

Thank you, My Friend

Conducting research with Gugu was like putting on a pair of 3-D glasses.

In early 2016 I had the privilege of being able to spend a month doing fieldwork with Gugu. I had travelled to South Africa as part of an exchange programme involving Coventry University, UK (where I am a Research Fellow) and Stellenbosch University. I had been in contact with Prof. Simon Bekker prior to my visit and on my first meeting with him he very kindly introduced me to Gugu. I can't remember quite how it happened, but within a week we were making plans to conduct a small project together, exploring how a labour dispute in Stellenbosch in late 2013 had intersected with elements of 'xenophobia', and how subsequent tensions had been interpreted by a range of different local actors.

We spent the next month meeting people and conducting interviews in and around Kayamandi, and pawing over the data together. As I look back now, there are a number of things in particular that have stuck with me: Gugu's attention to and passion for the details of social interactions – conversational inflections, subtle shifts in body language, or what was left unsaid; his extraordinary capacity for empathy and ability to engage with people on their terms; his commitment not just to a vague notion of 'social justice' but to interrogating what social justice is and how it does (or does not) come about; and the way that everything we did was infused with his humour (I still smile when I recall his suggestion that when trying to engage with certain senior figures in the local community we should probably 'make us of my cutis').

On one of our first days of fieldwork we were in a Spaza shop talking with the South African owner. As we conversed and people came in and out of the shop Gugu noticed that only some of the customers were addressed as '*my friend*'. Gugu, teasingly, asked whether some of the customers were not his friends. The owner explained, that the foreigners were '*my friend*' because he didn't know their names – the Zimbabweans and Malawians – but that he can't call South Africans '*my friend*' because that would be like saying that he doesn't know their names. As was often the way with Gugu, this was a source of great fun and amusement, and something to be played with in our subsequent field encounters and conversations – especially when it transpired that of the two of us only Gugu was really a '*my friend*' because I was by and large simply '*umlungu*'. But it also provided insight as to how the apparent familiarity and, quite literally, friendliness of this form of address in this particular context also marked social difference – an illustration of how apparently mundane social interactions could reveal important ambiguities.

In the months following the fieldwork we developed plans for further collaborations to explore everyday forms of insider-outsider politics in South Africa and beyond. We also started towards writing an article together based on our shared fieldwork; an article that sadly remained incomplete at the time of Gugu's passing. I hope, my friend, that over the next few months I am able to do at least partial justice to your insight and wisdom.

Joel Busher, Coventry University, UK, 17th March 2017.