

EPILOGUE

THE FUTURE OF SOCIOLOGY

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MARKETIZATION

A wave of marketization is sweeping the world. Entities that used to be embedded in human bodies, communities, and nature are being ripped out of their habitats, appropriated by new classes of merchants, and sold in chains of markets that stretch across the globe. This is not the first wave of marketization; it is not the first time markets have expanded their reach by turning common goods and public services into new commodities. The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century worked through a similar global expansion in the marketization of labour and its products. The financial revolution of the twentieth century turned money into a full-blown commodity, eventually threatening the very viability of markets. The ecological transformation that now besets us digs even deeper, making land, water, air, and genes the subject of market exchange, thereby threatening human existence.

So far, each wave of marketization has set in motion a counter-movement, erecting institutions to regulate, channel, and contain commodification. Yet each wave also swept away the ramparts erected against the previous wave. Under demolition today are rights won by Western labour movements against the marketization of the nineteenth century (such as the right to form unions) and the social rights

guaranteed by states against the marketization of the twentieth century (the provision of minimum standards of economic security). In the end, nothing seems immune to the third wave of marketization. Will there be a counter-movement strong enough to contain its destructive powers?

Behind the third wave are predatory classes colluding with nation-states and sometimes also with multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, imposing their will on the desperate and the destitute, on workers, students, farmers, and the middle class. The last holdout against this economic storm is society itself, or more precisely civil society, composed of *associations* with a measure of collective self-regulation, *movements* forged out of a collective will, and *publics* of mutual recognition and communication. Will society measure up to the challenge? What role can sociology play in meeting it?

SOCIOLOGY VERSUS THE MARKET

If there is a common thread to sociology's diverse traditions, it is opposition to the reduction of society to a market. Whether it is Marx's critique of capitalism, Durkheim's critique of the abnormal forms of the division of labour, Weber's critique of rationalism,

or Parsons's critique of utilitarianism, each tradition opposes market reductionism, albeit from different viewpoints. Today, it is even more important for sociology to continue its tradition of opposing market reductionism as commodification actually threatens to destroy society and with it human existence. In meeting this challenge, sociologists can join one of four groups of practitioners:

1. *Policy sociologists* help to formulate policies that side with the state against the market, using what remains of state autonomy to help regulate market forces. In Northern European countries with a continuing legacy of social democratic politics or welfare provision, this approach might make sense.
2. *Professional sociologists* argue that their discipline must be based on firm scientific foundations before it can be of any practical use. From this point of view, by wading into stormy seas prematurely, we will discover only that we cannot swim. Professional sociologists may understand the dangers of rampant marketization, but they sit tight waiting for the storm to pass, hoping that it will not sweep them up with the rest of society.
3. *Critical sociologists* agitate against the first two groups, writing tracts against their moral bankruptcy, complaining about those who collude with state and market, and also about those who busy themselves writing scientific papers. Critical sociologists are a shrinking band. Like the professionals, they live in insulated communities, seeking to preserve the power of critique, acting as if their words have the power to hold the storm at bay. Yet their message is often incomprehensible and few are listening.
4. *Public sociologists* refuse to collaborate with the market and the state. They say that science without politics is blind and that critique without intervention is empty. They engage directly with communities, institutions, and social movements, listening and speaking, observing and participating, learning and writing in order to defend society against rampant marketization. Third-wave marketization calls forth the age of public sociology.

There may be a need for public sociology, but it can move forward only on the legs of policy, professional, and critical sociologies. Without the kind of sociological knowledge accumulated in our discipline and presented in this book, public sociology cannot exist.

Public sociology also depends on critical knowledge that keeps professional science honest, steering it away from irrelevance and self-referentiality. At the same time, critical knowledge infuses public sociology with the values and direction that motivate its engagement with publics. Public sociology is nothing if it cannot help to bring about social change. It cannot, therefore, dismiss policy science. It can examine it from without, pushing it in appropriate directions, opposing the temptations of serving power. Public sociology must be the conscience of policy sociology.

Together, public, professional, critical, and policy sociologists form a discipline that takes civil society as its standpoint—as opposed to political scientists, who take the standpoint of the state, and economists, who take the standpoint of the market. Sociology's existence depends on the health of civil society, thereby declaring its commitment to the future of humanity that is currently threatened by the collusion of state and market. Here is the paradox: sociology has never been so important, yet its foundations have never been more precarious.

THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

To appreciate the future of sociology, we must understand the context of third-wave marketization, within which it is forced to operate. For that, I draw on Karl Polanyi's classic, *The Great Transformation* (1944).

Polanyi (who, incidentally, lived outside Toronto from the early 1950s until his death in 1964) devoted himself to understanding the dangers and potentialities of the market. He showed that markets that advance too far cause a social counter-movement. This was the "great transformation"—not the rise of the market, but the *reaction* to its rise.

Perhaps Polanyi's most important but least developed idea was that of "fictitious commodities"—entities that lose their value when subject to unrestricted exchange, unrestricted commodification. For Polanyi, there were three fictitious commodities: labour, money, and land.

When *labour* is overly commodified, people lose their capacity to work. For example, in a perfectly free labour market, where only supply and demand determine the cost of labour, the absence of laws governing minimum wages, child labour, safety standards, and the length of the working day allows some workers to die prematurely because of accidents, ill health, or starvation. Typically, when the New Poor Law was passed in England in 1834, revoking certain forms of

labour protection and poor relief, the ensuing desperation forged a spontaneous reaction in the form of social movements, such as the factory movement to restrict the length of the working day, and associations, such as burial societies, trade unions, cooperatives, and experiments in creating utopian communities. The nineteenth-century commodification of labour led to the spontaneous self-reconstitution of society.

Similarly, when *money* is overly commodified, it loses the capacity to facilitate exchange. The full commodification of money began in the early twentieth century and continues today. Thus, before the global financial crisis that began in 2008, important American laws regulating financial institutions were scrapped, encouraging banks to invest ordinary people's money in extraordinarily risky ways. In the process, the richest 1 percent of Americans multiplied their wealth many times over. However, when mortgages and other credit vehicles began to fail, millions of ordinary Americans lost their homes. Soon, the Occupy Wall Street movement emerged to protest growing economic inequality.

Finally, when *land* is overly commodified, it loses its capacity to deliver human subsistence. When land is enclosed and sold as real estate, as is happening in so many parts of the world, the livelihood of small farmers is threatened. However, it is not just land but other elements of nature that are being commodified. For instance, in Bolivia in the mid-1990s, the government decided to sell water supplies and delivery systems to a private company. The company soon set water prices higher than many poor Bolivians could afford. Water's availability—its human value as a source of life—fell as the cost of commodified water skyrocketed. Poor Bolivians naturally rebelled to protest the untenable conditions of their existence.

Polanyi (1944) wrote about the first two waves of marketization and the reactions to them—the nineteenth-century marketization of labour (and the ensuing rise of workers' rights) and the twentieth-century marketization of money (which led to the Great Depression of 1929–39 and the ensuing rise of the New Deal in the United States, Nazism in Germany, and Stalinism in the Soviet Union). Polanyi believed that, after the horrors of World War II, most people would come to understand the importance of regulating markets. He was wrong. In the mid-1970s, a third wave of marketization began, whose distinctive feature would be the commodification of nature as well as labour and money. How, more specifically, should we characterize the third

wave of marketization? What societal reactions to it can we observe?

THIRD-WAVE MARKETIZATION

First-wave marketization generated a counter-movement against the commodification of labour. Second-wave marketization generated a counter-movement against the commodification of money. Third-wave marketization is generating a counter-movement against the commodification of land or, more broadly, of nature. Of course, land began to be commodified before the third wave. However, the commodification of nature as a whole did not yet threaten the devastation of the planet. Today it does. Squatters and shack dwellers now defend themselves against local governments trying to clear them out of cities. Middle-class city residents oppose high-rise developers. Indigenous peoples refuse to give up their land so large commercial plantations can take their place. Farmers battle against dams that threaten their existence. Activists struggle for clean air, against the dumping of toxic waste, and against privatization of water and electricity. The list goes on. The commodification of labour and of money, of course, continue to be important, generating their own counter-movements, but the reaction to the commodification of nature will define the reaction to third-wave marketization and, thus, the future of humanity.

A second way to characterize the third-wave marketization is by its scale, which is global in its causes and ramifications. The response to the commodification of labour under first-wave marketization was mainly local, although it eventually aspired to become national (through the creation of national trade unions and political parties, for instance). The response to the commodification of money under second-wave marketization was mainly at the level of the nation-state (through central banks) but eventually aspired to be global (through the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for instance). The response to the commodification of nature under third-wave marketization has to be initiated by society—first at the local level but then rising almost immediately to the global level. Because the effects of climate change, nuclear accidents, water privatization, and the spread of contagious diseases are global, so the response to third-wave marketization must ultimately assume a global scale.

A third way of characterizing successive waves of marketization is in terms of the destruction of

the defences people have erected against marketization. Second-wave marketization destroyed the trenches defended by labour before it generated a counter-movement to build new trenches of state social protection (the welfare state). Third-wave marketization is rolling back labour and social rights. We see this almost everywhere as trade unions decline, the real wages of workers stagnate or fall, and budgets for social security, pensions, and welfare contract. On what foundation will the next round of defences be built—defences that will fend off the degradation of nature but also recover labour and social rights? The deeper the challenge to humanity and community, the deeper the reaction must be. In response to third-wave marketization, we will need to develop the defence of human rights—the defence of a community of mutual recognition as human beings—that will necessarily incorporate labour and social rights, too.

Of course, human rights may be appropriated and narrowed to suit particular interests. For instance, electoral democracy has become a human right that, for some people, can justify invasion, killing, and subjugation abroad. Similarly, markets have been promoted in the name of the human right to freedom of choice and the protection of private property, ignoring what this means to those who cannot choose and who lack property. Human rights that are universal, and that therefore include labour rights and social rights, must aim for the protection of the human community as a whole, which involves first recognizing and treating each other as ends rather than means: Human rights, then, is a complex terrain of struggle in which groups stake their claim on the basis of their own interests, but ultimately human rights are about the protection of humanity with the potential to galvanize struggles of global proportions against third-wave marketization. Now that I have described the major characteristics of third-wave marketization and its counter-movement, what is their significance for sociology?

THREE WAVES OF SOCIOLOGY

A distinctive sociology emerges with each wave of marketization. Sociology grew up in the nineteenth century together with civil society, itself a response to first-wave marketization. Thus, sociology began as a moral enterprise defending society against the market, especially the destruction of community, as newly proletarianized, destitute, and degraded populations made the city their home. It was foremost a critical enterprise, but it was also utopian. Sociology imagined life outside

the market. For example, Marx and Engels postulated communism, which they expected to arise out of the ashes of capitalism. Comte imagined a familial order led by sociologists. Durkheim envisaged an organic solidarity built on corporatist organization. In English Canada, the religious principles of the social gospel movement influenced sociology in its early stages.

Comte, Marx, Durkheim, and other early sociologists would object to my characterization. They saw themselves as scientists, committed to what is and what could be by virtue of the laws of society. Still, from today's standpoint, for all the scientific breakthroughs they brought to the study of society, their science was partly speculative, especially regarding the future, and strongly imbued with moral concerns aimed at reversing the degradation brought about by nineteenth century capitalism. At the heart of their utopianism lay the critique of the division of labour and its transformation.

Second-wave marketization, which took off following World War I, challenged the rights that labour had won through trade unions and political parties. As Polanyi (1944) argued, the ravages of international trade and exchange threatened the conditions of capital accumulation and prompted protectionist reactions by the state. In countries that reacted to second-wave marketization with authoritarian regimes, notably Germany and the Soviet Union, sociology was eclipsed, but in countries that reacted with some form of social democracy, a new type of sociology emerged. It collaborated with the state to defend society against the market. In the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, Canada, and elsewhere, a policy-oriented sociology developed. Even in the colonies, there was a policy science, although there it was called anthropology. This was the golden era of state-funded research into social problems.

Where sociology remained relatively divorced from the state, as in the United States, it also developed a strong professional branch, committed to the expansion of specific research programs chiefly concerned with social stability. There, stratification studies highlighted achievement-based mobility up the occupational hierarchy. Family studies emphasized the benefits of the smoothly functioning nuclear family. Studies of crime and deviance focused on regulation and control. Industrial sociology was chiefly concerned with pacifying labour and maximizing the extraction of value from it. Political sociology underscored the social bases of electoral democracy and the containment of extremism. The

overarching theoretical framework was summed up by structural functionalism—the delineation of the functional prerequisites needed to keep any social system in equilibrium and the mechanisms allowing social institutions to meet those prerequisites. During this period, sociologists gave detailed attention to empirical research, new methods of data collection and analysis, and the elaboration of “middle-range” theories that nestled in the scaffolding of structural functionalism. This approach was a reaction against the earlier, more speculative traditions that were propelled by the desire for moral reform. It wanted to expunge moral questions from sociology.

If the first wave of sociology invented utopias, the second wave of policy-oriented and professional sociology opposed utopian thinking, in effect claiming that utopia was almost within reach, or even already at hand. Indeed, in the United States and the Soviet Union, structural-functionalism and Marxism-Leninism, respectively, mistook utopia for reality. These were sociological traditions that were riveted to the present, concerned only with ironing out its small irrationalities. A critical sociology developed in reaction to these presuppositions of harmony and consensus, restoring an interest in struggle and conflict, but also in imagining a world beyond capitalism.

What sort of sociology marks the response to third-wave marketization? As we have seen, the third wave rolls back the statist defence of society, taking the offensive against labour and social rights. Unlike the second wave, which provoked an anti-market reaction from the state—variously involving protectionism, economic planning, wage guarantees, the welfare state,

and public ownership of the means of production—third-wave marketization is promoted by the state. Still a regulatory state, it is nonetheless regulation *for* rather than *against* the market. It undoes all that was achieved against second-wave marketization. Society is thus under a double assault from economy and state. Unable to gain much leverage in the state or from the market, the fate of sociology rests with society. In other words, sociology's self-interest lies in the constitution of civil society where it barely exists and in its protection where it is in retreat—hence the claim we are living in the age of public sociology.

Today, sociology cannot limit its engagement to local or national publics, but must be concerned with knitting together a global civil society. Moreover, the third wave of sociology calls for a science, quite different from the speculative science of the nineteenth century and the policy-oriented professional science of the mid-twentieth century—one that seeks to combine scientific rigour with the development of alternative values. We no longer strive for a single paradigmatic science but a discipline made up of multiple intersecting research programs, founded on the values of different publics, working out theoretical frameworks through engaging their anomalies and contradictions. I call this a reflexive science, a science that is not frightened of reflecting on its value foundations or of articulating them publicly, but a science nonetheless (see Table 1).

As sociology becomes more global, borrowings across national lines become more feasible and important. For example, after its 1974 anti-authoritarian revolution, Portugal drew on critical and professional traditions in American and French

TABLE 1 SOCIOLOGY VERSUS THE MARKET

	FIRST-WAVE MARKETIZATION	SECOND-WAVE MARKETIZATION	THIRD-WAVE MARKETIZATION
<i>Dominant "fictitious commodity"</i>	labour	money	land ("nature")
<i>Dominant locus of response</i>	local	national	global
<i>Dominant rights protected</i>	labour	social	human
<i>Dominant orientation of sociology</i>	utopian and critical	policy and professional	public
<i>Dominant thrust of sociological science</i>	speculative	positivist	reflexive

sociologies, harnessing them to a vibrant civil society. This small country is one of the leaders in public sociology, connected to policy, critical, and professional sociologies. Public sociology has flourished in other countries, such as Brazil, South Africa, and India, based on selectively imported North American or European professional sociology but reshaped in anti-authoritarian or anti-colonial struggles.

Global borrowings present dangers as well as possibilities. Notably, the domination of the United States' professional sociology can constrain the responsiveness of national sociologies to local concerns. Facing the dilemma of having the United States on its doorstep in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Canadian sociologists led a hostile attack on the Americanization of academic life. Farther afield, the dilemma can be even deeper. Pressures to write in English for remote professional audiences not only disadvantage peripheralized sociologists, but inevitably threaten the vitality of local public sociology. Writing of the Middle East, Sari Hanafi (2011) has expressed the dilemma as follows: publish globally and perish locally or publish locally and perish globally. Are there ways to transcend this chasm, to constitute a public sociology that is not isolationist but globally connected? That remains our challenge.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that sociology is taking a public turn in response to third-wave marketization. Sociology lives and dies with society. When society is threatened, so is sociology. We can no longer rely on the state to contain the market, and so sociologists have to forge their own connections to society, that is, to develop public sociologies. We have to do more than serve society passively. We must conserve and constitute society. In this, sociology has many potential allies and partners as they too come under increasing assault from state and market. That is the broader contemporaneous context within which public sociology can be a guiding spirit and directing force.

However, we cannot think of the contemporary context outside of its past. We cannot compartmentalize the three waves of marketization and the corresponding configurations of sociology as three separate periods. Each wave deposits its legacy in the next wave. The waves of commodification deepen as they move *regressively* from labour to money to nature, each wave incorporating the commodification of the previous period, just as the counter-movement

leads *progressively* from labour rights to social rights (which includes labour rights) and then aspires to human rights that include all three.

The development of sociology is different. Policy and professional sociology, with their value-neutral, scientific approach, are a reaction against utopian and critical sociology, with their speculations and moral infusions. Public sociology tries to synthesize the value commitment of the first period with the scientific advances of the second. However, even here we should be careful not to think in terms of discrete sociologies, but rather reconfigurations of the four elements of sociology, in which the weights of professional, policy, critical, and public sociologies shift over time. Indeed, a public sociology cannot really take off in a sustained manner unless it is impelled by critical sociology and grounded in professional sociology.

The rhythm and spacing of the waves of sociological development vary from country to country. For the advanced capitalist world today, the waves are more clearly separated in time, whereas for such countries as Russia, India, and China, the waves are compressed, with the commodification of labour, money, and nature occurring almost simultaneously in recent decades. National variation notwithstanding, we can still identify the present era as one in which the commodification of nature concentrates within itself the cumulative impact of the commodification of labour and money. In its subsumption of all commodification, the commodification of nature becomes the planet's most pressing problem, generating social movements that are held together by the principle of human rights.

It is unclear whether these movements can reverse third wave marketization and whether the result will be to expand or narrow the confines of human freedom. It is possible that sociology itself will succumb to commodification—the commodification of the production of knowledge in the university and elsewhere, the commodification of the distribution of knowledge by the mass media, and the commodification of the consumption of knowledge as student fees continue their upward trajectory. Conversely, there may be a place for public sociology to participate in the knitting together of organizations, movements, and publics across the globe, helping to fortify a civil society beyond the control of market and state. The world needs public sociology engaging publics across the globe: one that rests on the shoulders of a dynamic professional sociology that is inspired by a vital critical sociology, while holding policy sociology to account.