

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY ON A GLOBAL SCALE¹

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When Dr. Ku Hok Bun invited me to address your association, he indicated that he would like me to talk about public sociology, a topic that is indeed dear to my heart. But he also indicated that the WTO (World Trade Organization) would be holding its Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong the following week and that something on the global scale of public sociology would be especially appropriate.

While I am no specialist on international trade there seems to be little doubt that the mission—if not always the outcome—of the WTO has been to promote free trade. But what is free trade for some is unfair trade for others. The WTO's Ministerial meetings, from Seattle to Cancun and now to Hong Kong, have become the occasion for intense struggles between an emergent global civil society and this international agency, and within this agency among the representatives of different countries. When one thinks of the theme of this conference "Sociology for Change: Tackling the Challenge of Turbulences," especially from the standpoint of a thriving global city and center of commerce, such as Hong Kong, one cannot ignore the practices and the policies of such regulatory agencies as the WTO but nor should one overestimate their power. Whatever else, the WTO has become a flash point for public dissemination of condemnation of global inequity and inequality. My argument today is simple: If there is one force that connects the WTO, public sociology, and social turbulence it is the force of markets.

THE FORCE OF MARKETS

When I think back over my own research conducted during the last 35 years in different parts of the world, I am struck by the central place of markets, fuelled by nation states as much as international

¹ This was a keynote address delivered to the Hong Kong Sociological Association Annual Meeting and Conference, December 3rd, 2005.

agencies. I began my career as a sociologist in Zambia, four years after it had achieved independence from Britain. Between 1968 and 1972, I studied how the two multi-national corporations that owned Zambia's copper industry, responsible for 95% of foreign revenue, were reacting to independence. I was especially interested in the relations of race and class: why and how the colour bar, in which blacks never assume a position of authority over whites, was reproduced in postcolonial Zambia, despite governmental claims to the contrary. There were real social forces behind the colour bar and not just from white expatriate managers. When the mass of the 50,000 black workers thought of "Zambianization" they did not think of a few brethren breaching the colour bar but of improvement in their own working conditions and wages. The Zambian government depended on copper revenues and so was unprepared to dislodge the white oligarchy that controlled the industry. The mining companies themselves, while they were interested in cheap black labour, were more interested in promoting political stability so long as their profits were high. They were happy to shut their eyes to the colour bar along with the government. Thus, my study focused on the balance of national class forces promoting racism, but I neglected the international forces that would shape Zambia's economic plight. After I left in 1972 the price of copper plummeted. From being the major source of government revenue, the copper industry mired Zambia in ever-mounting debt, leading to intervention by the IMF. Structural adjustment brought ever-deepening poverty and decline.

I left Africa at a time when socialism was still very much part of the political landscape, and an on-going project in some countries, such as neighbouring Tanzania, where Maoist thinking and the Cultural Revolution influenced the leadership around Julius Nyrere. I went to the University of Chicago looking for challenges to the reigning models of economic development but found little interest, at least among sociologists, in the world beyond the United States. For my dissertation, therefore, I turned to a study of the local working class. In 1973–1974 I became a machine operator in a plant of a large multi-national corporation, located in the industrial belt on the South side of Chicago. Neighbouring steel mills were already closing down but manufacturing seemed to be thriving, despite the economic recession. I was interested in how it was that workers so actively collaborated in the pursuit of capitalist profit, in how, not only metallic parts, but also consent was manufactured on the shop

floor through what I called a hegemonic regime of production. I did not realize, however, that this seemingly natural and enduring hegemonic regime was about to disintegrate in a wave of international competition that would destroy all the industry of South Chicago, turning the area into a wasteland, into a ghetto for dumping African Americans displaced from the inner city. I also failed to realize that this hegemonic regime had so effectively organized consent and disorganized class that it had left workers defenceless against the onrushing deindustrialization. Once again a wave of marketization dispossessed a working class of its livelihood—the same wave of marketization that today we see rolling through China, leaving workers defenceless against the closure of state enterprises.

But in the 1970s only a few sociologists were thinking in global terms—mainly the world systems theorists associated with Immanuel Wallerstein. I myself found it difficult to problematize the nation as the container of society and politics. However, since I was interested in the specificity of capitalism it behoved me to study a non-capitalist society. It could have been China but in 1980 my attention was drawn to Eastern Europe, especially Poland where the Solidarity movement demonstrated that the working class was not yet dead, at least, in state socialist societies. How was it that the first working class revolution took place in a state socialist society? I determined that this was a movement for the democratization of state socialism and not yet a movement for the transition to capitalism. When I got round to packing my bags it was too late to study Poland—it had succumbed to Jaruzelski's military coup—so I did the next best thing. I turned to Hungary to ask why Solidarity in Poland rather than Hungary. I took up jobs in a champagne factory, in a machine shop, and intermittently for three years in Hungary's largest steel mill. I was searching for answers to two questions: first, what were the peculiarities of socialist organization of work and second, how was this connected to the production of class-consciousness. I concluded that the socialist workplace generated a socialist critique of state socialism—manufacturing dissent rather than consent—but then, much to my surprise, when the Hungarian regime, along with the other regimes of Eastern Europe disintegrated from above, it did not turn toward democratic socialism but toward market capitalism. Markets were not entirely new to Hungary, of course. There had been a spate of studies in the 1980s, interestingly parallel to the ones that were conducted in China in the same period, showing that state

socialism worked most effectively when combined with subsidiary markets—the so-called informal economy or underground economy, or the second economy. But what was secondary quickly became primary after 1989. The Hungarian industrial belt would tumble after South Chicago and my fellow steel workers suffered displacement, degradation and marginality.

Not interested in the market transition, and ever committed to the possibilities of socialism I again packed my bags and trekked to the last holdout of socialism in the region—the Soviet Union. This was 1991, the twilight of perestroika, although I did not know that then. I managed to inveigle myself into two factories, a rubber plant in Moscow and a furniture factory in Arctic Russia. Here too the market was making inroads destroying the first plant and energizing the second. Spreading throughout the Soviet Union was a quiet civil war that could often become rather noisy within these industrial plants. I left the Soviet Union in July 1991. In August Yeltsin stood on the tank to repel the coup that was mounted to restore the old Soviet Union. This was the last gasp of the old regime that disintegrated as bloodlessly as it rose to power 75 years earlier. And, then, for 10 years I studied the demise of the old order, the collapse of the old and the fitful emergence of the new, the reconstitution of the realms of exchange and distribution that would strangle production in a process I called economic involution. I studied the survival strategies of destitute working class families, bereft of job and the security it brought, while others were better placed to plunder the new economy. This was a wild market economy that would brook no opposition, as revolutionary and unconstrained as the Bolshevik revolution before it. So different, it seemed, from the regulated market transition in China, incubated within the framework of a party state. Indeed, the rate of decline of the Russian economy was matched by the extraordinary growth of the Chinese economy.

Wherever I went disaster followed me. I seemed to jinx every country I studied. My friends warned me not to go to Cuba or China for fear that I would wreck these economies too. For a long time I have stayed away. But here I am. The story I have just told reflects not the super-natural power of one individual but the unnatural force of markets, what I call 'third-wave marketization', what others have called neoliberalism. Like a tsunami, it creates social turbulence wherever it turns, leaving ruin in its path. It has grave implications for sociology—which I shall now explore.

POLANYI TODAY

Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* is the great, rediscovered sociological classic of our period if only because of its focus on markets, examining both their origins and their devastating consequences over a period of a century and a half, from the end of the 18th century to the middle of the 20th century. He not only studied two great historical waves of marketization but he does so by connecting the very micro processes of social disorganization to international economic and political processes, through the mediation of the nation state. He lays the foundation for a sociology of the third and, for him, unexamined and unanticipated wave of marketization, a sociology that not only comprehends but also partakes in the processes it describes. In short, he opens the door to public sociology.

Polanyi makes nonsense of the idea of the self-generating market to show that its origins and reproduction lie in deliberate policies of the nation state. The more original moment, however, lies in the how the capitalist market necessarily sows the seeds of its own destruction by commodifying labour, land, and money—fictitious commodities that are commodified only at the risk of impairing their very function and character. If labour power is subject to unrestricted exchange, its survival is dependent on the whims of capital, and it will not be able to perform its function as labour. That is, it will lose the ability to creatively respond to the needs of production. If land (and today we may speak of the environment) is similarly subjected to unrestricted exchange in pursuit of profit then it, too, will be defiled, losing its capacity to support human life. Finally, if the rates of exchange of currency fluctuate in accordance with market forces, then business will face such uncertainty that they will go out of business. To put it in Marxist terms, exchange value destroys use value. Fictitious commodities can be useful only if their exchange is restricted. If markets are not to destroy themselves, and thus the world they inhabit, they have to be regulated.

Polanyi focuses much of his empirical analysis on the rise of cooperatives, Owenism, trade unions, the factory movement, in short on the rise of associational life or what is more generally known as 'civil society' as a *counter-movement* against the commodification of labour in 19th century England. To be sure there are references to the protection of agriculture from the ravages of free trade, the creation of central banks to protect currency but the self-defence of labour plays

center-stage in the first wave of marketization. Developing through the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, interrupted by WWI, but developing a fever pitch in the 1920s, the second wave of marketization generates its own distinctive and often destructive counter-movement. If the first counter-movement privileges spontaneous struggles at the local level, the second counter-movement takes the form of national reactions to the anarchy of international trade based on the gold standard. States insulate themselves with autarchic moves ranging from fascism to Stalinism, and from social democracy to the New Deal. Second wave marketization eroded *labour rights* which were now either completely destroyed by despotic regimes or restored to a higher plane under the rubric of *social rights*, which included welfare rights, guaranteeing security in unemployment, but also greater protection against employers at work.

Polanyi thought that the link between free markets and political extremism would deter any future experiments in the liberal creed. It would spell the end of *laissez faire* and market idolatry and inaugurate a period of socialism in which markets and states would be subordinated to a democratically self-organized society. This was an optimistic scenario indeed. He did not anticipate a third wave of marketization that would be instigated in large measure because of the failure of socialism, or as I prefer to call it state socialism. Third-wave marketization sprung not only from a crisis of capitalism but more profoundly from within the bowels of disgruntled socialism, initiating a new round of commodification of labour, money and above all, nature itself, compounding the already serious environmental devastation of state socialism. Third-wave marketization, aided and abetted by nation states as well as a range of supra-national political institutions, is sweeping away inherited social rights and labour rights. This is the period in which we now live, a marketization of global proportions that commodifies what was hitherto regarded as sacred, entities such as the human body and its organs, or products of the human mind. The WTO is but one, surprisingly public, venue in which the parameters of marketization are hammered out, while other venues operate behind closed doors in the corridors of power of nation states, in bilateral trade agreements, in multinational corporations as well as in the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

THREE WAVES OF SOCIOLOGY

What does this mean for sociology? To put it most simply the history of sociology parallels the waves of marketization. In its first wave sociology reflected the response of local communities, defending themselves against the commodification of labour power. The first sociology was a *utopian sociology*, expressed in England by Robert Owen and his reflections on New Lanark, the communal projects in the United States, and the various visions of socialism. This utopian sociology was fused with a science that guaranteed the ascendancy of a moral order. This was the moral science of Spencer and Comte and their American epigones, the Social Darwinists—Ward, Small, Giddings, and Sumner—but also arguably Marx and Durkheim.

The second wave of marketization gave rise to the social rights of the regulatory state and corresponding policy sociology aimed at social amelioration. We might include Max Weber here but also the Fabians in England. In the United States we can plot the rise of foundations, such as Carnegie and Rockefeller, early sponsors of sociological research that drove research in a policy direction, concerned to contain the unruly labouring classes. Later it would be the New Deal and the Post-war federal government that sponsored sociology to tackle society's social problems. This golden era of US sociology saw the emergence of specialized branches within the discipline—industrial sociology, political sociology, stratification, family, modernization—expressing the collaboration of state and society against the market, so much so that leading sociologists (for example, Seymour Martin Lipset) thought that the United States had become the bearer of socialism! This period, stretching from the formation of the American Sociological Society in 1905 into the late 20th century, is marked by the rise of professional sociology with its ideology of pure science. Professional sociology reacted against the speculative science of the first period radically dissociating itself from the latter's moral foundations, and building its analyses on solid basis of the empirical analysis of data.

To be effective in the world of policy, professional sociology had to build a unified and coherent body of knowledge. Attempts to do so whether based on theory (structural functionalism) or method (survey research and demography) foundered. Sociology was never able to constitute a unique object of study over which it had a monopoly of knowledge. Here the contrast with economics is stark. Economists

have constituted the very object—the market economy—over which they have privileged insight to make diagnoses and propose interventions. Economics becomes a paradigmatic science, built on consensual foundations. Sociology never achieved any such unity and coherence.

What was a disadvantage in the second period could yet become an advantage in the third period. If sociology does not have a unique object of analysis, it has a unique standpoint, the standpoint of civil society, defending itself against depredations of state and market. If in the first wave of marketization, sociology reflects the spontaneous reaction of community. In the second wave of marketization, it reflects the regulatory state. In the third wave, the state succumbs to or even colludes in the promotion of the market, and sociology reflects the resurgence of societal self-defence—only now it is a society of global proportions. As I witnessed in the denouement of my researches—whether in Zambia, Chicago, Hungary or Russia—this is a period in which social rights as well as labour rights suffer major reversals. In this period the externalization of professional sociology lies, I argue, not in the direction of policy makers but of publics. Instead of subjugation to the concerns of the state, we now have dialogue with publics. Why should this be the case?

If the commodification of labour and money provoke local and national responses in the first and second waves of marketization, then the commodification of nature or the destruction of the environment is the distinctive element of third-wave marketization. What is novel here is that in principle this affects everyone, although we know only too well some groups suffer more than others from disasters, whether it be the Asian Tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan, Hurricane Katrina, or the explosion of a chemical plant outside Harbin. Wars of genocide whether in Darfur, Rwanda, or Bosnia decimate entire societies. These threats to human community can so often be traced back to the collusion of markets and states. The intensity of Hurricane Katrina, for example, was due to global warming, while its devastating impact was due to the exploration of oil, the destruction of wetlands in favour of the leisure industry, and the cutbacks in federal investment for the levees that should have protected the city against flooding. Having crippled the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by absorbing it into the Goliath Department of Homeland Security, and having drawn off the National Guard to fight in Iraq, the US security state became unresponsive

Table 1: Three Waves of Marketization and their Corresponding Sociologies

	First-Wave Marketization	Second-Wave Marketization	Third-Wave Marketization
Fictitious Commodity	Labour	Money	Environment
Locus Of Response	Local Community	Nation State	Global Civil Society
Rights	Labour	Social	Human
Orientation of Sociology	Utopian	Policy	Public
Unifying Principle	Vision	Object of Knowledge	Standpoint
Science	Moral	Pure	Programmatic

to the desperate needs of immobilized poor blacks of New Orleans. Now the city is being invaded by crony capitalism with sweetheart deals, and being rebuilt on the backs of cheap immigrant and illegal labour under a regime of suspended labour laws. Rebuilt for whom? For a new middle class and not for the displaced and dispossessed inhabitants of the ninth ward, now scattered across the states of America. Violated here are not simply labour rights or social rights but the very recognition of people as human beings, in other words, human rights.

Third-wave marketization threatens the viability of the human species which can be defended only by the reaction of society but this time the reaction has to be global and besides embracing both labour and social rights it also has to go beyond both to uphold human rights.

The defence of human rights has a universalistic and even abstract character, which is important, but it must also be made concrete to specific publics. Sociology of the third wave, therefore, must not only turn away from the state but also turn to diverse sets of publics with diverse interests. Sociology's division into multiple intersecting research programs, reflected, for example, in the 43 sections of the American Sociological Association and the 53 research committees of the International Sociological Association, is its strength not its weakness. Those who hanker after a paradigmatic science, such as economics, see chaos rather than order, fragmentation rather than

diversity. But this concern for unity is the perspective of policy science seeking the legitimacy of professional consensus whereas public sociology gains legitimacy from its dialogue with diverse communities.

Successive waves of marketization lead to successive waves of self-defence against commodification, which in turn give rise to successive waves of sociology. But one should not see these waves as disconnected: they build on each other dialectically. If policy sociology builds a science that rejects the moral science of utopian sociology, then public sociology restores the moral dimension of the first wave but combines this with the rigorous methodology of scientific research programs, building auxiliary theories to absorb external anomalies and internal contradictions. In the same way that social rights absorbed labour rights at a higher level, so now human rights absorb both social and labour rights in a movement toward even greater universality. Equally, public sociology's ascendancy to the global level does not come about automatically; it is constructed through stitching together dialogues with local communities and movements. Even when the global-local nexus is what marks third-wave public sociology, the state remains a crucial actor. We cannot dismiss policy sociology even though the collusion of state and market makes for an ever more inhospitable environment.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

We can now return to the significance of the WTO and the protest it has called forth. The WTO seeks to regulate and enhance international trade by bringing down tariffs. At stake in its Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong is what was at stake at Cancun, namely state subsidies for agriculture in the European Union (EU) and US, subsidies that led to dumping produce, the displacement of farmers in developing countries, and thus increasing dependency on foreign food supplies. With one fist advanced capitalist nations cling to their farm subsidies, while with the other they demand access to service sectors of developing countries, privatizing public utilities, holding populations to the ransom of multinational corporations. Unlike the World Bank and IMF, the WTO operates through the rule of consensus. All 148-member countries have to agree to new policies, so that the vigorous protest outside the ministerial meetings can encourage recalcitrance inside and deadlock bargaining, as happened in Seattle and Cancun.

From the standpoint of sociology what is important is the constitution of a global civil society with a machinery of self-defense and self-organization that can contain the devastation of markets but can also be deployed against supra-national and national bodies, be they states or capitalist corporations. The danger is that we restrict ourselves to the terrain of these bodies, for example, insisting that EU and US follow their own rules of free trade and cease their subsidies to agriculture. Universalization of free trade will not bring well-being to all. Can global civil society develop its own rules and principles that oppose the rights of international trade or is global civil society already irredeemably and irreversibly shaped by markets and states?

I propose to hitch public sociology to the discourse of human rights, knowing full well many of its shortcomings. The danger is that human rights will be seen in many places as but another Western civilizing mission, a cover for the occupation of foreign lands, and the plundering of resources. Is the language of human rights inherently corrupted by its use as an alibi for new forms of colonialism or can it be turned against the colonizers? If human rights is to be the ideological cement of a global civil society defending itself against third-wave marketization, then it will be especially important to expose the violation of human rights, as defined, say in the UN Declaration, by the dominant world powers, whether in their colonial adventures (use of torture, arbitrary killing as well as suspension of the rule of law) or domestically. It is important to make the US state accountable to human rights on its domestic terrain as well as abroad. Equally, the very definition of human rights will have to be the subject of struggle. It has to include economic and social rights as well as the political rights associated with liberal democracy. Only in this way does it have a chance of capturing the imagination of subjugated populations. Human rights cannot be simply left as abstract code, a cold utopia; it has to engage the very circumstances of oppression and exploitation. Nonetheless as a set of universal principles it does have the power in compelling all to bow to its dictates. Even if the prosecution of crimes against humanity takes time and the damage is done before tribunals get to work, still the universalism will hold states and corporations accountable to a new moral order. We simply have to intensify and extensify the application of human rights. A public sociology will have to be at the forefront of any such engagement.