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Die DFG-Kollegforscher_innengruppe „Landnahme, Beschleunigung, Aktivierung. Dynamik und (De-) Stabilisierung moderner Wachstumsgesellschaften“ – kurz: „Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften“ – setzt an der soziologischen Diagnose multipler gesellschaftlicher Umbruchs- und Krisenphänomene an, die in ihrer Gesamtheit das überkommene Wachstumsregime moderner Gesellschaften in Frage stellen. Die strukturellen Dynamisierungsimperative der kapitalistischen Moderne stehen heute selbst zur Disposition: Die Steigerungslogik fortwährender Landnahmen, Beschleunigungen und Aktivierungen bringt weltweit historisch neuartige Gefährdungen der ökonomischen, ökologischen und sozialen Reproduktion hervor. Einen Gegenstand in Veränderung – die moderne Wachstumsgesellschaft – vor Augen, zielt das Kolleg auf die Entwicklung von wissenschaftlichen Arbeitsweisen und auf eine Praxis des kritischen Dialogs, mittels derer der übliche Rahmen hochgradig individualisierter oder aber projektförmig beschränkter Forschung überschritten werden kann. Fellows aus dem In- und Ausland suchen gemeinsam mit der Jenaer Kollegforscher_innengruppe nach einem Verständnis gegenwärtiger Transformationsprozesse, um soziologische Expertise in jene gesellschaftliche Frage einzubringen, die nicht nur die europäische Öffentlichkeit in den nächsten Jahren bewegen wird: Lassen sich moderne Gesellschaften auch anders stabilisieren als über wirtschaftliches Wachstum?

Die Kolleg-ForscherInnengruppe zum Thema Landnahme, Beschleunigung, Aktivierung und (De-)Stabilisierung moderner Wachstumsgesellschaften wird gefördert von der DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

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Sociology and the Public in the Discourse of Crisis*

Zusammenfassung

International seit mehr als einem Jahrzehnt geführt, nimmt die Debatte um Public Sociology auch im deutschsprachigen Raum allmählich Fahrt auf. Die AutorInnen des Working Paper schlagen vor, die Diskussion nicht nur fortzuführen, sondern um eine wichtige Dimension zu erweitern. Können sich Gesellschaften, die eine große, krisenhafte Transformation durchlaufen, eine Wissenschaft von der Gesellschaft leisten, die vornehmlich um sich selbst kreist und auf einen Dialog mit der Öffentlichkeit verzichtet? Mit dieser Frage nähern sich die AutorInnen einer Metathematik der Kollegforschungsgruppe „Postwachstumsgesellschaften". In ihrem Antwortversuch skizzieren sie die Schwierigkeiten, einen angemessenen soziologischen Krisenbegriff zu erarbeiten. Sie streifen den neuerlichen Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit sowie dessen Konsequenzen für die Soziologie, um schließlich für eine öffentliche Soziologie gesellschaftlicher Transformation zu plädieren. Der Text, zugleich Einleitung des von den AutorInnen herausgegebenen Bandes „Öffentliche Soziologie", wurde noch vor dem Wahlsieg Donald Trumps und der Konjunktur des Postfaktischen geschrieben. Er befasst sich mit dem Selbstverständnis eines Fachs, dass wie jede andere Wissenschaftsdisziplin auf die Möglichkeit eines herrschaftsfreien Diskurses zwingend angewiesen ist.

Abstract

The debate on Public Sociology which has been going on globally for the past decade, has also started to catch on in Germany. The authors of this working paper not only suggest keeping this debate going but expanding it and adding an important dimension to it. Can societies that go through a great transformation afford a social science that is mainly preoccupied with itself and foregoes public debate? With this question the authors address a meta-theme of the Research Group on Post-Growth Societies. In their answer they sketch the problems faced when looking for an adequate sociological concept of 'crisis'. They touch on a new transformation of the public sphere as well as its consequences for sociology. Finally, they plead for a Public Sociology of societal transformation. The text, which also serves as the introduction to the book 'Öffentliche Soziologie' edited by the authors, was written before Donald Trump's election victory and the rise of 'post-truth'. It deals with the self-image of a discipline that–like any other scientific discipline–depends on the possibility of a domination-free discourse (herrschaftsfreier Diskurs).

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* This text is the introduction to the book ‚Öffentliche Soziologie. Wissenschaft im Dialog mit der Gesellschaft' (2017) edited by the authors. Therefore a number of footnotes reference articles in this volume. The text was translated by Jan-Peter Herrmann.

Less than a quarter-century has passed since Francis Fukuyama, in a book that subsequently became famous across the world (Fukuyama 1992), announced the end of history, confronting not only sociology but the social sciences as a whole with a twofold challenge – or, as it were, devaluation. On the one hand, the collapse of state-bureaucratic socialism had surprised most sociologists, causing the public to doubt the discipline's predictive capabilities. On the other hand, the era of grand narratives seemed to be coming to an end once and for all. If the future of capitalist modernity could only be a capitalist modernity (albeit with some slight modifications), as many were convinced at the time, then humility was unmistakeably the order of the day for sociology and the social sciences. As there was little else left to do but occasionally give the relentless juggernaut of modernity (Giddens 1990) an occasional nudge in the right direction, sociology could safely ignore aspirations to contribute to the 'betterment of society' (Eßbach 2014: 33), and instead concentrate on the elaboration of its objects and methods of study. Apparently, sociology was no longer needed as a science of crisis and, moreover, lacked the necessary partners in politics and civil society to live up to its aspirations towards social-technocratic management, which had led to an expansion of the discipline in many countries in the aftermath of the 1968 revolt. During this period of isolation, the question of the appropriate audience for their findings appeared largely irrelevant to many sociologists. If one's work was not appreciated, one did not have to worry about a public audience, and whoever did so nonetheless and used his or her academic reputation to establish a presence in the public sphere was often (with exceptions confirming the rule) keen to cultivate a distance to any sort of practical applicability.[1]

1 The (Sociological) Revolution Will (Not?) Be Televised

Ever since the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-9, such positions have grown increasingly untenable. Although many in the discipline have become aware of this fact, there seems to be significant hesitation to modify long-standing orientations of the discipline or academic traditions, even and especially in Germany. When Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Mann, Randal Collins, Georgi Derlugian and Craig Calhoun – all distinguished personalities in their own right – encouraged the social sciences to start 'getting real' (Wallerstein et al. 2013), the call went largely unheard in Germany. And yet the authors' appeal practically begged for a sociological debate, while the constructive controversy it contained already hinted at the questions such a discussion would necessarily have to address. Wallerstein and Collins interpret the turning point of 2008-9 as a mere prelude to the irreversible decline of the entire capitalist world system, anticipating a major systemic crisis between 2030 and 2050. While Mann and Calhoun present well-founded arguments against the former, they nevertheless agree that we are currently in the midst of a major social transformation affecting not least the self-understanding of science in general and sociology in particular. Apart from prominent exceptions such as Wolfgang

[1] The few exceptions include world famous personalities like Ulrich Beck, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens or – should he be included in the list of sociologists – Jürgen Habermas, who shook up not only the discipline but society as a whole with their diagnoses of the times, and who managed to draw renewed attention to topics that had hitherto been neglected or forgotten in the social sciences, such as ecological risks, precarity and so forth.

Streeck (2015), for example, the discipline itself is hardly mentioned in public. Germany is no exception to the trend that sociologists are once again able (or rather allowed), after a long abstinence, to use the vocabulary of capitalism and crisis without having to fear negative repercussions in their academic careers. Moreover, a critique of capitalism and capitalist society has again become acceptable and is in fact a prominent theme in the features sections of many high-brow newspapers. Sociologists can publicly argue for the end of capitalism or even claim that we have already been on a path to a non-capitalist society for a long time, yet at the same time, the impact of these arguments is, curiously, quite neglectable on the whole. One could almost get the impression that the ongoing struggle for originality is leading the academic critique of capitalism to regularly outdo itself in the form of varying (pseudo-) radical poses. But its fate is similar to that which has been described by revolutionaries in rock and pop music for some time. 'The revolution will not be televised', as Gil Scott-Heron, the progenitor of modern hip-hop music, once optimistically claimed, is met by 'the revolution *will* be televised' ringing from blues guitarist Jeff Beck's latest album (together with Carmen Vandenberg and Rosie Bones). Far from constituting the mainstream of the discipline, the sociological analysis and critique of capitalism faces a similar dilemma. Intellectually brilliant, well-formulated and – at least seemingly – as far away as possible from any specific subject matter that could be acted upon in the political sphere, such critique is even able to win academic awards in Germany. But then again, does this really mean it has a public voice or is taken seriously? And is it capable – should it aspire to do so in the first place – of influencing the ongoing transformation of society, or at least the debate on this change?

This volume constitutes an attempt to at least begin addressing these questions. It outlines – in the form of conceptual contributions, based on entirely distinct premises and arguments, through the presentation of practical examples and at times rather controversially so – the project of a *public sociology*, the prime objective of which is to raise public awareness of sociological research and expertise during these times of social upheaval. The authors thus seek to enter an ongoing international debate, in which public sociology is recognised as a mode of knowledge production, implying the existence of professional, policy and critical sociology, yet still exists as something separate, as a specialisation in its own right. While professional sociology conducts research and generates the necessary terminology, theory, premises and research questions, policy sociology conveys sociological knowledge to diverse clients. Critical sociology acts as an instance of reflection for both types (Burawoy 2015: 65, 74). Public sociology assumes the existence of professional, policy, and traditional critical sociology, while adding a new element. The very task of public sociology is to 'establish a conversation between sociology and different publics' (Burawoy 2015: 56). It marks an attempt to establish new foundations for interactions between scientists and the practice of social actors by taking the changes in the academic field as its point of departure. A new wave of marketization (Burawoy), of economisation (Aulenbacher) or of capitalist *Landnahme* (Dörre, Sittel) is irreversibly tearing down the ivory tower of pure scientific pursuit, indeed posing an existential threat to the social sciences and the humanities. According to cultural scholar Terry Eagleton, it is by all means conceivable that there will be no institutionally enshrined humanities left at universities in the Anglo-Saxon world in the not too distant future. In Germany, we are still a long way away from such a nightmare scenario; despite all parallels,

the commodification of higher education is far less advanced here than in Great Britain or the USA. However, this changes little about the general hypothesis. The ivory tower of pure scientific pursuit is crumbling, and all corporatist attempts to restore it are doomed to fail. Recognising this opens up the possibility of a public sociology whose fundamental assumption is that the altered mode of knowledge production in the social sciences constitutes the sociologist's natural interest in interacting with other social actors who oppose the commodification of knowledge for their own specific reasons. This thought has implications for the discipline as a whole. As all editors of this volume agree, sociology will only be able to survive as an advocate of civil society defending the social against the 'tyranny of the market and state despotism' (Burawoy 2015: 89). But how and in what way can this come about without paving the way for being 'televised', should it succeed? And, perhaps even more doubtful, is a successful public sociology even possible to begin with?

An initial and necessarily superficial glimpse at the German sociological landscape is not exactly encouraging. Despite the fact that the debate around public sociology has been met with remarkable resonance as well as controversy in the transnational scientific community and among the ranks of the International Sociological Association (ISA), in Germany it has not really taken off, regardless of some heartening efforts (for an overview see Aulenbacher/Dörre 2015). There is considerable scepticism within the discipline itself as to whether contemporary sociology can actually generate knowledge that would resonate in the public in the first place. Sociologists who attain public prominence through their professional reputation and are thus in a position to speak publicly on important aspects of social development are considered exceptions, while the broad mass of professionals clearly enjoys a much smaller forum.[2] Furthermore, the intractable rumour persists, as conceptually unfounded as it may be, that public sociology is primarily a way to circumvent professional quality standards. Above all, however, there exists understandable scepticism as to whether a contemporary audience capable of adequately appreciating sociological research in its sophistication and complexity even exists. To be fair, these reservations and criticisms can be found in the international debate as well, yet they appear particularly pronounced in the German community.

We thus consider it appropriate to begin with an overview of the academic field, but also of the recent restructuring of the public sphere, which has a strong impact on the self-conception of sociologists. We limit ourselves to a few deliberations we consider most important and do not claim to speak for sociology as a whole, nor to present a comprehensive survey of the entire discipline. Instead, we argue within the context of a specific project, which – funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) – explicitly aspires to develop sociological expertise through engagement with the crisis-ridden social turmoil in contemporary society, and to make this information available to relevant publics in an appropriate form. Here I am referring to the Jena Research Group on Post-Growth Societies, in which the editors of this volume are involved in various ways.[3] The research group seeks to push forward the

[2] See the contribution by Hans-Peter Müller in this volume.

[3] Brigitte Aulenbacher and Michael Burawoy are senior fellows and instigators at the DFG Research Group, Johanna Sittel has been a colleague at the research centre for a long time and currently collaborates with the research project 'Social-Ecological Contradictions of Capitalist *Landnahme* in Patagonia', and Klaus Dörre is both applicant and lead scientist, together with Hartmut Rosa and special fellow Stephan Lessenich, of the Research Group.

debate on the crisis of growth capitalism through an international network of institutions dedicated to a critical public sociology. This network is an instrument to explore possibilities for a transformation towards post-growth societies in the context of a global dialogue. The DFG Research Group on Post-Growth Societies seeks to provide a framework for thought experiments, allowing us to introduce sociological expertise to international discussions on the future trajectory of modern societies.

2 A science of crisis without a conception of crisis?

Why do German sociologists in particular have such a hard time productively discussing the concept of public sociology, despite the existence of the Jena research group and other relevant academic contexts? One seemingly obvious answer could be the liberal-conservative tradition of the discipline as established by Max Weber and his (albeit often far too narrowly defined) notion of the social sciences' freedom from value judgements. But identifying this tradition and its undeniable gravitational pull as the sole responsible factor would fail to do justice to the complexity of the matter. The problem lies at a different level. Without claiming to fully explain the process, we would nonetheless like to illustrate our argument based on three considerations.

The (1) supposed end of history has caught up (not only) with German sociology. Scholars who regard the evolution of social formations as concluded do not ascribe any system-threatening qualities to contemporary social crises, regardless of where or in what form they emerge. A sociology that proceeds in this way, however, will eventually become a science of crisis lacking a conception of crisis. That said, this dilemma affects the distinct modes of sociological knowledge production in different ways. Professional sociology knows many types of crisis. Following the implosion of state-bureaucratic socialism, however, the discipline abandoned the notion of systemic social crisis, and had in fact begun to do so even earlier. This is why professional sociology currently lacks an understanding of crisis that would allow it to accurately interpret the ongoing upheavals. A cursory glance at the catchword index of more recent sociological handbooks or dictionaries reveals that the category 'crisis' appears as a marginal phenomenon at best, and is certainly not a key concept of sociological expertise when it does.[4] Little was changed about this situation, at least for the time being, at the 37th Congress of the German Sociological Association in Trier, which, fully aware of this shortcoming, debated various crises for an entire week. An important underlying reason for this impasse is the simple fact that sociologists do not take each other seriously. That is not to say that they cannot talk about systemic crisis or even the end of capitalism, say, at a sociological congress, but rather that what is said rarely manages to evoke much of a response, even from potential conservative antagonists. Birds of a feather flock together. Although some may consider a certain diagnosis to be utterly wrong-headed and politically dangerous in its implications, these sentiments are only expressed behind closed doors. After all, one may well

[4] Examples of – otherwise very good – sociological handbooks and dictionaries include: Lamla et al. (2014), Endruweit et al. (2014).

encounter the author in question again as an evaluator of a grant application or in the peer review process of a prominent academic journal.

Policy sociology proceeds differently, turning crises into consulting opportunities. That said, this is an area in which neo-classical economists continue to have more than just an edge over their more progressive counterparts.[5] For these economists, crises are caused by market failures, and even more so by state failure. According to free-market radical economist Hans-Werner Sinn (2013: 103), for example, the European crisis was caused by states and societies which, exemplified by the case of Greece, 'were made too expensive by the cheap credit brought in by the euro' to remain globally competitive. Because these countries had lived beyond their means, the argument went, they now had to be subjected to austerity in order to end the crisis. We all became witnesses to a laboratory trial in which this market-orthodox therapy was tested in practice, that is, on entire populations. Wherever the austerity diktat was implemented in its intended form, the effects have been 'disastrous in economic and social terms' (Galbraith 2016: 11), yet this has done little to change the minds of European top politicians like German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who continues to promote austerity as the only viable crisis remedy. At the same time, the propagandists of the 'we have lived beyond our means' myth intentionally omit the fact that large sections of the population, primarily in the lower segments of the social pyramid and the crisis-ridden countries, are tightening their belts mostly to protect the assets of small minorities 'who are wearing massively larger pants and who show little interest in contributing to the cleanup' (Blyth 2013: 15).

The broken promise of economic austerity contains (2) a fitting point of attack for a reflexive, critical sociology – or so one would think. We must, however, remember that socially critical sociology in its current state also has little with which to effectively counter market-radical theodicy. In Germany, its main current as represented by the Frankfurt School abandoned a socio-economically grounded conception of crisis at an early stage. In light of the expansion of the welfare state, it regarded economic crises as generally manageable and the industrial class conflict as pacified. The cultural turn in sociology and the hegemony of anti-productivist theories especially dominant in the German-speaking world further amplified this tendency. This resulted in critical sociologists identifying numerous crises – of labour and the 'work-centred society' [*Arbeitsgesellschaft*], or of the natural world, gender relations or political systems. The potential of economic crisis phenomena to take on the quality of a systemic threat, however, was more or less ruled out, at least as far as the capitalist centres were concerned. Even on the margins of official sociology where remnants of academic Marxism carved out a shadowy existence for themselves after turning to French regulation theory, the abandonment of an economic conception of capitalism simultaneously meant a rejection of the notion of a possible end to the capitalist mode of production.[6] However, the conception of a crisis-prone yet permanent capitalist dynamic entailed and continues to entail many assumptions. Thus, the theory of a late welfare-state

[5] See the contribution by Till van Treeck in this volume.

[6] In searching for new forms of compromise 'beyond Fordism', regulation theory moves, against its own intentions, towards an affirmative system theory in 'how it a) cannot account for a crisis dynamic that spans the various modes of regulation and development and is tied to a long-term, internal tendency towards crisis, and b) has no conception of a possible end of the capitalist mode of production' (Demirović 2016: 34).

capitalism which defuses and de-escalates class conflicts assumes that economic growth can essentially be prolonged forever. Likewise, regulation theory views the production of economic prosperity as primarily a question of socially contested, yet theoretically resolvable compromises. But what happens when the capitalist growth machine slows down significantly for longer periods of time? How can social theory explain the undeniable reality that the alleged end of history has witnessed the return of war, imperial rule, shocking inequality and the worst forms of exploitation imaginable?

Even critical theory and sociology have thus far largely failed to provide an answer to such supposedly simple questions. Nevertheless, a degree of movement (3) can currently be observed in the academic field. Against the backdrop of numerous crises, critical sociology is once again marked by the re-emergence of a debate on the capitalist social formation's resources of legitimation. Here, we can identify a discourse formation deeply characteristic of German sociology. In order to appear innovative, it draws on bodies of knowledge that for many years were taken into account by a handful of Marxist market critics on the margins of the scientific community at best (Altvater 1987). This refers not least to Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi 2001 [1944]), a work which has become the most important theoretical point of reference in contemporary critiques of capitalism internationally (Fraser 2011: 137-157; critically: Kocka 2016: 17f.). Adopting Polanyi's line of argument has become the discipline's standard repertoire, at least in economic sociology and international political economy, as many observers now describe the development of international capitalism as a double movement in line with Polanyi's original analysis. Driven forward by radical free market ideologies, market-restricting institutions and organisations are weakened, markets are socially embedded and market-dependent individuals or groups are subjected to a principle of competition which continuously generates winners and losers. The disembedding of markets, which results in such fictitious commodities as labour, land and money being treated as if they were just another good, is not only leading to crises on a global scale, but also provoking more and more counter-movements, primarily from below.

Once ascertained, the double movement is accompanied by a social-scientific critique of capitalism which proceeds not from class-specific inequalities and exploitation, but rather from the socially destructive consequences of free markets as a whole. According to Polanyi, class interests 'offer only a limited explanation of long-run movements in society' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 159), as class-specific partial interests are ultimately always related to 'a total situation' (ibid.). Additionally, class interests 'most directly refer to standing and rank, to status and security', and are thus 'primarily not economic but social' (ibid.: 160). In Polanyi's view, an overly narrow conception of interests will 'lead to a warped vision of social and political history' (ibid.: 162) by obscuring the fact that economic conditions alone are far less relevant than 'questions of social recognition' (ibid.: 160).

The rather broad reception of Polanyi, which the editors of this volume have contributed to in various ways, represents an important step – particularly for German sociology – towards an adequate understanding of the social transformations induced by the crisis. Yet as illuminating as Polanyi's analysis of the fictitious commodities of labour, land and capital may be, it says little about the systemic driving forces underlying the expansive principle of market and competition, not to mention the grave crisis of the latter. By no means is capitalism's expansionist tendency realised exclusively via market

socialisation. In order to adequately grasp marketization as a driving force of crisis, the modus operandi of field-specific commodification requires precise and empirical research and analysis. However, once we reach an empirical depiction of reality, we soon realise that it is for the most part not market exchange as such, but rather merely the principle of competition that is being generalised. Throughout the process of competition, the strong dictate to the weak how they ought to live their lives. Interestingly, this principle of competition is then combined in the private economy with rigid bureaucratic measures (indices, documentation obligations, target agreements and strict surveillance). Workers in large corporations are less subject to the actual immediate pressures of the market than they are to internal performance measuring systems confronting them with the logic of increase and escalation, of the 'always more and never enough'. Beyond the private sector, say, in higher education, there exist at best quasi-markets, in which 'market participants' compete for public resources and competition is inserted via bureaucratically implemented budgeting (Aulenbacher et al. 2015). Suchlike can only be detected at a meso- and micro-level through detailed, field-specific analysis for which Polanyi's approach is essentially too imprecise. In this sense, critical sociology as well is only just beginning to comprehend the current crisis-ridden social transformation. As a result, it is unable, or perhaps only sporadically able, to fulfil its function as a body of reflection for professional sociology.

3 Public Sociology Without a (Counter-)Public?

Nevertheless, as is emphasised by some of the contributions in this volume, there has always been a public sociology in Germany, despite all odds. One of the most important projects explicitly aspiring to serve as an instance of public sociology, and which received an inordinate amount of attention by professional sociology because of this, is the research on 'group-focused enmity' [*gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit* – GMF] conducted by Wilhelm Heitmeyer.[7] Over the course of a decade, his research group reconstructed the emergence of patterns of attitude and orientation which have more recently escalated into Polanyian counter-movements of an anti-democratic type in the form of PEGIDA, the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) or vigilante groups carrying out violent acts against refugee-migrants and political opponents. The rise of right-populist movements and their parliamentary representatives points to a problem located largely outside of sociology and the academic sector more generally. In concert with many other social scientists, Heitmeyer's research group warned against the 'extremism of the centre' and an increasingly coarse civil culture as well as the emergence of an authoritarian style of capitalism. The public impact of his warnings were, at least upon first inspection, rather slim. Responsible figures in the so-called newspapers of record responded with accusations of alarmism and, in order to block a discussion of the actual content of his research, the ever so popular technique of methodical criticism. The public sociology of group-focused enmity by all means had a public effect, but was doomed to fall short as an early warning that could spur the deployment of adequate measures to strengthen democratic civil society. That said, it was not the

[7] See the contribution by Wilhelm Heitmeyer in this volume.

scholars who failed, but the relevant sub-publics and their representatives who were unable to adequately process the broad scientific knowledge provided by sociological research.

This observation points to a phenomenon relevant beyond this specific case, which has been given far too little attention in the debate around public sociology thus far. It is increasingly unclear which publics a public sociology ought to articulate its concerns to. The social public, understood in the Habermasian sense as a discursive space interfacing between norms generation and state structure formation, ideally able to democratically control both, is itself the object of commodification, of marketization, economisation and a new *Landnahme*. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas) would essentially have to be re-written to comprehensively account for these aforementioned changes. For the sake of illustration, we once again confine ourselves to three considerations on this point.

Aspirations and effectiveness of public sociology are (1) often measured by the extent to which research is discussed in society's leading media, if at all. In this regard, then, quality journalism by all means possesses a degree of power of definition with regard to raising public awareness or even transforming an academic reputation into celebrity status.[8] This kind of celebrity emerges out of an elective affinity between prominent personalities inside the academic system and adaptation to a fundamental social consensus defined by the leading media. Moreover, celebrity means that *what* is being said no longer counts as much as *who* says it. Irrespective of the topic and what is being articulated, significance is obtained through the person who says it. This criterion of celebrity is only achieved by very few sociologists, no matter how hard they may try. Those who become celebrities, then, no longer need to worry about their audience. They are public intellectuals, or, as it were, public sociologists, in the traditional sense. There are differing degrees of fame and publicly recognised expertise in certain subject areas below this threshold. Here, the group of recognised sociologists is noticeably larger. The hierarchy of public perception could be depicted in even greater detail, but there is something else that is more decisive for the present constellation. In times of private television stations and internet access, the domain of the so-called leading media is increasingly limited to positional elites, particularly the political class, its apparatuses and intellectual stooges. This evokes the danger of the emergence of a self-referential sub-system. Access to this partial public is granted only to that and those who conform to its, albeit contested, fundamental consensus; whoever and whatever deviates from it – such as the unpleasant findings on group-focused enmity – is pushed to the margins, if not excluded entirely, and silenced one way or another. Increasingly restricted in this way, the public created by leading media is gradually losing its regulatory function. Beneath this partial public, we find a veritable decay of the bourgeois public as a whole, driven by commercial pressures on print media as well as public and private broadcasters, the precarisation of employment relations in journalism and the banalisation of content in the commercialised media. Simultaneously, the internet creates new popular publics which may function as democratic fora, but also as catalysts of a fictitious reality eluding democratic control and the ability to critically evaluate content this control entails. Often enough,

[8] See, inter alia, the contribution by Oliver Hollenstein in this volume.

debates conducted in the publics of elite discourse have little or no relevance for these new partial publics, often serving as a negative archetype at best (e.g. the German trope of the 'lying press' [*Lügenpresse*]). Aspiring to engage in a sociological discourse around a major social transformation in the context of such fragmented publics is highly ambitious indeed.

As various contributions in this volume illustrate, a transformation discourse (2) is ultimately only possible if traditional public sociology is expanded by distinct organic public sociologies in dialogue with their respective partial and counter-publics. This represents a task that is all the more challenging in the German-speaking world, where not only professional sociology but also critical sociology rejects such a notion altogether, though the latter may often tacitly entertain such a practice nonetheless. Claus Offe, who is a fellow at the Research Group in Jena himself, expressed as much in an inspiring comment during a book lounge held at the Vienna ISA forum on public sociology, stating that the task of public sociology is to deconstruct *lies*. As an example, he referred to Thilo Sarrazin's cultural racism (a 'simple lie') and to European austerity (a 'complex lie') – both myths crying out for scientific critique and clarification. This mission statement corresponds to that of classical social scientific ideology critique. The latter's intention is certainly laudable, as it goes beyond a professional understanding which, for instance, considers a discussion of Sarrazin's claims at a sociological congress to be 'inappropriate because too overtly political'.[9] Yet the ideology-critical approach is confronted with the central problem that eventually plagues all social sciences concerning themselves primarily with the deconstruction of a supposedly false consciousness or false statements; namely, mere critique of ideology omits the question of the true core of that which is being criticised; it is unable to explain why the lie takes root despite the fact that it is a lie. Often enough it also overlooks the fact that sociological clarification itself is frequently fraught with exclusionary practices. In order to avoid this, a public sociology pursuing social critique will necessarily have to interact with subaltern groups. Only then will it become a truly *public* sociology capable of transcending the confines of a traditional public sociology.

This understanding of a critical and simultaneously organic public sociology implies an interrelation between empirical research and scientifically grounded social critique, which must necessarily comply with standards defined by professional sociology. Empirical research follows the rule of neutrality, is conducted open-endedly and is critical in the sense that it is carried out from a position of 'simple exteriority' (Boltanski 2011: 10). A sociology critical of exploitation and domination systematically looking for points of critique, however, must adopt a 'complex exteriority' (ibid.), which in turn requires a theoretical framing. Given that exploitation and domination commonly represent more or less covert processes, they are impossible to detect with the methods of descriptive sociology alone. Adopting a 'complex exteriority' for a public sociology critical of domination means, on the one hand, obtaining the relevant empirical data so as to be able to accurately depict the society in question; while on the other hand 'to be critical, such a theory also needs to furnish itself […] with the means of passing a judgement on the value of the social order being described' (ibid.: 8). The 'possibility of a social science' must constantly 'be created' (ibid.: 9) out of the tensions between the two modes of knowledge

[9] Michael Buroway was confronted with this view during the Frankfurt congress of the German Sociological Association.

production (empirically grounded description of society, construction of social order with critical intent). For an organic public sociology, exchange and interaction with subaltern groups and counter-publics forms part of this ongoing struggle.

Overtaken by the end of history, however, sociology has (3) developed patterns of socialisation and career paths of its own which do not exactly correspond to the requirements of an organic public sociology. History's turn towards an alleged end of alternatives certainly influenced how young researchers were trained. Whoever decided to pursue an academic career in a context of a growing supply of qualified young talent and a simultaneous lack of sufficient jobs quickly learned to avoid anything that may appear disreputable. This problematic is anything but new, particularly in Germany. On the path to professional academia in this country, one always had to learn to live with 'wild hazard' (Max Weber), for material predictability was provided exclusively to professors, even in Weber's day, and becoming a professor was a long, arduous journey. Very little has changed about this, even in the mass universities of our time. Academics without tenure are largely compelled to shuffle from project to project, from one form of *atypical* employment to another. Correspondingly, three quarters of the roughly 106,000 research and academic assistants working at German universities at the outset of this decade were subject to temporary employment. More than 40 percent of them only had a part-time position. Up-and-coming young sociologists do not know whether their efforts will be rewarded, whether they made the right decisions or chose the appropriate specialisation until the end of an extremely long qualification phase. Before receiving a professorial appointment, generally around the time researchers enter their late 40s, scholars in Germany belong to the so-called junior academics, or young talent. The scientific community formally acknowledges these 'young talents' as equals only when they become professors or researchers in leading positions. Failure to make the leap into a professorial position, for whatever reason, rapidly diminishes one's chances of reaching the safe haven of secure employment. A considerable number of scholars are then faced with a range of relatively unappealing alternatives, left with the option of either coming to terms with the uncertainty of temporary project-based employment, or re-entering the labour market in their mid-40s, where they are often perceived as over-specialised, over-qualified or simply too old (Dörre/Neis 2008/2010). Sociologists are particularly hard hit by these developments, which often discourage contradiction and an oppositional spirit, and yet changes can be observed here as well. Students and young sociologists are beginning to publicly address the precarious nature of their work. The 'patient precarians' are on the brink of losing their internalised humility, and are discovering public sociology as a means and method of raising awareness about their own situation in the political sphere.

4 For a public sociology of social transformation

This brings us to the purpose of this volume. The editors seek to provoke a debate about an adequate contemporary public sociology of social transformation, and to drive it forward wherever such a debate is already occurring. To this end, the volume comprises a number of contributions which can be

subsumed into several topical blocs. The first section introduces the concept of a public sociology from the perspective of the Research Group on 'Post-Growth Societies', situates it in the context of major ongoing transformations and critically discusses its implications. Part two contains contributions bridging the gap between the paradigm of public knowledge production and fields of application. The third section is designed to expand our insights into international experiences of public sociology, while the fourth and final section is dedicated to the relationship between public sociology, media and the political sphere.

We have neglected to introduce and comment on each individual chapter at this point, as we believe they speak for themselves. Instead, to conclude this introduction we will restrict ourselves, in anticipation of the documented debate, so to speak, to formulating five guiding principles of a public sociology fit to the task of bringing increased public attention to transformative knowledge.

1. Public sociology requires a productive exchange between the core of the discipline and its critical periphery. This is exemplified by the discussion of crisis and transformation. Innovative knowledge is often generated on the margins of the discipline (by no means intended in a derogatory fashion), in close interaction with heterodox science and counter-publics. The Polanyi discussion, the debate around multiple and social crises of reproduction or the economic-ecological double crisis[10] have at least in part trickled into the discipline's centre in this way. Public sociology should productively use this mechanism for the creation of transformative knowledge instead of – as, for example, in certain citation policies – effacing it.

2. Public sociology will not only have to deal scientifically with the recent structural changes to the public sphere, but will at the same time be forced to create and stabilise counter-publics itself, given the erosion of contemporary democratic civil societies. The fact that it is possible to engage in a controversial debate on transformation within the framework of an ISA forum may hint towards the direction sociologists – perhaps, sometime in the future, even in Germany (?) – ought to begin looking.

3. Public sociology must be built on a pluralist and internationalist platform, or it will not be built at all. Plurality means that sociology may and indeed must be conducted from distinct, even contradicting 'exteriorities'. This type of constructive controversy is the only way that controversies with roots in existing conflicts within civil society can be addressed in the academic system. That said, plurality must not imply randomness. On the contrary, sociologists should learn to take themselves seriously once again. Surely, sociology does not require a single, allegedly all-encompassing conception of crisis or transformation. But it must nevertheless learn to bring concepts with distinct or even mutually exclusionary implications back into a process of critical exchange. Now more than ever, it requires broadening our horizons beyond national boundaries. Anyone seeking to understand what an organic public sociology could look like should pay attention, for example, to the research praxis of the SWOP in Johannesburg – an institute prominently represented by two scholars, Karl von Holdt and Edward Webster, in this volume. The institute's research on mine workers, social conflicts and the emergence of

[10] See the chapter by Klaus Dörre in this volume.

precarious societies as well as the impact this expertise has had in the public and political sphere is among the most exciting examples of public sociology today.

4. Public sociology can only grow across the discipline and establish a base in civil society if it does not rest on the shoulders of a few highly prominent sociologists. Organic public sociology is not an elitist concept. On the contrary: it can only succeed if it calls into question the hierarchies of the academic system, at least to a certain degree. In other words, even a sociologist who chooses a specific partial or counter-public as her sphere of resonance and therefore remains largely unknown in other partial publics acts as a public scientist. Likewise, students who present the findings of their research projects in the sense of public sociology are public sociologists in training. If we take such a division of labour as a criterion, we will likely find that the public efficacy of the discipline in Germany is not in such bad shape after all.

5. In order to be noticed and assume its function in the defence of democratic civil societies, public sociology must be aggressive, must disrupt and challenge supposed social normality.[11] Moreover, this means that public sociologists do not have an easy existence. Wherever they are confronted with power structures across disparate fields, they must be prepared for uncomfortable research findings to cause uncomfortable reactions from addressees. This is the one aspect where even oppositional trade unions, left parties or social movements differ very little from institutions loyal to the state. Enduring conflicts within a context of power relations is anything but easy. At times, unconventional formats such as that of 'sociology in theatre'[12] can prove instrumental. What is generally true, then, is this: a sociology which seeks to command a public voice, or rather public voices, cannot fear confrontation. Accepting and engaging in conflicts and persisting is an art which should perhaps be taught as a special qualification to future sociologists. After all, the methodology of a public sociology does not grow by itself; to master it and to root it institutionally is a step that would probably first require a clarifying debate within the discipline itself.

[11] See also the contribution by Wilhelm Heitmeyer in this volume.

[12] See the contribution by Heinz Bude in this volume.

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