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A Sociology for the 21st Century? An Enquiry into Public Sociology Reading Zygmunt Bauman

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Abstract

Michael Burawoy's public sociology presents a vision of engaged and political sociology that stands for critical debate and social justice. The article will consider public sociology in light of Zygmunt Bauman's social thought, one of the most acclaimed sociologists whose writings transcend academic readership. It will identify the similarities and differences concerning their understanding of contemporary society and sociology's tasks, as well as its shortcomings, which will sediment public sociology's cause. The article will discuss Burawoy's conception of public sociology through Bauman's views on the tasks of sociology, which will be seen as illuminating for both political and ethical reasons. The aim of the paper is to interpret public sociology from the point of view of Bauman's writings on liquid modernity, and thereby increase its awareness of the ways in which contemporary societies call for sociological engagement. It will be argued that ethics and dialogue are equally important to politics for public sociology.

Keywords: Bauman, Burawoy, public sociology, liquid modernity, Marxism.

Introduction

Contemporary sociology is engaged with an ongoing re-evaluation of Enlightenment values, such as freedom, truth and justice and reason, and is also part and parcel of the world with its critique and hope (Davis & Tester, 2010, p. xi). An important feature of this ongoing re-evaluation is the concern with the relation that sociology as an academic discipline has with publics outside academia. Public sociology, with its advocacy for sociology's greater social involvement, is one of the conspicuous inhabitants of the contemporary sociological terrain that draws from Enlightenment thought and values.¹ Invoking the notion of 'civil society' (Burawoy, 2005a), its *raison d'être* is to re-invigorate social engagement guided by reason and justice, which marks a shift from postmodern thought for which these would have been primarily metaphysical nostalgia (Gane, 2004). As Fuller argues, 'the vividness of "society" as a distinct domain of inquiry has gradually disappeared with the rise of neo-liberalism and postmodernism, which are roughly the political and philosophical sides of the same world-historic movement' (Fuller, 2006, p. 4). In the wake of postmodernism, but amidst neoliberal reign, it is similar to much of social theory, which 'is vitally engaged with repression, oppression and indignity of unequal social relations; it is deeply political, sometimes melancholic, but profoundly humane critique of structural forces which underlay the self-destructive pathologies of modern societies' (Elliott, 2009, p. 342).²

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- 1 See Strydom (2000) concerning sociology and Enlightenment. His book argues that sociology is not only the heir of Enlightenment, but also a critique of the project of Enlightenment.
- 2 The state of critique in contemporary sociology is, however, complicated by the fact that new branches of Theory, such as Actor Network Theory and Science and Technology Studies, undermine critique by undercutting such conceptual premises of critique as the distinctiveness of the 'social' and the 'human' (Holmwood, 2011).

Since the formulation of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005a; 2005b; 2005c), it has received widespread attention among sociologists and it has been widely contested (Nielsen, 2004; Aronowitz, 2005; Brint, 2005; Calhoun, 2005; Kalleberg, 2012; Tittle, 2004; Turner, 2005; Holmwood, 2007). The purpose of this paper will be to relate public sociology to one of the most well known sociologists of contemporary times, who writes for academic and non-academic readership about a variety of relevant social issues, and who has never explicitly engaged with this topic (as articulated by Burawoy) – Zygmunt Bauman – thereby linking public sociology with a representation of sociology that is public.

The paper will explore Burawoy's formulation of public sociology from Bauman's understanding of sociology and society. Doing so, it sets out to critically consider public sociology by way of reading Bauman's sociology and to engage with the work of Bauman for assessing public sociology; interpreting the positions that pertain to Bauman's work. Bauman's sociological thought contains ample potential for a significant contribution to the debate about public sociology because it provides both a reflection on the nature and tasks of sociology and a highly original account of modernity in the beginning of the 21st century, captured by the metaphor 'liquid' (Bauman, 2000). Like Burawoy's (2005a), his is a sociology grounded in the problems of social life and critique of the status quo.³ Bauman's work is important for considering public sociology because he has come to rank as one of the world's most influential social theorists and politically engaged public intellectuals (Elliott, 2007). Reorienting sociology from narrow academic concerns to meaningful social contributions, it is the wider public that forms sociology's audience for Bauman. Both sociologists challenge the discipline to be more public.

This convergence in their work comprises the contour that allows for the discussion of these two focal points of public sociology; the condition of society that is its cause, and the nature of the ways in which it wants to effect change. Discussing these two sociological thinkers will illuminate some of public sociology's key issues, such as its theory of society and the ethics and politics of public sociology. Enthusiasm for public sociology and awareness of the ills of contemporary society has resulted in growing interest in Marx's critical theory of capitalism. Emancipation has reappeared as a topic of sociological concern. The article will provide an interpretation that problematises aspects of the influence that the Marxist tradition has had on Burawoy. This will further our understanding of where public sociology should stand with respect to Marxism. The article will also contribute to Eastern European sociology's self-understanding, which is in the process of becoming and will thus benefit from a theoretical reflection on public sociology. Theory increases sociological imagination and poses new questions for the practice of empirical sociology.

I will begin with an outline of Burawoy's public sociology. Following this, I will compare Bauman's and Burawoy's theories of contemporary societies and their sociological frameworks. Thereafter, ethics as a seminal topic in Bauman's sociology will be discussed in relation to modern society and its implications for public sociology. Bauman, it should be said, is a 'traditional' public sociologist according to Burawoy's vocabulary, while Burawoy himself is more interested in an 'organic' type of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005a). It will be assumed in this article that Bauman's sociology is eminently suitable for the discussion of the latter, that their similarities outweigh their differences – Bauman's views on engaged sociology are not exclusively 'traditional'.

3 In addition to sociological convergences, which is the topic of this article, there are also interesting similarities in Bauman's and Burawoy's life trajectories. Bauman, who is originally from Poland, settled in England after a brief spell in Israel and Australia. He has spent most of his academic career at the University of Leeds. Burawoy, who is originally from England, settled in the US, after a spell of working and studying in Zambia. He has spent most of his academic career at the University of California, Berkeley.

Burawoy's public sociology – the basic position

Before turning to the topic, I note that the discussions on public sociology can be seen as contributing to the wider debates on (public) intellectuals.⁴ A public sociologist is a certain kind of public intellectual (Burawoy, 2005a).⁵ This topic will be addressed with reference to Gramsci, who is a key influence on Burawoy – something that will be discussed later in the article.⁶

In his 2004 presidential address titled 'For Public Sociology' (2005a), Burawoy presents eleven theses where his aim is to 'examine the matrix of professional, policy, and critical sociologies as it varies historically and among countries, before finally turning to what makes sociology so special, not just as a science but as a moral and political force' (2005a, p. 6). Before elaborating his theses, he speaks of the need for public sociology by discussing the state and tendencies of contemporary societies. This is what necessitates public sociology. He does so by invoking Walter Benjamin's famous 'angel of history' – the figure of redemption amidst the destruction created by progress. The world calls for public sociology because

[t]oday, at the dawn of the 21st century, although communism has dissolved and fascism haunting memory, the debris continues to grow skyward. 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, 2005a, p. 4-5)

The contemporary globalised world, therefore, still needs redemptive engagement. The 'free markets' that have been disentangled from regulation have become the source of poverty and polarisation, undermining social cohesion and democracy.

Another key theme in his introduction is the historical change that sociology has gone through – something that is tied up with public sociology because sociology in its early days was very much driven by a public and transformative impulse, and its aspirations were not strictly professional. According to him, this is also visible in the works of the founding fathers. Karl Marx, Emil Durkheim and Max Weber could all, in addition to being critical of modern societies, recover positive meanings from them (this meaning socialism for Marx, rationalisation for Weber, and organic solidarity for Durkheim) (Burawoy, 2005a). Burawoy's reading of the history of the discipline, then, conveys the idea that what he is proposing has once been integral to sociology, so that it is about returning to this tradition, although in a way that does not want to go back in history. It respects the division of labour that sociology has developed with its institutionalisation.

Taking this into account, his idea is that as a result of uniform institutionalisation, under the imperative of living up to academic standards, sociology experienced a watershed with its publicly engaged past; 'the storm of progress got caught in sociology's wings. If our predecessors set out to change the world we have too often ended up conserving it' (2005a). Public sociology is meant to make public the knowledge that academic sociology possesses. It is meant to restore the public face of sociology that it once had (Burawoy, 2005a). I would consider these two introductory theses as

4 See especially Foucault's seminal *Power/Knowledge* (1980) concerning this topic.

5 For a discussion of sociologists as public intellectuals that problematises some of Burawoy's important distinctions, such as academic/extra-academic, and his fourfold division of sociology, see Kalleberg (2012).

6 Gramsci's work has influenced different branches of contemporary critical thought, including Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's postmarxism. In their well known work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they focus on Gramsci in order to outline a new radical democracy for the Left. Rejecting normative epistemologies and what they perceive as Gramsci's essentialist residues such as classes, they argue that hegemony implies a contingency and constructivism that takes us beyond Gramsci and Marxism (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Though different in their respective views on the Marxist tradition, both Laclau and Mouffe, and Burawoy look to revitalise politics.

essential for his overall programme; first, his critique of contemporary global affairs, and second, the necessity for sociology to return to the public and to counter the forces that are threatening the public sphere.

Elaborating on public sociology, Burawoy distinguishes between two branches: ‘traditional’ and ‘organic’. Traditional public sociology is characterised by indirect engagement with the public in the form of media or books that transgress academic audiences. At the forefront of his programme, however, is organic public sociology, ‘in which the sociologist works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public. The bulk of public sociology is indeed of an organic kind – sociologists working with a labour movement, neighbourhood associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, human rights organizations’ (2005a, p. 7-8). Regarding the modus operandi of organic public sociology, he says that ‘between the organic public sociologist and a public is a dialogue, a process of mutual education’ (2005a, p. 8). This is a key feature of organic public sociology – its dialogical nature.

A topic of particular importance in Burawoy’s outline is the standpoint of public sociology, namely that of civil society. According to him, ‘the standpoint of sociology is civil society and the defense of the social. In times of market tyranny and state despotism, sociology – and in particular its public face – defends the interest of humanity’ (2005a, p. 24). Sociology, civil society and humanity are all intrinsically connected. Sociology, taking the standpoint of civil society, represents the interests of humanity. The connection between civil society, sociology and democracy can be illuminated with historically grounded examples. The positive cases are Perestroika in Russia or the Late Apartheid in South Africa (2005a, p. 24).

Table 1: Division of Sociological Labour

	Academic Audience	Extra-academic Audience
Instrumental Knowledge	Professional	Policy
Reflexive Knowledge	Critical	Public

Source: Burawoy 2005a, p. 11

Burawoy’s division of sociological labour is thus fourfold. He defines the other three types of sociology in the following way. Policy sociology is a sociology that provides service to its clients by undertaking the research and providing the solutions that they request (Burawoy, 2005a, p. 9). Professional sociology is about true and applicable methodologies, research questions and conceptual frameworks. Critical sociology examines the foundations of the research programmes of professional sociology (2005a, p. 9). Having outlined public sociology, let us now turn to how these two sociologists view contemporary societies.

Theories of society

How does Burawoy understand civil society, public sociology’s standpoint? It is the site of the social, which in turn is the site of freedom, dialogue and democracy. It is formed of schools, political parties, trade unions and communities of faith – associations or publics that are outside both the state and the economy (Burawoy, 2005a). In addition, in our era ‘civil society has been colonized and co-opted by markets and states. Still, opposition to these twin forces comes, if it comes at all, from civil society, understood in its local, national and transnational expressions’ (2005a). It is the task of civil society as the site of the social to resist state and market.

The theory of society that Burawoy provides us in his call for public sociology is very brief. As the conception of his envisioned sociology depends on it, it needs further consideration. In order to do this, I will now turn to Bauman's work. State, markets and civil society are important notions in Bauman's writings. Unlike Burawoy, Bauman does not conceive of state as being in alliance with the markets; he does not envision it as a threat (to civil society). On the contrary, the modern nation state has undergone a decline due to power, previously territorial, becoming extraterritorial and global (Bauman, 1999; 2000).⁷ Bauman sees this development as constituting the contemporary predicament of societies in terms of insecurity and lack of adequate agency; being at the receiving end of uncontrolled globalisation. He says that

[o]f salvaging the certainty-and-security services of the state there seem to be little hope. The freedom of state politics is relentlessly eroded by the new global powers armed with the awesome weapons of extraterritoriality, speed of movement and evasion/escape ability; retribution for violating the new global brief is swift and merciless. (Bauman, 2000, p. 186)

In another words, the new era that globalisation has inaugurated is one where states abide by the rules that they themselves have not set. The downside of this is that state sovereignty in modernity constituted the framework in which the members of society could collectively tackle their problems. He thereby concludes that 'the most decisive parameters of the human condition are now shaped in the areas the institutions of the nation state cannot reach' (Bauman, 1999, p. 170). Bauman's and Burawoy's respective attitudes towards the state represent one of the biggest divergences in their sociological analysis. Public sociology needs a more informed concept of the state that would account both for the way the state and the economy have undermined civil society as well as how the state can sustain civil society.

Second, Bauman's understanding of civil society is quite different from Burawoy's. He conceptualises civil society along the lines of the Ancient Greek agora – the market place where citizens came together to voice their concerns over matters that they deem socio-politically relevant. It was a political space that brought together private and public life (Bauman, 1999). Civil society is relevant to restore notions like 'just society' or 'public good' on the social agenda so that they could become social aspirations again (1999). Looking at these respective visions from the point of view of Enlightenment and its public sphere that has been analysed by Habermas (1991), we can say that it is Bauman who stands closer to this tradition. The Enlightenment culture of discussion had at its heart the idea of private persons engaging in public discourse.⁸

Marxism or liquid modernity

The different views on civil society, markets and state arise from a background of considerably different frameworks of understanding. As Burawoy elaborates in a paper that he published shortly before his programmatic call for public sociology titled 'For a Sociological Marxism: The Complementary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi', Sociological Marxism focuses on a hegemonic system of classes, the coordination of class interests through different means (Burawoy, 2003, p. 242).⁹ Burawoy's Gramscian Marxism sees classes and class hegemony as the core constituents of

7 The question regarding the reality and the nature of change that the state has undergone is a contentious issue. See van Creveld (1999), Beyeler (2003) and Reis (2004) on this topic. The relative weakening of the nation state is something that all these authors agree upon.

8 See Habermas' classic work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* concerning the public sphere in Western societies and social participation during the Enlightenment.

9 For his critical discussion of Gramsci and Bourdieu for contemporary sociology, see Burawoy (2012).

contemporary societies. In quintessentially Gramscian language, he claims that '[n]or will be the socialist transition of tomorrow be centred on the nation-state alone but will include local struggles, of disparate kinds, connected across national boundaries in a simultaneous War of Movement and War of Position' (Burawoy, 2003, p. 251). The notions of civil society and democracy are then situated within the context of struggles (of the exploited and subaltern classes) against class hegemony. The uneasy co-existence of these aspirations – radical social transformation and seeking to contribute to existing democracy and civil society – is one of the main tensions of Burawoy's sociological project.

Bauman, at the same time, has employed the notion 'liquid modernity' in his writings from the year 2000 to capture the transformation of modernity. According to Elliott, '[t]he present-day condition of modernity, says Bauman, is one of liquidity, fluidity and drift, with the frailty, fading and short-termism of social relationships to the fore' (Eliot, 2007, p. 12). Liquid modernity is a reconfiguration of the relation between individual and society. Individuals have to come to terms with their self-constructing labours without previous social reference groups and certainties (Bauman, 2000). Society relinquishes its accountability for the course that individual lives take. Yet, the fact that people have to assert their individuality with only individual resources makes our sociality contradictory because '*individual liberty can be only a product of collective work, hence can be only collectively secured and guaranteed*' (Bauman, 1999, p. 7, original emphasis).

Both sociologists share a concern with labour in contemporary societies and its implications for politics. They agree that the current (lack of) organisation of labour and markets is a source of disorder and malaise. Global capitalism does generate human waste and is not sustainable in its current formation.¹⁰ The difference between them is that, for Bauman, labour and politics are not immediately related. Progressive politics is not primarily labour movement or class politics, as Burawoy is suggesting by his abiding preoccupation with Marxism and labour movements in relation to sociology. In the case of Bauman, labour is connected to politics in terms of needing a stronger public sphere and citizen engagement in order to be constituted as a political issue. His political vision for the current under-determined phase of modernity is republicanism that is meant to sustain a new active relation between individual and society, the local and the global (Bauman, 1999). Bauman's theory of contemporary societies, still modern and yet novel, then, is marked by continuity and change, whereas Burawoy's conception of economy and society as well as of politics is, at least broadly, a continuation of 20th century Marxist tradition. Bauman, having a Marxist background as well, moved beyond Marxism in the 80s. Postmodernity above all else meant post-Marxism. This, however, should be seen as a renewal, rather than a rejection of Marxism (Beilharz, 2000). Marxism retains its significance because capitalism continues to be excessive. Having discussed Bauman's and Burawoy's respective views on society and their theoretical frameworks, we will proceed with Bauman's understanding of sociology in relation to public sociology.

Envisioning public sociology

Interpreters and Legislators (1987) is Bauman's seminal book for discussing public sociology. Although Bauman returns to the themes of the book in his more recent writings, it is a key work that deserves revisiting. The book discerns modern and post-modern social formations and intellectuals' respective roles in them. The two formations are set apart by modernity's certainty of its foundations and the superiority of Western culture, art, and, above all, reason. Post-modernity, instead, is marked on the one hand by modesty and pluralism.¹¹ Different ways of life emerge as having equal worth. On the other hand, it is the market that gains in sovereignty with the disintegration of the modern

10 See especially Bauman (1998) concerning this topic.

11 Postmodernity is the negative for that which is positively captured by liquid modernity – conveying what we are, instead of what we are not. See Bauman (2004) concerning this topic.

rationalisation project (Bauman, 1987). The modern intellectuals – the ‘legislators’ – created the Western civilization’s understanding of itself as superior to others and its leitmotif of ‘progress’. They sedimented the West’s drive to civilise and educate those whom they considered as different and inferior. The post-modern intellectuals – the ‘interpreters’ – sustain dialogue between different communities without the previous power and authority. They interpret meanings and facilitate mutual understanding. This, however, does not mean that intellectuals no longer have a role to play in influencing the direction which society takes.

Bauman, like Burawoy, invokes the notion of redemption when discussing the tasks that derive from the social formation. According to Bauman, what modernity needs is a redemptive discourse because ‘its implementation took a wrong turn’ (1987, p. 191).¹² Modernity did not succeed because

[i]ndividual needs of autonomy and the good life are not satisfied, but the translation of their frustration into systemic concerns (like the questioning of systemic legitimacy) is infinitely postponed, while conditions for the domination of market exchange are infinitely perpetuated (Bauman, 1987, p. 189).

What is meant by discursive redemption is disentangling the latter three values from their equation with the strategies that the market provides for their fulfilment and setting them back into public discourse for negotiation. It is in an important sense also a project that should aspire ‘to expose the limitations of instrumental reason and thus restore the autonomy of human communication and meaning-creation guided by practical reason’ (Bauman, 1987). Autonomy of communication depends on a particular kind of intellectual practice – interpretation. Interpreter is a concept that captures the changing role of the intellectuals in the postmodern social constellation. It is a strategy that aims to generate communication between participants who are autonomous (Bauman, 1987, p. 5). This is in contradistinction to the modern legislator, who possesses final authority and whose judgement could not be doubted (Beilharz, 2000, p. 76).

Is Burawoy’s public sociologist, we could ask, an interpreter? Or, is the public sociologist a legislator? The latter is, of course, not compatible with the dialogical relations of civil society. One of Burawoy’s leitmotifs is Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’ (2005b); a thesis that refutes the adequacy and sufficiency of interpretation. Interpretation and change are not mutually exclusive, because one can engage in the former and have one’s sight set on the latter. What is decisive is the nature and agency of the change. The following passage, however, suggests that Burawoy’s public sociology is discontented with the role of the interpreter:

Indeed, the latest trends within sociological theory warn against any such advance into society, calling attention, instead, to the nefarious and insidious collaboration of power and knowledge. Michel Foucault warned that to disseminate social science is to extend domination, governmentality, and disciplinary powers, although that did not stop him from spreading his texts. He had no theory of his practice. Influenced by Foucault, Zygmunt Bauman (1987) proposed that in the age of postmodernity, the intellectual as a legislator is being replaced by the modest role of intellectual as an interpreter, so we might well abandon the aspirations of social science as we know it. Such are bleak prognoses of our theories of knowledge. (Burawoy, 2005c, p. 77)

What makes this paradoxical is that the redemptive discourse Bauman proposes in *Legislators and Interpreters* has important affinities with public sociology, and Bauman is rather suggesting a new self-constitution of intellectuals; a dawn, rather than a decline. The implication of this is that, for Burawoy, civil society is a strategic site of struggle (for and against hegemony), explaining why Burawoy, following Gramsci, would call the sociologist a ‘partisan’ (2005a). Interpretative sociology,

¹² The redemption envisaged is also valid and pressing in Bauman’s writings from 2000 onwards.

as we have seen, is not apolitical, but unlike Burawoy's Gramscian partisan, it does not commit strategically to one political programme. The partisan is, however, compatible with Gramsci's organic intellectual, as both are organically embedded in class struggle and located in the superstructure. They are the 'permanent persuaders' upon whom the hegemony of the new social group depends (Gramsci, 1980, p. 14). What deepens the relation between intellectuals and class or subaltern group is 'the intellectuals direct involvement in visible counter-hegemonic struggle on the side of agents against the ruling ideological common sense, such as during protest campaigns and protest action' (Brook & Darlington, 2013, p. 236). The engaged nature of public sociology should not, however, consist only of (a certain) political involvement, but it should also be characterised by a concern with ethics in doing sociology. This is a topic to which we will turn next.

Ethics

Ever since his critique of modernity in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), his most acclaimed work, a concern with ethics has been a constant characteristic of Bauman's sociology. The failures of modernity that lead to its 20th century atrocities were ethical failures. Bauman's focus is on how human action takes the form of extensive mediation in modernity, exemplified by bureaucracy, where the deeds of an actor remain hidden from him. In other words, modernity relieved moral responsibility from social intercourse, replacing it with codes and hierarchies that absorb the moral conscience. He also sees sociology as taking this social conduct as its framework of understanding. Namely, he says that

[t]he nature and style of sociology has been attuned to the selfsame modern society it theorized and investigated; sociology has been engaged since its birth in mimetic relationship with the object – or, rather, with the imagery of the object which it constructed and accepted as the frame of its own discourse. And so sociology promoted, as its own criteria of propriety, the same principles of rational action it visualized as constitutive of its object. It also promoted, as binding rules of its own discourse, the inadmissibility of ethical problematics in any other form but that of a communally-sustained ideology and thus heterogeneous to sociological (scientific, rational) discourse. (Bauman, 1989, p 29)

Holmwood (2007), raising the same question of sociology's embeddedness in modern societies, claims that Burawoy all too easily exonerates sociology itself from the various forms of domination because it is seen as a counter-force. Ethics is a matter that deserves greater concern regarding the public sociology's claim to reflexivity. Although Burawoy speaks of sociology as a moral force in addition to being a political force (Burawoy, 2005a), in his vision ethics is subordinated to political struggles, which is the main focus. I would argue that in order to be dialogical and symmetrical, public sociology should engage with new perspectives for opinion formation and leave it for the interlocutor to make up his own mind. Public sociology should indeed voice its critical judgement concerning the contemporary state of affairs, but it should also 'recognize the fragility or provisionality of judgement be recognized. So this is call for more debate, not less; only for a different style of dispute, whether in politics or aesthetics' (Beilharz, 2000, p. 81).

A greater concern with ethics will preclude the kind of instrumentalisation of publics for political purposes by the legislator type of modern intellectual. The redemptive discourse that is needed to fulfil what modernity aspired for – autonomous citizens and social rationality – also applies to ways in which this is done (Bauman, 1987). In this sense, the aspirations of public sociology need to be informed of the failures to which the top down strategies of intellectuals lead. What does this mean in more particular terms? Public sociology's knowledge is communicative and its legitimacy is relevance, whereas the knowledge of critical sociology is foundational and its legitimacy is moral vision. Both forms of knowledge are reflexive, as opposed to instrumental (Burawoy, 2005a). But unlike in his

formulation, moral vision should not be split between the two reflexive sociologies so that public sociology is conducted without moral vision. Instead, both reflexive sociologies should be marked by moral vision. The angel of history – public sociology's emblem – can't do without ethics.

Bauman's primary influence with respect to ethics is the 20th century Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. He takes the idea from Levinas 'that the primary mode of being in the proximity of the Other is the mode of 'responsibility', a selfless care for the other's well being, which is an innate impulse rather than a rational insight or orientation to a social rule' (Bowring, 2011, p. 140).¹³ Ethics, therefore, is not a matter of social rules or conventions. It is about personal responsibility, 'being for' the other person. The responsibility does not stem from the similarity or sameness of the Other, but precisely because the Other is different and beyond the individual (Tester, 2002, p. 68). Its implication for sociology is that the 'world-view effects' that underlie the judgement making of ordinary people can be neglected only at the expense of its responsibility (Bauman, 2000, p. 216). Sociology, then, is committed and no firm boundary should be drawn between the personal and the professional. It should involve responsibility and choice making similarly to the people that it engages with.¹⁴ Having considered ethics and postmodernity from the point of view of sociology, we will now turn to the means and aims of the discipline.

The tasks of sociology

Bauman recovers the ethical potential and premise of sociology and the potential for ethics in society via a historicity that stands for postmodernity (Beilharz, 2006). Sociology may then live up to the spirit of Enlightenment in the sense of contributing to knowledge and helping to overcome ignorance (Bauman 2014, p. 110). This continues to be the case. Sociology is seen as part of the ongoing meaning-making without final authority; its nature is inconclusive.¹⁵ It is in this sense comparable to art, literature and philosophy – other discourses engaged with the interpretation of human experience (Bauman, 2014, p. 14-16).¹⁶ It is the will formation of ordinary men and women and awareness of alternatives that sociology helps to facilitate this way. There is more to our social intercourse than common sense grasps, and it is here that sociology can make a difference, discerning the complex interconnectedness between the personal and the social.¹⁷ In terms of epistemology and methodology, this kind of sociology is hermeneutical. Sociological hermeneutics means interpreting human choices and actions as manifestations of strategies in response to specific social situations. The explanation of human behaviour should be above all else sociological (Bauman, 2014, p. 50-52). It is hermeneutics with sociological tools.

There are, however, tasks for sociology and critical theory that derive from Bauman's socio-political understanding of liquid modernity. To recuperate: it is the political space, the agora that our society needs to restore the link between politics and the life concerns of members of society. It is needed for a dignified and secure social existence. Sociology that does not neglect wider social issues and embraces both politics and dialogue can be seen as the '*cultural politics of human freedom*' (Bauman

13 For Bauman's discussion of Levinas' influence on him, see Bauman (2001).

14 For the importance of this for public sociology, see Turner (2007).

15 For a similar thesis, stressing modesty and self-criticism, see Holmwood (2007).

16 Burawoy understands sociology to be located between sciences and humanities because its forms of knowledge are both 'reflexive' and 'instrumental'; it shares something with both of them. Burawoy's categories of knowledge – 'instrumental' and 'reflexive' – are similar to Habermas' in his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971). Habermas posits three cognitive interests in this book – 'technical', 'practical' and 'emancipatory'. Burawoy's forms of knowledge correspond to the first two rather closely. However, what he and Bauman understand as 'redemption' is 'emancipatory' interest in Habermas terms. It is concerned with freeing the subject from hypostatized powers, with transformation (Habermas, 1971). In Burawoy's own appropriate form of knowledge, it would be 'reflexive-emancipatory'.

17 For a discussion of the role of intellectual in liquid modernity, see Bauman (2011).

& Dawes, 2011, p. 142, original emphasis). Ethical and open-ended public sociology is part of academic scholarship and legitimate for state support because it serves the purpose of improving democratic discussion (Turner 2007, p. 794). I would, therefore, argue that Bauman's views on sociology in our times can support its programme both in terms of how and what it endeavours.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are considerable agreements between Burawoy and Bauman. Both want sociology to foster social dialogue, which they hold as one of the pillars of democratic social arrangements. Bauman would also endorse the reflexivity that Burawoy sees as important for sociology and its relation to society in order to prevent sociology from losing the capacity to diagnose its regressive tendencies. Both invoke the notion of redemption as a necessary task for sociological engagement. There is more to the promise of our Enlightenment heritage than has been fulfilled. This, essentially, means recovering a vision of a 'good society', a society that would be more than a 'sum of its parts' and sustained by a rationality other than individual competition. However, Bauman's sociology diverges from Burawoy's in certain important respects.

The first contentious issue is Marxism. Burawoy's public sociology is framed by his long time commitment to Marxism, with Gramscian hegemony, civil society and the organic intellectual added to a critique of global capitalism. Bauman, on the other hand, is more equivocal about this topic. Marxian critique of capitalism is still timely as ever, yet the fact that modernity for Bauman needs to be redeemed indicates that Marxism, as paramount modern utopianism, deserves critique too. Bauman rejected Marx's obsession with changing the world rather than being content with an interpretation (Beilharz, 2000, p 79). Marx appears here as a champion of industrial modernity confined to the modern significations which can't be accepted as given any more. The means count as much as does the end. Change does remain the task, but this time it is the wider segments of society, in addition to intellectuals and public sociologists, that need to actively participate in initiating it.

It is because of the aspiration for dialogical knowledge, though, that Bauman's concern with symmetry is important for public sociology. Both of them envision sociology as turning people's private concerns into public issues and thus commit to civil society in which they see an empowering potential. Burawoy's Gramscian strategy implies, however, an asymmetrical form of communication driven less by reciprocity than by counter-hegemonic struggle. Public sociology should understand itself as creating significations about social processes marked by the plurality of experiences in a habitat where dependence forms an uneasy constellation with privatisation. The nature of public sociology, then, is that of the counter-factual and forward looking, but grounded in concrete insights and participatory.

Third, and in relation to the previous two claims; ethics should be equally important to politics for public sociology. Subordinating the former to the latter could end up replicating the ills of society that public sociology wants to redeem. The excess of modern progress is simultaneously its indifference towards its ethical consequences. Bauman's critique of a social order marked by impersonality points to the issue of personal responsibility in large scale social developments, and the perils that result from acquiescence. The question of ethics has provoked much controversy in the debates about public sociology. It has been seen either as arbitrary or conceived of in strictly professional terms as the hallmark of good scholarship.¹⁸ I suggest, along the lines of the protagonists of this paper, however, that ethically informed public sociology is an antidote to the threat that sociologists face due to institutional pressures, and methodological preoccupations – namely that of becoming 'academics without conviction' (Taylor, 2010, p. 163).

18 See Nielsen (2004) for the latter view and Brint (2005) for the former view.

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