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Practice

The (Di)vision of Sociological Labor

If sociology is the prototype of a public science, then South Africa is one of its heartlands. After graduating in 1968 I spent six months in South Africa as a journalist, but I never returned until the lifting of the academic boycott in 1990. In those twenty-two years I continued my interest in South Africa, following the ebbs and flows of apartheid. In 1990 I accepted an invitation to address the conference of the Association for Sociologists in Southern Africa, subsequently reorganized as the South African Sociological Association. I was to make a presentation on the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, in particular Hungary, where I had been doing research for the previous decade. Given the longstanding association of the African National Congress with the Soviet Union and the rethinking then taking place within the popular South African Communist Party, my talk was of unexpected interest. It was a special time in South African politics – only a few months earlier Mandela had walked out of Robben Island prison, free at last. Especially striking from my point of view was the character of South African sociology – its deep engagement with the struggles against apartheid, and the fascinating developments in industrial sociology, social movements, distinctive feminisms, and studies of violence. This was all on display at the University of Stellenbosch where the conference was held.

How different this was from the US sociology to which I had grown accustomed! I recalled how in 1982 Fernando Henrique Cardoso – then a visiting professor at Berkeley, thirteen years before he would become President of Brazil – was amused by US academics who circulate papers among themselves, publishing articles in professional journals that are typically read by no more than a handful of colleagues. We could be as radical as we wished – and that was a time of the ascendancy of Marxism and feminism within sociology – because outside the university no one was paying any attention. In Brazil, then under military dictatorship, sociologists had to be far more circumspect. There radicalism was a testament to courage and commitment. In South Africa and Brazil, in countries in the Soviet orbit, and, indeed, in many other countries, sociologists were taking their lives into their own hands when they defended critical thinking. Nor did it mean that the content of South African or Brazilian sociology was somehow weaker or less scientific. To the contrary, because so much was at stake sociologists had to do their utmost to get it right. Distinctive theories emerged from their engagement.

After the trip to South Africa in 1990 I returned to Berkeley with a different imagination of what sociology could be, a public sociology very much at odds with my experience of US sociology. When, a few years later, I found myself chair of my department we discussed how we might characterize Berkeley sociology. We agreed that, at least within the US, Berkeley offered a distinctively engaged sociology or *public sociology*.

From Professional Sociology to Public Sociology

Sociology had come late to Berkeley for idiosyncratic reasons. In 1923 the university awarded the irascible Frederick Teggart, autodidact and historian, his own

Department of Social Institutions. It never had more than two full-time faculty but it was an effective buffer against the creation of an independent sociology department. Teggart was openly hostile to sociology, its muckraking disposition and its thin intellectual pedigree. He was not alone. Leaders of the other social sciences on campus also conspired to suppress the discipline. The birth of the sociology department was delayed until Teggart died in 1946. It profited, however, from late development by recruiting up-and-coming sociologists from Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago, and quickly became a leading department in the country.

The 1950s proved to be the golden age for US sociology – the height of Parsonsian structural functionalism that commanded the attention of multiple disciplines, the ascendancy of middle range theory under the inspiration of Robert Merton, the advance of symbolic interaction in Chicago associated with Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman, the development of survey research and new quantitative techniques that gave new precision to studies of social mobility and stratification, and a precocious comparative history and modernization theory that expanded vistas beyond the US. Berkeley had representatives of all these trends. The next generation, during the 1970s and 1980s, were more radical in their public interventions and more critical of mainstream sociology. They reflected the national agitation for the expansion of civil rights that sparked parallel movements on campus for Free Speech, for Third World representation, and against the Vietnam War. Sociology itself became a battlefield, divided between a complacent professionalism and a turbulent political engagement.

By the time I became chair of the sociology department in 1996, old antagonisms had died down but Berkeley retained a reputation for a more engaged sociology based on the widely read works of its faculty: Bob Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (1972); Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (1985); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World*

Is Watching (1980); Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (1989); Kristin Luker, *The Politics of Motherhood* (1984); Martín Sánchez-Jankowski, *Islands in the Street* (1991). PhD students were encouraged to turn their dissertations into accessible books as well as articles in professional journals. With Jonathan VanAntwerpen I wrote a history of the department through the lens of public sociology; we held colloquia on public sociology, both its theory and its practice; we even produced an e-book of public sociology contributions from each faculty person. To the consternation of some of my colleagues, students began applying to the PhD program to do "public sociology"!

Public sociology was, after all, a very US concept. In other countries such as South Africa and Brazil, it was taken for granted that sociology had a public dimension. When I would later talk about public sociology abroad, I was often greeted with puzzlement: what else could sociology be if not public? Only in the US did we have to invent a special term to distinguish public sociology from professional sociology – a sociology that is accountable to a community of scientists, a sociology that is largely inaccessible and incomprehensible to lay audiences. In the postwar period, C. Wright Mills best represented the idea of public sociology, both in the monographs he published – *New Men of Power* (1948), *White Collar* (1951), and *The Power Elite* (1956) – and in his critical assessment of mainstream sociology, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), where he assails the grand theory of Talcott Parsons and the abstracted empiricism of Paul Lazarsfeld. According to Mills, these were the two central tendencies contributing to the degradation of sociology and denying its promise – namely, to stimulate public debate about the big issues of the day.

As I shall be at pains to insist, contrary to Mills, my defense of public sociology in no way implies a rejection of professional sociology. There can be no public sociology without a professional sociology, without the hard-won results of research into inequality, liberal democracy,

social mobility, social movements, gender violence, racial orders, education, and so forth. Without professional sociology we would have nothing to broadcast to the wider society except moral critique. A robust public sociology has to be accountable to an equally robust professional sociology. And vice versa: professional sociology needs public sociology or its research programs would ossify, marching to their own tune, ever more detached from the issues of the day. In *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), Alvin Gouldner correctly anticipated that 1950s sociology – proclaiming America to be the paragon of democracy, paradise on earth, and the "end of ideology" – could not survive the escalating demands for civil rights and social justice. But this wasn't to be the end of sociology. To the contrary, the turbulence of civil society in the 1960s infused sociology with new meaning, new paradigms, new categories, new ways of seeing, new utopias to challenge anti-utopian thinking.

From Policy Sociology to Critical Sociology

The engaged sociology of South Africa was one point of reference for what sociology could be; Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was another. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s I conducted research, first in socialist Hungary, then in the Soviet Union as it made its transition into a post-socialist world. I will have more to say about that research in subsequent chapters, but in this part of the world sociology was of a very different stripe. Indeed, Soviet sociology foundered on a very rocky road, as it had become a transmission belt for the ideology of the party-state. When a new leadership came to power in the Soviet Union it would set sociologists free to run surveys that would demonstrate popular disaffection with the old regime. As the new leadership consolidated itself, it would force sociology back into a tight corner. In short, Soviet sociology became an instrument of the powerful – what

I call *policy sociology*. It exists in all countries but its most pathological form could be found in Soviet societies where it is presumed that the ruling class – through central planning – represents the interests and needs of the whole population. Today Chinese sociology exhibits similar subordination to the party-state, especially the research conducted in the Academy of Social Sciences that promotes the latest party ideology. In Chinese universities professional sociology is freer, but there too academics are aware of the strict limits on the questions to be asked, and how society can be spoken of.

Still, alongside the policy sociology promoted by authoritarian regimes, there is often an underground *critical sociology* that exposes and opposes the instrumentalization or weaponizing of sociology. In Hungary in the 1970s, there was a flourishing critical sociology. I was especially influenced by Miklós Haraszti's book, translated as *A Worker in a Worker's State* (1977), a riveting account of his experiences working in the Red Star Tractor Factory – despotism at the heart of state socialism. In 1979 George Konrád and Iván Szelényi published their now-classic critique of state socialism, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power,* analyzing the antagonism between a working class of direct producers and an emergent ruling class of intellectuals – "teleological redistributors" who organized and justified the appropriation and redistribution of surplus. In revealing the underlying class character of state socialism, Konrád and Szelényi debunked the dominant ideology of classless society. Szelényi's (1983) urban research in the 1960s demonstrated how market reforms can benefit the working class, just as under capitalism it is the state that benefits the working class. The relative balance of critical and policy sociology under authoritarian regimes varies from country to country and from period to period, accompanying a relatively weak or even nonexistent professional and public sociology. Indeed, if we look across history and across countries we find that the articulation of these four

types of sociology is shaped by inherited legacies as well as economic and political contexts.

Defining Four Sociologies

To comprehend the complex relations among the four sociologies, we present them in a matrix motivated by two fundamental questions: Knowledge for Whom? Knowledge for What? In answer to the first question we distinguish between *academic* and *extra-academic audiences*. In answer to the second question we distinguish between *instrumental knowledge* that is focused on the means for a given end, solving puzzles in research programs (professional sociology) or problems defined by clients (policy sociology); and *reflexive knowledge* that is focused on goals, ends, or values, whether it be critical sociology that interrogates the foundations of professional sociology within the academic community, or public sociology that generates public discussion about the overall direction of society. While professional and policy sociologies answer narrowly defined questions, critical and public sociologies uncover the value foundations such questions eclipse.

The tensions among these four types of knowledge are palpable. We have already referred to the relation between professional and public sociology: the former

Table 2.1: The Division of Sociological Labor

		Knowledge for Whom?	
		ACADEMIC AUDIENCE	EXTRA-ACADEMIC AUDIENCE
Knowledge for What?	INSTRUMENTAL KNOWLEDGE	Professional Sociology	Policy Sociology
	REFLEXIVE KNOWLEDGE	Critical Sociology	Public Sociology

Source: Author's own

is theoretical/empirical knowledge that follows scientific norms whose validity is based on correspondence to reality and evaluated by and accountable to peers; the latter is communicative knowledge defined by its relevance to publics whose validity is based on deliberative consensus. I have already argued that the relationship is one of interdependence as well as antagonism.

Similarly, policy sociology provides concrete knowledge that serves clients and is evaluated on the basis of effectiveness, whereas critical sociology is foundational knowledge with moral vision made valid by normative principles, accountable to a community of critical intellectuals. Like professional and public sociology, critical and policy sociology are ostensibly opposed and provide a necessary mutual corrective for each other. Critical sociology reminds policy sociologists of the unspoken assumptions behind their research, just as policy sociology offers an anti-utopian antidote to the utopian proclivities of critical sociology – although policy sociology can also suffer from wishful thinking, as we shall see. Policy sociology, like public sociology, reminds critical sociologists of the relevance of research for the world beyond the academy.

The relationships continue, as professional and critical sociologies are simultaneously interdependent and antagonistic. Professional sociologists may be annoyed by critical sociologists snapping at their heels, questioning what they take for granted. But professional sociology, nonetheless, requires a critical sociology that interrogates the foundational assumptions of research programs – often repressed assumptions that are at the root of the on-going expansion of a given program, assumptions that may also be the obstacle to shifting toward an alternative program, one that is perhaps more consonant with the times. The stronger the professional sociology, the more important the function of critical sociology. In the United States examples of critical sociology are the aforementioned *The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills and *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* by Alvin Gouldner

– both aimed at structural functionalism, both elicited a hostile reaction from consecrated sociologists, both appealed to new generations of sociologists.

A similar antagonistic interdependence governs the relations between public and policy sociology. Policy sociologists, seeking to establish their legitimacy with clients on the basis of their recondite scientific expertise, and operating in private, are threatened by and therefore hostile to the advance of public debate and discussion of the values underlying their proposals. Policies attractive to states with regard to poverty, health insurance, and education may not be so popular with broader publics who have to live with those policies. Anticipated, problematic, or failed attempts at policy formulation often spur public debates that can reverberate back into professional sociology. One has only to think of the debate and research generated by policies focused on crime reduction, school segregation, poverty alleviation, welfare reform, affirmative action, and so much else.

The short-term tension and long-term synergy between instrumental and reflexive knowledge has its parallel in the relation between knowledge geared to academic and extra-academic audiences. Policy sociology can provide the guiding questions and resources for professional sociology, but it can also distort research programs, a tension we find ever more common as universities become strapped for funds. Public sociology can find a greater audience for the discipline but detracts from critical sociology's attention to the discipline's underlying foundations. In brief, the extra-academic pressures can threaten the autonomy of the academic project.

Underlying this scheme is the presumption that all four sociologies are necessary for a vibrant discipline. They form an organic division of labor in which each, potentially, contributes to the flourishing of the whole, but each can also assume a pathological form, threatening the integrity of the whole: when professional sociology becomes self-referential, when policy sociology is captured

by clients, when critical sociology becomes dogmatic, and when public sociology devolves into populist appeal or faddishness. In each case the particular type of sociology cuts itself off from the others to the detriment of the discipline as a whole.

Emphasizing the importance of all four types of sociological practice, this scheme courts criticism from all sides because actual sociologists tend to specialize in one or two of these practices, and elevate them to a dominant place in the discipline. Inflating their own importance, representatives of each type of knowledge either assimilate other sociologies under their own umbrella or reduce them to their pathological form, dismissing them as endangering the discipline as a whole. Thus, professional sociologists may claim that they are their own best critics, making a specific critical sociology superfluous, or they may repudiate critical sociology as dogmatic and destructive. Or, most likely, they do both. Again, professional sociologists may claim that going public is part of their day-to-day work or, alternatively, they may dismiss public sociology as pandering to the public. Public sociologists, for their part, may recognize professional sociology as a subordinate wing of their own enterprise or they may dismiss it as self-referential and irrelevant.

So sociology, like any other discipline, becomes a field of struggle. Representatives of a given knowledge-practice assert their control by expelling other knowledge-practices from the field, incorporating them as subordinate partners within the field or by absorbing them into a redefinition of the aggressor's knowledge-practice. The defeated may accept the terms of the dominant or create their own subfield. The resulting unstable equilibrium, reflected in a specific pattern of domination, will vary historically and by country, sensitive to the wider political context.

This matrix can be applied to all disciplines, but each discipline will have its own characteristic pattern of domination: in the natural sciences the instrumental will prevail over the reflexive; in the humanities the reverse

might be the case. The social sciences, being in between, can have a particularly unstable pattern of domination between instrumental and reflexive hegemonies.

Competition in the National and Global Arenas

Conventionally, the field of sociology has national parameters so that within each country the four sociologies strike a different balance. But national fields are also embedded in a global field of domination. Northern countries have a monopoly of resources favoring academic autonomy and professionalization, while countries with fewer resources and a more precarious academic order may give more attention to public engagement. Salaries in the Global South may be low, forcing some sociologists into a local-policy sociology or to scramble for consultancies with international organizations. Other sociologists seek ties to the North by writing in dominant languages, primarily English but also French or German, and publishing in Northern (so-called international) journals. The antagonistic interdependence among the different knowledge practices is intensified when the division of labor is projected onto the global arena.

Such global stratification is intensified by global ranking systems based on measures of productivity and recognition. Nation states endorse an evaluation of their universities against the so-called top-ranking universities of the North. Absurd though it may be to have a single set of criteria, evaluating a university in Africa in the same terms as Harvard, such ranking systems are used by states and university administrators to discipline academics and to attract economic investment to their universities or to seek international collaboration. The resulting incentive system has perverse consequences. Orienting oneself to the North – obtaining a degree from the North and aiming to become a global cosmopolitan – usually requires a position in one

of the elite Southern national universities. It cuts sociologists off from their less fortunate colleagues, but also from their own communities. Speaking of universities in the Arab East, Sari Hanafi (2011) expressed the dilemmas of the academic: "Publish locally and perish globally or publish globally and perish locally." Competing in the global arena may be so off-putting, so out of their reach, that many turn to local engagement as public sociologists or they simply despair of ever giving their job a sense of vocation.

Thus, inequalities of the global order stamp themselves on the national field. Within northern nations, too, there is an established hierarchy of universities, dependent on the resources they garner, the prestige they hold, the students they attract. And within the university, there is a growing two-tier order separating those who hold tenure-track positions and those employed on a more or less contingent basis to teach. The expansion and differentiation of higher education combines with privatization to increase inequalities at every level. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 15 by expanding the significance of the four types of knowledge-practice.

Sociology's Standpoint: Civil Society

If sociology is a terrain of struggle, what holds it together? What meta-understanding do sociologists share that makes the struggles possible? Here one has to return to the rise of modern sociology. Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and the early Du Bois were writing when sociology was not yet a proven academic field; the division of labor described above was still latent. The dawn of sociology reflected the rise of civil society in Europe and the US at the end of the nineteenth century – civil society understood as the movements, organizations, and institutions that are part of neither the state nor the economy. Civil society represents the drawing of popular classes into a national framework

through political parties, trade unions, voluntary associations, social movements that tied family and community to the state. Just as economics took the standpoint of the economy and the expansion of the market, just as political science took the standpoint of the state and the consolidation of political power, so sociology took the standpoint of civil society and the assemblage of collective power.

Sociology reflects the nature of civil society: when civil society disappears, as in Pinochet's Chile or Stalin's Russia, so sociology disappears or goes underground; when civil society is fragmented or precarious, so sociology suffers a parallel tendency. To say that sociology takes the standpoint of civil society is not to say that sociology only studies civil society. To the contrary, it studies politics, economics, and more from the standpoint of civil society. Thus, economic sociology studies the way the market is simultaneously supported by and erodes civil society; political sociology studies the roots of liberal democracy in civil society as well as the way the state consolidates or threatens civil society.

A thriving civil society is a cacophony of institutions, organizations, and movements with roots in a plurality of values – notions of freedom, equality, solidarity – that are at the heart of sociology, motivating its research programs. Civil society, in other words, is the source of a plurality of utopian visions – "real utopias," as Erik Wright (2010) calls them – that sociology uncovers and spreads through discussion and debate in a public sphere. Sociology examines how state and economy depend upon civil society as a condition of their existence, but also how state and economy obstruct – and sometimes facilitate – the realization of the utopian imaginations embedded in civil society. The plurality of values circulating within civil society makes for a plurality of sociologies, a plurality of public sociologies, and a plurality of real utopias. The only value that all sociologists share as sociologists is the commitment to the consolidation and expansion of civil society and an open public discourse that supports it.