companies data-archives and unavailable for any further sociological attention.

Another sector of capitalist social research enterprise is that deployed by consultancy companies. A transforming State is in considerable need of research to steer its redirected efforts. With the wider establishment of provincial and local governments there has been a major build-up in the demand for research to underpin local economic development planning and

related enterprises. Some critics have complained that this mode of delivery of knowledge is expensive and yet deficient (more show than substance), and may rely too much on overseas expertise and experts insufficiently attuned to local circumstance: on the other hand it usually does at least deliver some results on time!

Other infrastructural services to support social research are provided by the HSRC (or its funding arm the CSD). For example, a data archive is maintained. HSRC is also able to underwrite collective social research enterprises and provide or support leadership potentials. With shrinking (and more constrained) social science research budgets in many first world countries, a heightened social research attention may well being displaced onto third world countries such as South Africa, since support for social science research might still be won through 'foreign aid' budgets. For this and other reasons, in recent years South Africa has been besieged by a trail of overseas social researchers touring the country, seeking reciprocal research agreements etc. This intense overseas interest has yet to be properly harvested in South Africa's interests.

As Lazarsfeld has argued, the social science research establishment relies to a considerable extent on the validity and availability of 'official social bookkeeping data'. Right through the apartheid years the South African Central Statistical Service (CSS) kept pumping out a myriad of beautifully presented statistical reports from population and economic censuses together with vital statistics, trade figures and the full gamut of modern data-series. Unfortunately, partly because of the illegitimacy of the regime and because of efficiencies in collection of data and in its presentation, much of this data was unreliable and non-valid. Critics have shown some alarming discrepancies in terms of the error-margins in the data and have also hinted at some extent of state-conspiratorial manipulation of this data. Fortunately, as the statistical services become transformed and fresh and much higher quality data are collected, better quality data which can be a more sound base for social science research is now becoming available.

Publishing opportunities in South Africa have been reasonably readily available. There are several South African book publishing outlets (eg Ravan Press) and some interest from Northern hemisphere presses specialising in African matters (eg Zed books). There is a wide range of South African journal-publishing outlets. Many are subsidised through a system of state-support. To encourage publication of articles and books staff (or rather their universities) are given state grants against each approved (usually peer-reviewed) publication. However, as the economic noose of recent years tightens, the range of publishing opportunities have progressively begun to narrow. In recent years, several publishing houses have gone to the wall, and the range of available local journals is steadily shrinking.

Sociology in the Post-Apartheid Era

As it moved into a status as a 'Government in waiting' the ANC began to develop its own policy-formulation agencies. Four think-tanks (including the LAPC) were set-up or cajoled into providing appropriate research and policy-development tasks (see Padyachee 1993). The scope of acceptably legitimate research tasks expanded considerably. In particular, poverty and rural poverty became important concerns. Alongside these institutional moves came a flurry of renewed research activity. In particular, on the quantitative social research front came a slew of very useful survey research collections which laid the basis for much academic and policy-relevant research. The leading examples have been the SALDRU living standards study and successive CSS's successive October Household Surveys which enable a broad range of policy issues to be modeled across all sectors of the population.

A further fill up to these new data-collections has been a considerable degree of international attention. This attention partly arises out of South Africa's rather unique situation of being a mix of 'first' and 'third' world in one country (with a nod in the direction of some 'second world' socialist thinking) and also because of its geo-political situation, not just at the foot of Africa, but as the spring-board for capitalist economic activity throughout sub-saharan Africa. This gives South Africa an 'absolute advantage' as a strategic research site for a variety of economic and social issues. Agencies such as the World Bank and IMF have seen South Africa (to at least a small degree) as testing-sites for the development of new policies. This glare of international attention can add an extra value to the results of local social research efforts.

Some concern with the transformation of institutions involving sociology and social research has begun. However, it seemed that amongst state agencies the HSRC has been amongst the slowest to transform. As the broad political agenda of the new government began to bite, some of the flow of resources towards major sites for conducting social research have become increasingly cut. Despite increasing demands for access to higher education, and indeed despite increasing enrolments, government support of university expenses has been held and rolled back. This has put increasing pressure on teachers and researchers, especially in hard-pressed areas such as sociology with its high student demand. While access to research funding continues to be reasonable, there are signs that there will be increasing pressure in these areas in the near future.

From Transition into Transformation?

There are many obstacles to overcome in endeavouring to turn a culture of 'research in opposition' to a culture of 'research assisting transformation'. A major barrier is the lack of appropriate theoretical and methodological skills

amongst many social researchers who were able to 'cut their teeth' on oppositional research which required only relatively limited methodological research skills. Now, a rather more constructive mode of inquiry is 'required', including an ability to identify policy implications of research work and communicating these to appropriate stake-holders. (Important discussions are provided in Morris, 1996; Sitas, 1996 with a review of recent work provided in Webster 1997.)

It seems easier to understand the paths leading up to the present, and to document the dilemmas of the present, than to work through the ways in which South African sociological research should advance into the future. We could, though, proceed as follows: survey data can be used to locate the concerns facing the people, especially those who are poorer. (It might be possible to supplement this source of information of the 'demand' for social research by others: perhaps interviewing senior politicians or policy-makers). Then the ability and the capacity of the South African sociological and social research apparatus to deliver appropriate social research might be gauged and suggestions made as to future directions in which it might be built.

In the Saldru Standards of Living survey respondents were asked to rank the three most important issues that they would like to see tackled by the government. These included poverty, homelessness and the provision of jobs (see table 1). The views of the poorest respondents are emphasised in this table.

Table 1: Where could the government help most? (% in each quintile who name the following issues among the three items the government could help most with: totals can exceed 100% since up to three responses were permitted.) Source: Ministry, 1995, p25

Issue	Ultra-poor	Richest	Total
Jobs	57.8	56.6	57.3
Housing	32.1	37.1	38.6
Food Aid	34.3	10.6	19.9
Piped Water	44.2	7.8	24.2
Electricity	27.3	9.8	20.4
Schools	19.9	19.9	19.2
Clinics	18.1	8.3	11.8
Peace/end of violence	9.2	35.0	27.1

If this can be taken as the main agenda for social science researchers over the next decade, in what shape is the South African social research establishment to be able to deliver appropriate research on these topics? There is no available clear intellectual or policy framework that might guide the transformation of the 'social research system' in an appropriate direction. Some organisational transformation is required, with capacity-building amongst HDUs being a major priority. Much reworking of the 'social research system' may however need less commitment to major structural changes: rather, networking and other more flexible and even short-term job-specific structures may suffice. There also needs to be considerable changes in person-power and in the competencies and skills of those in the 'social research system'. While retaining a critical edge, social research which has the ambition of being useful in the 'transformation' of South African society needs to be able to deliver far-better formulated and well-researched ideas about why things are they are and how they might be changed than hitherto. Broad characterisations of social structures (such as those inherited from the South African Marxian-inspired tradition of societal analysis) need to be supplemented by far more closely-focussed theories which identify levers of social change (see Morris 1996). Instead of painting stark pictures of repression with broad brush-strokes, field-research needs fine-brush work which shows up the details of how institutions actually work, and might be made to work better. Accordingly, social researchers must gain high quality theory-construction and research skills, including where appropriate both economic models and also quantitative research competencies (however much such approaches might have been despised by progressive sociologists in the past). Social researchers must become thoroughly versed in the local policies pertaining in their area of study, in the range of policy alternatives which are used across different countries, and in the vicissitudes of the policy process in general. Above all, and most centrally, social researchers cannot rely solely on the older models of academic peer review to ensure quality of theory and social research work, but instead there must systematic efforts by groups of social researchers to develop high quality in-depth and innovative research projects. This takes systematic collective effort to achieve.

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