Public Understanding of the Social Sciences

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In August 2005, the TV channel BBC asked its overseas viewers to vote for the "Greatest Briton". In that poll, Sir Isaac Newton, who contributed much to the world's understanding of gravity and planetary motion, was voted the greatest. If a poll on the "Greatest Filipino" were done in the Philippines, who would she or he be? Would a scientist, natural or social, be voted the greatest Filipino? Or would the greatest Filipino turn out to be an actor, a politician, a singer, or a boxer? The answer to this question can be taken as an indicator of the existence of a culture of science in the Philippines.

To be scientific, a person must be able to assess whether or not a personal experience responds to questions of validity and replicability. Personal experiences have to be theorized and be set in a broader paradigm. To be scientific, a person must be able to distinguish between the transcendental (e.g., spirituality, religion) and the mundane (e.g., physical survival), between specialist knowledge and lay knowledge. How many Filipinos are able to make these distinctions?

An examination of the development of a scientific culture in the Philippines would primarily concern itself with the meanings and practices of everyday life of both the scientists and the society which they emerge from. The daily activities and the social relationships being created by scientists, technologists, and users of scientific knowledge and artifacts can be the means of understanding the society which generates such culture and practice. In turn, the knowledge of a society can be the means of understanding its scientific and technological enterprise. Both explorations allow a fuller understanding of imperatives for the culture of science and technology to be present not only in laboratories, universities, scientific reports, journal articles, books, but more importantly in everyday life.

Thus, the project of building a culture of science in the Philippines requires an understanding of the public understanding of the sciences, as

well as science's understanding of its public. In this presentation, I will focus on the former, in particular on the public understanding of the social sciences. What is the public understanding of the social sciences that would, for example, allow them to vote for a social scientist as the greatest Filipino. Or not? How is this public understanding constructed? If this public understanding were to be reconstructed, in what directions?

Understanding the Public's Understanding of the Social Sciences

One way of looking at the development of scientific culture in a society is to examine whether or not it has become a "knowledge society". One of the earlier versions of the notion of knowledge society is Daniel Bell's (1973) idea of a society wherein knowledge is an important element of production along with capital and labor. In a knowledge society, new technologies and knowledge workers such as scientists, technologists, and other experts are essential. According to Bell, changes in the society's social structure - comprised of the economy, technology and occupational system are manifested in the following:

- Shift from a goods-producing economy to a service economy;
- Pre-eminence of the professional technical class in the occupational distribution;
- Centrality of theoretical knowledge as source of innovation and policy formation for the society;
- Future orientation in the control of technology and technological assessment; and
- Creation of intellectual technology to aid decision making.

Development work as a public

Let us look at the central manifestation of a knowledge society: centrality of scientific knowledge as source of innovation and policy formation and decision making well into the future. Towards this end, there are many insights that one can learn from the social sciences. Burawoy (2005) cites W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) The Souls of Black Folk, Gunnar Myrdal (1994) An American Dilemma, David Riesman (1950) The Lonely Crowd, and Robert Bellah et al. (1985) Habits of the Heart as some of the books written by sociologists which are read beyond the academy and have stimulated public discussion about the nature of U.S. society. In the Philippines, the works of sociologists and anthropologists such as Frank Lynch and Mary Racelis, which have contributed to the understanding

of Philippine society and culture in the 1960s, the works of Walden Bello, which help people to understand the debacle of globalization and development, and those of John Carroll, which show how sociology can be used as a tool to help the poor and the marginalized, could be some of the works being read by a wider public albeit by a specific public. Social scientists who write in the opinion pages of national newspapers where they comment on matters of public importance likewise introduce the frameworks and methods of the social sciences to the public. A few examples: Randy David (sociologist), Alex Magno (political scientist), Michael Tan (anthropologist), and John Carroll (sociologist). Quite recently, psychologist and educationist Patricia Licuanan wrote an article in a national paper, explaining that students learn better when the mother tongue is used in the instruction. She was responding to a government order which mandated, among others, the teaching of English as a second language in Grade 1 and the use of English as the medium of instructions for English, Science, and Math starting Grade 3

What insights can be learned from the work of social scientists?

Let us take as an example the work of sociologist Emma Porio which enables us to understand further an idea introduced by de Soto (2000): that some poor individuals and groups take it for granted that they do not have capital to benefit from capitalism in a more systematic way. De Soto argues that the inability of the poor to produce capital is the major hindrance to the widespread enjoyment of the benefits of capitalism. He points out, however, that most of the poor in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America do have assets and capabilities to make a success of capitalism. But since these assets are not adequately documented (i.e., houses built on land whose ownership rights are questionable, businesses that are not incorporated), they cannot be converted into capital (i.e., collateral for a loan, equity against an investment). One of the solutions that De Soto is suggesting is to give the poor access to formal property. Formal property includes a system of ownership rights (e.g., titling and recording assets), as well as a system of thought that allows people to work on their assets for the purpose of generating capital. He argued that through formalization of their properties, the poor can be part of a representation process where documents are the visible signs of a process that links all assets to the rest of the capitalist economy.

While the formalization agenda undoubtedly solves a number of problems with regard to the poor's access to capital, Porio and Crisol (2004) show that there are limiting cases. Some development planners and workers who take on De Soto's ideas also take a number of realities for granted. The formalization agenda fails to differentiate between different

kinds of poor people and their differentiated needs and interests. Porio and Crisol's analysis of experiences from the community mortgage program for urban poor residents in Metro Manila show that ownership does not work for everyone, and that there is a need for intermediate instruments for tenure. Since, as Porio and Crisol show, ownership works only for the "better of the poor", intermediate instruments for tenure, which include lease arrangements and governmental proclamation agreements, ensure that the "poorer of the poor" can afford less costly arrangements of tenure. This means that poverty programs have to be monitored on their ability to stratify different types of poor and to design appropriate programs for different types of poor individuals and communities. Putting one solution, ownership, towards urban poor's tenurial security does not consider that people have different capabilities and therefore have different responses. An approach to security of tenure that differentiates among different capabilities must provide a range of solutions that include not only ownership but also rental arrangements.

Many social scientists work in various capacities as consultants, experts, and researchers in international development projects. For example, a research project of the national oil company which aims at assessing the environmental, economic, political and social consequences of its energy development projects included in its project brief provisions for a sociologist, an economist, and a political scientist to work alongside engineers and natural scientists. A research team for the development of tourism plans and strategies for Metro Iloilo and Guimaras includes social scientists such as a sociologist, psychologist, and a heritage economist who work with tourism managers and specialists, marine specialists, architects, and urban planners. The sociologist's task is to ensure that women and communities in the area participate and benefit in tourism-related projects, while the psychologist's job is to design human resource development interventions for the communities.

The everyday life-world is the province of reality "which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes-for-granted in the attitude of the common sense" (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Meanings created by the interactions of individuals in society become typified into routines or patterns that become the social stock of knowledge, or the recipe or map which a member of a group or society uses to interpret the everyday life-world and to identify the set of practices and social actions required of in this everyday life-world. With the growing awareness of the role of social scientists in activities typically and traditionally understood to be the realm of engineers and natural scientists, does the general public routinely turn to social scientists for explanations of and plans of action for the social world?

Many social scientists complain about the flow architecture of research,

advocacy, policy and action that limits the ways in which scholarly works might or have contributed in shaping development initiatives and policies. One anthropologist says:

> "They want to simplify. That's the bureaucracy. They say "everyone", but there are differences."

GR, 30 June 2007.

Another insight into the role of the social sciences in the everyday life-world of Filipinos can be drawn from the Tasaday controversy (Pertierra 2003). Because the arguments over the facticity of the Tasaday were held in the media, a dispute that could have been resolved scientifically (by the anthropological community) suddenly became a political dispute (i.e. a view is either anti-Marcos or pro-Marcos). Non-scientists such as politicians and media personnel share the same space as scientists. Expertise and competence were not given the role to resolve a mainly scientific dispute.

Thus, one public of the social sciences, the development world, may understand the work of social scientists as part of the legitimating process, or worse, as dispensable, easily replaceable by a media personnel or a politician.

General public

> "Who is this person appearing on TV? She is supposed to be a sociologist. How come I can say what she is saying myself! If that is only what sociologists say, then someone who sees this so-called sociologist on TV would ask why he or she should let her or his child take up sociology in college."

CSK, chemist and mother, conversation, 6 June 2007

Newscasts and talk shows have been one of the vehicles in which the general public comes to know about social scientists and their works. TV reporters and assistants of talk shows would call university departments and ask who among the faculty could be interviewed for this and that topic.

These reporters are actually taking the "short-cut". A library research would have informed them about the works of a particular social scientist that have a direct bearing on a particular topic. It however appears that the world has succumbed to what Gertrude Stein has earlier observed: Without pictures we do not exist. Thus, while TV reporters could have done the library research themselves or conduct in-depth key informant interviews, the main interest is on how to get the social scientists to appear

on TV. Social scientists appearing on TV lend an air of legitimacy to a news or feature report whose storyline has long been decided independent of what the social scientist would say or not say. On TV, a 30-minute interview could appear as a one or two sentence-interview. Which sentences or ideas these would be, the social scientist has no control of. The primacy of legitimation over substantive content discourages certain forms of broadcast journalism to be investigative and broadcast journalists to be researchers. One does not have to wonder why we have a Center for Investigative Journalism when journalism should be first and foremost investigative!

The other reason for the general public's misconception of the work that social scientists do is that, more often than not, social scientists who appear on TV are propagating general social sciences. They are likely to comment on anything as a generalist. The more established social scientists who have developed expertise in specific fields are more likely to be preoccupied with teaching, research and writing, and consultancies, leaving them with no time to grant TV interviews and accept TV guesting invitations. Many of them have had the experience of being "used" by the media in previous interviews (e.g., an interview being "cut" to support a storyline for a news or feature report) and would now mechanically turn down requests for TV interviews and guestings. More often than not, established social scientists do turn down requests for TV interviews because topics could be too "general" and do not call to bear specialist knowledge. Examples: "Why do Filipino men urinate in public spaces?" Why are we fond of "tingi" (sachet marketing)?" "Why do starlets not wear underwear?" Why is bayanihan no longer being practiced these days"?

While the language of the social sciences could readily be used to explain these phenomena, the topics themselves risk trivializing the social sciences. While a good sociologist could explain urinating in public places to the nascent experience of urbanization of most Filipinos who would have grown up in the rural areas abundant with open spaces and to the lack of public structures in cities such as public toilets which would allow "urbane behavior", these insights run the risk of being reduced into a few words. Thus, the episode on TV might show the sociologist saying something that any Juan or Juana could also come up with!

During the 2006 national conference of sociologists, sociologist themselves complain about fellow sociologists - who unfortunately are not members of the professional association of sociologists – who trivialize sociology with their trite appearances on TV. Where lengthy expositions are reduced to second-long sound bites, Prof. Randy David, who uses the language of sociology to inform and explain social phenomena to the public gives this advice: Prepare one sentence that contains the essence of

what you want to say and say nothing more than that. Through this way, the TV editors could not "cut" the sentence as it is the only one! While not to be taken literally, David's advice is an injunction for social scientists to prepare for any media interview. One should have at least one big idea for the interview. But until such a norm becomes widespread among social scientists, the general public's understanding of the social sciences is one wherein anyone with an opinion can be a social scientist.

Improving the public understanding of the social sciences

Burawoy's (2005) work on "public sociologies" provides some ideas for addressing the issue of improving the public understanding of the social sciences so that a culture of science might develop in the Philippines. Accordingly, Burawoy maps out the division of sociological labor among four types of knowledge: professional, critical, policy, and public, which should complement and not negate each other. Public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation. Policy sociology is sociology in the service of a goal defined by a client. It provides solutions to problems or to legitimate solutions that have already been reached. Professional sociology supplies true and tested methods, accumulated bodies of knowledge, orienting questions, and conceptual frameworks. Critical sociology examines the foundations, both the explicit and the implicit, both normative and descriptive, of the research programs of professional sociology. It ensures that the stability of sociological frameworks and practices is often subject to periodic rupture or revolutions by making professional sociology aware of its biases and by promoting new or alternative research foundations.

From Burawoy, we learn that like sociology, the social sciences can be categorized in terms of its audience and the type of knowledge it produces. Its audience can be academic or extra-academic and its knowledge instrumental or reflexive. For instance, professional social sciences are characterized by an academic audience and instrumental knowledge, while public social sciences has an extra-academic audience and relies on reflexive knowledge. Bautista (2004, as cited by Porio 2006) modifies the Burawoy model to take account of Philippines realities where social scientists who engage an extra-academic audience using instrumental knowledge are not merely engaged in "policy". In the Philippines, social scientists engage policy and participatory development and are action-oriented (please see Table 1).

Table 1. Typology of Philippine social sciences (adopted from Burawoy, 2004; Bautista, 2004; Porio 2006)

Knowledge \ Audience	Academic	Extra-academic
Instrumental	Professional	Policy/participatory development/action-oriented
Reflexive	Critical	Public

Imperatives for a culture of science

What social scientists should know and do:

1. Social scientists have to be aware of the different possibilities and responsibilities opened to them. Social scientists can and should occupy multiple locations. Sociologist Randy David, for example, simultaneously works in both professional, critical and public worlds. The works of his fellow sociologists, Cynthia Bautista and Emma Porio, are located within the professional and policy/participatory development, and action-oriented fields. Economist Cielito Habito works in policy, professional and public fields. Historian Ambeth Ocampo who teaches, writes a column, and heads the national institutions for history, cultural, and arts is a public, professional, and policy/action-oriented social scientist.

2. Professional competencies—being good in one's discipline--allow one to occupy multiple-locations or perform different roles as a social scientist. Public commentaries (e.g., TV appearances) should be limited to areas of one's expertise, usually established through one's researches, rather than expounding on topics of broad interest. The challenge is for young social scientists to specialize and for the established social scientists not to forego public and critical social sciences for the more lucrative world of policy/action-oriented consultancies.

3. Students are the first public of the social scientists. The challenge of the social sciences which takes people as its subject of inquiry is to engage in different publics in different ways. However, there is a view among social scientists who are working in the academe that their only task is to teach. The other view, no less faulty than the first, is that one's only task in the academe is to produce knowledge through research. A social scientist should depart from both views and instead see teaching, research (including research-based consultancies and publications), and outreach

(through membership and leadership in professional and action-oriented associations) as complementary processes. Categories such as "teaching university" and "research university" should only exist as a discourse as the practice combines both teaching and research

The multiplier effect of teaching cannot be underestimated as our students secure, through their own engagements, the place of social science frameworks, research methodologies, and methods in Philippine economic, political and social life.

What relevant actors can do for social scientists:

1. Universities and colleges should support original thinking among the social scientists that they employ by providing structures for research and extra-academic engagements and treating these activities as public goods. Often, social scientists remain in their professional worlds, but even within these worlds they are only able to do teaching, at the expense of research. There are many reasons why they are unable to perform more than one role. Those who are able to occupy more than one quadrant of the typologies of social sciences often come from the best universities in the Philippines where work conditions (e.g., workload) are relatively better than in other universities (please refer to Table 2). At Far Eastern University and Xavier University, full-time faculty members teach eight classes a semester. Faculty at the University of Santo Tomas and the Polytechnic University of the Philippines-Manila have to teach from six to seven classes a semester. Their counterparts at the Atenco and UP teach four classes a semester, with UP faculty not being required to teach in the Summer.

In all combinations, the workload in the Philippine academe hinders original thinking and empirical grounding. In Australia, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, and the USA, the teaching load of a faculty member ranges from three to four classes a year. This gives them time to do research, which regenerates the social scientist's public, critical, policy/ participatory development/action- oriented engagements as research, first and foremost, contributes to the teaching component of professional sociology. Moreover, grants for development of course guarantees that research insights are incorporated into teaching.

Table 2. Annual number of classes of a full-time faculty (selected universities)

University/college	Number of classes per faculty per year
Ateneo de Manila University	10
De La Salle University	12
Far Eastern University Polytechnic University of the	16 (plus summer)
Philippines-Manila University of the Philippines	14 (plus summer)
Diliman	8
University of Santo Tomas	12 (plus summer)
Xavier University	16

2. Professional associations of social scientists and national bodies of science and technology should play an integral role in public life. The establishment of AGHAM party list is one such initiative but scientists can still learn much more about political campaigning. Networks of social scientists (e.g., Philippine Social Science Council) and those found in universities and colleges should be better utilized.

Professional associations should begin to consider their role in contributing to public discourses through opinion columns in newspapers and in issuing public statements with regard to issues of public interest. The experience of two universities after coming up with public statements on the alleged cheating in the 2004 presidential elections that appear national newspapers is however instructive as to how this can be done. Since the nature of public statements is to speak on behalf of all the members of the association coming up with the statement, the process for issuing public statement should be marked by open dialogues.

Social scientists are losing out in the marketplace of ideas in part because of the lack of awareness of their roles vis-à-vis the four typologies of the social sciences and the absence of structures to support those with the vision to excel in more than one typology. If only for the goal of contributing to the development of a scientific culture, (a) social scientists ought to aspire to have a more serious public engagement through teaching, research, publications, and professional outreach, and (b) relevant actors such as university systems, government, business, and other research funding agencies ought to understand that they cannot and should not fully colonize original and creative thinking in the academe. Lyotard was given funds to conduct research on how to modernize the French

university system. He ended up writing a canonical book on the condition of postmodernity, which was not useful with regard to the original intent of the funding. However, the work illustrates that pure research is good and hence is an argument for giving academics more money not merely for creating instrumental knowledge, but more importantly, reflexive knowledge.

Notes

[1] *The idea of "public sociology" is not without its critics, who argue that sociology is always public and that the term undermines the standing of sociology as an academic discipline. See, for example, Deflem (2004). The purpose of citing this term in this article is to highlight how the public might understand the social sciences.*

[2] *UP faculty receive honoraria if they teach in the summer. Ateneo de Manila University faculty have 30-unit workload, which typically includes a six unit or two-classes assignment in the Summer session.*

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