

MOBILIZING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Mamadou Diawara†

One day the snake was told “There are boubous for sale at the market.” The snake, supreme, replied “How nice for those with shoulders!” A boa constrictor, for instance, lacks the physiological wherewithal (shoulders, for instance) to wear a tunic, however beautiful. This Sahelian proverb from the Soninke country (Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia) shows that solutions need to be tailored to problems and not vice versa. The procedure has to be first to find out what the snake needs and then to find the solution. Exactly the same surely applies when organizing social security for seasonal and other rural workers from the South. Is this a solution to their problem? Are we not putting the cart before the horse, as we did in our experience with “development”? This article looks at the regrettable tendency to apply a framework of analysis based on the situation in the West to other areas about whose own specific nature little is known. The situation in the West reflects what is happening “at the top” and the further away we get from this context, which might be termed the top of the “pyramid,” the more irrelevant this analysis and its instruments become. Dominocentrism is an attitude censured by Grignon and Passeron in Bourdieu.¹ A criticism that I should like to echo.

I. ON DOMINOCENTRISM

The International Labour Office, according to the mandate it was given by the International Labour Conference in June 2001, is to extend social security coverage. Keen to secure the same rights for as many workers as possible, the International Labour Organization is using three methods in the field: 1. extending social security based on “conventional” mechanisms; 2. promoting and supporting new

† Professor of Anthropology, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

1. CLAUDE GRIGNON & JEAN-CLAUDE PASSERON, *LE SAVANT ET LE POPULAIRE: MISÉRABILISME ET POPULISME EN SOCIOLOGIE ET EN LITTÉRATURE* (1989).

decentralized local systems; and, 3. linking local forms of social protection with public intervention systems.² On several occasions I have heard ILO experts talking on programs broadcast by ORTM, Mali's radio and television companies. They speak in particular at conferences to commemorate international or national events. For a Sahelian intellectual like me, these people and what they say, and their references to ILO Conventions, mean little. They mean even less to the average Sahelian worker, and possibly nothing at all to those at their daily grind. Taking account of this silent majority is the real challenge.

The colonial and post-colonial economies have forged two parallel working worlds in Mali. When people ask toward the middle of the day whether the *workers* have come home, what they mean is those whose working life is controlled by the clock. This obviously does not include shepherds, farmers, and everyone else, i.e., the vast majority who keep their specific name in the local language. They may be shepherds, farmers, well borers, or all three at once, depending on the season. Those whose work follows a daily timetable, i.e., employees, are the privileged few who are employed in what is called "white work."³ A similar situation is to be found in the other countries of Africa's Sahel.

The workers' journal published by their union (UNTM—National Union of Workers of Mali), called *Barakéla* ("The Worker" in the Bamana language), is written in French. It is the prerogative of those who understand French and can read in a country in which 69% of the population is illiterate.⁴ What a pertinent definition of the working world!

Most producers are completely unaware of the existence of International Labour Standards (ILS). These ILS' are not for this majority; they do not concern them. It may well be that a trade unionist, following on from an ILO expert on a fleeting visit with just time for a short speech, brings up the subject of this silent majority. Those making up this majority, however, away at their work, do not really feel concerned. Very little is known about these standards,

2. Emmanuel Reynaud, *The Extension of Social Security Coverage: The Approach of the International Labour Office* (ESS Paper No 3, 2003).

3. Mamadou Diawara & Isaïe Dougnon, *Du "travail de Noir" travail du Blanc: la codification du travail dans les peuples du pays dogon émigrés à l'Office du Niger à partir des années 1930*, in *L'INTERFACE ENTRE LES SAVOIRS LOCAUX ET LE SAVOIR UNIVERSEL* 105–19 (Mamadou Diawara ed., 2003); Isaïe Dougnon, "Travail de Blanc" "Travail de Noir": La Migration Paysanne du Pays Dogon à l'Office du Niger et au Ghana (1910–1980) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bayreuth) (on file with author).

4. See <http://erdkunde.bildung-rp.de/africa/daten1.htm>.

even among senior managers. At most they are the business of trade unionists. To the extent that they are applied, these standards cover only employees or maltreated children to be saved from the clutches of planters in Côte d'Ivoire and their minions in frontier areas.

It is impossible to talk about adapting these standards without first resolving the problems of: 1. who they concern; 2. the language in which these people are to be addressed; and, 3. the potential ways of speaking to them.⁵

Better informing and educating Member countries about conventions is an idea that makes sense, but the ILO too often makes do with a legalistic approach that fails to take account of the real situation in the field. Simply affirming that the parties in the ILO's tripartite structure (governments, employers, and employees) are representative is not enough. Just because the state is called Mali, for instance, does not mean that it has taken up the cause of its workers and is prepared to defend them. The extent of foreign investment and domestic social and political constraints may well cause it to defend other interests. Nor is it because trade unionists come from that country that they will defend the majority that we talked about.

It is not enough to rely on the good faith of one or the other, and international standards too often fail to be applied. The devastation brought about by labor abuses is no less calamitous than that wreaked by weapons of mass destruction. The only difference is that the death of millions of innocents is not scandalous or spectacular enough to interest the international press, which ignores it or at most puts its own slant on it. A handsome body of legal resources means little without an appropriate system of control, i.e., effective inspection and enforcement mechanisms.

The ILO has undoubtedly made considerable progress by shifting away from the concept of the "unstructured sector" to the "informal sector."⁶ It continues, however, to be enslaved to that same teleological model that requires everyone to work toward "progress," which is a synonym for "structured" or "formal." In order to "pave the way for an interpretation of fundamental rights,"⁷ this socio-

5. The new information technologies offer real potential here, but could well turn out to be a wild goose chase. Conditions in the field have to be taken into account. Questions need to be asked about who is to be targeted. The language of address is crucial, since it cannot be any of the imperialist languages whatever they are called: English, French, Spanish, or German. The environment in which they are to come together is also crucial in a country that lacks electricity.

6. See <http://utal.org/movimiento/17frabibl.htm>.

7. ALAIN SUPLOT, *HOMO JURIDICUS. ESSAI SUR LA FONCTION ANTHROPOLOGIQUE DU DROIT* 312 (2005).

evolutionist model needs to be discarded and ways found to take account of the genuine needs and aspirations of civil society. This means giving a voice to those from the NGOs (OXFAM for instance) who have a real knowledge and experience of the field and, in contrast, not listening to those, often better financed and equipped than the former, who do little more than undermine matters.

Taking a knowledge of the field as a starting point helps to provide the resources needed to draw up a working definition of decent work. It is then possible to examine how the ILS are to be applied in the so-called informal (but essential) sector, which does not necessarily share the same parameters of decency as the capitalist system. At this point, the local concept of decency needs to be explored.

The fundamental rights proclaimed in 1998, the Declaration of Philadelphia, the much-vaunted Convention 102, do little to resolve the problems specific to the sector discreetly known as informal. As its name indicates, this sector takes its name from and is shaped by the "formal" sector, which is its sole reference. The risk lies in wanting to resolve the problems of countries and peoples solely from this reference. Generously, there is a desire to extend the same coverage to everyone, but is this not the wrong course? Dominocentrism offers solutions that fit Western societies. With this course of action there is a risk that no account will be taken not only of reality in Africa, but also of the long history of social protection detailed splendidly in Simon Deakin's article in this volume.⁸ Time is needed to discover ways of finding out about local conditions that could pave the way for action; full account then needs to be taken of these conditions.

An example can be used to illustrate this difference. Some years ago in the South Africa it was often said of apartheid: "however wretched a life, it has to end with a memorable funeral worthy of the name." Even today, long funeral processions are to be seen at weekends in Soweto and elsewhere in the Rainbow Nation. Their cost is prohibitive in terms of the resources of the dead person or their survivors. The latter continue, however, to cling to their belief: a worthy end to a wretched life.⁹ The situation is the same in the

8. Simon Deakin & Mark Freedland, *Updating International Labor Standards in the Area of Social Security: A Framework for Analysis*, 27 COMP. LAB. L. & POL'Y J. 151 (2006).

9. ANN SOLOMON, FUNERAL RITES OF THE AMAXHOSA AS THERAPEUTIC PROCEDURES COMPARED TO CRISIS INTERVENTION (1995); SP. MOLEFE, WELFARE PROVISION BY SELECTED SELF-HELP ORGANIZATIONS – AN EXPLORATORY STUDY (1990); M. Stanford, *Stokveis: People's Ways and Means: Development*, NEW GROUND 34–37 (1991); J. Ncube ka Mathanda, *Too Poor to Bury our Loved Ones: More and More People are Abandoning Bodies at the Morgue Because*

Central African countries and the countries along Africa's west coast. While apartheid was not an issue here, the cost of funerals continues to impose an excessively heavy burden on survivors' purses.¹⁰ We have heard about the Mercedes Benz coffins in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.¹¹ While they are undoubtedly the prerogative of the elite, ordinary people continue to be ruined by the funerals of their nearest and dearest, which are the genuine potlatch of modern times, always for the same reasons: the quality of the food and drink, the length of the ceremonies, the reputation of the film crews booked for the occasion, and so on.¹²

As everyone runs the risk of dying, the threat of bankruptcy after the death of a close relation is constantly in the minds of those who are not so well-off. Where can they invest to insure themselves against such a risk? This risk may well expose whole families to sicknesses that cannot be cured because they cannot afford to visit a doctor or buy drugs. The people concerned far prefer to invest in this social duty than in health or in long-term food supplies. Funeral expenses consequently expose people to a risk that is as serious as unemployment or sickness, even though it is not included in the catalogue of risks covered by social security norms.¹³ Thematising death and its consequences does not mean transforming death into a sector of development. The additional deaths and illnesses caused by AIDS highlight the real extent of this problem (even though AIDS kills fewer people than malaria in the Sahel).

Let us move on to the conventional areas covered by Western-style insurers: sickness and old age, starting with the latter. One question that may be cynical but is worth asking: How do you deal with old age in a country where the average age at death is scarcely 45 and the probability of dying before the age of 40 is higher than ever?¹⁴ The nature of the problem may be similar in the nations of the North and South, but the form that it takes is so different that analyses and solutions for one cannot be projected onto the other. What

They Can't Afford the Cost of a Funeral, 26 DRUM 24–25 (Aug 16., 2001); S. Jacobs, *Revenge From the Grave: Strange Rituals to Avenge the Death of Loved Ones*, DRUM, 10–11, (Jan. 1994).

10. Rena Singer, *A Sadly Mounting Ritual*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, April 23, 2001, at 34.

11. MARIA SUSANA CIPOLLETTI, LANGSAMER ABSCHIED: TOD UND JENSEITS IM KULTURVERGLEICH (1989).

12. BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI, ARGONAUTS OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC (1922); MARCEL MAUSS, ESSAI SUR LE DON: FORME ET RAISON DE L'ÉCHANGE DANS LES SOCIÉTÉS ARCHAÏQUES (1925); JAMES G. CARRIER, GIFTS AND COMMODITIES: EXCHANGE & WESTERN CAPITALISM SINCE 1700 (1995).

13. Singer, *supra* note 10.

14. See WORLD REPORT, WORLD HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 252–53 (2002).

percentage of Africans benefit from a pension or even from old age insurance? The average figure given for the working population covered by a statutory social security system in Africa is 5–10%.¹⁵

Is it the same for sickness? The low level of health coverage in the countries of the South is evident and dramatic in Africa. The vast majority of ordinary people care for themselves outside this framework. Since senior managers also make use of local medicine (in cases of psychosomatic disorders, occult protection, orthopedics, etc.), the ways in which local and modern medicine are combined are very important and need to be taken into account.¹⁶ However, nobody really knows how much the care people receive in practice actually costs. Is it really possible to create a system of social protection based on ignorance?

II. THE NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE

The ILS regulate relations between three partners: governments, employers, and employees. A number of questions have to be asked before looking at the role that the ILS can play in developing a rule of law. The authority and legitimacy of governments of countries that are in cut-throat competition to offer the best investment conditions to Western enterprises that are relocating remain to be seen. Similarly, the authority and legitimacy of a government whose only source of revenue is “development aid” have yet to be defined. It is the governments of the South that are faced in the long term with deteriorating trading terms and the price dumping practiced by the governments of rich countries. The fight between the Sahelian David and the U.S.-American Goliath offers an eloquent illustration here as to the future of Sahelian cotton growers competing with those of the south of the United States.¹⁷ When we consider that capital needs and supposed “poverty” are largely explained by this dumping, our countries have no room to maneuver at all. In these circumstances, what meaning can a rule of law have and what authority does a rule of law have to enforce the ILS properly? If the ILO has no tools

15. Reynaud, *supra* note 2, at 1.

16. Tiéman Diarra, *Représentation et Itinéraires Thérapeutiques à Bankoni*, in SE SOIGNER AU MALI. UNE CONTRIBUTION DES SCIENCES SOCIALES: DOUZE EXPÉRIENCES DE TERRAIN 177–91 (Joseph Brunet-Jailly ed., 1993).

17. James Bingen, *Cotton, Democracy and Development*, 36 J. MOD. AFR. STUD. 265–85 (1998); André Linard, *Victime des Rapports Nord-Sud: Le Coton Africain Sinister*, LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE 24 (Sept. 2003); William G. Moseley, *Global Cotton and Local Environmental Management: The Political Ecology of Rich and Poor Small-hold Farmers in Southern Mali*, 171 GEOGRAPHICAL J. 36 (2005).

through which it can find out about and understand the diversity of local situations, it has no choice but to base itself on experience from the old industrial countries and to take no account of the experience of the new countries. In so doing, there is a risk that formal monitoring of the letter of standards will take precedence over their enforcement. If such is the case, very little is to be expected from the ILS.

The emergence of a new kind of standardization among the ILO authorities and a knowledge of the “resources to be used” to extend social security coverage obviously require a thorough analysis of the situation. The starting point has to be to recognize our ignorance and to learn what local practice and knowledge have produced in this field.

Attitudes to sickness and accidents and their prevention are central to security. What do we know about these attitudes? Very little!

Take the example of *sickness*. From what point do you consider yourself to be sick and how do you care for yourself? Is this an individual or a collective action? Collective in the sense that the family and relations take charge of the patient, bearing in mind the real social and economic relations involved. What is called social security elsewhere is provided here by whatever resources are available, and our starting point has to be to study these resources.¹⁸

The case of Mali, and of the countries of the Sahel in general, is well-known: as a result of the liberalization of the trade in medicines, thousands of specialists and—in particular—non-specialists have made health their area of choice. In the case of the “roadside” pharmacies, products imported from Nigeria and Ghana in particular, or arriving from Guinea, are stacked on the stalls of illiterate country people who sell them to passers-by, including antibiotics, with no prescription from a doctor. In this case, the street supply of modern and inexpensive drugs (when they are not dangerous counterfeits) has followed the demand from country and town dwellers accustomed to modern medicine, but also continuing to turn to traditional medicine. The problem is not just the danger posed by these drugs that are flooding the parallel and official market, since pharmacies along the lines of these roadside pharmacies are legion. They operate according

18. LE SENS DU MAL: ANTHROPOLOGIE, HISTOIRE, SOCIOLOGIE DE LA MALADIE (Marc Augé & C. Herzlich C. eds., 1984); Diarra, *supra* note 14; YANNICK JAFFRÉ & JEAN-PIERRE OLIVIER DE SARDAN, UNE MÉDECINE INHOSPITALIÈRE: LES DIFFICILES RELATIONS ENTRE SOIGNANTS ET SOIGNÉS DANS CINQ CAPITALES D’AFRIQUE DE L’OUEST (2003).

to market forces, almost without a code of ethics, reducing drugs to little more than commonplace goods.

In the case of *prevention*, it would be useful to know, for instance, why the farmers and shepherds of the Niger delta use mosquito nets to ward off mosquito bites and therefore malaria, while those from other regions less infested with mosquitoes always avoid this cheapest way of protecting against malaria. It would also be useful to know why those used to using mosquito nets do not use nets treated with insecticides, which are considered to be even more effective. These are crucial questions in the case of an endemic and chronic disease that kills more people than AIDS in countries such as Senegal and Mali.

We still do not know why the average citizen of Dakar or Bamako goes to the doctor only when he or she is ill. Here, the role of prevention is minor or even non-existent. In these countries, however, very few people do not use medicinal plants, formulae, decoctions, and a whole range of amulets made by priests of traditional, Islamic, and Christian religions to prevent against attacks from others. This high-level awareness of prevention does not go as far as positive protection against sickness. This more spiritual protection is rooted in the fear of accidents and their prevention. People protect themselves constantly. They protect themselves spiritually, but certainly do not pay for insurance.

As regards the way in which *the sick are cared for*, we need to know how the family or the village is organized in the event of sickness. The situation of the Peul/Fulani stockbreeders needs to be studied in more detail: they are said to be dying because they do not buy drugs in time, whereas they possess tens if not hundreds of heads of cattle.¹⁹ The notion of "sentimental stockbreeding" may well have been decried, but we still do not know why these stockbreeders, so essential to the national economy, take such an attitude to health care.²⁰

A majority of people care for and protect themselves in a local context, taking account of the products of modern medicine. They are not really concerned about what social security could provide for them. Social security, in the Western sense of the term, is the prerogative of a minority of people who use or rather abuse it, since

19. CAMILLA TOULMIN, *CATTLE, WOMEN, AND WELLS: MANAGING HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL IN THE SAHEL* (1992); Peuls et Mandingues: *Dialectiques des Constructions Identitaires* (Mirjam de Bruijn & Han van Dijk eds., 1997).

20. ANGELO MALIKI BONFIGLIOLI, DUDAL: *HISTOIRE DE FAMILLE ET HISTOIRE DE TROUPEAU CHEZ UN GROUPE DE WODAAABE DU NIGER* (1988).

they try their utmost to use it for the benefit of relations, friends, or other allies who are not legally insured by them.

Social security, in terms of sickness insurance, is making some progress in the health mutuals in Mali and Senegal for instance. Finding out how these types of institutions can be integrated into the local landscape is an unanswered question, assuming that it has ever been asked.

These few examples show how little we know about the contemporary context surrounding any extension of social security. It is said that our past, about which we know so little, may well disappear; in this case, it is the most mundane day-to-day life that is eluding us.

To remedy this, we have to invest in high-quality local research centers. The task cannot be performed from the outside on the basis of mere assumptions; we need to know about the foundations on which we are building, if we really want to do so.

What I have in mind are research centers independent from state structures so that they can achieve results that are not subject to the diktats of the main employer, i.e., the state. They must be staffed by researchers who have a performance contract with the center, thereby avoiding a mentality of officialdom that is the corollary of precariousness.²¹ Independent from the academic world, these knowledge centers could nevertheless help universities by sending researchers to teach there or by supervising the work of young researchers. Their work should focus on development problems that are not being studied by the development agencies or universities, which are preoccupied, if such is the case, by basic or “food” research. The latter is unfortunately the most frequent and consists of a few expert reports or consultations by teachers to round off month ends. The aim is to satisfy an external demand, thereby failing to pave the way for any more advanced thinking.

These knowledge centers must be focused on local issues, which are then located in a wider context to make it possible to draw up “medium-scope theories.”²² The aim is to erect a bridge between the development and academic worlds, between broad academic theory and the working world.²³

21. Colin Bundy, *Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century*, 101 *AFRICAN AFFAIRS* 61–73 (2002); Dominique Darbon, *Réformer ou Réformer les Administrations Projetées des Afriques: Entre Routine Anti-politique et Ingénierie Politique Contextuelle*, 105–06 *REVUE FRANÇAISE D'ADMINISTRATION PUBLIQUE* 135–52 (2003).

22. Bundy, *supra* note 21.

23. Mamadou Diawara, *L'Interface Entre les Savoirs Paysans et le Savoir Universel*, in *L'INTERFACE ENTRE LES SAVOIRS LOCAUX ET LE SAVOIR UNIVERSEL* 8–16 (Mamadou

The challenge to be met is obviously one of conducting independent research that is not instrumental. There are many stumbling blocks along the way: high-level researchers keen to work for and stay on at the center, even if they do not automatically become “officials,” need to be found. Avoiding turning researchers into officials—without placing them in precarious situations—may well help to prevent them losing enthusiasm for their work. Only high-level research open to the outside world can meet the knowledge issues raised by the objective of extending social protection. A contribution from researchers from the diaspora is obviously needed, as the aim, with the help of facilities in the North, is to bring about a brain gain that is free from constraints and in which everyone is a winner. The brain drain is partly due to the fact that people are unable to carry on the trade they have learned and to make the most of the potential they have accumulated during years of education. The aim is to make high-level research in situ compatible with input from Northern university centers in an exchange in which field concerns continue to take priority.

The challenge to be taken up is one of questioning the imperial certainties of the West, which are shared in some circles of the South. The certainties of the North need to be seen in a different light. Unless this happens, we shall continue to apply other people's recipes to a singular situation. They are the product of a place, the North, which is not universal.²⁴ Support for this type of knowledge tool could readily come from the third complementary form of action in the ILO's social security extension policy.²⁵

This type of research is obviously geared toward improving practices. Good field knowledge makes it possible to design appropriate measures to extend social protection. There is no fixed recipe. Nor is there a fast and effective solution. Time is needed. Through ongoing tests and small projects taking account of different situations onto which changes from the outside are grafted, it should be possible to set in motion a genuine operation of trial and error. We

Diawara, ed., 2003); Mamadou Diawara, *Point Sud: Carrefour de gens, pont entre les mondes*, in *L'INTERFACE ENTRE LES SAVOIRS LOCAUX ET LE SAVOIR UNIVERSEL* 17–33 (Mamadou Diawara ed., 2003). Examples include the research being conducted at Point Sud (Local Knowledge Research Centre) on the concepts of “nutrition and malnutrition seen from the village.” ALY BARRY, *LA NUTRITION ET LA MALNUTRITION VUES DU VILLAGE: ÉTUDE DE LA SITUATION NUTRITIONNELLE DES ENFANTS DE 0 À 2 ANS DANS 3 VILLAGES DE LA COMMUNE DE CINZANA* (2001). Recognizing this definition, which differs from that of nutritionists and doctors, is the basic step in any action to improve rural people's daily lives.

24. DIPESH CHAKRABATRY, *PROVINCIALIZING EUROPE: POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT AND HISTORICAL DIFFERENCE* (2000).

25. Reynaud, *supra* note 2, at 2.

shall learn on the job, with the people directly involved. They may well be able to tell us what is successful and what is not in this all-out experiment. From our side, we shall be able to assess and compare experiments from different countries, and from different economic, social, and political constellations. What we therefore need to invent is a real research action of a different type. The ways in which the social security system can be articulated with local forms of solidarity can be envisaged only if serious account is taken of the latter. They should not be seen as a deposit to be mined for its African or Asian pay dirt.²⁶ They need to be understood in their full social and historical context so that the necessary lessons can be learned. If this is not the case, the mistakes already committed in the fields of health and agriculture may well be reproduced. In order to make the most of the resources of the traditional pharmacopoeia, the pharmaceutical industry is trying to reduce medicinal plants to their simplest expression, the active principle, the chemical formula, disregarding the context in which they are produced and used. Experiments in the agricultural field have not brought about a green revolution in Africa. One of the reasons for these setbacks is that research has been limited to laboratories, taking little account of those directly involved, i.e., farmers and stockbreeders.²⁷ The ILO must avoid any similar mistakes.

III. IF YOU SIT ON SOMEONE ELSE'S MAT, YOU SIT ON THE GROUND

The current, formal neo-liberal sector is certainly not the future for all economies. It is running out of steam.²⁸ It is illusory to wish to "formalize" 90% of the economy of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. The informal goes perfectly with "poverty," which is the new buzzword. A few years ago we were "underdeveloped," then "developing," and now "poor." The first concept assumed that we should develop, perhaps along the lines of "home," in a Western style; any hopes there were soon disappointed. Now, we are assessed, or rather measured, against more complex tables.

In the "human development indicator," "development" is no more than a "synthetic measurement tool" that includes life

26. JEAN-PIERRE OLIVIER DE SARDAN, *ANTHROPOLOGIE ET DÉVELOPPEMENT: ESSAI EN SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGIE DU CHANGEMENT SOCIAL* (1997).

27. PAUL RICHARDS, *INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION: ECOLOGY AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN WEST AFRICA* (1985).

28. GEORGE SOROS, *THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM: OPEN SOCIETY ENDANGERED* (1998).

expectancy, access to knowledge, and the possibility of a decent standard of living.²⁹ Along the lines of U.S.-American society, with its GDP in thousands of dollars, but also its millions of people marginalized throughout their lives. Until the next ghetto riots, whatever their color?

In the same way as wealth, a purely quantitative approach to poverty is a view that takes up a way of thinking that reduces the world to money and to figures in a hierarchical table. Can we really reduce the world to a common denominator, the capacity to consume more than a dollar per day, or else be *poor*?

The world has never produced as much wealth, yet at the same time it has never had more disadvantaged people. People who become poorer while the production of goods proliferates are entitled to ask two fundamental questions: (1) Why has the world never had so many poor?; and (2) Is more wealth needed to find a solution to this situation? Other assessment criteria are therefore necessary. For this purpose, we need to start from the experience of those classified as "poor." They need to be seen as subjects, capable of acting well or badly. It is time to find out what they think and how they act. This objective can be achieved only by going into the field and working with them. We need to learn to be aware of our ignorance and to learn from those we are claiming to help. By continuing to use inappropriate instruments to save those whom we love so much from harm, we may just be aggravating the tensions between the "rich" and the "poor."

We have a saying: "If you sit on someone else's mat, you sit on the ground."³⁰ We need to distrust solutions, however generous, that employ methods that are not those of the people of the so-called informal sector. They resolve problems that are not really their problems. Are we not finding the wrong solution and the wrong target group when we try to provide social "protection"—along the lines of the West—for the "poor" about whom we know so little? The snake knows the answer.

29. WORLD REPORT, *supra* note 14.

30. LA NATTE DES AUTRES: POUR UN DÉVELOPPEMENT ENDOGÈNE EN AFRIQUE: ACTES DU COLLOQUE DU CENTRE DE RECHERCHE POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT ENDOGÈNE (C.R.D.E.) (Joseph Ki Zerbo ed., 1992).