

Report from
14th International Human Science Research Conference
Midrand, South Africa
August 21 - 25, 1995
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The impression from an international conference like this is obviously dependent on the expectations one had beforehand, which were mixed in our case. One of us had been to the Human Science Research Conference earlier, the others not. Still, we were familiar with some of the vocal researchers that normally participate in the conference, due to their international publications.

Beforehand, we were excited about the theme of the conference; "What can the Human Science Research Conference, through the different disciplines and on different levels, contribute towards healing, change or transformation, peace reconciliation and development?" We were also fascinated about the possibility of going to South Africa so soon after the cultural boycott had been lifted. On the negative side, we had heard rumours that famous participants like Amedeo Giorgi and Kenneth and Mary Gergen would not come to South Africa.

When arriving at the ESCOM centre where the conference was to be held, we discovered that the number of conference participants was quite low, and there were about 50 intended presentations all together. Many had probably not found the means for going all the way to South Africa. After our initial disappointment, we realized that the small number of participants did allow for quite an intimate atmosphere, during the academic discussions as well as in the more informal evening gatherings.

A surprising discovery for us was the lack of black scholars participating in the conference. Only one (!) black scholar - the daughter of a South African minister, studying in Canada - had a presentation in the conference. After some time, three black, female students also arrived at the scene, but they did not present papers. To us this was a contradiction, especially since notions such as multicultural perspective, multicultural competence and multicultural communication were dominant in the academic discussions.

When we discussed our disappointment about the conference having so few black participants, we were told that they probably lacked both time and money to come - if they were aware of the conference. Time was also a problem for us, as the conference coincided with the beginning of the semester. In our opinion, this is a question of priority. If money was the main reason for the absence of black scholars, we suggest that the next organizers do what other international organizations try to do; provide funding for those from less wealthy universities (and countries). Furthermore, it is important that invitations to the next Human Science Research Conferences are broadly distributed.

At the conference, the range of presentations was broad: ranging from therapeutic to theoretical, methodological to philosophy of science issues, psychology and pedagogy to cultural studies and media studies. An interesting phenomenon was the fact that South Africans during the times of isolation had developed their own angle to philosophy of science. This perspective was mainly developed by the sociologist Johan Mouton and his colleagues. According to them, a

paradigm had sociological and teleological aspects, in addition to its traditional ontological, epistemological and methodological levels.

In the interpretation of some South African scholars, paradigm then became something you could pick and choose from when studying a phenomenon, rather than something you operate (more or less explicitly) from within. Kuhn and Althusser would have been surprised! We interpreted this development as dependent on the specific cultural surroundings in South Africa, presently faced with large social conflicts, and where religion traditionally had a stronghold. As a result of the latter, for example a Christian paradigm was seen as one alternative in the social sciences. This gave nourishment to interesting discussions around the possibility to combine scientific scepticism with religious belief.

For newcomers it was interesting to get a deeper understanding of what the label Human Science Research was taken to mean. We found that the term was used more or less as equivalent to phenomenological research, mainly dealing with psychological and pedagogical issues. This is an interesting and fruitful perspective for studying, especially individual's lifeworlds. However, the phenomenological framework was sometimes too taken for granted - in our view. At the same time, psychoanalytical perspectives had a tendency to sneak back into the discussion. This at times also resulted in animosity and lack of appreciation for other perspectives. To us, a broader understanding of Human Science Research, as the study of human consciousness, actions and culture, as originally intended, would be more fruitful.

One of the great advantages of this conference was its ability to include both practitioners, mainly clinical psychologists and also teachers - with more theoretically oriented "scientists". All in all it was an inspiring conference. There were many noteworthy and interesting talks. Many could be mentioned, especially also the therapeutic oriented, but we will limit ourselves to three more general speakers. One of the most outstanding was Pieter du Toit's presentation "Kierkegaard on moral sense and moral courage", which impressed by its clearness and persuasive structuredness. The second, Robert Romanyshyn, was a very charismatic speaker. He talked about "Method as symptom and metaphor" (plenary session) and of "The alchemy of consciousness". Engela Pretorius' talk on "The cultural heritage of traditional health care in South Africa: The new dispensation" gave an interesting insight into the meeting point between modern and traditional culture. We missed, however, some more attention to the theme of the conference.

The conference was organized in three parallel sessions. But with the small number of participants, this meant that some presentations had small audiences. There was little information from the conference organizers beforehand. That meant that participants did not know in advance how long their presentations would be. To us, this was a bit frustrating. For us personally, it resulted in papers that were either rather short or quite extensive, something which again had consequences for the accompanying presentation.

We enjoyed the atmosphere of the Human Science Research Conference, both the formal discussions and the more informal intellectual as well as social interactions. Moreover, we also appreciated our brief introduction to South African culture. Sometimes it was interesting to compare what was said in the conference - for example in the critical analysis of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) - and the enthusiastic appreciation of the same program by a black psychologist we met in Soweto. We must admit

that we found the ESCOM conference centre a bit isolated. However, we had the chance to go and see the nearby surroundings: Midrand, Pretoria, Jo-burg and Soweto.

The evening in Soweto was quite interesting to us Scandinavians. Especially since there were so few blacks at the conference, we found it very powerful to listen to some black people's experiences from the Apartheid era. We were also impressed by their lack of bitter feelings and of their compassion; what they called "Umbuntu" (an attitude of humanity; to forgive and look forward). Still, we think Nelson Mandela - who seem to be very trusted by both blacks and whites - has an enormous reconciliation and development task to do in a magnificent country.

The legacy of apartheid is still visible in many respects, especially in terms of the incredible unequal distribution of wealth among blacks and whites. We experienced that the necessary post-apartheid process had only just begun. Nevertheless, we had to readjust several of our Nordic preconceptions. This society has many layers and the situation is not just black and white, in whatever meaning you would choose to read this dichotomy.

After the conference, we were also lucky enough to visit another beautiful part of South Africa; the Cape province. A coparticipant from the conference spontaneously had invited us to stay at his home in Stellenbosch. We enjoyed very much the hospitality of Henney de Vos and his family. To us, this was a chance to get a little bit more of an inside view of South African culture. We really appreciated this opportunity, and we hope to show our country in a similar way. We also would like to be back in South Africa again.

Finally, during the conference we were encouraged to arrange the 16th Human Science Research Conference in Trondheim, Norway in 1997. We are working on the project to realize this task. So we hope to be able to invite you to come to Norway for the conference in two years. 1997 also happens to be the year for the 1000 year anniversary of the city of Trondheim, together with the World Championship in skiing being located here during the winter, as well as a major sailing competition in the summer. Since Norwegian winters are less pleasant than the South African one, we suppose you prefer to come to Norway in the summer