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Barbarians at the Open Gates

Public Sociology and the Late Modern Turn

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Abstract Burawoy's manifesto connects to a long series of debates on the role of science in society as well as on the myth of pure science. This paper argues that the gap between professional sociology and public sociology is far from being unbridgeable and that public sociology is not suppressed to the extent portrayed by Burawoy. In late modern societies a number of schools, including various scientific, public and intellectual movements have questioned the possibility, value position and social relevance of a functionally differentiated pure science by applying the *sine qua non* of modernity, i.e. critical reflection, to science. According to the argument developed here, also illustrated by a personal example, Burawoy could possibly prevent the gate-keepers of the empire of pure science from closing the otherwise open gates in front of his program and in front of critical reflection if only he used less harsh war-cries and were more careful in detecting the changes he himself urges.

Keywords Public sociology · Burawoy · Late modernity · Social relevance · Complexity · Critical thinking

Something is surely out of hand if in the new millennium Vladimir Putin, the leader of an empire masquerading in the role of Europe's strategic partner, is under a cloud of suspicion of getting rid of his political adversaries—be they multibillionaires of Russian neo-capitalism, troublesome human rights journalists or telltale secret agents—with select methods befitting a James Bond film. Only recently radio reported an attempt to poison Aleksandr Litvinenko, a former secret agent living as a political refugee in London after fleeing his home country. He is considered to be a friend of Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist who was recently murdered in front of her own flat

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in Moscow. Naturally, there is no evidence to prove 'state order'—the witness is dying in a hospital bed... Whether it is Mr. Putin or the Russian mafia in the background, Burawoy's outcry is hardly surprising:

> Unfettered capitalism fuels market tyrannies and untold inequities on a global scale, while resurgent democracy too often becomes a thin veil for powerful interests, disenfranchisement, mendacity, and even violence (Burawoy 2005b: 4–5).

Burawoy's political standpoint and moral stance is appealing; moreover, adopting a stance (regardless of its leaning) is his obligation as a citizen. Yet I think that his attempt to shake up the community of American sociologists turned out to be too harsh. I do agree with a number of elements of his diagnosis and his program; however, we happen to disagree on several important points. With his manifesto, Burawoy connects to the stream of debates about the role of science and the myth of pure science. By applying the *sine qua non* of late modern societies, i.e. skeptical reflection, to science itself, a host of schools of thought, scientific, intellectual, and public movements have questioned the possibility, the value position, and social relevance of a functionally differentiated pure science. Even though the strong program of post-modernism receded into the background, social sciences and their practical, public, and policy application underwent changes in the past years and decades revealing changes in the role of science. Following a brief presentation and partial critique of Burawoy's program, I argue that the antagonism between professional sociology and public sociology is not as great as Burawoy would have it, and that public sociology is far from being in such an oppressed position as Burawoy claims it to be. Finally I will illustrate my points through personal experience about the co-existence of public and scientific roles.

The Program of Public Sociology

In what follows I will focus only on those ideas of Burawoy's about public sociology which serve as the basis of my arguments later in the paper.

In Buroway's view 'sociology has moved left and the world has moved right.' This statement provides the context for the other theses of his program, with referring to the changes in the dominant philosophies of economics and to the advancement of neo-liberalism, considered worrisome by Burawoy, which distantiated the world from the 'natural position' of sociology. Therefore he immediately launches his scientific policy program with a hot political statement, with a bold rhetoric blitz, thus making it less likely that dissenting sociologists will accept his other theses.

I find important Burawoy's thesis which positions the discipline of sociology as a field of power, drawing attention to the fact that every science is embedded in a wider power structure affecting the choice of subject matters and the application of research results. Burawoy expects public sociology to give voice to subordinated types of knowledge so that the latter have the chance to put forth themselves. Public sociology brings suppressed groups into scientific discourse in a way that it equally opens up the possibility of their emancipation. But Burawoy goes even further: he

argues that 'beyond creating other publics,' public sociology can also constitute itself 'as a public that acts in the political arena.'[1]

The next important point Burawoy makes concerns the division of labor in sociology: he outlines professional, policy, critical and public sociology as the four sociological ideal-types which define researchers' roles. Policy sociology and professional sociology rely on instrumental knowledge, that is, they do not reflect on the value-positing which serves as the basis of a research program. Critical and public sociology, by contrast, are reflexive in this sense but they are less inclined to delve into technical details. Policy and public sociology address an audience beyond the scientific community, while professional and critical sociology are for the scientific community. In the next point which seems to be important, Burawoy argues that each ideal-type has its strength and weakness (professional sociology, for instance, produces a robust body of knowledge but is at risk of falling into the trap of self-referentiality; public sociology, on the other hand, provides relevant knowledge but may at the same time be susceptible to fads). All four sociological ideal-types have their own place in Burawoy's normative model; they push sociology ahead while fertilizing and restraining each other in a positive sense.

Finally, Burawoy applies a devastating critique to economics (which depends on the existence of markets) and to political science (which depends on the existence of the state) claiming that these disciplines have ended up inordinately serving the tyranny of the market and the state. Sociology, however, must establish its own identity: sociology's task is not only to engage in a dialogue with civil society but *to conduct its investigations from the standpoint of civil society*. Just as in politics, civil society presents the opposition to the twin powers of state and market, so must sociology counterbalance the dominance of political science and economics in public life.

Criticism

Below I attempt to highlight the main lines of criticism applied to the program of public sociology. On the one hand Burawoy has been heavily criticized in the name of pure science, while others took him to task for his reductionist account of critical sociology. Some approved of the foundation of his program but debated a number of his points, while others went beyond accepting the program and further elaborated on, as it were, its tasks.

Criticism in the Name of Pure Science

Based on an overview by McLaughlin et al. (2005), the most vigorous critic from this direction is Mathieu Deflem who even launched a web page dedicated to 'saving

[1] It is in this spirit that Burawoy acted when, as President of the American Sociological Association, he initiated (and succeeded in achieving) that the Society take position in a statement against the war on Iraq or against the legal limitations on same-sex marriage.

sociology' (Deflem 2006). The essence of this kind of criticism is that sociology as a science should detach itself from values and get on step by step with the objective exploration of the world based on a rigorous methodology. Once a given amount of knowledge is accumulated, it then can be applied to policy issues. From this point of view public sociology, or any value-based critical sociology, can only harm the scientific enterprise and just complicates the application of slowly accumulating knowledge to public policy. Deflem (2006); Tittle (2004); Turner (2005) or Brint (2005) think that Burawoy's public sociology undermines sociology's legitimacy: the source of sociology's credibility does not rest in a prior moral commitment, but in a reliable body of knowledge which is produced in the course of systematic work. In Tittle's (2004) view, the fact that a sociologist embarks on gathering knowledge relevant for civil groups might be dangerous in itself, even without a commitment to values. Critics agree with Burawoy's statement that sociology is not influential enough but, in their view, a change cannot be brought about by activism, but by a commitment to scientific epistemology and to the elimination of internal divides (diversity). Turner (2005) carries the critique so far as to offering Burawoy and the army of the committed (thus unscientific) researchers who practice sociology to 'take' the name sociology, only to cleanse the discipline and to separate hard, scientific sociology—which Turner would gladly call 'social physics'[2]—from Burawoy's humanistic/activist sociology.

Criticism in Defense of Critical Sociology

Certain critics blame Burawoy for reserving scientific rigor and a systematic approach exclusively for professional sociologists, while entrusting public and critical sociology only with the task of applying and criticizing theories formulated by the former (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2005). These critics reject the 'beacon's role,' which Burawoy designates for professional sociology, and decline to accept that critical sociology is to play the second fiddle. In addition, Braithwaite (2005) argues that Burawoy restricts sociology too much, albeit a problem-oriented critical social science should be interdisciplinary.[3]

Followers

One of the most general reactions to the program of public sociology is its partial critique and its further elaboration, building on the acceptance of the bases. Such point of view is held, in my opinion, by Ulrich Beck (2005); Amitai Etzioni (2005); György Lengyel (2006); McLaughlin et al. (2005); and Dénes Némedi (2006). In my view, these authors do not reject the program of public sociology in its entirety, but they find unacceptable its thesis of normative commitment to civil society. However, they do not take this position in the name

[2] Although he does not make it explicit, but with the term 'social physics' Turner reaches back to Comte's positivist program which only very few scientist would take today in this form.

[3] It is not my goal to review here all the radical critiques, with McLaughlin et al having done so (McLaughlin et al. 2005: 137–138)

of pure sociology which withdraws from public life and retreats instead to the ivory tower of science, but simply on the grounds that civil society itself is divided and it is far from being clear-cut as to which of the competing values sociology should opt for. Too much prior commitment will most likely impede a critical exploration of reality.

Ulrich Beck (2005), who had attracted attention earlier with his theory on reflexive modernity and risk society (these topics, however, have in recent times receded into the background in his work, giving way to the topos of cosmopolitan world society), criticizes Burawoy's program for the narrow-mindedness of methodological nationalism. Only partly do I find this critique fitting, for while it is true that Burawoy does not make an attempt at elaborating some kind of a theory about global society and social phenomena over-arching national borders, he does urge the relativization of the position of American sociology. It is apparent therefore that Burawoy perceives the challenges posed by globalization.

The critique explicated by György Lengyel (2006), president of the Hungarian Sociological Association, focuses on the harmful consequences of an ill-conceived division of sociological labor. Although Burawoy's analytic map of sociology helps recognizing the tasks facing sociologists but, so Lengyel's argument goes, it becomes fruitless when Burawoy wishes to institutionalize this analytic division:

> It is of no good if the orientation of research, education, consulting, critical reflexion, and public opinion systematically diverge. I personally believe that these are tasks every sociologist faces. (...) We speak of one and the same sociologist whose task is to carry out research, to reflect on the premises of his/her research, to teach and give advice to the best of his/her professional knowledge, to espouse the problems of civil society, and to inform public opinion (Lengyel 2006: 108).

The claim that reflexivity is not only a task of critical and public sociology, but a general requirement in the social sciences, has taken a central place in the 'friendly criticism' of Burawoy's program by McLaughlin et al. (2005). These authors also argue for the integrity of science instead of a functional separation of reflexivity.

Amitai Etzioni, who is basically one of the 'sympathizers,' holds that 'public sociologists have always been called for' (Etzioni 2005:373). One of the key points of his work is the argument that 'public matters are never merely technical, nor can they be treated strictly on the basis of empirical findings and observations. There are normative dimensions to all issues that one faces in the public arena' (Etzioni 2005). Both positive and negative consequences arise with regard to the program of public sociology. Etzioni highlights that practicing public sociology implies, to some extent, getting involved in politics. There is no criterion as to the direction or the extent to which a public sociologist can go in the action chain. Public sociologists should not think that they know what the 'right direction' is, as most moral dilemmas are far more complicated. I concur with Etzioni when he brings up budgetary deficit as an example. One of the most common criticisms voiced by the left about neo-liberalism is its fiscal conservativism; they claim it is 'socially insensitive' and makes welfare policies impossible. Is it certain though that the just way to increase present wealth (consumption) is by placing a mortgage on the future? A preconception about cutting back budgetary deficit turns the public

sociologist dogmatic. In reality, so Etzioni's argument goes, neither the public sociologist, nor the scientific purist can afford to carry out research or publish its results without having previously pondered its moral implications. Elaborating further on Burawoy's program, Etzioni thinks that sociology would only benefit from more public policy courses involving moral dilemmas being taught at the universities, and if researchers more often faced the multidisciplinary challenges posed by public policy issues.

What I would like to add to these lines of criticism is that it seems as though Burawoy ignored institutional changes which the advent of late modernity brought about in politics, economics and science. Taking into account these institutional changes, it looks as if Burawoy were banging on open doors, while it is to be feared that their gatekeepers, hearing the harsh war cries, will close them. I will now focus on this issue.

Late Modernity: The Institutionalization of Public Sociology?

Reflexive Modernity

First let us come back to the issue of reflexivity which is problematic from 'two directions.' As Kowalchuk et al and György Lengyel highlighted, reflexivity is a general requirement in the social sciences. We can safely add that the reason why institutionalizing reflexivity as a separate sub-discipline is unnecessary is because critical thinking has been considered the *sine qua non* of modernity, at least since Kant (1959), so there is no point in reinventing it.

Thus critical reflection has been with us since the dawn of modernity. From a more radical point of view the reason why Burawoy's concept of reflexivity is problematic is because he reserves it for sociology as a science and by this he *ab ovo* places the expert over the layman. However, it has proved true in quite a number of instances that expert knowledge does not necessarily supersede non-expert knowledge. This is illustrated by the social scientific 'career' of the concepts of *extended peer communities* (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993) or that of *local knowledge* (Kalb 2006), and its popularity among disciplines which deal with resource conservation; the notion is eminently popular among anthropologists co-operating with ecologists, and is frequently used in various development programs (see for instance Gagdil et al. 1993).

The radicalization of reflexivity as the basic characteristic of modernity stands at the center of Ulrich Beck's vision about risk society which is situated between post-modern and modern theories (Beck 1992). He places those changes into the center of his theory which are characteristic to late modern societies or to the era of reflexive modernity. By reflexive modernity Beck means that the process of reflexivity reflects on itself and thus threatens its own base. Ecological crisis is not a consequence of the failure of modernity but, on the contrary, of its success. In a risk society we have to live among risks which are produced by a 'socially pacified' capitalism: a looming nuclear crisis, escalating epidemics, climate change, etc... Capitalism affects itself, therefore it is reflexive. This reflexive modernity is the radicalization of modernity, the result of which is the dissolution of the basic features

of industrial society.[4] In the age of reflexive modernity, conflicts arise between experts and counter-experts; scientific results become the object of debates; while certain new social movements (green movements in the first place) use scientific knowledge for thematizing risks and for criticizing science itself and technical evolution which builds on it.

Beck's rough historical overview (which I have no room to review here, not even roughly) could be criticized at several points but I think that he highlights well the structural changes which institutionalized, as it were, public sociology. It is clear that in Beck's view risk societies are characterized by a larger scale of reflexivity than their predecessors. Reflexivity and critical potential, however, do not appear in the division of left and right, characteristic to industrial societies—individualization and the ecological risks cross-sectioning class logics do not make this possible. In Beck's view this increased reflexivity can be detected in the institutionalization of counter-sciences: the skeptical self of modernity questions its own foundations.

Still on the ecological crisis: the point is not only that technology, with the support of science, produces risks of civilization, but it is also important that scientists are indispensable in order to detect these risks. In Burawoy's view this is how experts, starting from biologists all the way through to anthropologists who detect the destruction in faraway countries which follow directly from the consumption structure of developed societies, turn into counter-experts who rely on the power of science to question the scientific truths believed to be fundamental. On the other hand relying on the knowledge of counter-experts, and as a response to risks, a new politics arises under politics which drives the state and the market to new directions by using consumer boycotts, direct action, identity politics (for instance the 'hacking' of brand names is an opportunity to 'pay back' the misdemeanors of companies),[5] and movement activity. In Beck's sub-politics counter-experts (whose science is as scientific as that of the experts) are the activists of new social movements, who co-operate in the organic solidarity urged by Burawoy himself.

[4] At one place Beck uses six dimensions to compare late (reflexive) modern and classic modern societies. (Beck 1994: 94–96). 1. Early industrial modernization had a linear view of history, while self-inflicted insecurities and dangers are characteristic to the age of reflexive modernization. 2. What lay in the background of industrial modernization was instrumental rationality, but late modernity is characterized by reflexivity and taking into account corollary consequences. 3. Industrial modernization viewed itself as modern, while reflexive modernity—viewed from its own age—looks half-modern only. 4. In the age of industrial modernization large groups and categories, such as class, were used in thinking; the age of reflexive modernity, in turn, is characterized by individualization. 5. Early modernization was accompanied by the functional differentiation of society; in the age of reflexive modernity interaction and coordination between sub-systems intensifies. 6. Finally, the politics of early modernity was determined by the division between left and right but in late modernity differences between the two fade into the background and their place are taken by the struggle between politics and -'sub-politics,' the opposition of security and risk.

[5] The bestseller book *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* describes the misdemeanors of brand corporations and the relating movement of identity politics (Klein 2000).

Complexity and Network Governance

With his theory Ulrich Beck grasps, among others, changes occurring in the process of public policy which have been described in more modest (or more sober?) visions by others. In his comment on Burawoy's article, Némedi (2006) also refers to the spreading of public policy research which he views as multi-disciplinary, application-oriented, and context-sensitive, and in which the user also has an active role, as urged by Burawoy. Ágh (2003: 133–136) depicts a more detailed picture of these changes in his historic overview of the public policy systems. He considers the form of public policy emerging from the 1980s—which builds on co-operation with enterprises and the civil sphere, instead of the former top-down approach in management—the fifth and sixth period in the history of public policy development. The phrase 'new governance' denotes a management system which is characterized by co-operation, decentralization, deregulation, privatization, a supplier state, collaboration, and network governance. This is important from our point of view because it draws attention again to the institutional changes which provide a new framework to the public policy actions of interest groups and public interest groups as well, thus creating a new structure of opportunity. Bevir and Rhodes (2001) emphasize in particular that one should not, within this 'wave,' blur the line between neo-liberal policies wishing to rely on the market, and the approach they term 'institutionalist,' which understands network governance as social participation and public policy co-operation as opposed to the market principle. A central notion of the literature on 'new governance' is that exercising power has ceased to be a top-down practice and the state is increasingly entering into co-operation and partnership with enterprises and civil society. Governmental and non-governmental actors, experts, scientists, agencies, interest groups, interaction among parties, formal and informal relations among these actors, networks formed by them—these are therefore central to understanding what exercising power means. In this post-parliamentarian phase of politics, public policies no longer depend directly on the will of representatives who hold legislative rights and compete for the constituencies' votes, but depend on the agreement of the 'public policy community' (Richardson 2000). Concepts such as policy community, policy network, policy coalition, issue network, advocacy network, advocacy coalition, critical community, epistemic community try to grasp the fragmentation which is also denoted by the concept of new governance.[6] Partnership and network governance, urged by Burawoy, as well as the literature which focuses on it, are thus alive and kicking.

The Science Shop Movement

Finally let me refer to a phenomenon which also proves that Burawoy in certain respect is knocking on open doors. I have in mind the science shop movement (for an overview see Leydesdorff and Ward 2005). It started off in The Netherlands in the 1970s and it spread all over Europe in the course of the eighties. The essence of the

[6] Another aspect of the new wave of the science of public policy which stems from complexity and insecurity and which was overviewed here briefly, is discursive and constructivist public policy analysis.

science shop concept is close co-operation between knowledge-producing institutions, such as universities, and social groups, self-organized groups, which seek a response to certain questions. The institutionalization of the science shop movement could not be illustrated better than by the new funding scheme of the European Union which has been recently started for their support in the framework of the Science and Society Action Plan (European Commission 2007). Co-operative research carried out in this framework must surely suit Burawoy's idea of public sociology, with the addition that its validity should embrace all disciplines, not only sociology. Let us remember those 'radical' criticisms which reproach Burawoy for isolating sociology and ridding it of interdisciplinarity.

In the framework of a science shop usually a civil organization (which does not necessarily have to have a formal organization as well) contacts a university or a research institute with a certain issue. For instance people perceive that the water source of the village is too polluted and they would like to see to it; they would like to ask for help in elaborating a micro-regional development plan; or they ask for the researchers' help in order to acquire more precise information about a public policy conflict which they are involved in. Research then is usually carried out on a voluntary basis or with money gained from tenders, as the charter of science shops (International Science Shop Network 2007) lays down that only non-profit oriented research may be conducted in this framework so that those have the possibility to turn to scientists with their problems who otherwise would not be able to pay for research. The science shop movement, however, does not mean an *ab ovo* commitment to certain issues or certain social groups: it implies *institutionalized relevance*, openness and dialogue.

What we see therefore is that late modernity produced those reflexive fields of science, as well as the possibilities of social utilization of the knowledge these fields produce, which Burawoy claims lacking. This seems true whether we consider the reinforcement of Beck's sub-politics and his counter-experts, as he describes it in the historic vision of Risk society; or if we regard at the literature on governance which analyzes the changes occurring in public policy processes; or considering the institutionalization of collaborative and participatory research in the framework of the science shop movement. Perhaps if Burawoy took these changes into consideration, it would not overextend his program, since we have seen that even his 'sympathizers' found fault with his *a priori* commitment to civil society.

'Self-anthropology': Personal Experience in Shifting Public and Scientific Roles

Looking back on my short 'career' so far, maybe I won't seem immodest if I say that I have not been far from practicing a kind of public sociology.[7] Yet, only with hesitation would I take on the role of public sociologist as defined by Burawoy. For the past five years I have switched my position back and forth between science and

[7] For the past five years I have participated in the work of Hungarian civil organizations and movements as a volunteer and, in more fortunate periods, as a paid employee. Beside this I completed two degrees and at present I am 'wrestling' with a training program in sociology and economy at a Hungarian University.

the movement, I have applied certain scientific knowledge to issues of the movement, and I have conducted research prompted by the problems of Hungarian society. I certainly would not dare to call myself a scientist or a sociologist; I am present in the academic field as an apprentice rather than as a practicing scientist. I do know, however, that when I switch positions, I also 'change hats,' as Tittle (2004) urges too. I think that my activities in a movement and in civil society made me direct my attention to certain issues and, as a scientist, I am able to pose more relevant questions which may contribute to the debates between various movements and the 'power.' I do not do this with an unreflected *a priori* commitment, as such an approach would only harm the movement in the longer run with implying an easily contradictable knowledge, while at the same time it would also undermine the credibility of the researcher. Science can be used to take us closer to the truth if we apply scientific formulation of concepts and empirical verification and falsification in the strictest possible sense. But truth cannot always be rendered at the service of politics, as demonstrated by Hannah Arendt in an overview beginning from ancient Greece (Arendt 2005).

I can fully relate to one of Burawoy's examples of public sociology (Burawoy 2005a: 162). Pointing to the problems in the operation of WTO, he draws attention to the danger that the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) poses for the welfare of the inhabitants of third world countries with the marketization/liberalization of public utilities. In Burawoy's view a public sociologist's task could be to study the impact of water privatization (or of other public utilities) and thereby endowing the globalization-critical movements with such elements of knowledge which could help them contain the damages stemming from the principle of profit and from the proliferation of giant corporations. I have myself focused on practically this very issue for several years (Scheiring 2003a; 2003b; Boda et al. 2006), yet I would formulate the matter somewhat differently. That is, my experience throughout my work and my activism has been that every group criticizing or challenging hegemonic discourses has to wage a titanic struggle for its legitimacy and for making its arguments accepted. Success is most likely if its messages are arguments at the same time, if these arguments can be defended in a public debate, and if they are capable of withstanding the attack of rational criticism. This is precisely why the 'cause' is best served by scientific conceptualization in a strict sense, by applying support for arguments systematically, as well as by exposing alternative explanations empirical testing. In case the researcher precludes certain explanations because of prior commitment (and it is hard to interpret otherwise Burawoy's call to go beyond dialogue and take the standpoint of civil society against the twin tyranny of the market and the state), then the quality of the knowledge thus produced deteriorates and its falsification becomes easier. And nothing could harm a movement more than if the stereotype of 'irrational grouchy set' is reinforced, even if for a moment.

I would like to bring up a very concrete personal example as an illustration. In accord with Burawoy's suggestion, I began focusing on the problems of GATS, its democratic deficits and its potential damaging impacts on ecological and social sustainability. Soon after the completion of a thesis, a working group was set up within an eco-political organization to address the question. However, before long we came to realize that in order to turn the concern of a few worrying intellectuals

and activist into a public issue, we need to provide facts and arguments to demonstrate the damaging impacts of the ill-considered privatization/liberalization of public utilities. We did not take a position opposing privatization *ab ovo*, rather we put an emphasis on the robust regulatory-institutional environment and the control it provides. With adopting such a viewpoint I found myself in a minority position at numerous international meetings of activists and researchers, and it made my Western friends eye me quizzically: while at home I had to escape the anticapitalist stigma, in their eyes I appeared as a supporter of privatization. Later on we had the opportunity to carry out an extensive and thorough research, commissioned by UNRISD, to map the social impacts of water privatization in Hungary (Boda et al. 2006). The most important result of the research was that in Hungary no relationship can be established between water privatization and an increase in prices. That is, the criticism, shared by Burawoy as well, that water privatization inevitably leads to increasing prices and social tensions, is not valid in the case of Hungary. Of course this does not mean that water privatization is a desirable program by all means. On the contrary, the result highlights the importance of the state's role. In Hungary the absence of conflicts, arising in other parts of the world as a result of water privatization, is the consequence of an exceptionally strong state regulation and a system of subventions, which make possible that prices are kept at a low level. This seems to justify our assumption that it is not a change in ownership in itself that matters, but institutional structure and democratic control are of real importance.[8] If we had made an initial commitment, as Burawoy would suggest, and uncritically took the 'mainstream' viewpoint in civil society, we would hardly have come to this result, or at least it would be hard for us to tolerate it.

I trust that the result refines the movement's argument so that at the same time it does limit its space of action, and even without a prior commitment we were able to contribute to turning an important issue into a public concern, as well as to the emancipation of an oppressed community (of those who are endangered by an *ill-conceived* water privatization). That is to say, I trust that commitment to scientific epistemology, accompanied by sensitivity to problems, could lead to justice without previously adopting a stance. It is apparent, however, that the viewpoints of science and sociology cannot be simply equated with those of civil society. This short example may, at the same time, illustrate what has been said about reflexive modernity as well, since all this took place with the involvement of scientific 'counter-experts' in the realm of 'sub-politics' existing beside state institutions and independently of the institutions of official public policy. I do not mean to assert that values could or should be evaded in the course of research. The normative dimension cannot be evaded, as shown by the renaissance of the ethics of economy or political philosophy, but I consider an uncritical, unreflexive prior commitment dogmatic.

[8] The picture is of course complicated; these lines do not serve to prompt any viewpoint on water privatization, let alone on the question of the privatization of public utilities in general. The aforesaid serves only to illustrate my argument concerning the research methodology of social science and, more precisely, its epistemological position.

Instead of an Epilogue

To me it seems that Burawoy, *rightfully* disillusioned with an almost isolated academic sociology, wants to impose such roles on his discipline which it is inadequate to fulfill as a science. He prompted most criticism with sharply separating and contrasting professional and public sociology, and with entrusting them with behavioral patterns which should not become dominant in either case. Above all it is unfortunate if a (public) sociologist turns into a politician.

We seem to agree with Burawoy in that value-free and morally neutral science is a myth, because every science works in the value-network and power-structure of a society, therefore research results, getting into the currents of public life, further the interests and values of a particular group. Burawoy elaborates on this idea in the seventh thesis of his talk and he builds on it in his response to the criticisms appeared in the *American Sociologist* (Burawoy 2005a, b). Pure science, building on positivism's classical program, set out to conduct a completely value-free study of the working of society and, from this value-free position, to observe universal laws similar to those in physics. Today, by contrast, it is a widely-held view that data-gathering and, more generally, the perception of reality are unavoidably organized by conceptual or interpretive frames which precede perception in our mind. Although there are methods to eliminate the influence of these frames, and scientific conceptualization should build on these universal methods, we should not believe that we can get rid of our antecedent conceptual frames once and for all. Somehow the complexity of the world has to be reduced and we need to start our research somewhere but in every case it goes together with a choice of values and conceptual frame. We had better make explicit these values, ideals, and prior choices, as suggested by Weber as well, and reflect upon them, instead of entertaining the illusion of 'pure science.' After the myth of a value-free public policy and politics exempt from morals wore out, social sciences are forced into a new role, as Etzioni argues in his partial critique of Burawoy's program. That being said, if sociology wishes to remain a social *science*, then it cannot adopt the role of politics. This view can undoubtedly be reconciled with Popper's concept of science or with Merton's sociology, and I am convinced that it can claim the approval of those practicing sociology as a hard science as well.

It is exactly because of conceptual rigor that I have high esteem for Merton's program on middle range theories, as I think that we do not have a choice given our limited cognitive abilities. Yet I do not share Merton's conviction, and that of the proponents of pure science, that by distancing ourselves from the problems of the world and public life, then we will be able to accumulate a sufficient amount of objective knowledge for a 'perfect' intervention in the future. I think that society changes faster than the pace at which social scientific knowledge accumulates. It is mistaken to believe that economics has become so 'respected' because of withdrawing from practical problems. I claim that the exact opposite is the case: most economists were interested in more successful management or in the more efficient and rational managing of state finances—thus the bulk of economists (though not all of them, unfortunately) has from the start taken a more active public and practical (management) role as well. This was not to their disadvantage, on the contrary: it helped to restrain an excessive

abstraction of theories with a built-in 'reality check.' As the remarkable Herbert Simon said:

> In the philosophy of science, just like in other theoretical domains, the question of practical applicability is an indispensable source of new problems and ideas. If a research field of theoretic character loses contact with the world of practical implementation, then it can easily sink into triviality or become obsessed with formal elegance. One responsibility of the practicing scientist is therefore to save philosophy and theory from an excessive formalism. At least from time to time it has to make an effort to do so (Simon 1982:171—Translated from the Hungarian edition).

Simon's lines speak against formalism for its own sake in neoclassical economics but I believe that they are true for social sciences in general. A large number of sociologists, however, thought that the right thing was to embark on speculative philosophizing. It is better to build on a limited apparatus of concepts. But how should we choose theories and concepts? This is the point where problem-sensitivity, experience in the public sphere or practical-organizational experience, *the public construction of relevance*, becomes important.

Since the time I typed the first paragraph of my paper, Litvinenko has died of drinking his 'radiant tea.' It is very probable that we will never learn who were behind this spectacular, presumably demonstrative, act of retaliation. What we do know is that it had something to do with Russian secret agency networks and that we could be made to drink even radioactive polonium should we be found bothersome. Although this case demonstrates it very expressively, it is not the only one to expose that reviving democracies may build on a practice of fraudulent acquisition, violence and threats as much as on public trust. In late modernity despite (or partly as a result of) the spectacular advancement of science, we cannot appraise the entire range of risks incurred by our actions. We cannot fully keep track of nuclear production and trade, nor can we control it. We do not know if a nuclear power plant will not explode any time as a result of human negligence. We cannot fathom the consequences of the ice cap melting in the North Pole. We cannot put an anti-terrorist squad by every building.

I am convinced that in an age we happen to live in precaution, a public (including 'the lay') evaluation of risks, problem-sensitivity, and critical reflection are indispensable. We should address the problems of public life and we should be sensitive enough to hear the voices coming from civil associations, as the crises we are facing seem to reveal a need for systems of collective aim-building and democratic norm-setting other than the parties and the established channels of interest reconciliation. We should be sensitive and avoid methodological fetishism. We should not wait, akin to naïve positivists, for pure knowledge to accumulate for creating a rational (scientific) foundation for morality and politics. We should espouse paradigmal research (discourse-analysis, analysis of interpretive frames, etc.) without sinking into relativism and giving up the role of normal sciences (Kuhn 1962; Dryzek 1990; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993). We should not back from subscribing to problem orientation which organizes research and the academic field along the lines of important issues rather than on disciplinary basis. We should be open to normative dimension — facilitating normative discourse but not *ab ovo* committed.

Reflexivity and critical thinking should belong to every discipline without institutionalizing commitment. This is the only way our arguments and our knowledge can be valid and *relevant*. The rest is not scientific obligation but our obligations as citizens.

Barbarians reappeared in front of the gates of our civilization—the barbarians being ourselves this time, the gates are open. With the technological complexity we achieved, our escapist over-consumption and aggressive economic colonization, we are digging our own grave. The policy of isolation no longer works, we do not have anywhere to escape; the challenges of the future are the common concern of mankind. Burawoy could possibly prevent the gate-keepers of the empire of pure science from closing, out of fear, the otherwise open gates in front of his program and in front of critical reflection if only he used less harsh war-cries and were more careful in detecting the ongoing changes he himself calls for. There is a burning need for critical reflection, that is clear: without it humankind in late modernity cannot avoid destroying itself.

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