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Sociology and Economics – Towards a Normative Partnership in Analysing and Responding to 'Globalisation from Below'[1]

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President of Ireland
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A cháirde,

I am honoured to have been invited to deliver the 2023 Geary Lecture, and I am delighted to be in a position to host the event here in Áras an Uachtaráin. May I welcome all of you here today, be it from the Economic and Social Research Institute, or other sites of research or teaching, in sociology and economics, across the third-level sector.

Dr Roy C. Geary, after whom this lecture series is named, regarded as perhaps the most eminent Irish statistician of the twentieth century, was the first Director of the Economic and Social Research Institute. Before taking up this post, he was head of the National Accounts Branch of the United Nations in New York from 1957 to 1960, as well as being a founding member of the Central Statistics Office. It is fitting that the lecture series is named in his honour.

Over the past 63 years, the ESRI has established a long and significant history of social science research, research that has been influential in both economic and social policy in this country.

It is notable that, at its inception in 1960, thanks mainly to a Ford Foundation grant of $280,000 to fund the new institute for its first five years, the think-tank was originally known as the Economic Research Institute (or ERI).

A decisive influence on setting up the ERI was Dr T.K. Whitaker, then Secretary of the Department of Finance, who, in the course of preparing the major study,

[1] This paper is based on the fifty-first annual Geary Lecture, presented on 24 November 2023 at Áras an Uachtaráin, when the author was President of Ireland. The author is solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.

Economic Development, published in May 1958 – itself an input into the 'Programme for Economic Expansion (1958-1963)' – had identified the need for research on the Irish economy (Whitaker, 1958).

The absence of sociological research within the Institute's remit was addressed when a Social Research Committee was established under the auspices of the Institute of Public Administration in 1963. This Committee approached Henning Friis, then Director of the Danish National Institute for Social Research, who completed a report recommending that a Social Research Institute be established and amalgamated with the Economic Research Institute to form an Economic and Social Research Institute, supported by the establishment of a field survey unit within the Institute Friis (1965).

While it was a far-sighted proposal for which we should be grateful, the lack of debate on the Friis Report's recommendations is notable, and the implications of its funding model for social research would lead over time to complications and impediments for those engaged in such research outside the Institute.

The ESRI recognised early the value of social research. The appointment of Dr Damian Hannan, who would spearhead such research, was a testament to this, he becoming a Research Professor in the ESRI from 1967 until his retirement in 2000, apart from a period as Professor of Sociology in University College Cork from 1971 until 1976.

Damian Hannan, a respected friend of mine, published extensively during his time at the Institute on education and labour market integration in both Irish and international journals and books. He played a leading role in the development of sociology as a discipline in Ireland.

I can imagine his influence on the choice of two of the leading sociologists of the decades to give the Geary Lecture. Alvin W. Gouldner, author of *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* in 1970 (Gouldner, 1970), gave the seventh Geary Lecture in 1974; and Peter Berger gave the fourteenth lecture in 1981 (Berger, 1981): Gouldner on objectivity, Berger on secularisation.

Hannan's work, mostly empirical, regularly survey-based, was a reflection of his own early immersion in the Illinois School of Sociology of his time, his PhD drawing on quantitative work presented at Michigan State University. His research focus on emigration produced what is one of the classic studies of emigration from Ireland in the 1960s, *Rural Exodus: a Study of the Forces Influencing the Large-Scale Migration of Irish Rural Youth* (Hannan, 1970).

Inequality was a major focus of Damian Hannan's work, as was the theme of 'community'. Damian and I often debated the role of cooperative behaviour in Irish life as either normative expression or alternatively as an elaborate system of reciprocities.

Sociology, a field in which I trained and which I subsequently taught, at what was University College Galway, was just emerging as a subject in the 1960s.

However, my lecture this afternoon will touch on some aspects of the evolution of the relationship between sociology and economics in the 1960s and '70s, and some of the consequences of such an evolution for policy, practice and scholarship, and how perhaps the latter discipline – economics – came to grow to prominence among the policymaking community, while sociology would be so much less referred to by policymakers, indeed quite ignored.

Indeed sociology in the decade of the 1960s came to be viewed by some commentators as 'soft' and even 'woolly'. Sociology, as a taught subject in Ireland, had come out of the Philosophy departments and had frequently been taught as 'social ethics'. Economics on the other hand, well regarded in modernisation theory and central to development, was viewed as 'hard', grounded, and having a realisable, functionalist purpose.

Sociology, from its foundation, was – and perhaps still is in some circles – viewed as not just a critical scholarship, but as an inherently subversive discipline, borne as it was out of three 19th-century revolutions: the development of modern science, the emergence of democratic forms of government, and the industrial revolution.

Perhaps it is unsurprising then, given its radical genesis, its critical capacity, that, over the decades, sociology would become under-funded in a society that was conservative, a prevailing ethos that did not recognise inequality or find it unacceptable, a State that had a stated materialist development project. That project stressed adjustment rather than structural engagement with issues such as inequality.

Economics, on the other hand, particularly in its more applied forms of economic theory, policy and practice, drawing on neoclassical and neoliberal economics, could become hegemonic, and thus would be the more likely beneficiary of research funds in what was a utilitarian atmosphere within an unquestioned modernisation that defined 'development'.

Economics, as a formation of intellectual thought, also had a more comfortable arrival in State bureaucratic practice, particularly after 1958. Sociology's experience decades later was different. For example, the Combat Poverty programmes saw practicing sociologists being perceived in their advocacy as unwelcome critics of a State that was "trying its best". The eventual abolition of the Combat Poverty Agency in 2008, during austerity cutbacks, was an example of the silencing of any funded social research that might be critical of State policies.

The side-lining of sociological research and sociological scholarship and the epistemology upon which it was based facilitated a discourse of economics that could easily eschew the normative. This was particularly so in the United States, over-influenced as it quickly became by Hayekist perspectives which would lead to the Friedmanist crudities of the Chicago School.

Such an orientation was assisted by a public discourse that concentrated on commodification and consumption, a rejection of structuralism, and indeed the

reduction of the definition of the concept of 'freedom' to a narrow, laissez faire version that championed deregulation and privatisation, reduced the human experience to one of materiality, and human value to consumption, acquisitiveness and comparisons and evaluations of net worth.

Such an emphasis in the economic discourse was of course a profound, if mostly unacknowledged, ideological one. It led to the gap between sociology and economics becoming even wider.

Such a form of economics, particularly as represented in the Chicago School, made unsustainable claims for the mechanism of the market. It fostered a social unaccountability, one that had a profound social impact, most markedly on cohesion and inequality within society itself.

A notable and, by now, extensive scholarship has emerged that has illustrated empirically the adverse consequences of such a model. Thomas Piketty's excellent work on inequality is among that which is most often quoted, and for good reason (Piketty, 2014). Piketty's argument that, without intervention, wealth inequality tends to increase over time owing to the higher rate of return on capital compared to the fruits of economic growth, underscores how such a trend poses significant social and economic challenges.

Piketty's early predictions of a world of low economic growth and extreme inequality are coming to pass as we witness the ongoing concentrations of economic and political power through the accumulation of capital (or wealth) by the very richest with all the attendant social ills, most notably falling cohesion.

It is in responding to such conditions that sociology and economics could, may I suggest, make a significant contribution within a shared normative agenda.

When we compare sociology with economics as disciplines, what is perhaps most startling is the different manner in which inequality is considered.

The origins of a sociology that emerged from Catholic Social Thinking, and indeed so much earlier in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, underscored how poverty and inequality were to be construed as failings of society. This was very much at odds with classical economic thought which viewed inequality as an inevitability. Indeed neoliberalism and neoclassical economics championed inequality as virtuous: a maximiser of utility and a generator of wealth, with the market envisaged as ensuring that everyone gets what they deserve.

This epistemological orientation, combined with the hegemony of a version of economics in policy discourse and practice, can be seen as a major factor in the yawning inequality manifesting itself in so many parts of the world with such corrosive consequences for cohesion in society, delivering as it does a version of society that is reductionist and in which the shared culture of daily life is commodified and peripheral.

An alternative to such a narrow view is that of the economy as embedded in a culture that appreciates and seeks to deepen the democratic experience in an ever more inclusive way.

The embedding of economy in the social and cultural is a motif developed, for example, in the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi. May I suggest that such work remains relevant in our contemporary circumstances, that such ideas may be utilised to produce a forceful counter-hegemonic model to contest the depoliticisation, atomisation and commodification endemic to neoliberal globalisation.

While it was part of Polanyi's achievement to demonstrate the repercussions of domination in the economic lives of people, Gramsci was concerned to show the political domination that necessarily precipitated it.

Polanyi's critique of the self-regulating market, his discernment of society's 'double movement', when bridged to Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony and his notion of 'good sense', can supply vital components of what might serve as a critical theorisation of globalisation, as well as the taking note of the practical strategies of resistance to the anti-politics of market ideology on which James C. Scott has made such a valuable contribution (Birchfield, 1999).

The critical integration of Polanyi, Gramsci and Scott into the globalisation debates, as expounded by, for example, James Mittelman (Mittelman, 2000), produces valuable analytical tools, ones that maintain a primacy on political agency, that critically specify the national-international distinction, and make a methodological virtue of radical democratic theory.

Incorporation of Polanyi's 'substantivism' thesis into a reinvigorated economics for our times – a cultural version of economics that emphasises the manner in which economies are embedded in society and culture, is an idea that, if made popular in a revised anthropology, sociology and political science, could be emancipatory (Polanyi, 1944).

It is most revealing to see how, in times of austerity, a shift away from state spending on culture in some major economies occurs. This can be seen as the further articulation and broadening of a neoliberal economic paradigm that emphasises the individual, privatised experience of the economic over any collectively transcendent version of shared welfare and economic security. That culture and the economy within it is part of a shared public world is not accepted.

In the more sophisticated form of its narrowness as to the role of culture, and happy to reap the financial gains from the cultural industries, the key advocates of neoliberalism are not concerned that the world of entertainment has eschewed any responsibility for enlightenment or education, that it is often characterised by monopoly in ownership and by such a fragmentation in audiences as turns active citizens into passive consumers (Higgins, 2011).

The choices provoked within social policy that emerge are stark: inclusion versus exclusion; activity versus passivity; democratic control versus monopoly; freedom versus captivity.

Can economics then and its relationship with society, and with culture, be changed for the better? I believe it can be changed. This debate was a significant one between Australian and New Zealand economists Michael Volkerling and David Throsby.

In a seminal paper from 2000, *The Necessity of Utopia: Lessons from the Culture of Economics*, as part of his debate with Professor David Throsby, an economist who had argued that economics and culture were irreconcilable due to the nature of their differing foundational assumptions – the one being 'hard', individualistic, the other being 'soft', collective – Professor Michael Volkerling had addressed a contradiction that he saw as arising between changes evident in those sciences of the mind that appear to have "wholly rejected Cartesian dualism" in favour of theories of multiple intelligence and concepts of mind-body holism redolent of the Classical Age of Leisure on the one hand and a set of cultural policymaking practices on the other, that was not only influenced by the new consciousness but was happy to continue functioning within the failing and destructive model of neoliberal economics. Volkerling (2000).

More than two decades later, this debate is not over, the contradiction suggested as to epistemological sources has not been resolved, nor does its resolution feature within the central discourse in economics or public policy. I believe, however, that economics and culture can be reconciled with benefit to both.

Culture and economics should not be envisioned as antagonistic, as any clash, as Professor Throsby suggested, of a collective impulse with the individualistic impulse. Rather, as Professor Volkerling suggested, economics should be considered as a discourse within a wider cultural discourse in terms of both its origins and in its application (Throsby, 2001).

I agree with his suggestion that the development of economics and sociology together within a shared democratic culture that has as its aim "the full human capacity of the individual" is the best way of ensuring the emergence of the "representative citizen" whose commonly shared interests it is the function of the state to safeguard.

Volkerling argued for a reconnection of economic policy with its cultural roots to produce what he called a "rich, holistic discourse" (Volkerling, 2000).

While the absence of the sociological perspective as a joint influence with good economics in crucial areas of policy formulation and administrative practice in Ireland, and indeed the European Union, has remained an ongoing concern, the stress on social economies, post the crisis of 2008, and the COVID epidemic, has ushered significant change. The benefits to scholarship and policy of good theoretical and policy work that represents a collaboration between theorists in ecology, economics and the social studies, given our contemporary challenges, may I suggest, is obvious.

As Ian Gough from the London School of Economics has put it, we require a better symmetry of economics, social policy and ecology, one combining ethics and human need theory with political economy and climate science (Gough, 2017).

From its origins, sociology has sought to be relevant by qualifying as a science, its perhaps hubristic ambition was to be included in the method and perceptions of science and specifically the gathering of scientific knowledge of a measured society.

I have often reflected on an intriguing hubristic moment in the debate as to the future of sociology. It was the announcement in the 1960s by a President of an American Philosophical Conference that the abandonment of causality in science, its replacement with probability theory when combined with the capacity for large-scale sampling, such as that assisted by, for example, ILLIAC computer technology, had brought everybody together. With probability theory's ascendance, and such capacities, "we can all be scientists together now", he announced. Such scientific hubris didn't last, nor was it shared.

French sociology remained close to philosophical debate on existentialism, neo-Marxism and post-colonial theory.

The question endures: should economics or sociology aspire to be primarily a part of a scientific discourse and, if so, are there limitations as to the scope of the reach of both disciplines, economics and sociology? There are fundamental issues as to quantification and the interpretation of human data as dealt with by quantitative method and qualitative method. These are qualifications and limitations as to discourse. These were addressed in Alvin Gouldner's Geary Lecture in 1974, *The Dark Side of the Dialectic: Toward a New Objectivity* (Gouldner, 1974).

The anthropological work of scholars such as James C. Scott attempted to capture not just the full human experience, as can be measured, what is behind the mask of presented behaviour, but how it is structured, and how it has to take account of underlying, challenging counter-discourses.

The over-determinism of structural functionalist theories with their insufficient allowance for diversity in agency was addressed by Scott.

Scott's research on agrarian and non-state societies, Indigenous Peoples, subaltern politics, and anarchism, mostly in South-East Asia, and such societies' resistance strategies to various forms of domination, has been hugely influential in the field of ethnographic fieldwork, political science more generally, and is an example of how the experience 'from below' can provide a rich scholarship from which better policy can be designed (Scott, 1976).

How might theory then meet research in sociology or economics? As Alvin Gouldner put it in his 1974 Geary Lecture, achieve the "unity of theory and practice on behalf of hope" (Gouldner, 1974).

Bridging the gap between what Charles Wright Mills in 1959 called "grand theory" and "abstracted empiricism" remains a challenge (Mills, 1959). Over 240 years ago, Immanuel Kant formulated a similar conception:

> *Thoughts without content are empty and perceptions without concepts are blind* (Kant, 1781).

The debate on objectivity – as to whether sociology must reject the possibility of objective truths and try to understand the subjective nature of sociology, of knowledge in general, and how it is bound up with the context of its times and the mind of the researcher – was the subject of Alvin Gouldner's classic *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* in 1970 (Gouldner, 1970). He returned to that topic, as I have said, when he presented the Geary Lecture in 1974. He was of course not the first sociologist to be critical of the project of objective knowledge of society – it has been addressed, for example, by Theodor Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno, 1966).

In the period that Damian Hannan and I were in the United States in the late 1960s, "middle-range theory" was developed by Robert K. Merton (1973) and influenced by Max Weber (1975). It was, and is, an approach to sociological theorising aimed at integrating theory and empirical research. Emphasising, as it does, the distinctiveness of scientific norms and the adoption of 'organised scepticism', it stands in contrast to the earlier 'grand' theorising of social theory, such as functionalism.

Where European sociological theory was having an influence in the same period, it was through phenomenological theory. There have been many valuable variants drawing on the phenomenological tradition. There is a modesty in the claims of such work which would have pleased Gouldner. His seminal work of 1970, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, had stressed the necessity of the declaration of assumptions by a researcher and the near impossibility of its full achievement. His Geary Lecture in 1974 dealt with the discourse issues involved.

Can the rich insights of the phenomenological tradition not be re-visited, inform empiricism as practice, be considered and incorporated into a modern sociology? Can we create new discourse opportunities for sociology, anthropology and economics together so that the material and immaterial can work together? I believe such can be achieved, bringing not only these disciplines together, but also in that process gain much by acknowledging the insights of literature and the arts in general.

Recent work from a scholar who is making an outstanding contribution to the field of sociology, Professor Hartmut Rosa of Jena University, attempts to contribute such an emerging discourse. His 2018 book, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, and more recently *The Uncontrollability of the World*, are impressive contributions to contemporary social theory, presenting as they do a critique of modernity as the history of a catastrophe of resonance, a reflection of loss and of efforts towards belonging (Rosa, 2018).

There is an increasing recognition in interdisciplinary work of the importance of the concept of 'resonance', and a growing body of evidence suggests its importance for seeking an understanding of what might be sought as deep human

fulfilment. The search for a sense of 'belonging' is discernible too in both the popular accounts and literature of our times. 'Belonging' is a concept that unites classical and contemporary sociology, and indeed disciplines.

Throughout its history, sociology has inevitably confronted the critical issue of ideology, unavoidable in its attempts to be an emancipatory science, and of course the tension between ideology and science is not one that is unique to sociology.

There have been significant moments when sociology, as to its epistemology and research practices, has at times been attacked for its 'whiteness', sexism and racism. The issue is not with the methodological approach per se, but with the suggested insufficiently stated assumptions of researchers, results not shared with interviewees, the causal picture that such research might be presenting of the people being studied.

Perhaps one of the seminal events in American sociology for the development of this 'positionality doctrine' was the *Moynihan Report*, a policy document based on cross-tabulations of demographic data which presented a suggested objective account of family relations in the Black community, and specifically the significance that might be attached to large number of female-headed households, which related to poverty (Moynihan, 1965).

The issues identified were well-known to Black sociologists, such as Charles S. Johnson (1934), but the reaction to the *Moynihan Report*, beginning with the Black students at Cornell University, was fierce, the report being perceived as a racist attack on Black people and their traditions, perceived too as a regressive work, coming as it did 20 years after Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (Myrdal, 1944), that far-sighted utopian account of the obstacles to full participation in American society that American Blacks faced in the 1940s.

We should also consider nearer to home the contested concept of society, particularly from the period of Thatcherite Britain, and its suggested death of society as a relevant concept, as suggested by some contemporary writers including Nicholas Gane (2004). Yes, 'society' is a contested term in the literature, but it is also a central ideological concept that is intrinsic to our understanding of sociology's value. It raises important questions:

- Surely any retreat from the concept of society must mean a retreat from the major questions with which sociologists have traditionally been concerned, leaving a vacuum that is not merely nihilistic but dangerous?
- What might a future sociology concerned with such basic questions concern itself with, and what would be the role of the concept of society in such a sociology? It would have to extend itself beyond the classical forms of structure that were recovered.

To salvage a distinctive sociology fit for the future, Gerard Delanty suggests that the classical foundations of sociology, of the theory of society, needs to be re-thought, especially as they relate to nature, rather than abandoned:

> *As is now becoming increasingly clear from the Anthropocene debate, scientists in the field of Earth Sciences alone are unable to fully deal with implications of climate change and other changes in the earth. Sociologists need to become active in these developments.* (Delanty, 2023)

The future of such research as is aimed at policy options then is inevitably multidisciplinary and we can all benefit from it.

As to our present circumstances, we are fortunate to have valuable contributions in sociology, including from Ireland, that are adding to the growing body of international scholarly work, work that is advocating a new eco-social paradigm that offers our best hope for a sustainable, inclusive and even emancipatory future. It is a paradigm that represents a significant and meaningful gesture towards inter-generational equity.

Mariana Mazzucato's contribution to this new, heterodox economics, is significant, calling, as it does, for a reappraisal of the sources from which wealth actually emanates, what constitutes real value in the economy. Her work shows how market-led capitalism has failed, of how the privatising of state-owned enterprises and the outsourcing of essential services have left governments weakened without benefitting society or taxpayers. Her positive contribution as to how economic forces can be made to serve the public interest once more, to recover a discourse that is broken, is so valuable (Mazzucato, 2018).

Ireland, in discourse terms, is in a better shape than many other countries in relation to bridging the gap between theoretical work, applied research, policy formulation and institutional delivery.

Professor Mary Murphy's *Creating an Eco-Social Welfare Future* is a recent important sociological contribution addressing the institutional adaptations required to move towards a sustainable welfare state (Murphy, 2023).

The role that the National Economic and Social Council through its grounded, peer-reviewed and shared work has played, and continues to play is a crucial role in the institutionalisation of such a new paradigm. Through its advisory role to the Irish Government, it can help to bridge the gap between the research and the policy formulation required to achieve Ireland's sustainable economic, social and environmental development. Its recent work on 'just transition' is one such important contribution (NESC, 2020).

Sociology has a role to play in that 'just transition', too. How we will organise our society as it transitions towards a decarbonised world, do so within, and adjusting as necessary, the values and beliefs we hold, the critique of the power expressed in our politics, and how we distribute the benefits of our economic system all will influence the emergence of how people will continue to experience the consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss.

As we face what are interacting crises – climate change consequences that are at a critical level, wars, global hunger and spiralling inequality – claiming an

appropriate place for sociology in the policy discourse in our new circumstances of multiple, interconnected crises has never been more crucial.

The policy implications are also urgent. Achieving such requires a realisation that policy must be formulated and critically evaluated in such a way as to be able to tackle head-on the material and cultural contexts that are driving phenomena such as the growth of reactionary and far-right movements. This necessary development, challenging as it may be, of offering economic, social and cultural policies that can improve conditions for marginalised groups and help drive the creation of a more equal and inclusive society, while confronting policies that marginalise 'the Other', can help confront the exploitative targeting of marginalised groups and their scapegoating in conditions of crisis.

Sociology has a rich legacy from which to draw inspiration. Yes, I agree with Delanty that sociology must broaden its horizons to encompass 'transformations in the very fabric of society' (Delanty, 2023) in terms of the constitution of the individual, social relations, and, importantly, the natural environment. There is need, however, for a return in political theory to a discussion on 'power', the articulation of its new forms and their lack of transparency, and consequences of its exercise.

Those with whom research is to be shared matters. The fruits of research given our shared crises must be shared for universal social benefit so that we may utilise scientific insights collaboratively to address the great challenges facing humanity. The benefits of research must be shared equitably between, and within, nations.

How we got to where we are in sociology in Ireland has a particular history. I have written of this in the *Irish Journal of Sociology* (Higgins, 2021). Sociology in Ireland has been shaped both by responding to Irish conditions, it reflects United States' influences on research training and, by now, an increasing and rich use of European sources which rightly reflect the aspirations of a discipline whose theories and conceptualisations must transcend national boundaries.

Ireland's earliest sociological encounters include the often-quoted Arensberg and Kimball work, first appearing as *The Irish Countryman* in 1937 (Arensberg, 1937), later enhanced as *Family and Community in Ireland* (Arensberg and Kimball, 1966) in 1966, an applied functional analysis of life in two fictional rural communities located in County Clare. It was followed by the *Limerick Rural Survey* which gave us valuable insights into the significance of the communication networks of rural peer groups (Muintir na Tire, 1964). I believe that the work of Pat McNabb on that project has been under-estimated.

Catholic institutional dominance in the teaching of sociology retained an influence of moral philosophy. It had the result of a late secularisation of the discipline, a narrow epistemological inclination, and a marginalisation of sociology, in what were becoming more materialist circumstances. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the connection it made to European vocationalism and the Thomism of the universities such as that of Louvain.

Undoubtedly, a defining and uplifting moment in awareness of the contribution sociology might make in Ireland was the 1974 Kilkenny Conference on Poverty which had contributions from Sr Stanislaus Kennedy and drew on the work of Séamus Ó Cinnéide. The subsequent establishment of Combat Poverty and its funding for social research drew on the conference and also on United States' President Johnson's combat poverty programmes, including the programme Head Start.

The 1970s had benefitted too from the publication of excellent articles on poverty by Declan Bourke Kennedy and Vincent Browne in the journal *Magill*, all of which gave a huge encouragement and excitement to new practitioners in sociology and investigative journalists.

However, the late 1970s and early 1980s led to a period of stagnation in sociology, with very few appointments at third-level. The only Irish economic and sociological journal was *The Economic and Social Review*, but it had very few sociological articles, and those that were included were largely of the positive-empirical variety. Peter Gibbon and I contributed an anthropological article that drew a spirited response from Modernisation Theory enthusiasts of the history of Irish credit systems. The sociological community, at least in terms of membership of the Sociological Association of Ireland, was small.

There was a suspicion attached to sociology too in those early years and indeed of those who taught it. Neo-Thomism was perceived as being under siege, and new accounts of continental sociology were being published that included Marxist texts and critiques of them.

Sociology has always been a child of intellectual ferment and political and social conflict. The events in Paris of 1968 drew an unusual, even eclectic, response as to the dangers of sociology. In Paris the splitting of the campus of one of its main universities into a number of campuses across Paris was a response to the riots of 1968. In Ireland there was an eclectic event that I recall. It was a period when for cadets of the Irish Army who were studying at UCG, all the '-ologies' and '-osophies' were forbidden by their Director of Studies at the Curragh.

Professor Edmund Dougan and I, founding members of the UCG Department of Political Science and Sociology, were summoned to discuss the situation by the President of the college, and it would be three years before the 'ologies' could again be studied by those who would be in charge of the security of the State.

Those of us teaching or researching in sociology, in those early years, were doing so in conditions of flux that would end in a particular way, that would celebrate the hegemony of quantification in research and the loss of opportunities for qualitative research.

The exclusion of the sociological perspective and imagination from the main centres of policy in Ireland is not accidental. Its experience of arrival in Irish universities was a controversial one. For example, Professor Eustás Ó hÉideaín was

one of the few academics to raise questions about adoption of the 1965 *Friis Report* which had the effect of moving the scarce funded research in sociology to the Economic Social Research Institute rather than the universities (Friis, 1965).

At University College Galway Professors Labhrás O'Nualláin of Economics, Breandán MacAodha of Geography, Eustás Ó hÉideaín and Edmund Dougan of Sociology and Political Science established an interdisciplinary Social Science Research Centre in 1965 which sought modest funding from difference sources.

There were alternative models for institutionalised, funded sociological research over which Professor Geary's initiative for the ESRI had won out, including Muintir na Tire's Project for Rural Sociology, and the initiatives that were underway within the Agricultural Institute. Putting it bluntly, sociological research in Ireland, for the main part insofar as it would have an influence on policy, was captured for positivism as to theory and quantification as to method, and sought to live not entirely at a great distance from the hand of government.

I have referred already to Karl Polanyi's *Great Transformation*, that seminal work which outlined the dystopia of marketised society within the prism of economic liberalism some 80 years ago (Polanyi, 1944). It remains a text that is as relevant as ever in helping to explain how the embedding of market forces within the self-regulating market has had disastrous consequences for cohesion.

Polanyi's work reminds us that the public world must be seen as a space of contestation, a space that sets that which is democratic in tension with that which is unaccountable.

We have had recent outstanding interdisciplinary work, including that from writers such as Hartmut Rosa (2018), Tim Jackson (2021), Ian Gough (2017) and Anna Coote (Coote and Percy, 2020), as well as Irish scholars Mary Murphy (2023), Pádraig Carmody (2019) and Peadar Kirby (2022), and happily many, many more whose work attempts to analyse and harmonise links across disciplines into a co-ordinated, coherent whole so that we may merge consciousness, especially with regard to the existential crisis of climate and biodiversity, and within an institutional framework.

This is work that acknowledges what might be regarded as little less than a species crisis which we face, one that requires connections to be made across the social sciences, silos to be broken down, a rebalancing of ethics, ecology and economy within an activist state that recognises the natural resource limits of our vulnerable planet.

As to interdisciplinary collaboration, many younger scholars and a limited number of policymakers, including international organisations such as the OECD, have made cautious steps towards a more pluralist approach to policymaking, now recognising that the discipline of economics is not diminished but rather is enhanced by partnerships with the other disciplines that are dealing with the social world. There is an ever-growing recognition of the reality that the source of its richest

work has been the envisaging of a political economy embedded in a culture of a shared society that drew on moral instincts.

The social disciplines have nothing to lose by working imaginatively in the 'interstices', as Edward Said put it, between their disciplines, by the encompassing of the concerns of sociology, history or anthropology (Said, 1978). By cooperating, everything is made stronger. New partnerships between sociology and social history and social anthropology are mutually beneficial.

Neither can sociology dispense with scholarship from broader philosophical sources in the interrogation of the foundational assumptions of disciplines that so often go unquestioned. This applies to sociology as much as it does to other disciplines.

Surely it is necessary to know, and to understand, the ontology and epistemology that underpin models and methodologies that have been so influential over the past 40 years, and which have determined the lives of so many.

Philosophy can assist in the reconsideration of ethics and ethical dimensions into many areas – public accountability, war, trade, debt and dependency, to name but a few.

There is, I suggest, a strong argument that sociology, in partnership on projects, could also best benefit from a restored relationship, where assumptions are declared and understood, as Goudner suggested, within a shared moral concern of a normative orientation, with economics, such as is offered in heterodox economics, including ecological economics, so well exemplified in the work of scholars such as Kate Raworth (2016), Tim Jackson (2021), Mariana Mazzucato (2018) and Ian Gough (2017).

I would like to offer as a challenging project for consideration in interdisciplinary work what I call 'globalisation from below'. I referred earlier to globalisation and how the critical integration of ideas from Polanyi, Gramsci and Scott might inform debates on a fair model of globalisation. James Mittelman has outlined in his book, *Globalization Syndrome*, how such work offers a framework for such a project (Mittelman, 2000).

The uncritical acceptance of globalisation, as an inevitable aspect of modernisation, its promotion as a panacea for economic and social development, with little critique as to distributional or socio-cultural effects functioned as part of the theoretical assumptions for what is a failing and failed paradigm. This 'globalisation from above' allowed for the financialisation of the global economy with all its distorted power effects, its opaque character, its absence of transparency and accountability.

A more complete understanding of globalisation requires us to understand how it is being experienced, what is happening 'on the street', as I have put it, what form of economics is being invoked to justify it (Higgins, 2021).

In his use of the concept 'globalisation from below', James Mittelman in his *Globalization Syndrome*, a text which remains, some two decades after its

publication, a touchstone text, advocated listening to the voices of those affected by this phenomenon, including those who resist it and those adversely impacted by it (Mittelman, 2000).

Mittelman was among the first to present a holistic, multi-level analysis of globalisation, connecting the economic to the political and cultural. Mittelman's findings, drawn mainly from Eastern Asia and Southern Africa – two globalisation 'hubs' – underscore the importance of being open to transnational field research in understanding the full human experience. James C. Scott's work was also groundbreaking in giving agency to the hidden discourses of defence employed by peasants.

The Polanyian perspective that Mittelman drew on provides a template for studying globalisation's impacts, the 'systemic changes that generate discontents' (Mittelman, 2000). The three analytical frameworks Mittelman draws on, those of Gramsci, Polanyi and Scott, overlap, deepen our understanding of resistance politics and may, I believe with benefit, be integrated to sharpen the theoretical perspective.

The way in which an absence of critique of globalisation might be challenged was also considered by Richard Falk of Princeton University's Center of International Studies in his paper, *Resisting 'Globalisation-from-Above' Through 'Globalisation-from-Below'* (Falk, 1997).

In a prescient conclusion to his paper in 1997, Falk suggested that a reconciliation between global market operations, the wellbeing of peoples, and the carrying capacity of the earth would be the most salient political challenge at the dawn of the new millennium.

I believe that a project, such as addressing 'globalisation from below' can pattern and strengthen responses to the interacting crises of our time, including global hunger, and can strengthen democracy. This was a theme of one of my papers at the World Food Forum in Rome in October.

I also spoke in Dakar and in Rome of a new anthropology emerging in Africa, assisted by such scholars as Pádraig Carmody (Carmody, 2019), that as a tool of evaluation and initiation can extend and deepen democracy. Such a project as 'globalisation from below', can challenge the rise of unaccountable policies and development initiatives controlled by elites which have been such a major source of the corrosive disenfranchisement, and falling cohesion, that is so manifest, North and South, one that has resulted in what Jürgen Habermas described as far back as 1975 in the European Union as a 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas, 1975).

What we are now seeing emerge from what is often termed 'the South' is a range of movements that are, while not perhaps using the term, advocating globalisation 'from below', a project that can potentially assist democracy and undo some of the damage that an unaccountable, uncriticised globalisation 'from above' has delivered on institutions and on people's lives.

Globalisation 'from below' can also draw on (post-) dependency sociology, perhaps such as that most brilliantly expounded by South-American scholars such

as Carlos Lopes (Lopwes, 2019). That work demonstrates how a better symmetry between ethics, economy and ecology can be achieved, how a renewal of life on our planet can be realised through transformational change and ethical development policy.

In this new discourse of the South, Ireland has a special welcome, in its own right and as a European Union Member, with the opportunity of being a bridge to a refurbished multilateralism.

In recent times, Irish sociologists have charted the course of a country undergoing profound social and economic changes. I believe the best days for an Irish sociological contribution are emerging, that the current community of sociologists is well-placed to make a significant contribution, in partnership with the other disciplines, to a changing Ireland, and will do so with a theoretically strong economics.

There has been a new lease of energy amongst Irish sociologists, a new sense of solidarity, and sociology in Ireland has become international, attracting sociologists from all over the world, both in terms of positions, contributions to the *Irish Journal of Sociology*, and participation in workshops and conferences.

Sociology has become established throughout the third-level sector, although it is deeply concerning to hear of the decline in numbers studying sociology at third-level, modules and courses being cancelled or merged, and even entire Departments under threat. New partnerships with, inter alia, philosophy, history and anthropology can help to stem the tide, untie the advocacy of a narrow, misplaced functionalism that has passed, as it inevitably will.

May I stress that a healthy sociological contribution will require a space of epistemological freedom in our institutes of learning – by which I mean staff and students being encouraged to think critically, university teachers given freedom to teach pluralistically and, fundamentally, free to critique an orthodox capitalist system that is under-regulated, unaccountable as to its consequences for society, that exercises its power, for example, through occasional actions of the dysfunctional and dated Bretton Woods Institutions, to punish without explanation, or thought as to consequences, if a sovereign state strays from the neoliberal course.

What sociology has been and what it can be are largely determined by what its practitioners are themselves allowed and encouraged to be.

The sociological imagination is such a valuable perspective. It is only by understanding our shared and entangled histories, our vulnerabilities, our hopes that may have been dashed, our successes, and our awaiting utopias, that we can hope to be better prepared to meet the social and sociological challenges of the future.

The challenges to the discipline of sociology that call for moral courage will arise in facing new forms of inequality and injustice that will have continuities and connections with the past, but, like them, are not inevitabilities.

Sociology has a key part to play in providing a moral foundation to economy and society, as E.P. Thompson and James Scott so powerfully advocated, recovering

possibilities and unearthing the rich promise of a more moral and ethical economy and society (see, for example, Thompson, 1971).

Such utopianism is as central to understanding the work of Keynes as it is to Thomas More and, later, Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, Henri Saint-Simon and Étienne Cabet.[2]

Has it ever been more necessary? Has there ever been a more appropriate time to envisage together our future utopia? Notwithstanding the distance we find ourselves from achieving such, not just sociologists, but all of us must dare to dream it.

Sociology can and should be more directly involved in claiming what futures might be, should be, and in materialising these claims via expansive engagement with other actors.

In being a future-oriented discipline, sociology must be alert to how the world is changing, how we are taking the world into us, be it in our yearning for peace, or our collapse into war, and how what should be questioned, but is wearing the mask of inevitability, is absorbing us. Sociology and economics must not be afraid to call into question previous certainties asserted. Neither are limited to any one context or time or to their contemporary self-understandings. We are of the world.

It is both a daunting but also an exciting time in which to be a sociologist or economist, and I know that all practitioners, whether in academia, practice or policy, are anxious to play their part in the advancement of what are, at their best, as shared disciplines, ones which can carry the emancipatory potential to create progressive societies founded on core human values of equality, shared capacity, fairness and decency. 'Emancipation' is to critical theory what 'goodness' was to Platonism. It is grounded in, but not limited to, reason, as Alvin Gouldner put it in his 1974 lecture (Gouldner, 1974).

While the trajectory on which society has been travelling for four decades now has resulted in a period when, in so many places and ways, the concept of 'society' has been questioned and redefined pejoratively, when the public space in so many countries has been lost or commodified, our recent experience of pandemic has made possible the galvanising of support for a paradigm shift towards seeking an exit from the worst aspects of a destructive, extreme individualism, the taking of a path that offers the capacity of achieving transcendence, meaning, resonance, even an encounter with beauty, in all its senses of shared life.

Sociologists can join with other disciplines in encouraging the merging of the consciousnesses of ecology, human need, dignity, respect for sources of truth and consolation, reasoned and revealed. In doing so, sociology, working collaboratively with the other social science crafts, can yield its greatest achievement to date: generate a catalytic atmosphere that can enable a new, harmonious paradigm of

[2] Utopianism is derived from the word 'utopia', coined by Thomas More whose book Utopia (1516) is regarded as the first text on the subject.

existence based on inclusivity, equality and sustainability to come to be our shared experience. It is not only past time to break the silences that mask what has not only failed but is inadequate for survival, sustainability and democracy itself. It is a time full of promise for scholarly cooperation.

In achieving this, the Economic and Social Research Institute contributes an ever-more promising atmosphere, just as it did when it welcomed the arrival of Dr Damian Hannan's ground-breaking work on migration all those years ago

Mo bhuíochas libh as ucht éisteacht liom. Beir beannacht.

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