

**Academic Excellence and Social Relevance:
Israeli Sociology in Universities and Beyond**

**Victor Azarya
President, Israeli Sociological Society**

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Sociology is a well established field of study in Israeli universities. From 400 to 800 students choose it as their undergraduate majors in each university, though no distinction is made between sociology and anthropology at the undergraduate level. Some of those students choose sociology and anthropology together with another field (such as political science, economics, geography, communications, psychology, etc.) as part of a double-major system. In four of the five Israeli universities that include Humanities and Social Sciences in their curriculum, i.e. The Universities of Bar Ilan, Haifa, Tel Aviv and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Sociology and Anthropology form a separate department within Social Sciences¹. In a fifth university, the Ben Gurion University of Beersheba, Sociology and Anthropology are part of a more general department, called Behavioral Sciences, that also includes Psychology. However, in Ben Gurion University too a decision has been made to separate Sociology and Anthropology from Psychology and establish it as a distinct department. The implementation of this decision awaits the approval of the National High Education Council, which has already received favorable recommendations, and, in all probability will grant the approval in a matter of months. Departments of Sociology and Anthropology in each university have a teaching faculty ranging from 20 to 40 people, about two thirds of them tenured. Sociologists outnumber Anthropologists among the faculty at an approximate ratio of three to one.

At the graduate level, the distinction between sociology and anthropology is stressed a bit more though both continue to be taught within the same departments. Masters' degrees usually specify whether students have specialized in Sociology, Anthropology, Demography or Organizational Studies. While undergraduate studies

¹ There are also two university level institutions that emphasize Natural Sciences and Engineering. They are The Technion in Haifa and the Weizman Institute in Rehovot. Together they form the 7 University-level institutions in the country. In addition to them, in recent years a large number of Colleges have been opened in response to a surging demand for post-secondary education in the country. They are considered to be of a lower rank than the seven institutions mentioned above and usually do not offer graduate degrees.

in sociology and anthropology are considered as being part of general non-professional education, at the Masters' level professional aspects of the fields receive greater emphasis. Masters' students in each university range from about 30 to 80, depending on the university, and many of them continue their studies for a PhD degree even though in Israel, unlike the US, masters and PhD studies are clearly differentiated as part of graduate studies. All five of the seven universities are entitled to offer PhD degrees in Sociology.

Sociology is also prominently taught in the many Colleges that have been established in recent years, usually as part of a behavioral sciences or a general social sciences degree. Sociology is taught also in high schools and is recognized as an elective topic for high school matriculation exams. About 400 people are fee paying members of The Israeli Sociological Society, the professional association representing sociologists in Israel. The association was established in 1967 and many prominent sociologists have served as its past presidents, such as Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Elihu Katz, Yehudit Shuval, Ephraim Yaar, Eliezer Ben Rafael, and others. One third of the ISS members are graduate students or retired members. Despite its various activities that include the organization of annual conferences, support for a Hebrew language periodical in sociology, the periodical publication of books in English that focus on a specific topic of study on the Israeli society, the publication of newsletters, the preparation of a Hebrew-English dictionary of sociological terms, etc. only a minority of those who consider themselves as sociologists by profession are members of the association at any given year. Even in academic departments only about 60 percent of the faculty members are members of the National Association.

In addition to academic sociologists, a large number of people identifying themselves as sociologists are employed outside academic institutions. Many of them are secondary school teachers. An increasing number of others are employed as organizational consultants by the armed forces and the police. In fact, The IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) has recently become the single largest employer of sociologists outside academia. The Behavioral Sciences branch of the armed forces is being packed with sociologists, gradually replacing psychologists in organization consultant responsibilities. Lately the top position in the Branch has also been occupied by a sociologist. This professional outlet has also given a big push to 'organization studies'

that have become the most popular specialization field among Masters' students. Until a few years ago, high tech companies had also employed a large number of sociologists as organization consultants, though the bursting of the high tech bubble has reversed that trend. Sociologists are also employed by immigrant absorption authorities, the ministry of housing, the Central Statistics Authority of the State and similar public service agencies as well as in a number of non-governmental planning and organizational consultancy agencies that have recently been established.

Despite such relatively strong establishment in the society, Israeli sociology faces a number of serious difficulties both within academic circles and beyond. Sociologists employed outside academic institutions still have to fight constantly for the public recognition of their professional identity and expertise. While increasing numbers of people with graduate degrees in sociology do find employment in large organizations outside academia, their professional status is still insecure compared to that of psychologists and social workers, for example. They are the first to be laid off, their positions being the first to be eliminated in cases of financial cuts. Even when they work, the apparently simple question: 'what do sociologists do besides teaching sociology?' does not get a clear answer, and the confused attempt at a response makes things even worse. Simple and naïve as the question appears, it stings and hurts deeply and causes a lot of damage to the sociologists' self-esteem.

Israeli sociologists are also relatively absent from general public debates. They appear much less in the media and offer much less commentary on 'the state of society' than do political scientists and economists. Even literary and artistic figures get more recognition and are more prominent in the public intellectual discourse. It seems that sociologists have not mastered the art of the sound bite. Their explanations are more hesitant and more convoluted, depending on too many conditions, sometimes with contradictory effect. At times they sound too complex, and at times too trivial. Also, it often appears that sociologists are more preoccupied with communicating (and disagreeing) with each other than with communicating with a general audience. Their jargon is heavy. They seem to forget a basic distinction, in the eyes of the general public, between the professional stature of physical sciences and what is considered 'hard' social sciences (economics, statistics and perhaps psychology) on the one hand and 'soft' social sciences. While the general public who does not understand medical,

or physical, or even economic explanations will blame this on its own ignorance in these matters, when a sociological explanation is not understood, it is attributed to the sociologists' own obfuscation, rather than to the public's professional ignorance in the matter. And if, by contrast, the explanation is too clear, it would be attributed to simple common sense. 'Anyone could have thought of that', they would say, and 'you don't have to be a sociologist to offer a sociological explanation'. However, while our professional disadvantage to medicine, physics, chemistry, economics and even psychology is apparent, it is still not apparent why sociologists are disadvantaged even compared to political scientists in their public discourse in Israel. I will return to this point later in the article.

Under these not so attractive conditions that sociologists face outside academia, it may not be so surprising that many seek refuge within academia. However, life for sociologists in the academic scene is equally harsh and uncertain, if not more. I would even venture to suggest, somewhat paradoxically, that the absence of sociologists in the non-academic national public discourse is at least partially related to the difficulties of professional life within the academic institutions. Just as it is getting increasingly difficult to place an article in the leading journals of sociology in the world and having manuscripts accepted for publication by the leading publishers, both university presses and commercial ventures, the Israeli universities have raised their demands in terms of quantity of publications and place of publication, for offering tenure, and even tenure-track positions to young scholars, in total disregard for the tightening market in precisely those top publication venues. What was sufficient a decade or two ago for getting tenure may not be enough today even for obtaining a tenure-track position. The metaphor is one of medieval torture. While one machine pulls (or pushes) up the other one pulls (or pushes) down, and the victim is stretched (or squeezed) until he/she is about to be dismembered (or to explode)...I am sure that this is not a specifically Israeli phenomenon, but I have no doubt that Israeli universities have excelled in this practice in recent years.

We all know how long it takes to have an article accepted for publication in a top sociological journal. The research may take years. When a first draft of the article is prepared we are expected to send it to colleagues for comments, unless we are too afraid that some of our ideas would be stolen. When we feel confident enough to

submit the article to the journal, and it is not rejected immediately, we can expect that two, three, or more external reviewers will be asked to review it. Such reviewers usually do not get any financial remuneration for that job, and they are over-worked doing their own research and trying to publish their own manuscript. So, it is not reasonable to expect an answer before three to six months, nor is it reasonable to expect that the two or more reviewers and the journal editor will all agree on the academic merit of the article. In most cases, if not outright rejection, a 'revise and resubmit' is in store for our article after six months. If we opt to send it to another journal the whole procedure will start anew. If we decide, as most of us do, to resubmit after corrections, the procedure still repeats itself, though perhaps at a somewhat accelerated pace, but still there are close to 50% chances of rejection, and then we return to square one, another year of uncertainty with some other journal. Two or three such rounds mean two or three years, about half the time Israeli universities allow faculty to remain employed without tenure.

Why can we not submit our article simultaneously to a number of journals (or our book manuscript to a number of publishers) and have the publishers compete with each other on who would publish our manuscript? Simply because the publishers would not allow us to do so. If they did, they would be flooded with manuscripts even more than they are now. The publication costs would be multiplied many times over. The procedure would be more advantageous to the authors than to editors, but it is the latter that are the ones setting the rules, and since we depend on the editors so much, we abide by those rules. Brute power relations reign supreme! The publication establishment and the university authorities each exert power over us and squeeze us from their different angle.

And after the long arduous process, in the few fortunate cases in which our article is accepted for publication, how many people will read it??...Anecdotal rumors making rounds in Israeli university circles assume that a sociology article will be read by an average of less than 10 people, besides the reviewers of course, and unless it is put on a compulsory reading list for students. An article for which we worked for two or three years has a real chance of being read by fewer readers than reviewers!...Could we not have communicated the ideas or data put forward in that article in a more efficient manner? In a 40 minutes lecture to 30, 50, or 100 people for example? or in

an op-ed article in one of the leading daily newspapers? or now in the rapidly developing electronic media? But none of those media would count when we are reviewed for tenure, or for any other academic promotion.

These facts are well-known in Israeli academic circles. Nonetheless, Israeli universities have recently further tightened their criteria (?) for academic promotion. They are no longer content with the number of publications in refereed journals, supplemented by additional external peer reviews of a sample of the candidate's publications (four to six such reviews, preferably from abroad, in addition to internal committee members reading the material). They insist that publications appear in the top-rated world journals. Israeli universities, following the lead of the Hebrew University, instituted a few years ago a system according to which journals in a particular field are ranked into four categories and a candidate's publication record is judged according to how many of his publications appear in the different rank journals. And woe on those whose articles appear in C and D category journals, or God forbid, in unranked journals!

In other words, a potential candidate has to make sure that his/her article is accepted by a highly ranked world journal. But these are also the journals that everyone in the whole world wants to publish in. Hence, obviously, the rejection rate in those journals will hover around the 90% and the time it takes for an article to be published there would be much longer (and imagine the power held by the editor of such a journal). The university forces the young scholar to be irrational: to send the article to a place where the chances of acceptance are lower, and this while more than doubling its demands on the quantity of publications compared to a decade or two ago (and no matter that hardly anyone besides the reviewers will eventually read those publications).

All this is done in the name of academic excellence. It affects mainly young scholars, 30 to 35 years old in Israel, who at the same time are also in the process of raising a family with young children, taking mortgages to buy their apartment or their car, if male and Jewish being called to reserve military service for about a month every year, if female still assuming an inordinate share of the household responsibilities, or if non-Jewish probably suffering some other disadvantages. Who could blame, then

such young scholars for thinking that nothing besides adding items of academic credit to their CV is worth pursuing in their professional life.

Furthermore, Israeli sociologists opting for an academic career face an additional hurdle. The academic institutions expect them to compete for excellence at the world stage and not at the national stage. Articles written in Hebrew, or published in local publications, get very little academic credit. To get academic recognition the Israeli sociologist has to impress a basically 'non-Israeli' audience. Studying a problem of great social relevance to the country, whether poverty, crime, family dislocation, ethnic tensions, etc., would be of little academic value to the researcher if it cannot arouse the interest of an audience from another society and culture, for whom there might be nothing original in those problems. An inevitable disconnection thus develops between the society in which the academic sociologist lives, teaches and conducts his research and his/her target audience.

In order to improve the chances of publication in the places that count, the Israeli sociologist will then have to opt for one of two possibilities: Either, as many try to do, he/she would try to 'theoretize' the problem, to raise it to a higher level of conceptualization that will interest a more general audience and show some potential of knowledge generation that is not culture or society dependent. Or else, he/she will pick a topic that, while specific to Israel, arouses general world interest and curiosity because the Israeli model, or example, has implications for other societies.

In the early years of Israeli independence the study of the Kibbutz was such a topic. While specific to Israel, it aroused curiosity and interest in the entire global (or Western) academic community. Not surprisingly, the kibbutz was a hot topic of study and publication in sociological journals around the world. Not anymore. Kibbutz has declined as a hot topic, both in Israel and abroad, paradoxically just as the kibbutzim started to undergo extensive privatization, but not much different, in terms of the general issues it raised, than other communal structures in North America (Amana Colonies, Oneida, New Harmony, Icarians, etc.). Another such hot topic that attracted world attention in the early years of Israel's existence was the large scale congregation of immigrants, and indeed many of the leading Israeli sociologists built their early careers on this topic. But this topic, too, has consumed itself and is in

decline. By contrast, because of the prolonged military conflict with its neighbors, military sociology was, and to a certain extent still remains a topic in which the Israeli example arouses general interest and provides career opportunities to local sociologists. And of course, since 1967, occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with its many political overtones, may enjoy the publication short track in world journals. However, on the whole, specifically Israeli topics that arouse world interest are limited and hence academic survival inexorably pushes the Israeli sociologists into more theoretical writing and continues to drive a wedge between them and the acute, but academically uninteresting, problems of the society in which they function.

It would be interesting, at this juncture, to compare the academic evaluation procedures of Israel with those practiced in some other countries. In Taiwan, for example, a similar categorization of sociological periodicals exists and crucially affects the academic careers of sociologists.² Journals are ranked according to whether they belong to the SSRC (Social Science Research Center) list, to the TSSCI (Taiwan Social Science Citation Index) list, or are unranked. This has created a very powerful prestige ranking system for academic journals, and by inference for so-called academic excellence, as in Israel. However, there are also very important differences that separate the Taiwanese case from the Israeli one.

First of all, while the top ranked SSRC list is analogous to the US established Social Science Citation Index and tries to adopt a so-called universal measurement which, in fact, is very strongly dependent on the United States, the middle ranked TSSCI list has been created to accommodate also publications that are directed to a more local audience and are written in the local language. The TSSCI list comes, to some extent, as a corrective measure to the dependence on the US academic world manifested in the SSRC list. According to Tsai's analysis, the TSSCI list has a latent function of encouraging domestic researchers to address issues specific to the Taiwanese society as it accredits papers written in Chinese³. Tsai then concludes that, for this reason, the

² See Ming-Chang Tsai, "Evaluating Professions in Taiwan: Power, Profession and Passersby", paper presented at the ISA meeting of the Council of National Associations, Miami, Florida, August 9-11, 2005.

³ Tsai, "Evaluating Professions in Taiwan...", p.15.

Taiwanese review process, despite its strong US dependence, has not led to a detachment from concern in specific local issues.

In the Israeli case, according to the Hebrew University ranking of journals for sociology and anthropology⁴ (no differentiation between the two) the top A category includes 13 periodicals none of which is published in the Hebrew language nor does it even include an English language Israeli publication. At the B category we find three Hebrew language journals out of 62. One of them, *Theory and Criticism*, while being published in Hebrew, is a very theoretically oriented journal and can hardly indicate local empirical concerns. On the contrary, its relatively high status shows the preference given to theory and abstraction even in the Hebrew language academic discourse. Even in the rather despised C and D categories the respective ratios of Hebrew-language or local journals are, respectively, 3 out of 97 (one of the three is published in English) and 2 out of 65. Interestingly, among the C and D category publications we may even find journals such as *Man in India* or *Journal of the Polynesian Society* (?). . . . Interest in and appreciation of the ‘other’ seems to be truly global whereas the local-national engenders a gripping fear of parochialism! . . . It is not too difficult to infer from such figures that they both reflect and further reinforce a singular lack of encouragement for Hebrew language or Israel-based academic publications in sociology and anthropology, and that they lubricate, rather than reduce, the academic detachment from local concerns.

Another crucial difference between the Israeli and Taiwanese examples is the strong involvement of the Taiwanese state in determining the ranking of the academic journals and hence the ‘social construction’ of academic excellence. The National Science Council that initiated the ranking system in Taiwan is a public institution apparently controlled by the Ministry of Education. In Israel, by contrast, as hard as I tried to look for government intervention in this process, I could not find any. The state in Israel has a crucial influence in determining university budgets and faculty salaries. However, it has very little influence, if at all, on what is considered academic excellence. The ranking of the periodicals has been developed within each university and involved negotiations between university authorities and each separate

⁴ Hebrew University of Jerusalem website: <http://sites.huji.ac.il/madad/journals1.htm>

department (which, of course has had the side effect of hurting the ranking of inter-disciplinary journals). It reflects power relations within departments and between departments and university authorities. I doubt that the government was even informed of the ranking while it was being developed, and if informed, it probably would have objected to it out of a more populist stand that collects more political points with the general public. The ranking list was, in fact, incorporated in the more general discourse on academic freedom, attributing to the universities the exclusive right of determining what academic excellence is and not tolerating any outside interference in this matter.

This brings us to another interesting comparison with the current practice and evaluation of sociology in post-communist societies in Eastern and Central Europe. As Pepka Boyadjieva has shown with regard to Bulgaria,⁵ when sociology was allowed to exist under the communist regime, in most cases (with some exception regarding Poland), it did so in the service of the state and of the ruling political party. It was therefore tainted with ideological and political biases. With the demise of the communist regime, sociology faced the challenge of how to continue being socially engaged while also being value-free. Furthermore, in the post-communist period, sociology was all too often confounded with public opinion polls or other kinds of surveys, often undertaken by sponsors from various sectors in the society, including business interests or political parties. Their results enjoyed little credibility as they were assumed to have been manipulated to serve the sponsors' interests. Under these circumstances, academic detachment and the creation of an independent professional sociological culture became the goal, associated with an aspiration for universal criteria of quality and excellence, untainted by local political or economic interests. In the words of Boyadjieva, sociologists feared that they would fall under ideological control, however diverse it may now be, if they dealt with current social problems. Incited by such fears, several sociologists preferred to turn theoretical problems and large scope studies which they considered to be more value-free⁶.

⁵ Pepka Boyadjieva, "Social Commitment and Academic Values in Sociology: Rediscovering Sociology in a Society in Transition", paper presented at the ISA meeting of the Council of National Associations, Miami, Florida, August 9-11, 2005.

⁶ Boyadjieva, "Social Commitment and Academic Values in Sociology...", pp.10-11.

Under a very different socio-political background, things have developed very differently in Israel, and apparently in Taiwan as well. In Israel, some pro-Zionist ideological bias has been assumed for sociology in the 1950s and 60s, when it also appeared to be the most socially relevant, a point that I would further elaborate below. From the 1970s onwards, a more critical trend developed in Israeli sociology, accusing the earlier works of being too embedded in the Zionist nation-building aspirations. However, even in its early development, and certainly in the present, adhering to global, i.e. Western, criteria of academic excellence has been the undisputed norm of all sociologists of diverse ideological shades, and so it seems was the case in Taiwan too. In both countries (and perhaps in Israel even more than in Taiwan) the rush to become ‘more royalist than the king’ in maintaining Western academic excellence appear to have created, perhaps unintended, but quite perverse tendencies of detachment from the concerns of their society. The exaggerated ambition to create the ‘little Harvard of the Middle East’ has created, at least in Israel, an acute issue of doubtful social relevance.

Two years ago, a young Israeli sociologist by the name of Alec Epstein published an article, in Hebrew, in an unranked journal⁷, in which he claimed, on the basis of topics covered in the annual conferences of the Israeli Sociological Society, that Israeli sociology is progressively detaching itself from relevance to its society as it no longer focuses on the contemporary problems of the society. Epstein thought that the main reason for this detachment was the over-preoccupation of Israeli sociologists with paradigmatic and ideological debates among themselves⁸. First and foremost, Epstein thought, there is a fierce debate going on between the so-called Jerusalem school, the founders of Israeli sociology, and a younger, more critical generation of theorists who, as we have already mentioned, accuse the founders of having been too closely linked to the Zionist state-formation or society-building paradigm. Israeli sociologists are so taken up with this debate, Epstein claims, that they tend to forget that society has evolved since then, and that the current acute issues of the society are quite different from those of the early years of independence. Rather than study contemporary problems, Israeli sociologists rehash past disagreements. New issues,

⁷ Alec D. Epstein, “The Decline of Israeli Sociology” *Tehelet* (Hebrew), No: 15, Fall 2003: 89-117.

⁸ On such debates see, for example, Uri Ram, “The time of the ‘Post-’: Remarks on Sociology in Israel since the 90s” *Theory and Criticism* (Hebrew), 26, Spring 2005: 241-254.

such as the structure of communities in settlements established in occupied territories, to give just one example, do not attract sufficient attention.

Epstein's article has been a subject of harsh criticism from all circles⁹. Nonetheless, many were jolted by the raw and penetrating nature of the attack, perhaps explaining the equally strong criticism. Some of the criticism on Epstein's article has been on empirical grounds, refuting the validity of his data, finding serious methodological flaws in it. Others took issue with the reasons he suggested for this situation. I would like to analyze both criticisms in a bit more detail.

If the ISS annual conference, held in Tel Hai College in February 2005, is any measure of it, the data indeed indicate the opposite of what Epstein claims. The theme of the annual conference was 'The Different Faces of the Israeli Periphery' and the focus was squarely on various social manifestations of marginality in society, from national minorities to new immigrants, entrenched poverty whether coupled with gender differences or not, life under uncertainty in communities established on politically disputed land, peripheral higher education, as manifested in the rapid development of Israeli colleges, beyond the seven university level institutions, etc. There was very little theoretical discussion in the conference, not even in the plenary sessions. Most presentations were down-to-earth data analyses on specific topics related to the Israeli society.

If we look at who attended the last conference, however, some more credence could be given to Alec Epstein's claims (he, by the way, did NOT attend the conference). While attendance records were broken for at least the last five years (more than 400 participants, more than 300 presenters of papers), relatively few leading prominent sociologists were among the participants, and even less so among the presenters. One third of the presenters were graduate students (also due to strongly subsidized registration fees for students). Another one fourth of them were people from outside academic institutions. And a similar number, both from within and from outside academia, were not sociologists, but rather people from related fields, social workers,

⁹ One such criticism can be found in Moshe Shokeid, "Distress in the Discipline: Remarks on the article by Alec D. Epstein 'The Decline of the Israeli Sociology' " *Catharsis* (Hebrew), Fall 2004: 46-52

geographers, political scientists, jurists, urban or other social planners, etc., and of course anthropologists who, in Israel, are difficult to distinguish from sociologists.

In other words, the annual meeting of the national association of Israeli sociologists, held in a small college at the northern tip of the country, only a few miles from the Lebanese and Syrian borders, and focusing on the Israeli periphery, also attracted mostly the large periphery of Israeli sociologists, but relatively few of its core elite elements, from both the older and the younger generations. My sense is that Epstein is basically right in his observations of the Israeli sociology's declining social relevance but wrong in the data he provides as support for his claim. Presentations at annual conferences do deal with current social issues of the country, but they represent mostly the work of students or of people at the margins of the occupation. They do not reflect the predominant discourse among those considered to be the leading, most influential, most quoted people, or even those who are seen as being the academically most promising members of the young generation. A clear disconnect does appear to exist between what is perceived as academic excellence and current social relevance.

I would also like to suggest that Epstein is wrong in the reasons he attributes for this declining social relevance. The detachment of the leading Israeli sociologists from the acute current problems of their society is not, in my view, due to their being too preoccupied with theoretical, paradigmatic or ideological debates among themselves. It is more a reflection of the constraints created by academic institutions whose evaluation procedures have been presented above. Israeli universities are singularly oriented towards maintaining their status in the global, i.e. Western arena. In order to survive in them, a scholar does not have to prove national relevance. He/she has to prove that they are top figures in the global arena, measured by place and quantity of world scale publication. It is deemed of utmost importance to maintain a global network and world recognition. For this reason, Israeli universities continue to be rather generous in the travel allowances and sabbatical arrangements they offer to their faculty, despite deepening financial difficulties caused mainly by a cut in government support to their budget. The financial difficulties have seriously damaged, however, the provision of basic research tools, from library acquisitions (almost at a standstill in social sciences) to computer facilities, equipment and research grants. Nonetheless, this deteriorating support have not stopped the universities from raising

their demand from their faculty members even more in terms of academic productivity and excellence, judged in a rather narrow and arbitrary fashion, as explained above.

Academic excellence is the key word, no matter how vaguely defined. Organizational and teaching skills play very little role in it, and so does 'good citizenship', i.e. using one's skills and knowledge trying to explain and perhaps suggest ways to alleviate problems in society. On the contrary, such activities may even be a burden, perceived as an 'easy way out' for those facing difficulties in placing articles in Category A or B journals that probably no one besides reviewers would read. The constraints of academic survival lead to theoretization, conceptualization, and disengagement from social relevance. The fear of being accused of mediocrity is much stronger than the urge for national social involvement. Most core Israeli sociologists, taking their cue from university administrations, truly worship the Global Ivory Tower. This attitude, and not their ideological or paradigmatic disputes among themselves is the main reason for their social detachment.

But why, then, did Israeli sociology flourish in the early years of independence and was also considered socially relevant? Was academic excellence less emphasized then? Certainly not! It is true that the number of publications expected was lower, the global competition was less accentuated and universities did not try to create so-called objective criteria of journal rankings that only reflect existing academic power structures and force people to send manuscripts precisely to those places where they have the least chance of being accepted. But this was not the reason for the social relevance of sociological research at that time. Academic expectations were still considered quite high and global for its time. What really explains, in my view, the flourishing of socially relevant and internationally recognized Israeli sociology at that time was the fact that the Israeli society as a whole was seen then as a peculiar social experiment that aroused great global interest. A society was being formed out of the ashes of historical persecution that had just culminated in genocide. Communities from all over the world were being brought together and were learning to live together. Old traditions were being quickly challenged. An old language was being resuscitated, a new culture was being created. New settlement forms were being experimented. State institutions were being built and a military organization was being

formed to defend the new entity in a very hostile environment. Under these circumstances, it was not particularly difficult to publish in the world academic arena a study that highlighted any of these processes. However, as routinization set in, and as the favorable image of Israel waned and disappeared, such problems stopped arousing the same interest and curiosity. Then the disconnect between the target audience and the society on which sociological research was based became more apparent, creating an increasingly wider gap between academic excellence and social relevance, just as the academic performance expectations from the young generation of scholars rose perceptively, setting in motion the 'double squeeze' mentioned above.

Having said all that, however, I still cannot explain why contemporary Israeli political scientists, who face the same academic constraints as their sociologist or anthropologist colleagues, are still, today, marginally more active in public discourse (though not by much). Perhaps this slight difference has to do with the subject matter of politics which is more inexorably connected with public debate than the topics addressed by sociologists and anthropologists. As for psychologists and economists, their stronger showing in the national public discourse is more easily explained as they have reached a stronger professional recognition in the general public and have a much larger pool of analysts who come from outside universities and are less dependent on academic constraints.

There is very little reason to expect a significant change in the social relevance of sociologists struggling for survival in Israeli universities. If at all, universities have become even more strident in their demand for 'pure' (?) academic excellence, by which they also try to protect their academic freedom and independence, i.e. forestall any possibility of politicization and government intervention which, in the deeply divided Israeli society, is considered, and perhaps rightly so, as a great threat, far more dangerous than lack of social involvement. Under these circumstances, for social relevance one has to turn, again, to the periphery of sociological occupation, to those colleagues employed in colleges, or outside academic institutions, and to the many graduate students the great majority of whom has no chance of obtaining a position in one of the seven universities of the country.

Colleges are indeed places where an increasing number of sociologists, with a PhD, are offered jobs, as sociology has established itself as a ‘must’ topic in departments of management, education, communication, social work and general behavioral sciences. And colleges are indeed places where sociologists engage in more socially relevant research, as well as stressing teaching. However, colleges, unlike universities, are not independent in their academic promotions. Each promotion has to be approved by the National Council of Higher Education after the candidate in question is reviewed by a committee of, guess what, university professors!...Those professors, naturally try to apply to college candidates the same criteria of promotion (foreign reviewers, category A journals and what not) that they use for their own colleagues. College professors are, therefore, under intense pressure of ‘academization’, i.e. following the academic excellence route at the expense of social relevance.

Outside academia altogether, however, sociologists do engage in daily activities that are socially relevant and draw on their professional expertise. They engage in research, teaching, and semi-clinical work (at the level of groups and organizations, not individuals). This is seen quite clearly in the great expansion of sociologists working in the armed forces as mentioned above. Another recent development that we mentioned above is the propagation of NGOs dealing with social planning, organizational consultancy and other service provision and employing an increasing number of sociologists. This is not the critically engaged ‘public sociology’ that Burawoy has advocated.¹⁰ It may be closer to what he called ‘policy sociology’ or we may call it, in fact, ‘professional sociology’, but in a non-academic sense, i.e. the contrary of how Burawoy defined the term. In these non-academic units, socially relevant sociological work is done on a regular daily basis, not in the form of public discourse and instant interpretation of social trends, but in the form of daily tackling of social problems as they occur. This, perhaps, is the ultimate social relevance in a professional sense, but only a very small minority of Israeli sociologists experiences it in their occupational life. And they, too, have to fight constantly for recognition and legitimacy of their work not only from the general public, but even from fellow sociologists.

¹⁰ Michael Burawoy, “For Public Sociology,” *American Sociological Review*, 70, 2005: 4-28.

We have thus closed the circle and have returned to our point of departure in this article. Paradoxically, those sociologists who are most insecure professionally are also the ones whose work is most directly relevant to their society. In a country like Israel, ridden by conflicts and beset by existential social problems of much greater magnitude than in many other places in the world, prominence in sociological practice means academic detachment and reduced national social relevance while strong bridges are built, completely over-flying one's society, with a global reference group of like-minded thinkers. And this occurs in a field of knowledge that claims to be the most 'social' of all.