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AN "PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY" TRAVEL AS FAR AS RUSSIA?1

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On being invited to talk in a foreign land, Pierre Bourdieu (1992) once reflected on the futility of making the trip. If he was just going to deliver an omnibus lecture, he might as well stay at home and send a cassette. A lecture delivered *in situ*, therefore, should not be simply a reading of a standardized text, but should treat the subject in a way that engages the particularity of the context. In his words, the international circulation of ideas calls for a "double historicization"—to situate one's ideas in their field of production and then in their new field of reception. This is what I will attempt today, namely to examine how my notion of public sociology arose in the fields of US and South African sociology, and how it has been received and translated in different national fields, in order to foster a discussion about its possible place and meaning in the Russian context.

This tracing of earlier travels of "public sociology" is all the more important in the Russian context where the idea has been subject to debate over its meaning and contestation over its ownership. Is public sociology umbilically tied to anti-Western nationalist sociology, to the inheritors of Soviet sociology, or to a liberal intelligentsia—to all of these or to none of these? How can one map the classification struggle over Russian sociology? I will return to these questions at the end of these comments, after tracing the trajectory of the idea in different countries and historical periods.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY AS PROFESSIONAL SOCIOLOGY'S OTHER

The story I am about to tell is, in part, personal, but with claims to more general validity concerning sociology's appearance in different national fields. The odyssey began in June, 1990, when I visited South Africa, for the first time in 22 years, to address the Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa (ASSA) on the collapse of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe. I had been working in and studying Hungarian factories for the previous decade—the decade running up to the collapse of communism. When I arrived in 1990 I found South Africa in the midst of its own revolution against the apartheid state. Nelson Mandela, imprisoned leader of the African National Congress, had been released six months earlier and the popular South African Communist Party was relaunched while I was there. I was amazed at the vibrancy of South African sociology, its engagement with social movements in the trenches of civil society and with labor movements emanating from the factories. Entirely new analyses of the relations between race and class, working class formations, and social movement unionism had emerged from the struggles against apartheid. Public sociology, never separate from the academic world, inspired new directions for professional sociology.

How different was this engaged sociology from the professional sociology that dominated the field in the United States. There the prevailing trope was sociology as an accumulating body of scientific knowledge,

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evaluated by and aimed at peers, published in peer-reviewed journals that consecrated steps in an academic career. At least, that was the case at the top ranked research universities. To be sure, there were exceptions such as my own department at Berkeley where a number of my colleagues sought out wider audiences beyond the academy, such as Robert Blauner in his book, *Racial Oppression in America* (1972), Robert Bellah and his collaborators in *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Arlie Hochschild in her *The Second Shift* (1989), Kristin Luker in *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (1985). Still, what marked US sociology was its disciplinary and professional focus.

The very idea of public sociology was originally formulated by C. Wright Mills in reaction to this hyperprofessionalization. So it might be said that "public sociology" is an American utopia, formulated as the antithesis to "professional sociology." Yet, for many American graduate students and teachers, sociology's public mission was the reason they had become sociologists and, moreover, it was the public mission that informed its genesis in the 19th century. The professionals had sought to bury these public yearnings as signs of immaturity, whether of the individual or of the discipline. To this day the dominant forces in the profession, when they are not busy repressing or ignoring it, think of public sociology as a good idea but unrealistic (the incentives are not there), or claim that sociology is still too immature as a science to venture forth beyond its protected cloisters, or they vilify public sociology as a political project that endangers the discipline's legitimacy. The battle for public sociology continues, largely promoted by traitors from within the professional elite and by a great swathe of sociologists in non-elite establishments.

When I returned to South Africa in 2003 with my talks on public sociology, I was first greeted with bemusement and bewilderment—what could sociology be if not public? Public sociology was a tautology, since sociology was inherently public. Only in the United States, where a self-referential professional sociology is so developed, do we have to put the word "public" in front of "sociology" to designate professional sociology's other. But times had already changed since the 1980s and the struggles against apartheid. As the publics which South African sociologists had engaged—the social movements and labor movements—receded along with the fragmentation and neutralization of civil society, sociologists were increasingly forced inwards, and as a matter of economic survival they often turned toward policy research, seeking out consultancies, research projects defined by corporations, labor unions, NGOs, etc. The very organs with which they had fought against apartheid were now part of the ruling apparatus of post-apartheid South Africa, and sociology became entangled with them too.

THE ASCENDANCY OF POLICY SOCIOLOGY AND THE DECLINE OF CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY

This turn from a public sociology engaging elements of civil society in a dialog about the future of society to a *policy sociology* serving clients facing social problems, who need immediate solutions or, at least, the stamp of scientific approval, besets many national sociologies in the world today. One sees it not just where market fundamentalism has made great inroads into state ideology, but also in Latin American states claiming socialist orientation. Thus, to speak of countries where I have recently observed this phenomenon, namely in Uruguay and in Brazil, sociologists have been drawn into governmental think tanks, often forsaking their critical autonomy in the process. Across the world, from university administrations to nation-states, sociologists are being asked to make themselves useful in immediate and practical ways.

You might say this policy science had reached its apotheosis in the Soviet Union, where sociology was the handmaiden of ruling ideology. When it was allowed to exist, it served to explore, in a limited way, public opinion (as when a successor regime wanted to delegitimate a prior regime); it was designed as the articulator and purveyor of party ideology. The greatest number of practicing sociologists was found in enterprises managing relations between workers and their bosses. I recall the consternation and tension that greeted myself and Erik Wright—two Western Marxists—in 1986, when we came to the Institute of Sociology in Moscow to

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collaborate on a comparative survey of social structures in the US and USSR. This was the initiative of Vladimir Andreenkov, with the support of his head of department, Fridrikh Filippov. From the beginning, Vilen Ivanov, head of the Institute at the time, was skeptical about the possibilities of collaboration. He was right. It was hampered by all sorts of restrictions, from the formulation and content of questions to conceptualization, and the ownership of the data.

The attempted execution of the project revealed far more about the divergence of the two societies than could the results of any survey. I remember so well all the fascinating translation problems, not least that of social structure itself, which meant something very different in the lexicon of the Western Marxist than it did in the language of official Soviet Marxism. For Wright, class was a critical concept that could be turned against the social structure of the Soviet Union, where, he argued, "organizational exploitation" prevailed, as much as against the social structure of the United States, where he talked of "labor exploitation." This new-fangled scientific Western Marxism was the enemy of Soviet Marxism, as we learned when a public discussion of his ideas at the Institute was suddenly and arbitrarily cut off in midstream.

Unbeknownst to us, Soviet Marxist sociology was already being pushed aside by subterranean movements. In the twilight of perestroika, sociology would burst onto the public scene with the development of all sorts of small cooperatives and individual enterprise, swimming on the waves of an effervescent civil society. Here, indeed, were the embryos of a genuine public sociology, but it was short-lived, arriving at the very end of the Soviet era. When the tide of civil society receded in the post-Soviet era, sociology quickly succumbed to market and then state imperatives. Professional sociology was so little developed and civil society so fragile that outside small pockets such as those in Saint Petersburg and in Moscow it returned once again to opinion poll research, but this time the clients were usually corporations and politicians. The precariousness of sociology in the post-Soviet order replicated its precariousness under the Soviet regime. Sociologists, working at one, two or three jobs, could not and, indeed, cannot make ends meet without enormous sacrifices, often at the cost of intellectual pursuits. And, as we have seen, departments are easily subject to uncouth forms of political interference⁴.

Sociology was not the same all over the Soviet Bloc, giving rise to different national legacies. If in Bulgaria there had been a vast supply of sociologists closely connected to the party state, in Hungary and particularly Poland there had been greater space for an autonomous professional sociology. Indeed, Polish sociology had a long tradition of its own, bespeaking the greater autonomy of civil society. In Hungary it was economics that was more developed in a professional direction, reflecting and shaping the country's market reforms, while its more original sociology was linked to the critical theory of the Budapest School of Philosophy. You might say that *critical sociology*, my fourth type of sociology, is the retreat of public sociology into a self-sustaining dissident community, a community that constituted itself as its own public, so beautifully described and enacted by Václav Havel. In a sense, dissidents formed their own internal latent civil society—not just in Soviet-type societies, but in all authoritarian regimes, even where sociology is banned as in Pinochet's Chile or Nazi Germany.

Critical sociology nurtures the reservoir of values that sustains sociology through its darkest years, but it also sustains the vibrancy of sociology where it is practiced openly as in the United States. There critical sociology targets the narrowness of professional sociology, its unreflective pursuit of science for science's sake, its obsession with the intricacies of methodology. Thus, critical sociologists such as Robert Lynd, C. Wright

² I am reminded of the struggles for academic freedom in the US at the end of the 19th through to the beginning of the 20th centuries, when individuals were targeted by university administrations unhappy with their political stance. An informal and unspoken agreement was ultimately struck in the name of objectivity, by which academics would limit their political interventions in exchange for academic freedom and autonomy (Furner 1975). Similarly, in Germany during the first decade of the 20th century Max Weber fought similar battles to defend the academy, and in particular the rights of such sociologists as Georg Simmel, Robert Michels, and Werner Sombart who suffered discrimination at the hands of the Ministry of Education for their politics or their religion (Weber 1974). One of the reasons Weber was so vehement in the defense of "objectivity" was his concern for the autonomy of the social sciences.

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Mills, Pitirim Sorokin, Alvin Gouldner, or Dorothy Smith played crucial roles in compelling professional sociology in the United States to reflect on its assumptions, its conditions of existence, its goals. Certainly the configuration of US sociology today is very different from what it was in the 1960s, and, in no small measure, this is due to the appeal and influence of critical sociology in the 1970s and 1980s.

Just as policy sociology is on the upswing in so many countries, with the notable exception of the United States where it has lost its earlier appeal to corporations and state agencies, so critical sociology now finds itself in a weaker position, even as its impulses are more urgently needed.

THE DIVISION OF SOCIOLOGICAL LABOR

We have, then, four types of sociology: professional, policy, public, and critical. In so far as they are arrayed against one another, the temptation of each is to reduce the others to itself. Professional sociologists claim they are also critical (if science is not critical then what is?), public (when they have something to say to the public they say it), and oriented to policy (when called on they give their opinions and undertake research for clients). When such professional sociologists are not being inclusive and hegemonic, they can be exclusive and despotic, expelling public sociology from the field as pop sociology, as utopian, or as political. Equally, public sociologists may claim that theirs is the only authentic science, or they may dismiss professional sociology as irrelevant or futile while denouncing policy sociology as selling itself to the devil. Each type of sociology tries to reduce the whole field to itself, whether by incorporation or exclusion. While empirically it is the case that the relation among the four types of sociology is one of domination, indeed even to the point of exclusion, I insist on distinguishing these types both as an analytical tool and as a normative ideal.

How can I justify these distinctions and separations? Here I refer to two fundamental questions that any disciplinary regime of knowledge must answer: Knowledge for Whom? and Knowledge for What? First, are we talking to ourselves or others? Here the distinction is between *academic* and *extra-academic* audiences. Second, are we concerned with means, whether fixing problems or solving puzzles, or are we concerned with ends, whether discussing values with publics or discussing, among ourselves, the assumptions of professional sociology. Here the distinction is an old one, with deep roots in sociology from Max Weber to the Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas, the distinction between *instrumental* and *reflexive* knowledge. If we take seriously these questions and the answers they portend then we get the following division of sociological labor, in which each knowledge has its own distinctive character—its notion of truth, power, legitimacy, and accountability³.

Table 1

THE DIVISION OF SOCIOLOGICAL LABOR

	Academic Audience	Extra-Academic Audience
Instrumental Knowledge	PROFESSIONAL	POLICY
Reflexive Knowledge	CRITICAL	PUBLIC

Let me clarify some of these distinctions. Critical sociology is not public sociology because its audience tends, first and foremost, to be made up of sociologists themselves, and it is not professional sociology by virtue of its critical stance toward the very assumptions that propel professional practice. Policy sociology is not public sociology because it is subordinated to problems and issues defined by clients as opposed to a reciprocal dialog between sociologists and their publics. We have to think of the field of sociology—in its local, national, and even global manifestations—as a structure of dominance among the four types of sociology. In the US the

³ These distinctions are more fully developed in Burawoy 2004.

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professional dominates, in the USSR the policy dominated, whereas in transitional societies, public sociology manages to carve out a larger space for itself.

The underlying claim is that a thriving sociology depends upon the coexistence in relative autonomy of all four types of sociology, that they provide synergies, impulses, and stimuli for one another. If one type of sociology loses touch with the others—whether through a process of involution or extraversion, whether because it turns in on itself and insulates itself from the rest ("irrelevant" professional sociology or "dogmatic" critical sociology) or because it is captured by external forces (subservient policy sociology or populist public sociology)—then it assumes a pathological form in which not simply the particular type of sociologist, but rather we should do what we do best and respect others for what they do. Over a lifetime we find ourselves following a trajectory through the matrix—trajectories shaped by careers but also by broader political and economic transformations.

FOUR PATTERNS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Given the view that a fully developed division of sociological labor involves the coexistence of relatively autonomous knowledges, how should we think about the development of sociology? Since the division of labor does not appear ready-made at sociology's inception, how does it advance? There is no one developmental scheme, and historically there have been different prime movers. If we take Comte as the beginning of French sociology, then we might say that it sprung from a reaction to the French Revolution in the name of progress and order, and it developed in the academy as a professional science concerned with questions of order. In England, sociology itself was dwarfed by ideas of social administration and Fabianism at the end of the 19th century, always linked to policy science. US sociology began as a movement for moral reform in the 19th century and only slowly consolidated its professional academic character during the twentieth century.

But how should we think of sociology today in places that are relative newcomers to an autonomous professional sociology, in a world where academic resources are so heavily concentrated in the United States and Europe? We can identify four models. The first is the Chinese model, driven by the importation of US sociology through graduate students trained in the leading departments of the United States and, to a lesser extent, of Europe. Chinese sociology was only restored in the 1980s and then under the influence of US-based sociologist Nan Lin. The bifurcation of sociology into two streams—a university stream and an Academy of Science stream— permits a certain autonomy for sociology in the universities and even space for a limited critical and public sociology, while policy sociology is tied to the Chinese Academy of Sciences. All things being considered this separation actually works quite well to the benefit of both.

The second model, what I call the indigeneity model, is the antithesis of the Chinese model. It can be found mostly strongly in Africa. You might say it draws its energy from a critical sociology. Here the domination of a Euro-centric sociology is opposed by an Afro-centric sociology, rooted in African traditions. It has different emphases: it may underline the uniqueness of an African sociology, or it may discover the foundations of Eurocentric sociology within African social thought, or it may claim that those European foundations depended upon the exploitation and othering of African societies. Afro-centric sociology is a reaction to the domination of Euro-centric universalism. Raewyn Connell has developed such ideas on a much broader canvas in her book *Southern Theory* (2007), seeking to resurrect sociologies of the South so that they can take up a place in world sociology. Of course, not all African sociology follows the indigeneity path. Indeed, there have been schools of thought, such as the Dar Es Salaam group of the 1970s, that was inspired by Marxism to explore the possibilities of socialism in Africa. In South Africa today, much sociology works with metropolitan categories, questions, and theories.

A third developmental model follows the Scandinavian pattern, in which sociology is connected to the welfare state. Here sociology is not simply a narrow policy sociology, but through its public and professional

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roles shapes the debates around policy questions. We can see this model at work in England too, perhaps most vividly in the period just after World War Two in the work of Richard Titmuss, Brian Abel-Smith, Peter Townsend, Peter Wilmott, and Michael Young, when the welfare state was being created. The state broadly defines the agenda of professional sociology by channeling funds to research projects. Here the state is a patron as well as a client of policy research. Generally, policy sociology can be more effective and autonomous if it also engenders public debate about issues of public welfare. To what extent such a model would be effective in countries outside Europe depends, of course, on the scope for public debate. Once policy science is separated from the other three types of knowledge-practice, then it is easily captured and instrumentalized by clients, be they the state, corporations, or politicians.

Finally, there is a fourth model that draws its energy from public engagement. Many national sociologies began with critical intellectual infusions from an emergent civil society. Although this has been successfully buried in its prehistory, US sociology had its origins in various reform movements—some religious and some not—of the 19th century, movements that gave it a strong moral flavor. Today, as I suggested above, South African and Brazilian sociology bear the marks of the social movements of the 1980s. In this regard, contemporary Indian sociology is especially interesting and complex. Although it has its roots in British social anthropology and US modernization theory, there are also influences from neighboring disciplines and subaltern studies, leading to close ties with vibrant social movements around issues of caste, privatization, environmental protection, and so forth. While public sociology has lost some of its momentum in many of these semi-peripheral countries, its influence continues to be considerable.

POSTSOCIALIST SOCIOLOGY

There are instances, therefore, of sociology emerging as a field under the impetus of one or more of the four types of knowledge: professional, public, policy, and critical. Which of these prevail and in what combination is very much dependent on social science traditions within and beyond the academy, and also on the overall political and economic context that must include a country's position in the world system. Russian sociology is hobbled by its preexisting links to the state, by the infusion of market forces, by the feebleness of civil society, but also by the effects of a declining superpower.

One can see how the greater autonomy of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe gave greater space to sociology in Hungary and Poland, but why should sociology have assumed a much more vibrant form in China than in Russia? After all, Chinese civil society is also restricted, and sociology had no professional traditions. These have had to be imported from the West under a state sponsorship that has also given more autonomy to universities in contradistinction to and alongside the Academy of Sciences, which maintains close ties to the party state, supplying perspectives on social problems and new ideologies to deal with escalating social tensions.

The overall development of capitalism in the two countries offers clues to their divergent sociologies: the one an involutionary process of wanton destruction, propelling civil society into centrifugal retreat, leaving populations to their own devices in search of livelihood. With its commitment to market fundamentalism, the Russian state plunged the economy into darkness, a primitive disaccumulation ever more dependent upon the export of natural resources, whereas the Chinese economy was powered by new processes of industrial accumulation under the supervision of the party state. Like the economy and civil society, sociology was given a space, albeit regulated and restricted, to flex its muscles.

If a field of sociology has emerged in China, can we say that there is a field in Russia—a field with a certain relative autonomy based on a coherent mutual referentiality among producers considered simultaneously as consumers? Can one say we have a field when sociologists are represented by three or more competing and antagonistic national associations? The struggles of students at Moscow State University against the administration are precisely for a relatively autonomous field of sociology, free of arbitrary influence from

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outside. They and their allies struggle for the autonomy necessary to uphold a professional sociology, without which there can be no public sociology. Very different are the sociologists at the Institute of Sociology in Moscow, the descendents of Soviet sociology, who think of themselves as already doing public sociology, investigating social problems with the use of the survey instrument, seeking to influence the state. In effect, theirs may be as much a policy sociology as a public sociology. Finally, there is third wing of Russian sociology hostile to the Westernizing autonomists, namely the Russian nationalist sociology that claims to have a spontaneous public, and a following in many provinces. Perhaps they are, indeed, the true public sociologists in Russia. But before drawing that conclusion, one would need to know whether and in what sense they are sociologists: In what ways do they subject their claims to empirical validation, in what ways do they develop a science of Russian society? They may be speaking to publics, but do they do so as propagandists or as sociologists?

There is a deeper issue here. Can there be a public sociology without genuine publics? We need to think through a sociology of publics before we can have a sociology for publics. So much of Western critical scholarship—from Mills to Habermas to Bourdieu—has claimed that state and markets, media and advertising, have created a world of mass society with a limited public sphere. But there is considerable cross-national variation and one might conjecture that the public sphere in Russia is thinner, more fragile, and more fragmented than the ones in Western Europe and even the United States. The very concept of public has been corrupted by the manner of its deployment and manipulation by the Soviet party state. In Russia, the notion of public has negative rather than positive connotations, so much so that there is a dispute as to how "public sociology" should be translated. Avoiding the obvious translation *publichnaia sotsiologiia*, it has sometimes been translated as obshchestvennaia sotsiologiia (communal sociology), thereby missing the broader meaning of "public" as a distinct and autonomous sphere that stretches across society. It is not just a matter of the connotation of "public," but also its non-existence as an integrated national entity.

Interestingly, there is also no obvious word for policy sociology—the most commonly used being political sociology which, at least in its English rendition, is definitely not what is intended, since policy sociology embraced the whole of Soviet sociology. Where there is no recognized and independent professional, critical or public sociology, with few exceptions, sociology served the party state. Policy sociology has been translated variously as *prikladnaia sotsiologiia* (applied sociology) or *zakaznaia sotsiologiia* (sociology made to order), neither of which quite captures the multifarious meanings of "policy sociology." The difficulty in translation bespeaks the very different political legacies of the Soviet and indeed pre-Soviet eras that can make the categories of Western sociology appear anomalous in the Russian context.

A PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY FOR RUSSIA?

Time and again I'm asked by liberal Westernizers whether the Slavophiles don't represent the realization of public sociology in the Russian context. Skeptical of the relevance and possibility of public sociology, liberals use the example of Dean Dobrenkov of Moscow State University to dismiss the very idea of public sociology. This is a strategy of damning public sociology by substituting its pathological form for its ideal type. Those who are committed to a genuine public sociology have to be doubly conscious of its pathologies, whether these be vanguardism or populism, but their examination of pathologies is undertaken not to dismiss the idea out of hand, but to establish the conditions of its realization. That it is difficult for sociologists to sustain a reciprocal dialogue with publics is no reason to abandon the goal.

Others insist that before there can be a public sociology there has to be a professional sociology, but historical examples suggest that often it is through public sociology that a professional sociology is launched and revised. Just think of Pitirim Sorokin, whose political activities, first against Czarist autocracy and then against the Bolshevik regime, inspired his *System of Sociology*. His 1921 research into famine, widely disseminated and incurring the wrath of the Soviet regime, leading to his exile in 1923, was a precursor to the empirical

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sociology he would advance in the United States. His turn to professional sociology was in part a reaction to his experiences during and after the Russian Revolution. Yet later in life, after being one of the leading figures in US sociology, and the first chair of Harvard's sociology department, he would undergo another transformation. Turning against the professional sociology he had done so much to nurture, he attacked his epigones for their fetishism of methodology ("quantophrenia") and intellectual narrowness, missing out on the big issues of the day. He ended his life trying to infuse professional sociology with a public mission.

Finally, other naysayers argue from the side of demand, that there cannot be public sociology without publics, and in Russia there are only fake publics. In that case perhaps it is the function of sociology to contribute to the forging of publics. Perhaps the first public we can forge is from amongst our students, such as the brave students of Moscow State University, while a second public could be composed of sociologists, at home and abroad, brought together under the aegis of a new independent journal such as this one. Perhaps our public task is, following Elena Zdravosmyslova (2008), the defense of professional sociology? But to retreat into self-contained isolation is to defeat the very idea of sociology. Such a retreat betrays sociology's originating and motivating passions: whether they be turning private troubles into public issues, demystifying the social structures of domination that limit human self-realization, or discovering how history is and can be made under conditions not of our own choosing. Bereft of its public face, sociology is stillborn.

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