Am Soc (2013) 44:23–41
DOI 10.1007/s12108-012-9173-2

No Path to Paradise: Deconstructing the Promise of Public Sociology

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Published online: 12 January 2013
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Abstract This essay treats Burawoy's advocacy for public sociology as a social problems claim. Using a social constructionist approach, I examine the rhetorical strategies Burawoy uses to construct the discipline in a way that makes public sociology seem not only relevant, but integral to what sociologists do. Sociology's history, ethos and practitioners are framed in ways that make its commitment to the civil sphere appear as a "natural" direction for the discipline. Certain features of the discipline are foregrounded. Motives and desires are imputed. Villains are constructed and the paths to progress are outlined. By examining the framing strategies Burawoy uses to present his vision, the promise of public sociology is called into question. I do not argue that public sociology is without value. Rather, I unpack the claims its advocates make and question whether public sociology can deliver on its promise of a better sociology or a better society.

Keywords Public sociology · Social constructionism · Claimsmaking · Critique

Paradise remains a persistent symbol culled from humanity's mythos, evoking the acute pain of loss and the hopeful promise of a return to bliss. The longing for Paradise lost has led countless figures throughout history to seek those who bear the lost knowledge that will reveal the path back to Paradise. And so it was with Burawoy's (2005a) rallying cry *For Public Sociology*, which begins by invoking the image of Paradise lost to progress. In returning to Burawoy's call 7 years later, we see a longing for a lost past and the hope of reclaiming civil society, our own piece of Paradise.

Burawoy's work on public sociology is an attempt to construct the discipline as a coherent whole with a singular ethos that drives the work of those who practice it. In making the case for public sociology, Burawoy positions sociology as the guardian of civil society. Undoubtedly, his address and the tireless work he has done promoting his vision invigorated the discipline. But, Burawoy's advocacy was about more than

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simply rallying the troops; he has sought to establish public sociology as a legitimate part of the sociological endeavor rather than something sociologists simply do "on the side." Thus Burawoy's speaking and writing on the matter have involved convincing his audience (other sociologists) that sociology is inherently committed to the types of activities to which public sociology leads. His construction of sociology and his definition of our collective ethos offers a particular promise: that sociology in general and public sociology in particular can renew the public sphere and defend the interests of humanity.

Using a constructionist analysis, this essay examines the strategies by which the need for public sociology has been constructed and sold to the discipline. Burawoy's arguments for public sociology are treated as a social problems claim. Civil society, he argues, is disappearing. Sociology stands as one of the last bastions capable of defending it. I examine how sociology's history, its practitioners and its role in the academy were framed in a way to make the promise of public sociology as "defender of humanity" seem not only possible, but natural. Unpacking the rhetorical moves used to present this vision and bind the discipline to it helps us to take up a critical dialogue around the assumptions and values that are embedded within it. Are the four sociologies Burawoy identifies truly interdependent? Is the standpoint of sociology civil society as he argues? Is there any authority that can provide a binding mandate for what sociology should be about?

This essay examines the rhetorical strategies Burawoy utilizes to advance his argument that sociology's natural commitment is to the civil sphere and its defense and that public sociology must be an integral part of the discipline if it is to flourish. In this issue of *The American Sociologist* both Adorjan (2012) and Kelly and Farahbakhsh (2012) have presented visions of how public sociology can be used to create a better world and a richer sociology. In contrast, I am much more doubtful. Although I will not argue that public sociology should be avoided, I aim to offer some perspective on its promise. The constructionist analysis presented here leads to questions about 1) whether sociology has any natural "standpoint," 2) whether the four types of sociology Burawoy constructs truly do require each other to flourish, 3) whether sociology has any type of core ethos and, lastly, 4) whether sociologists are qualified to shape society for the better. Thus, although public sociology offers much, it cannot offer us a path to Paradise.

To begin, the article will outline the basics of the constructionist approach being used and explain why it is relevant for this analysis. Following this I demonstrate how Burawoy's advocacy for public sociology tells a story of sociology's historical roots and its current status. I will rely on the concepts of "diagnostic frames" which typify a state of affairs, "motivational frames" which concern why audiences should care and "prognostic frames" which have to do with the ameliorative actions that should be taken (Loseke 2003; Snow and Benford 1988). I argue that Burawoy offers a "diagnostic frame" in detaling the challenges faced not only by the discipline, but by civil society in general. He constructs a "motivational frame" by appealing to a sociological ethos that drives the discipline toward the pursuit of social justice and equality. Lastly, he provides a "prognostic frame" that outlines how to address the problems he identifies and explains why sociologists "own" these solutions. Throughout this process, certain facts are foregrounded while others are pushed to the background. Motives and desires are imputed. Villains are constructed and the paths to progress are outlined.

The Constructionist Approach

The social constructionist approach to studying social problems is primarily concerned with the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions (Spector and Kitsuse 1977:75). A fundamental premise of the approach is that conditions or situations are not inherently problematic, but may come to be seen as such as the result of claimsmaking activity. Claimsmaking refers to ". . . any verbal, visual, or behavioral statement that tries to persuade audience members to take a condition seriously and respond to it as a social problem" (Loseke and Best 2003: 39).

Framing the Problem

Elaborating on the claimsmaking process, social constructionists have focused on process of framing problems. In order to convince their audiences, claimsmakers create an interpretive context, a frame, through which the audience is meant to make sense of the problem in question. In constructing this frame, claimsmakers usually 1) establish the facts of the matter of the problem and its causes (a diagnostic frame), 2) motivate people to care and to do something about it (a motivational frame) and 3) provide a solution for the problem (a prognostic frame) (Loseke 2003; Snow and Benford 1988).

The diagnostic frame establishes the "facts" of the problem, answers questions about its scope and establishes its causes (Best 1990; Loseke 2003; Snow and Benford 1988). They are comprised of definitions, typifying examples and estimates of the problem's extent (Best 1990). Usually, constructing the grounds of the problem involves statements establishing how widespread the problem is. These statements indicate how often the problem occurs, who or what is affected by it and how quickly the problem is growing. The diagnostic frame also answers questions about whom or what is responsible for causing the problem (Loseke 2003; Snow and Benford 1988).

Beyond diagnosing the problem, claimsmakers must also motivate their audiences to do something about it. They do so by constructing what (Loseke 2003) and Snow and Benford (1988) refer to as *motivational frames*. Motivational frames answer the audience's question, "Why should we care?" (Loseke 2003: 63); they provide justification for action to solve the problem. This is achieved by framing the condition as being inconsistent with or a threat to commonly held values that Loseke (2003) refers to as *cultural themes*.

Lastly, claimsmakers must provide a solution to the problem. Known as "prognostic frames," these claims outline what should be done and who is responsible for doing it (Loseke 2003: 98). Prognostic frames are inextricably linked to the framing processes that come before it. A condition that is framed as a medical problem will yield a prognostic frame that identifies medical solutions and usually mandates medical professionals to deliver those solutions.

By examining how Burawoy constructs these frames with regard to the "problem" of civil society, this paper uncovers Burawoy's typification of sociology and renders obvious the claims-making strategies he uses in making his case for a public sociology. In doing so, I raise questions about the ambitions Burawoy has for public sociology. These ambitions, that sociology in general and public sociology in

particular are responsible for and capable of protecting the civil sphere and "defend[-ing] the interests of humanity" (Burawoy 2005a: 24) requires that civil society be under threat and that sociologists can, in some way, determine how best to deal with this threat. In the following sections, I will examine how Burawoy constructs the civil sphere as a problem and positions sociology as holding the solutions.

Constructing the Diagnostic Frame

The first task for social problems claimsmakers is to construct a diagnostic frame that lays out the boundaries, scope and causes of the conditions they see as problematic. These facts are key to the entire claimsmaking process. If they are not accepted by the audience, it becomes difficult to motivate them to care about the issue or convince them of who should "own" the problem's solution.

The Erosion of Civil Society

Burawoy (2005a) frames his advocacy for public sociology in terms of a concern over the erosion of civil society. This is the key problematic in his argument. His 2004 presidential address begins by outlining the problem:

> Unfettered capitalism fuels market tyrannies and untold inequities on a global scale, while resurgent democracy too often becomes a thin veil for powerful interest, disenfranchisement, mendacity and even violence. (pp. 4–5)

The problem, we are told, has only been getting worse:

> Over the last 25 years, earlier gains in economic security and civil rights have been reversed by market expansion (with their attendant inequalities) and coercive states, violating rights at home and abroad. . . . the evidence they[sociologists] have accumulated does suggest regression in so many arenas. And, of course, as I write, we are governed by a regime that is deeply antisociological in its ethos, hostile to the very idea of "society." (p. 7)

The regression Burawoy identifies has affected the home of sociology itself:

> . . . the university has suffered mounting attacks . . . facing declining budgets and under intensified competition, public universities have responded with market solutions—joint ventures with private corporations, advertising campaigns to attract students, fawning over private donors, commodifying education through distance learning, employing cheap temporary professional labor, not to mention armies of low-paid service workers. (p. 7)

His statements reflect a common strategy used by claimsmakers in constructing the grounds of a problem: portray the problem as a worsening situation (Best 2008). The rhetoric of a worsening situation is found throughout: "regression," "mounting attacks," and "intensified competition." There is little evidence given, but this framing of the political situation and academic climate is likely to resonate with the sympathetic audience of sociologists. The claim sets up the need for immediate action

and plays into the motivational frame. The problem is only getting worse and someone (sociologists) must step up to fight back.

Neoliberalism and Villainous Disciplines

With the problem and its growing threat established, claimsmakers may attempt to assign blame for the problem. For Burawoy, the "villains" responsible for the erosion of civil society are found in the realms of the ". . . market and state [who] have collaborated against humanity in what has commonly come to be known as neoliberalism" (Burawoy 2005a: 7). Their academic representatives, economics and political science, are taken to task for being apologists for these forces:

> I do believe that economics and political science, between them, have manufactured the ideological time bombs that have justified the excesses of markets and states, excesses that are destroying the foundations of the public university, that is, their own academic conditions of existence as well as s much else. (Burawoy 2005a: 24)

This maneuver not only rallies the audience against a common enemy, but also sets up public sociology to claim ownership over the problem's solution. Economics and political science cannot stop the threat of neoliberalism as they are complicit in its creation. Sociology is thus left as the discipline poised to challenge this threat to civil society.

Challenging Older Interpretations

In order to position sociology as the "owner" of this problem, Burawoy defines sociology's project and ethos as one dedicated to the defense of civil society. The argument here hinges on establishing sociology as a unified discipline, at least in this regard. Thus Burawoy pays attention to re-orienting how sociologists themselves understand their discipline. He engages in a type of grounds construction that Best (2008: 35) refers to as "challenging older interpretations." In this case, the challenge being laid down was not to the definition of the problem itself, but to the division of sociological labor. Burawoy's division of sociological labor offers an alternative understanding of sociology's various factions (professional, policy, critical and public). What might have been perceived as irreconcilable divisions are recast as cohesive and interdependent. As McLaughlin et al. (2005) note:

> Burawoy's presidential address . . . is such an important and inspiring break from the past, precisely because he attempted to break out of these old debates. He offered us not the same old internal battle between radical and mainstream sociology, but a new framework that sees professional sociology and policy sociology in a complimentary, not antagonistic, dialogue with critical sociology . . . (p. 135)

Presenting sociology as a discipline of complementary pursuits allows Burawoy to (ideally) align these various divisions behind his vision of a discipline bound by a common "sociological ethos." Instead of participating in a zero-sum game of

disciplinary domination, sociologists of all stripes are asked to understand their work as part of a larger movement toward a common goal.

Again, the construction of grounds here becomes imperative for what follows. If public sociology is to gain recognition, the discipline must be constructed in a way that makes public sociology an integral part of the disciplinary agenda. Further, this construction must be done in a way that makes public sociology indispensible to the project. As Burawoy states in the abstract to his presidential address "These public sociologies should not be left out in the cold, but brought into the framework of our discipline. In this way we make public sociology a visible and legitimate enterprise, and, thereby, invigorate the discipline as a whole" (Burawoy 2005a: 5). Thus Burawoy (2005a) argues that the instrumental knowledge valued in professional and policy sociology depends on the reflexive knowledge found in critical sociology:

> However disruptive in the short term, in the long term instrumental knowledge cannot thrive without challenges from reflexive knowledges, that is, from the renewal and redirection of the values that underpin their research, values that are drawn from and recharged by the wider society. (p. 19)

Burawoy argues that each of these sociologies is necessary, that ". . . the flourishing of each type of sociology is a condition for the flourishing of all" (2005a: 4). This interdependence is stressed as key for the health of the discipline. By tempering the instrumental knowledge of professional and policy sociology with the reflexive tendencies of critical and public sociology, we are told that we can ". . . manufacture a *bolder* and more *vital* vision" (Burawoy 2005a: 18, emphasis added). This formulation of mutually dependent (though not equal) types of sociologies allows him to present sociology as a cohesive whole, connected by a common ethos and capable of moving in the same direction.

But is this the case? Would a professional sociology without a policy, public or critical aspect be any less vibrant? Its form would certainly be *different*. Without critical sociology, professional and policy sociology certainly would attend to the topics of race, class and gender in a very different manner than they currently do. But would sociology be worse off on this altered trajectory? Burawoy certainly thinks so. Without critical sociology to keep sociology honest and public sociology to keep it public, it would be too easy for professional and policy sociology to assume their "pathological" forms.

> In the pursuit of the puzzle solving . . . professional sociology can easily become focused on the seemingly irrelevant . . . policy sociology is all too easily captured by clients who impose strict contextual obligations on their funding, distortions that can reverberate back into professional sociology. (Burawoy 2005a: 17)

But the question becomes, why is what is described here seen as pathological? What is wrong with a policy sociology more closely tied to the needs of its clients? In fact, paying a bit more attention to what our clients want seems to be the recommendation of our clients themselves. Burawoy (2005b) points out that the heads of research for the Labour government in England have complained that sociology is

methodologically faulty and unconcerned with producing anything useful in the policy realm (Davies 2004; Johnson 2004; Wiles 2004).

In light of these comments, it would seem that policy sociology has failed to flourish. In fact, it may need to become a bit more "pathological" in order to succeed. But Burawoy's (2005b) response in this matter moves in a different direction. Instead of attempting to discover how to address the concerns of policy sociology's clients, he advocates packing up shop and, instead, influencing policy through public sociology's policy dimension. He states:

> Ulrich Beck, for example, recounts the results of his extended research into the policy uses or rather abuses of sociology, that when it is deployed sociological knowledge is transformed out of all recognition. . . . It becomes a servant of power. . . . the influence of sociology on policy, if it comes at all, will come via its public face. (Burawoy 2005b: p. 420–421)

It seems sociology's four faces have become a trio.

But, again, we must ask if a policy sociology tied closer to the needs of clients would be such a terrible fate. We may gasp and rage at the specter of a sociology flourishing in service to industry and government, the agents of power. It seems to fly in the face of *what sociology should be about* and it is this sentiment that brings me to the next lynch pin in Burawoy's argument: the sociological ethos.

Constructing the Motivational Frame

The notion of the "sociological ethos" plays a prominent role in Burawoy's claims. Above, we saw how the problem being addressed, the shape of sociology and the value commitments of its competitors have been framed by Burawoy. Once these facts are established, the next step is to develop a motivational frame. Motivational frames provide justification for action to solve the problem. This is achieved by framing the condition as being inconsistent with or a threat to commonly held values or *cultural themes* (Loseke 2003).

The Sociological Ethos

The "cultural themes" of sociology are expressed through Burawoy's (2005a) concept of the "sociological ethos." In order for sociology to be seen as the natural defender of civil society, Burawoy must present sociology as a cohesive discipline driven by a common ethos. Thus one of his first tasks was to find a way to bring the disparate factions within sociology together. He does this by framing them as mutually dependent. If one of the pieces is missing, the others risk spiraling into their pathological forms. This problem is especially acute for the sociological forms on his "instrumental knowledge" axis (professional and policy). Since, as Burawoy argues, these forms are dominant (at least in North America), they are the types best positioned to descend into their pathological forms. Thus a robust critical and public sociology must be maintained to keep the dominant forms in check. However, above, I asked why these pathological forms are considered "pathological." If they had proceeded unchecked by critical sociology, for instance, they may certainly be

different than the form they take today, but why is this negative? This is where the sociological ethos becomes useful.

According to Burawoy (2004), the sociological ethos is ". . . an ethos opposed to inequality, to the erosion of civil liberties, to the destruction of public life, and to discrimination and exclusion" (p. 1604). In this characterization of the sociological ethos lies the answer to why a policy sociology that serves the interests of the machinery of power is at odds with what sociology should be about. To serve agents of power is to serve those who threaten public life and perpetuate inequality. But why is the sociological ethos typified by opposing inequality and the destruction of the public sphere?

Buraway argues that this ethos evolves with the interests and commitments of sociologists themselves. His (2005a) first thesis ("The Scissors Movement") is that over the past half-century, sociology has moved in one direction while the interests of the market and the state have moved the world in the opposite direction. This movement to the left represents an evolution in the sociological ethos. In both his presidential address (2005a) and his piece in Social Forces (2004), Burawoy points to the ASA's anti-war resolutions in 1968 and 2003. While the anti-Vietnam war resolution failed to pass, the 2003 resolution against the Iraq war passed with a healthy majority. It seems that over the intervening 35 years, the commitments of sociologists have shifted:

> One might conjecture that in 1968 a very different generation dominated the profession—a postwar generation celebratory of the U.S. and its "victory over fascism," among them pioneers of professional sociology. Today's post-Vietnam generations are more accustomed to criticizing the U.S. government and in particular its foreign policy. They are also less concerned about the purity of sociology as science and more likely to assume that our accumulated knowledge should be put to public use, whether in the form of member resolutions or policy interventions. (Burawoy 2004: 1604)

Thus the sociological ethos is not a static feature of the sociological endeavor, but one that shifts and changes with the interests of sociologists themselves.

But there is a tension in Burawoy's notion of the sociological ethos. At some points, this ethos is portrayed as a spirit that is nimble, malleable and responsive to evolving interests and value commitments of sociologists. He states:

> Thus, empirical science can only take us so far: it can help us understand the consequences of our value commitments and inform our value discussions, but it cannot determine those values. Determining values should take place through democratic and collective deliberation. (Burawoy 2004: 1607)

In his presidential address, Burawoy argues that "If sociology actually supports more liberal or critical public sociologies that is a consequence of the evolving ethos of the sociological community" (Burawoy 2005a: 9). But an ethos is not enough to keep the four faces of sociology bound to each other. The term ethos implies preference. Our ethos defines what sociologists would prefer sociology to be about. But it seems strange to say that a sociology that moves counter to a preference is "pathological." If policy sociologists choose to pursue closer bonds with the agents of

power and social control, it may fly in the face of the current sociological ethos, but could they be accused of anything more than failing to toe the line? Again, what makes such a stance "pathological?" The most that can be said is that such sociologists are not interested in what critical sociologists think they should be interested in. If this is the case, the idea that the four quadrants of sociology are interdependent and that the flourishing of one requires the flourishing of all begins to crack. It becomes clear that policy sociology could plunge into its pathological form and thrive by catering to the needs of those with wealth, influence and power. And this could be achieved with little input from the critical or public quadrants. There is no need for interdependence here.

Burawoy (2005a) is acutely aware of this:

> At least in the United States professional and policy sociologies—the one supplying careers and the other supplying funds—dictate the direction of the discipline. . . . This pattern of domination derives from the embeddedness of the discipline in a wider constellation of power interests. In our society money and power speak louder than values and influence" (p. 18).

In light of this, something stronger than an ethos is needed to keep the four quadrants bound to each other. This is done is by treating the sociological ethos as an *ethic*, a set of moral principles that guide sociology. The implication is made that if professional sociology's insularity and policy sociology's client centered focus are not "kept honest" by the reflexive forms of sociological knowledge, they become destructive—not just to sociology, but to the idea of civil society itself. A policy sociology that serves the interests of the powerful is seen as morally wrong.

Thus, at times the commitments defined in the ethos Burawoy describes above are simply preferences that reflect the current spirit of its members and at other times they are moral principles that delineate right sociology from wrong. In the former case, by framing the ethos as a type of preference rather than obligation, Burawoy is (hopefully) able to keep the peace between the various factions and maintain his assertion that the discipline is not fractured, but a cohesive whole. In the latter, case, the construction flips entirely. The sociological ethos is constructed as an obligation. When any of the sociological types step too far away from this obligation, they are labeled "pathological." This is also serves to portray sociology as a cohesive whole. It keeps the various factions tethered to each other. However, it also lends authority to Burawoy's central claim about the role of sociology. Thus, while Burawoy argues that this ethos simply reflects the value preferences of sociological practitioners, there is work done to show that this ethos is actually an ethic rooted in sociology's "past" and that this historical precedent gives sociologists the moral imperative to act as "defenders of humanity."

Constructing Prognostic Frames

Burawoy's claim that sociologists can serve as protectors of civil society becomes the foundation for his prognostic frame that serves to ". . . construct a general line of action (what should be done) and it constructs the responsibility for that action (who

should do it)" (Loseke 2003: 98). The prognostic frame Burawoy constructs focuses on ownership of the problem. Through his construction of sociology's historical roots and his characterization of other disciplines in the social sciences, he creates a frame that leaves sociology well positioned to defend the interests of civil society. Interestingly, how public sociology will stop the destruction of the civil sphere is left somewhat vague.

Constructing Ownership of the Problem through Sociology's "Roots"

In placing sociology as the defender of civil society, Burawoy links the discipline to a long tradition of engagement in public sociology, social justice advocacy and interest in the civil sphere. Early in his presidential speech, he positions sociology as an "angel of history, searching for order in the broken fragments of modernity, seeking to salvage the promise of progress" (Burawoy 2005a: 5). Marx's socialism, Durkheim's organic solidarity and Weber's ability to ". . . discover freedom in rationalization, and extract meaning from disenchantment" (Burawoy 2005a: 5) are given as examples of sociology's commitment from its earliest days to delivering hope in times of darkness. W. E. B. Dubois, Jane Addams and C. Wright Mills are each invoked in turn as examples of sociology's historical roots in public sociology aimed at "changing the world" (Burawoy 2005a: 5). Burawoy's first thesis, the "scissors movement," likewise presents a construction of sociology's history in terms of its commitment to humanity and civil society. His 8th thesis notes that the roots of the discipline in America were inherently public and activist oriented, dedicated to working with various reform groups to document and demonstrate the social problems of the age. By the end, he uses his construction of sociology's past to argue the discipline's place as nothing less than the defender of the "interests of humanity" (Burawoy 2005a: 24)

While foregrounding certain events that cast sociology as inherently interested in the promotion of civil society, historical moments that run counter to this narrative are backgrounded or treated as turning points that provoked the retrenchment of public sociology in the discipline's psyche. Whereas Marx, Durkheim and Weber are typified as sociology's early founders who rooted the discipline in a concern for civil society, another of the discipline's progenitors, Comte, is largely excised. The only reference to Comte takes the form of "Comtean visions" momentarily gripping the discipline. In fact, the move towards promoting sociology as a morally agnostic, pure science is cast as a short-lived "burst" that is uncharacteristic of the discipline's general history. In thesis eight, the burgeoning professional, state sponsored sociology of the mid 20th century is set up as a foil to reinvigorate the discipline's interest in its public sociology roots during the "third phase" of American sociology. This third phase, characterized by ". . . critical sociology's engagement with professional sociology . . . provided the energy and imagination behind the reconstruction of professional sociology in the 1980s an 1990s" (Burawoy 2005a: 19–20). In each of these cases, movement away from publicly engaged sociology is framed in a way that minimizes their importance except as catalysts for critical and public sociology.

This construction of sociology's history can be understood as what Mead referred to as a "symbolic reconstruction of the past" (Maines et al. 1983). In this view, the recollection of events leading up to the current moment, the recollection of others, the people present, the definition of the situation and countless other factors each play

into how actors will recollect the past and imbue it with meaning. Thus Burawoy's mention of sociology's historical roots can be understood as a narrative that imbue past actions with meaning that has utility in the present context. This is not to say that his narrative is inaccurate, but it should be understood as part of a rhetorical strategy used in the service of a specific agenda

Constructing Idealistic Students

In addition to the symbolic reconstruction of sociology's past, Burawoy engages in what Loseke (2003) refers to as "constructing people" to further reinforce the idea that sociology is committed to public, activist pursuits. Loseke conceptualizes the process of constructing people as one in which claimsmakers tell the stories of those involved in the problem. In telling these stories, claimsmakers create archetypal characters who embody certain traits. Motives and desires are attributed to these characters. Putative facts about them are foregrounded while others are pushed to the background.

Burawoy (2005a) capitalizes on this process by constructing a "typifying example" of the sociology graduate student:

> A typical graduate student, perhaps inspired by an undergraduate teacher or burnt out from a draining social movement—enters graduate school with a critical disposition, wanting to learn more about the possibilities of social change, whether this be limiting the spread of AIDS in Africa, the deflection of youth violence, the conditions of success of feminist movements in Turkey and Iran, family as a source of morality, variation in support for capital punishment, public misconstrual of Islam, etc. (p. 14)

Here, the graduate students who enter sociology are portrayed as idealistic and motivated by a concern for changing the world for the better. But this idealism is soon worked out of the student:

> There she confronts a succession of required courses, each with its own abstruse texts to be mastered or abstract techniques to be acquired. After 3 or 4 years she is ready to take the qualifying or preliminary examinations in three or four areas, whereupon she embarks on her dissertation. The whole process can take anything from 5 years up. It is as if graduate school is organized to winnow away at the moral commitments that inspired the interest in sociology in the first place. (p. 14)

The process of entering the academy further destroys these commitments:

> The original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better world, that drew so many of us to sociology, is channelled into the pursuit of academic credentials. Progress becomes a battery of disciplinary techniques—standardized courses, validated reading lists, bureaucratic rankings, intensive examinations, literature reviews, tailored dissertations, refereed publications, the all-mighty CV, the job search, the tenure file, and then policing one's colleagues and successors to

> make sure we all march in step. Still, despite the normalizing pressures of careers, the originating moral impetus is rarely vanquished, the sociological spirit cannot be extinguished so easily. (p. 5)

Burawoy's construction of graduate students portrays them as energized, morally committed idealists, dedicated (somewhat conveniently) to all the things he argues that sociology is about. They are the embodiment of his view of the sociological ethos. By constructing this typifying example of the sociology graduate student, the complex motivations that drive those who pursue sociology are reduced to a single archetype. In doing so, Burawoy taps into a popular conception of "children" or "the innocent" as speakers of truth. Just as the process of growing up is popularly viewed as destroying a child's ability to see simple truths, the process of enduring grad school and treading the tenure track distorts the undergraduate's understanding of the sociological ethos. This, combined with Burawoy's construction of sociology's historical roots, essentializes sociology's role as defender of humanity's interests.

However, this portrayal of graduate students merits interrogation. Undoubtedly there are many who pursue sociology out of a fervent desire to advance the cause of social justice. Further, there are undoubtedly many who have experienced the dispiriting professional disciplining that Burawoy describes. But there are also those who have little or no interest in the sociological ethos Burawoy describes and do not necessarily see it as sociology's task to fix the world. I have heard these students (and faculty as well) express frustration at being accused of moral bankruptcy because they chose to frame their analyses in ways that have nothing to do with pursuing social justice goals. I myself have encountered hiring committees that expressed disappointment (and, occasionally anger) with the theoretical framing of my research because it did not take the critical stance to which they are committed. This is not to say that critical stances in relation to what we study are inappropriate or that critical questions should not be asked. My point is that the "professionalization" experience of graduate students varies and that Burawoy's description of that experience flattens its nuances and fails to recognize the complex motivations and goals of grad students. The push toward professionalization or "criticalization" varies locally and can run in both directions. Glossing over these complexities allows Burawoy to present a one-dimensional vision of graduate students, a vision consistent with his casting of students in the role of the innocent moral compass of our discipline. This construction is an emotional cudgel used to drive home the claim being made.

Returning to Villainous Disciplines

Beyond the construction of students, Burawoy's portrayal of economics and political science is another aspect of his prognostic frame. As was discussed earlier, Burawoy argues that economists and political scientists have served as apologists for the forces working against the interests of humanity. They are, in part, responsible for the problem. In casting their disciplines in this light, Burawoy effectively eliminates the "competition" for ownership of the problem, leaving sociology as the only discipline positioned to provide a solution:

> If the standpoint of economics is the market and its expansion and the standpoint of political science is the state and the guarantee of political stability, than the standpoint of sociology is civil society and the defense of the social. (Burawoy 2005a: 24)

And later:

> In this sense, sociology's affiliation with civil society, that is public sociology, represents the interests of humanity—interests in keeping at bay both state despotism and market tyranny. (Burawoy 2005a: 24)

Thus, sociology is left as the natural owner of the problem.

Sociology's Legitimacy as Owner of the Problem

Burawoy goes on to reinforce his argument about sociology's ownership of the "civil society" problem by stating that the "standpoint of sociology is civil society and the defense of the social" (Burawoy 2005a: 24). Burawoy presents sociology's commitment to civil society as an unproblematic fact of the matter. This leaves public sociology in the position of being the primary vehicle by which sociology engages with and promotes civil society.

This rhetorical move is necessary to head off alternative framings that do not position public sociology as integral to the discipline's flourishing. For instance, if one were to claim that the standpoint of sociology is *social life*, public sociology's necessity is not as obvious. Thus where Burawoy (2005a: 24) states that sociology studies the economy "from the standpoint of civil society", one would instead say that we study the economy from the standpoint of social life. This reframing would not be inconsistent with Burawoy's (2005a: 24) later statements that political sociology ". . . examines the social preconditions of politics and the politicization of the social just as economic sociology . . . looks at what economists overlook, the social foundations of the market." However, this reframing does not make public sociology integral to the sociological project. In situations where civil society disappears, (Burawoy lists Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Germany and Pinochet's Chile as examples) there would be little room for public sociology, but the subject matter of sociology, social life, would still be present.

Constructing Ambiguous Solutions

While establishing sociology's ownership of the problem is part of Burawoy's prognostic frame, ownership without a solution is futile. Thus Burawoy presents public sociology as the path to defending civil society from colonization, erosion and destruction at the hands of the market and the state. Yet, as some commentators (Kalleberg 2005; McLaughlin et al. 2005; McLaughlin and Turcotte 2007) have noted, the concept of public sociology itself is unclear. Burawoy does not outline how public sociology will stop the erosion of civil society, nor does he explicitly deal with questions of what defines a public, if there are proper publics with which to engage and how this engagement might proceed.

The advantage of leaving social problems solutions vague in the early stages of a claimsmaking campaign is that it allows the focus to be on developing the diagnostic and motivational frames:

> Early in the social problems process, when claimsmakers' primary aim is to raise awareness of the troubling condition, grounds [diagnostic frames] and warrants [motivational frames] tend to receive more emphasis (Best 2008: 40)

Leaving the solution vague allows claimsmakers to focus on rallying the troops. In the case of sociology, this is no mean feat. The segmented audience the discipline presents requires Burawoy to spend an incredible amount of time bringing all sections together under the same banner, bound by a common ethos. Burawoy's work serves largely as a rallying cry, a path to "reinvigorating" the discipline. Having done this, sociologists are set loose into the public in order to seek out the solutions on their own. By doing this, no one is left alienated by having a specific path laid out for them.

Yet, this ambiguity has led to some difficult questions about what qualifies sociology to act as a protector of the civil sphere. Much of Burawoy's claimsmaking is dedicated to outlining sociology's *commitment* to protecting civil society, but commitment is not the same as *qualifications*. Are we qualified to offer advice on how to build a better society and "defend humanity?" Tittle (2004) makes this very point:

> Moreover, the notion of "public sociology" assumes that sociologists actually have good knowledge that can be applied to human problems. In fact, however, our supposed knowledge is quite shaky. In the two areas of sociology about which I know the most, criminology and urban sociology, there is not a single issue about which even a modestly demanding critic could be convinced. For example, despite what some of my professional colleagues would like to believe, we cannot say with even reasonable certainty what causes crime, we do not know with much assurance whether or under what conditions arresting domestic abusers deters their future misconduct, we do not know whether gun control prevents violence, and we do not even know for sure the extent to which the death penalty curbs capital crime. In every case, there is conflicting evidence. This is not surprising since research is limited, and our data are always incomplete, error prone, and accepted as supporting an argument if it simply shows something "better than chance." Indeed, most sociologists are thrilled to explain 25 % of the variance in some dependent variable. (pp. 1640–1641)

Tittle's argument, while somewhat demoralizing, does illustrate one of sociology's simplest, yet most useful insights: social life is complex. Recognizing this has given us the capacity to cast doubt on those who would cure society's ills through simplistic "common sense" solutions that usually serve to further entrench power and inequality. But, by the same token, this complexity makes it difficult to identify causes of phenomena and offer up solutions to whatever problems sociologists feel the need to address. We may be able to offer up an analysis of whether a given phenomena exists, but Tittle challenges Burawoy's framing by asking if we can we honestly say we are qualified to direct the shape of society. Burawoy's claims emphasize sociology's

commitment to defending the public sphere but they are ambiguous on what *qualifies* us to engage in such a defense.

Interestingly, Burawoy sidesteps this issue and, in doing so, reinforces his argument that the four sociological faces are interdependent. It is through organic public sociology that sociologists gain their society shaping qualifications, or, rather, sociologists rely on others who are qualified: their publics. Organic public sociology places the sociologist in a dialogic conversation with a chosen public, directing and directed by the public with whom he or she choose to engage. The sociologist's knowledge is grounded, his or her activism negotiated with the public rather than dictated to them. Here, Burawoy uses Gramsci's notion of "organic intellectuals" to advocate for the effectiveness of this approach in fostering social change:

> . . . in the final analysis, for Gramsci truth can only be elaborated in dialogue with agents themselves who are endowed with 'good sense' within their common sense. Subaltern groups are subject to dominant ideologies but this never totally eclipses their indigenous reason that intellectuals excavate and elaborate—a good sense that springs from their subjugation in and transformation of the world. In this Gramscian perspective social change comes from intellectuals working in close connection with agents, elaborating local imaginations of what could be, and struggling for their realization. These are the 'organic intellectuals', or more specifically *organic public sociologists*. (2005b: 429–430)

In Burawoy's formulation, the publics with whom we engage are the source of sociologists' qualifications. Thus, the necessity of public sociology to the entire sociological endeavor is reinforced. If our ethos is the defense of civil society and this defense can only be effectively achieved through the insight provided by organic engagement with our publics, public sociology is integral to the heart of the entire sociological enterprise.

In this framing, Burawoy romanticizes these publics. Their "indigenous reason" is portrayed as holding sacred, forgotten or repressed truths. Constructed in this manner, these groups are endowed with a primordial insight that has been suppressed by the dominant ideology. However there is a bit of magic in this formulation. Where this knowledge comes from is unclear. Somehow, subjugation grants these subaltern groups insight into how the interests of humanity can be defended. By excavating their knowledge, we are led to believe we can find the route to positive social change.

Again, as with most social problems constructions, this portrayal simplifies complexity and backgrounds alternative constructions to forward the narrative of the claimsmaker. It is entirely possible that the indigenous knowledges of these subaltern groups are rife with prejudices, racism, homophobia, misogyny and other beliefs that run counter to the sociological ethos. We have seen tragedy and bloodshed across the globe as subaltern groups have emerged from the shadows of dictatorship and colonization. Can such events be solely blamed on the corrupting influence of dominating ideologies? Can we assume that only purity and insight spring from the depths of oppression? Can we assume the sociological ethos as Burawoy has constructed it is likewise the ethos of the dominated? Is there any guarantee that "indigenous knowledge" will reveal the path back to paradise?

Burawoy is prescient on these objections. He (2005a) argues that public sociology is compatible with any public, but that the choice of public mirrors the sociological ethos:

> Public sociology has no intrinsic normative valence, other than the commitment to dialogue around issues raised in and by sociology. It can as well support Christian Fundamentalism as it can Liberation Sociology or Communitarianism. If sociology actually supports more liberal or critical public sociologies that is a consequence of the evolving ethos of the sociological community. (pp. 8–9)

In Burawoy's view, public sociology is not pledged to any specific ideology or politics. It is a tool given to sociologists to do with as they will. Although not all publics are equally likely to be engaged, any seeming bias is placed on sociologists themselves. However, this too raises questions about the qualifications of sociologists to shape societies for the better. If sociologists are meant to "excavate and elaborate" the indigenous knowledge of the publics they engage in order to better shape our society, why should only one aspect of the entire spectrum of publics be engaged? Can sociology claim to be the defender of humanity and shaper of a better world if it chooses to engage only with those who reflect its values back to it?

Here we see the importance of Burawoy's framing of the sociological ethos in bringing this entire endeavor together cohesively. In framing sociology as the defender of humanity, the sociological ethos is commensurate with the ethos of civil society. Thus, only the publics that reflect this ethos need be engaged. By doing this, the nature of the dialogue between sociologists and their publics poses minimal threat to the values of sociologists themselves. Public sociology's engagement with various publics will then focus much more on discussions about how social change might be achieved, but not the central values of sociology itself. Sociologists are thus free to avoid those publics who would challenge their vision. At the same time they are given a useful resource to sidestep allegations of ideological bias since public sociology "has no intrinsic normative valence."

Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this analysis, the focus has been on the construction of sociology's claim to ownership of the "civil society" problem. In order to position sociology as the natural owner of this problem, Burawoy does a great deal of work to bind the various segments within sociology to a common purpose. He promotes a vision wherein the various sociologies are necessarily interdependent, where "The flourishing of each sociology would enhance the flourishing of all" (2005a: 17). In promoting such a vision, Burawoy achieves another goal. He transforms public sociology from an endeavor on the margins of the discipline to one that is an integral part of what we do as sociologists, for if sociology is to defend civil society, public sociology is the primary means by which it will do so.

By treating Burawoy's work as a social problems claim, we gain insight into the rhetorical strategies used to bring us onside with his vision. Embedded

within the vision of sociology that has been presented are claims about what sociology *should* be about. Unpacking the rhetorical moves used to advance this vision helps us to critically interrogate the authority of these claims and understand their consequences.

One of Burawoy's claims is that the different types of sociology are necessarily interdependent, that each type of sociological knowledge requires the others. He argues that if each type is not mutually accountable to the others, there is a tendency for them to descend into their "pathological" forms. Yet the mutual accountability that Burawoy casts as a positive can easily be reframed in terms of different factions of sociologists demanding that others pay attention to the things they think are important, what they would *prefer* sociology be about. As I have argued, policy sociology may not need critical or public sociology to flourish. In fact, there are hints that it might become more relevant if it became more "pathological." The problem is not that policy sociology cannot flourish without the other types of sociology, it is that it would not flourish in a way that fits the frame Burawoy has constructed. The pathological forms of the various sociological types lead them in directions that reduce their dependence on the others. In order to keep them bound to each other, Burawoy constructs a shared ethos that delineates sociology's commitments.

This ethos positions the discipline as committed to the quest for social justice and the defense of civil society. Through it, the interdependence of the four quadrants can be maintained. Each quadrant's pathology can be understood as such because it inhibits sociology's pursuit of social justice. A self-referential professional sociology offers nothing of practical utility. A servile policy sociology serves the interests of those who work against civil society. A dogmatic critical sociology fails to provide the ". . . infusion of values into public sociology" (Burawoy 2005a: 17). A faddish public sociology too willing to tell publics what they want to hear fails to deliver the insights gleaned from professional and public sociology. Thus the sociological ethos provides the measuring stick by which the pathology is judged. Pathology is sociological practice that does not fit the narrative of what sociology should be about.

Yet sociology's purpose evolves over time. Burawoy himself says as much: "If sociology actually supports more liberal or critical public sociologies that is a consequence of the *evolving ethos* of the sociological community" (Burawoy 2005a: 9). If this is the case, we should also expect sociology's pathologies to evolve with it. Burawoy points out that the critical turn in sociology reshaped the ethos of the discipline. The works of sociology's Millses and Gouldners helped free the discipline from what Burawoy refers to as its "Comtean visions." And these critical theorists were condemned by the Comtean purists for plunging into areas that sociology should not be about. Undoubtedly to those who pursued the idea of sociology as a pure science, critical theorists represented a pathological form of sociology at the time. By the same turn, if policy sociologists were to reject the values embedded in Burawoy's sociological ethos, arguing perhaps that critical sociologists have no more moral authority to supply values than the clients they serve, they may very well spark a reshaping of the discipline's ethos (or their claims may fall flat and disappear into history). What drives the evolution of the discipline's ethos if not those who tread into places where they have been warned not to go?

However, if the sociological ethos were to evolve further, what would be left of the mutual interdependence of the four quadrants? Would public (or critical or policy) sociology still have a place? Further, if sociology's natural position is the defense of civil society and the values that inform civil society remain a relatively static ideal type, how can an evolving ethos make sense? These questions require the sociological ethos to be something more than the reflection of the spirit and values of the current generation of sociologists. Thus Burawoy also situates the ethos as a reflection of sociology's historical value commitments. The ethos then becomes a part of our "roots," inherent in the very nature of our discipline. These value commitments, he argues, draw in each new generation of sociologists, students who are committed to the principals of social justice and civil society.

The commitment to these principles grants sociology the authority to facilitate social change. Yet it is unclear why these commitments are assumed to grant us some privileged understanding of what social justice looks like or the optimal shape social change should take. Commitments are not the same as qualifications. Further, it assumes that the things this ethos leads us to pursue will be better for society. Tittle (2004) and DeFlem (2004) have already raised questions about such claims:

> Advocates seem to think that what is "socially just" is clear and easily agreed upon among people with good will or sociological training. Actually, almost every social issue involves moral dilemmas, not moral clarity. What is or is not "just" is almost never unambiguous. (Tittle 2004: 1640)

We should be cautious about assuming the inherent righteousness of our pursuits. In attempting to make personal troubles into public issues, we must be wary of translating individual convictions into universal truths. Deflem (2004) raise pertinent questions about sociology's capacity to reveal truths about what is moral. There are certainly many prominent sociologists throughout the discipline's history who have articulated sociology's moral responsibilities. But why do we prize their moral visions any more than a random stranger on the street? From where do we inherit the moral high ground?

It is hoped that by creating and engaging our publics, that we might discover this high ground. By romanticizing our publics, they are portrayed as holding privileged knowledge that will guide us in our attempts to build a better society. Herein, the necessity of public sociology is reinforced. It is only through our publics that we will find our path to paradise. Yet at some point we must unpack this romanticism. We must ask why the suffering of our publics grants them an insight into transcendent truths. Perhaps we must face the cold realization that there is no path to paradise. Instead, there is a snarled mass of paths, each carrying the angel of history further into the future regardless of which is chosen.

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