GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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International Sociological Association

SPECIAL ISSUE
In Memory of Michael Burawoy

Michael and the Two Karls

Klaus Dörre
Brigitte Aulenbacher
Roland Atzmüller
Fabienne Décieux
Raphael Deindl
Karin Fischer
Johanna Grubner
Nancy Fraser
Ngai-Ling Sum
Bob Jessop
Heidi Gottfried
Michelle Williams

Michael and Public and Global Sociology

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Testimonials

Ari Sitas
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Open Section

> A Time for Sociology

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> Editorial

Special Issue in Memory of Michael Burawoy

As part of the celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of *Global Dialogue*, founded by Michael Burawoy in 2010, we agreed with him in January this year that this issue would be devoted to reviewing the advances in public and global sociology over the past fifteen years.

Michael's vision for this special issue was ambitious, as he expressed it in his own words in personal correspondence: *"Breno, I think it is a terrific idea to have a special session for GD on its 15-year anniversary. Perhaps you could produce a special issue with contributions from the regions (though that may be a challenge) or focus on some of the major challenges for public sociology in turbulent times, such as big issues of the day – war, climate change, inequality, and abortion – all examined through a global lens. An alternative would be to solicit pieces from people who are likely to produce something interesting. Another possibility would be to put out a call to RCs for them to contribute something. You can ask for proposals. The sky is the limit!"*

Tragically, Michael passed away in a hit-and-run accident on February 3, 2025. The tributes and remembrances after his passing were immediate and heartfelt. On February 8, the International Sociological Association (ISA) organized an Online Tribute in Memory of Michael Burawoy. Over the past few months, colleagues, students, activists, and organizations from every corner of the globe have been remembering him for his incisive intellect, generosity, and dedication to social justice.

Michael's impact as a mentor, public intellectual, and transformative scholar has inspired thousands of sociologists worldwide. His legacy encompasses groundbreaking work on labor and ethnography, a deep commitment to public sociology, and the cultivation of a global community of thinkers and activists shaped by his mentorship.

Hence now this issue is not only about celebrating the relevance of public sociology but also about honoring Michael's memory and legacy. With it, we both celebrate the 15th anniversary of *Global Dialogue* and reflect on the development of public and global sociology through the lens of Michael's career and contributions. For this special issue, we invited Michael's colleagues, students, and friends from around the world to share their insights, analyses, and personal reflections on his work and the moments they shared with him.

The issue is organized around three thematic threads. The first, generously edited by Klaus Dörre and Brigitte Aulenbacher, previous editors of *Global Dialogue*, explores Michael's engagement with sociological Marxism, examining both its theoretical rigor and practical relevance. Drawing on his dialogues with the 'two Karls' – Marx and Polanyi – the pieces address questions of labor, exploitation, market fundamentalism, and the transformative potential of Marxist sociology, while reflecting on Michael's intellectual influences. This section, featuring contributions from Nancy Fraser, Bob Jessop, and Michelle Williams, among others, celebrates the depth and breadth of his analytical vision and his capacity to connect critical theory with contemporary social struggles.

The second thematic thread focuses on Michael's pioneering work in public and global sociology. Here, contributions reflect on challenges and possibilities of sociology as a global vocation, one that is attentive to urgent issues such as inequality, social movements, and transnational dialogues. The essays highlight Michael's innovations in methodology, his insistence on a sociology engaged with civil society, and his influence on debates across continents – from Europe to South America, Asia, and Africa. Together, they illustrate how Michael's work provided both a compass and a framework for understanding the world in turbulent times.

The third thread gathers personal testimonials and reflections, emphasizing the human dimension of Michael's scholarship. Through encounters, debates, and fieldwork experiences, these contributions reveal the warmth, mentorship, and inspiration that characterized his relationships with students, colleagues, and activists. They show how his work resonated in local struggles, from South Africa to Bangladesh, and how it continues to guide sociologists in thinking critically about society while remaining committed to transformative action.

Michael Burawoy inspired a vision of sociology that is both rigorous and committed to social transformation. This special issue celebrates his extraordinary life and work, reaffirming our collective commitment to public and global sociology – a sociology that not only analyzes the world but also seeks to transform it, planting the seeds of new ideas, debates, and actions. At a time when sociology and sociologists are under attack, it is more important than ever to reclaim the kind of critical sociology that Michael so powerfully advocated. For this reason, this special issue also includes the Declaration "A Time for Sociology", presented by the ISA at the 5th ISA Forum of Sociology in Rabat on July 6, 2025.

We hope that the insights, reflections, and research presented here inspire sociologists worldwide to advance a public and global sociology that is courageous, critical, and transformative. ■

Breno Bringel, and **Carolina Vestena** and **Vitória Gonzalez**,
editor and assistant editors of *Global Dialogue*

> *Global Dialogue* can be found in multiple languages at its website.

> Submissions should be sent to: globaldialogue@isa-sociology.org.

> Editorial Board

"a sociology *of*, *in*, and *for* society, combining global and local perspectives"

The section "Michael and the Two Karls", edited by Klaus Dörre and Brigitte Aulenbacher, explores Michael's engagement with ***sociological Marxism.***

The second thematic section focuses on Michael's pioneering work in ***public and global sociology.***

The final section gathers ***personal testimonials*** *and reflections, emphasizing the human dimension of Michael's scholarship.*

Credit for the cover page: Michael Burawoy at the European University at St. Petersburg, 2015. Photo by Tatyana Lytkina.

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"Public sociology without Burawoy is like a bird without a wing. But fortunately, he taught many young sociologists 'how to fly'"

Labinot Kunushevci (Kosovo)

> Sociological Marxism:

What Remains to be Done

by **Klaus Dörre**, Emeritus Professor, University of Jena, Germany

Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi are key sources of inspiration for the sociological Marxism developed by Michael Burawoy together with his friend Erik Olin Wright.

> Marxism: roots, trunk, branches

Burawoy understands Marxism as a living tradition; one rooted in the historical materialism, humanism and specific understanding of theory and practice of the young Marx. From these roots grew the great "trunk" of Marxism – the critique of political economy elaborated in *Capital* – from which, in turn, many branches have sprouted: German Marxism prior to World War I, Soviet Marxism, which solidified into dogma and, as reactions to these, Western and Third World Marxism. Some branches wither, others bloom; each corresponds to the three waves of marketization (the first in the nineteenth century, the second from 1918 on, and the third beginning in the 1970s) that Burawoy outlines in his critical engagement with Polanyi. A reading of Polanyi alongside Marx is central to understanding a sociological Marxism that reflects on the third wave.

> Marxism after Polanyi

Burawoy breaks with the conventional Marxist idea that the sphere of production is where opposition to capitalism is to be sought. For Burawoy, production is precisely where consent to capitalism is generated. Given the availability of a global "surplus" labor population, semi-protected employment appears to the worker not as exploitation but as a coveted privilege. Subjectively, it is not exploitation, which is still indispensable for capital accumulation, but rather the experience of the "Satanic mill" of the market (Polanyi) that shapes the manifold of human existences.

> Sociological Marxism

To this rethinking of traditional Marxism, Burawoy adds further key ideas. Firstly, sociological Marxism needs to see the commodification of nature as the defining feature of the third wave of marketization. Burawoy thus calls for markets to be constrained and the means of production to be socialized, which could mean expanding but also restricting basic freedoms. Secondly, third-wave Marxism will focus on democratic civil society beyond the market and the state. Markets and states will not disappear, but they must be placed under the control of democratic civil societies. Thirdly, this Marxism conceives of civil society as both global and national, since a civil society that defends humanity against looming ecological catastrophes must ultimately have a global dimension. Fourthly, such a Marxism can draw on the breadth of sociological knowledge contained in widely accepted works of market critique. Fifthly, Burawoy keeps the idea of a socialist society alive by seeking points of leverage for a molecular transformation by civil society, that is, the hope for real utopias. Since he discovers embryonic forms of lived alternatives worldwide, sixthly, he develops sociological Marxism into a global Marxism which, seventhly, methodologically dispenses with theoretical certainties and practical imperatives in order to test new equilibria between theory and practice.

> Authoritarian liberalism

With his idea of a sociologically grounded socialism, Burawoy has left us a legacy that we must take up if we are to advance the chance of a future worth living. Three tasks seem central to me in this regard. One is that we must analyze the new social bifurcations emerging in response to the commodification of nature and knowledge, as well as the finance-driven *Landnahme* of labor and money.

The third wave of marketization is coming to an end, with counter-movements to market expansion increasingly emerging from authoritarian states and governments. Meanwhile, democratic civil society, in all its diversity and independence, is increasingly under threat. We are beginning to experience a fourth wave, which – following Hermann Heller, a Marxist theorist of the second wave – can be

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“authoritarian liberalism can only be defeated if credible alternatives emerge within the political system”

termed “authoritarian liberalism.” This term identifies an authoritarian state which completely relinquishes its authority when it comes to the economy and recognizes only the freedom of the market. Today we seem to be experiencing just such a reaction to conflict-ridden socioecological transformation: the economy is being freed from bureaucratic shackles, while climate protection, if still pursued at all, is being left to market forces and technological innovation. Neo-mercantilist trade policies are ending the era of market-driven globalization, elite deals are replacing transnational diplomacy, oligarchic rule is hollowing out democracy from within, and a fundamentalist culture war is liquidating basic human rights. Class privileges are being entrenched, sexism and racism are mutating into state ideology, and universities, to which Burawoy assigned a central role in the fight against commodification, are subject to state tyranny. This new wave of commercialization is centered on social relations. Since there is supposedly no longer enough for everyone, only the most productive inhabitants of the earth are to have a right to life; and this in prosperity zones sealed off from the disaster-prone rest of the world by all available means.

> Return of the class question

In a world marked by wars and disasters, another of the vital tasks Burawoy has left us stems from the idea that it is not enough to seek alternatives within niches of the old system. While such efforts to build socialism from below are still important, it is also clear that the “authoritarian liberalism” of the new oligarchs can only be defeated if credible alternatives capable of winning majority support emerge within the whole political system. It would therefore be negligent to abandon the struggle for state power. In order to counteract the ongoing destruction of reason, the exploitation and domination that hide behind market logic must once again be exposed to public scrutiny. Erik Olin Wright’s reflections on an integrative class theory which connects Marx not only with Polanyi, but also with Weber and Bourdieu, and not least with the intellectual voices of “black” and feminist Marxism, seem to me to be central to this undertaking.

> Global Marxism

Regardless of how one feels about these proposals, the development of a sociological Marxism with a global self-image remains an aspiration yet to be realized and the third task I see as central to Burawoy’s legacy. With Michael’s shocking death, we are witnessing the gradual passing of a generation of sociologists shaped both academically and politically by the (post-)1968 movements. New generations are growing up of course and it is a worthy task for sociologists of my age to support and encourage all those using Michael’s idea of sociological Marxism as a basis for reflection. We can support the younger generation by listening to them; by criticizing the new central committees for eternal truths as well as the idea of a Marxist “supermarket” where insights are picked and chosen according to the Zeitgeist, without engaging with the everyday social grievances of the oppressed. In short, we should urgently seek platforms and formats that enable an exchange that would realize what Michael envisioned as a performative idea: a global Marxism that indicates the way towards overcoming capitalism, its wars and catastrophes. ■

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The original article was translated from German to English by Adrian Wilding. Those interested in these reflections can also consult the results of the project *Emancipation through Socialism*, run by the author together with students and young sociologists, at:
https://emasoc.de/sozialismus-von-unten-emanzipatorische-ansaetze/

> Resisting Exploitation and Market Fundamentalism

by **Brigitte Aulenbacher**, **Roland Atzmüller**, **Fabienne Décieux**, **Raphael Deindl**, **Karin Fischer** and **Johanna Grubner**, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria

Michael Burawoy's sociology is Marxian, Polanyian and so much more. This article reflects on his most impressive and inspiring work, culminating in his analysis of twenty-first century market capitalism.

> Michael and Karl Marx

The breadth and persistence of Michael's work are difficult to summarize in just a few words: one might get lost in a bundle of intriguing trajectories. No wonder he described his long-standing engagement with the development of labor processes as the "Odyssey of a Marxist Ethnographer" or understood his role for the renewal of (a sociological) Marxism as that of a "traveling interpreter".

Michael's theoretical perspective encompasses a comprehensive grasp of debates within Marxism as well as (classical) sociology. His work on labor processes is engaged with, among other things, Marxist assumptions about the crisis-prone nature of capitalism, the significance of class struggles, the establishment of the ruling class's hegemony in and through the factory, and the conditions for revolutionary transformation. However, from the outset, his uses of the Marxist theoretical tradition were determined by a critical approach to some of its general assumptions. His studies of labor processes demonstrated the necessarily variable ways through which the structural features of the mode of production are realized. This insight precluded any dogmatic application of theoretical concepts, whether in science or in political practice. His long-term perspective demanded that we grapple with the transformative dynamics of capitalism.

> Complementing Karl Marx with Karl Polanyi

The fundamental transformation of capitalism since the 1970s, which Michael diagnosed as the "third wave of marketization", and the end of "real socialism", led him to shift focus toward the relationship between society and the market. This change underlies his conceptualization of sociological Marxism, drawing on thinkers as diverse as Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi. For Michael, a sociological Marxism is transnational, aims to incorporate the experiences of decolonization and postcolonialism, accounts for the patriarchal fragmentation of societies, and recognizes the diversity of social struggles and potential forms of a post-capitalist society.

Michael's ambition to reconceptualize the Marxist legacy "for our times" was also based on recognition that it must abandon theoretical certainties. Instead, what is needed is an egalitarian dialogue between critical social theory and science, and transformative social practice.

In particular, since the financial crisis of 2008, Michael drew more and more on Karl Polanyi's masterpiece *The Great Transformation*. In his presidential address "Facing an unequal world" at the XVIII World Congress of Sociology in Japan, he presented his reading of Polanyi for today as well as the results of controversies and debates concerning public sociology, i.e., the tasks of sociology in times of fundamental crises. Reflecting on sociology became a key component of his Polanyian analysis of contemporary market fundamentalism and vice versa; both leading to what he called a "Polanyian *global sociology*": a sociology of, *in*, and *for* society, strongly related to civil society and combining global and local perspectives.

> Market fundamentalism as "lived experience"

Inspired by insights into transformative change in many countries, Michael's interpretation of Polanyi's "Great Transformation" was quite original. It impressively combined a historical and sociological reflection on the "movements" and "countermovements" of past centuries and the present. One of the most important parts of Michael's Polanyian theory of market fundamentalism is the com-

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"a sociology *of*, *in*, and *for* society, combining global and local perspectives"

bined analysis of the three waves of marketization at the macro- and meso-level, and of marketization as "the lived experience" of people in their everyday life. From a historical perspective, he showed that the market-fundamentalist commodification of the Polanyian "fictitious commodities" – land/nature, labor and money, to which he added knowledge – provoked "countermovements" in the form of struggles for labor, social and human rights, be they class-based struggles or demands for legal protection and regulatory frameworks.

Crucially, his perspective of "countermovements" of our times allows us to understand that everyday life experience stimulates different forms of social protest. In times of market fundamentalism, not only commodification but also processes of *de-*, *ex-*, and *recommodification* can lead to fundamental problems, especially for those excluded from market exchange due to unemployment or in the face of unprofitable and therefore ignored ecological problems. Far from romanticizing civil society – particularly amid increasing right-wing populism – the latitude of labor and social movements in the early twenty-first century represents for Michael a wide range of Polanyian "countermovements" that are central to the ongoing transformative change of capitalism.

> Michael's sociology of and for social movements

Building on Polanyi's analysis, Michael argued that commodification is the defining experience of our time. Exploitation, though fundamental to any critique of capitalism, is often not consciously perceived as what it is – an insight Michael had already developed in *Manufacturing Consent*. In his "general theory", the three waves of marketization are not viewed in isolation but understood as interconnected through a dialectical – perhaps even regressive – dynamics.

Michael expected the commodification of nature to play a leading role in the current phase. He stressed that an effective countermovement must emerge on a global scale, as only at that level can the destruction of nature and the global machinations of finance capital be meaningfully contested. Yet such a countermovement must overcome entrenched geopolitical boundaries, national constraints, and the short-term logic engineered by marketization.

Against naive optimism, Michael advocated an uncompromising pessimism. He drew on both Polanyi and Marx, combining Polanyi's concepts of fictitious commodities and countermovements with a Marxian analysis of capitalist dynamics. Only through a careful examination of the material forces driving marketization can we begin to assess whether contemporary social movements are contributing to its intensification, intentionally or not, or to reversing it.

> Missing Michael

Having been familiar with his sociology for years, we are looking back on a longstanding and enriching collaboration with Michael. We are grateful for the many opportunities to meet with him, to benefit from his work, to exchange ideas and collaborate, as well as for his intellectual generosity, his academic engagement and stimulating sense of humor. As a visiting professor at our university, Michael inspired the foundation of the International Karl Polanyi Society in Austria. As the founder of *Global Dialogue*, he invited us to contribute to this amazing magazine. Much more could be said. An outstanding thinker of our times has passed. We miss him. ■

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> For Michael Burawoy: An Appreciation

by **Nancy Fraser**, New School for Social Research, USA

All of us were shocked and dismayed by the news of Michael Burawoy's tragic and senseless death. For me, that news also brought pangs of regret for missed opportunities. I had long admired Michael's intellectual brilliance, political commitment, and personal warmth. But I had squandered the chance to develop a sustained relationship with him. In fact, we interacted only sporadically: first, at Northwestern University, in the mid 1990s, when he was a visiting professor and I was preparing to leave for the New School; and later, at a series of conferences and seminars, where we discussed Marx and Polanyi, Gramsci and Du Bois, all with a view to clarifying prospects for democratic–socialist transformation. Each of these meetings was fruitful in itself but also pregnant with future possibilities. At Northwestern, Michael intervened in my support at a difficult, critical moment in what can only be described an act of selfless, spontaneous generosity. At conferences, he engaged me in brilliant, impassioned debate, which pushed me to think in a deeper, more critical vein. It is only now, when faced with his loss, that I see how important he was to me. And it is only now that I sense how much I missed by not pursuing more sustained dialogue with him.

> Shared inspiration

Certainly, there was a lot to discuss, given how much Michael and I shared. Granted, he was a British-born sociologist who studied labor regimes on three continents, while I am a relatively provincial U.S. philosopher. But both of us were baby boomers and New Leftists who found our respective voices in an extraordinary moment of emancipatory global upsurge. Out of that experience both of us forged commitments to develop a Marxism for "postcommunist" times that could integrate hard-learned lessons from previous socialist deformations with indispensable, if underdeveloped, insights from new social movements. What strikes me most now, however, is that both of us found grist for this mill in many of the same thinkers.

Karl Polanyi is a case in point. In him, both Michael and I spied a thinker who complemented and enriched Marx. Unconvinced by those who cast "the two Karls" as mutually antithetical, we independently developed readings of *The Great Transformation* as offering extended, trans-Marxian understandings of capitalist crisis and social struggle.

> New ways of understanding struggles in capitalist societies

For both of us, Polanyi's account of the fictitious commodification of land, labor and money disclosed the structural roots in capitalist society of crises of ecology, social reproduction, and finance—despite the distance of the first two from "economics." But Michael's formulation of this point was uniquely brilliant, conjuring a Polanyi who was non-essentialist and deeply Marxian. In Burawoy's words, fictitious commodification reduces land, labor, and money to exchange value and thereby destroys their use value, including as conditions of possibility for a market in true commodities.

For both of us, too, Polanyi's idea of a "double movement," pitting exponents of extended marketization against proponents of social protection from it, suggested a new way to understand struggles in capitalist societies. Located far from the point of production, these conflicts are what I've called "boundary struggles" which contest the grammar of life and institutional design of society, as opposed to the distribution of surplus value. For both Michael and me, then, Polanyi's figure served to overcome economism, multiplying sites and forms of anti-capitalist activism beyond those central to classical Marxism.

> Diverging interpretations: skepticism versus power and promise

And yet there was one crucial difference. While I was deeply skeptical of Polanyi's invocation of "society," which I took to be essentialist and to obscure non-market-based

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“liberal elites clearly lack the will to defend the very system that once empowered them”

domination, Michael glossed it positively—as “active society.” Called into being by capitalist development and thus, historically specific, Polanyian society appeared to him to be full of dynamism. Bursting with activist energies, it prefigured a new form of socialism in which the supposedly self-regulating market would be subordinated to a truly self-regulating society. It is only now, having just reread his brilliant 2003 essay, “For A Sociological Marxism,” that I have come to appreciate the power and promise of Michael’s interpretation.

> Convergence through the work of Gramsci

Famously, that essay posited a convergence between Polanyi and Antonio Gramsci, who represents a second major point of reference I shared with Michael. The Italian, too, posited the centrality of society in *developed* capitalism. Unlike Polanyi, however, Gramsci theorized “civil society” dialectically: both as an arena of class contestation and as a constraint upon it. Specific to developed capitalist societies, civil society is an intermediating space between economy and state, a locus of schools and churches, law courts and welfare agencies, universities and research centers, trade unions and professional associations, media and museums. It is here that public opinion and everyday understandings are formed and circulated, that bourgeois common sense is rendered hegemonic, and that the consent of the dominated to class rule is (more or less) won. But that is not all. Civil society is also a space of contestation, where consent can fray and counterhegemony can in principle be constructed. Simultaneously a terrain of containment and contestation, it signals both the relative autonomy of politics from economics and the former’s embeddedness in specific institutional matrices, class-structured forcefields, and historical conjunctures. For Michael, as for me, that view was foundational. Both of us made ample use of a broad range of Gramscian concepts, including civil society, the expanded (or integral) state, the historic bloc, crisis of authority, interregnum, passive revolution, subalternity, hegemony and counterhegemony, common sense and good sense, war of position and war of movement, Fordism and “Americanism.”

Michael and I first connected over the use I made of some of these ideas in an early essay. Operating largely on intuition, I half-consciously channeled Gramscian tropes to analyze “struggles over needs” in late social-democratic, welfare-state capitalism. Played out in the historically specific realm of “the social,” where previously “private” matters became contested, these struggles disputed not just the satisfaction of needs, but also their interpretation and the modes of governmentality by which they could be met and tamed within state agencies. They, too, were boundary struggles, but ones that, contra Polanyi, formed a “triple movement,” involving not two but three sets of antagonists: radical activists who militated for the public political character of “runaway” needs and for their participatory–democratic disposition; conservatives who aimed to drive those needs back into family and market enclaves that had previously depoliticalized them; and progressive liberal technocrats who sought to translate these needs into administrative-ese and satisfy them bureaucratically. Michael understood better and earlier than I did how much this account owed to Gramsci. His 2003 discussion of this work inspired me to undertake a systematic study of *The Prison Notebooks* in a graduate seminar. For that I’m forever grateful.

> When hegemonic rule becomes enforced rather than consensual

Michael understood, too, how much Gramsci has to offer now, in a much darker historical conjuncture. In an era dominated by Trumpism (and its many analogues across the world), it is useful to recall the great Italian Communist’s contrast between the “normal” operation of hegemonic rule in a developed liberal–democratic society and its pathological political devolution in fascism. Michael’s gloss on Gramsci’s account is exemplary. Explicating the latter’s concept of hegemonic rule as a balanced amalgam of consent and force, he reminds us that, for Gramsci, the capitalist state in its non-pathological form is “only the outer ditch, behind which [stands the] powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” that is civil society. Insofar as that “system” promulgates consent to class rule, it diminishes both the need for and visibility of direct force.

Today, of course, those fortresses and earthworks are under assault—and not from the Left. In the US, at least, the MAGA state is systematically annexing the central institutions of liberal–democratic civil society: shredding the autonomy of educational, scientific, and cultural institutions; of state-independent media and government-independent state agencies; of private firms, NGOs, and professional associations. By thus undoing bourgeois society’s “normal” channels for generating consent, it is shifting the hegemonic balance in favor of force. The visibility of the latter now looms large, both as brute reality and as impending threat. Policing is militarized, protest

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is quashed, and migrants are snatched off the streets by masked men and summarily deported. Fear settles in over the land. If this looks a lot like incipient fascism, it portends a fascism of a new kind, which invokes the spectre, not of an actual socialist movement, but of a "woke Left" that was allied with neoliberals and has little working-class support.

> How to defend against (proto-)fascism: the mobilization of Burawoy's insights

Where, in this conjecture, might an effective opposition be centered? Surely not among liberal elites. Far from mounting a coordinated militant self-defense of civil society, that stratum's leading lights have abandoned any thought of collective action and rushed to negotiate private deals. Clearly, they lack the will to defend the very system that once empowered them. Effective opposition, if it arrives, will come from elsewhere.

Might such opposition come from below? Might there emerge a subaltern-led historic bloc that could mount a credible opposition to (proto-)fascism? Presumably, the principal aim of such a bloc would not be to restore the "non-pathological" balance of force and consent that "normally" solidifies bourgeois authority in support of capitalist class domination. It would rather be to overcome such authority and domination. But for such a bloc to be viable, critical masses of subaltern subjects would have to overcome gulfs of toxic misrecognition that now divide them—above all, gulfs of race. Is such a process still conceivable?

Michael would have much to say on this matter. It's a terrible loss for the Left that his voice is now stilled. Fortunately, however, he left us a rich trove of rigorous and imaginative reflection on which we can draw. It is by mobilizing his insights to clarify present-day prospects for emancipation that we can best honor this brilliant and humane thinker. ■

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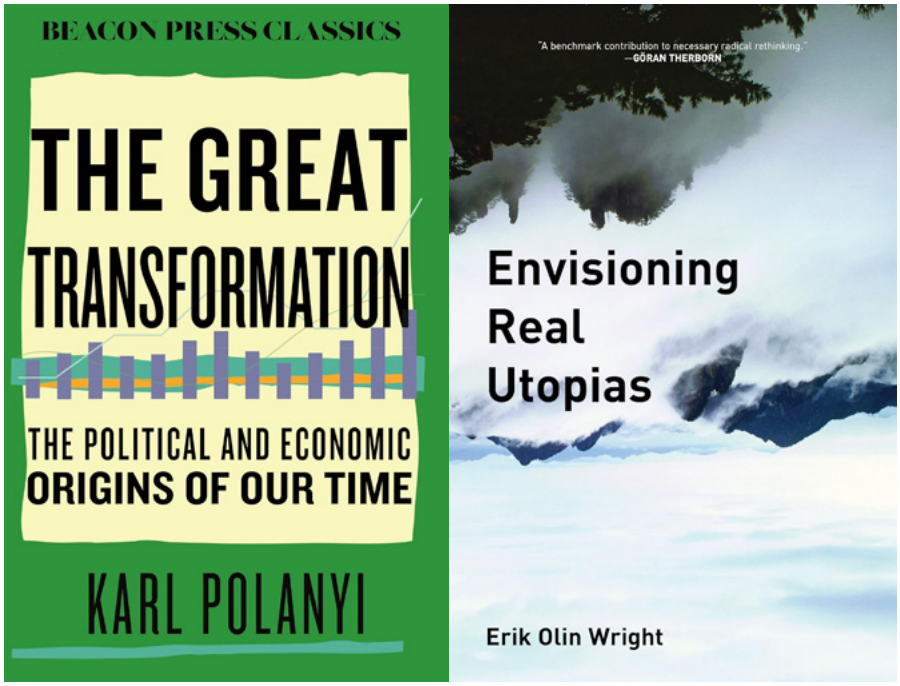
> Michael's Public Sociology and the Attention Economy

by **Ngai-Ling Sum** and **Bob Jessop**, Lancaster University, UK



Karl Polanyi's The Great Transformation *(Beacon Press, 2025 edition), and Erik Olin Wright*'s Envisioning Real Utopias *(Verso Books, 2010).*

This piece is a tribute to Michael's innovative and influential idea of "public sociology" and how this can be enhanced to address the attention economy and the post-truth Trump era. Theoretically, he distinguished Marx from Polanyi and attempted to synthesize and extend their work, especially on the three waves of marketization, when examining capitalism, commodification, exploitation, and inequalities.

> Michael, Marx, and Polanyi

Michael regarded Marx as a theorist of capitalist exploitation in production who was mainly concerned with the first wave of marketization. In contrast, Polanyi was a theorist of commodification in market relations who discussed the first and second waves. He observed how the marketization of fictitious commodities (labor power, money, and land), none of which are directly produced for sale although all have a price, led to the failure of self-regulating markets and prompted society to regulate them to preserve the use-value of such goods. Michael extended Polanyi's analysis to include a third wave of marketization initiated by neoliberalism in the 1980s. This wave involved the commodification of nature and led to environmental degradation. It also commodified knowledge in the form of intellectual property rights and the university system.

This synthesis of Marx and Polanyi continued in 2022 when Michael drew on E.O. Wright's theoretical and empirical research on "real utopias". These do not abolish markets or states but subjugate them to the collective self-organization of society. They bring society back into socialism and show how, as countermovements, they are unified by their resistance to different forms of commodification, such as Wikipedia opposing the commodification of knowledge. Michael's sociological Marxism saw public sociology as well-placed to explore fictitious commodification and how society reacts.

> The attention economy and post-truth Trump era

Michael, in his last interview before he passed away most regrettably in 2025, highlighted the importance of

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the Trump era. This can be seen as the latest stage of third-wave marketization, especially that of the commodification of attention. At this stage, knowledge based on behavioral data is generated from social media users via fun-based gamification (e.g., quizzes, partnering with influencers, virtual currency, exclusive points systems, social networking, etc.) and hyperbolic discourses/images. These nudging practices keep users engaged and captured within the attention economy. Seen critically, human attention thus becomes a scarce resource that can be commodified to derive exchange value. Businesses compete to attract, capture, filter and monetize data and attention. Such commodification in the attention economy is mediated by Silicon Valley social-media titans (e.g., Meta's Zuckerberg). These actors gather data on their platforms, collate them in their data centers, and hold the keys to algorithm designs and gamified/persuasive techniques aimed at keeping people's attention focused on their websites. They also supply users with some media or socioeconomic products (e.g., digital giveaways, videos, newsfeeds, networking) to entice them and influence their opinions, and possibly to shape the economic and political outcome of events.

In this regard, people's attention generates exchange value as it is both a resource and a currency. As a resource, it becomes important for boosting sales and influencing. As a currency, users' cognitive, emotional, and affective attention can be exchanged for certain gifts and technological services (e.g., virtual event tickets, social engagement, Internet searches) and, in turn, surrenders some control over that very attention (e.g., exposure to advertisements and political "fast-food" tweets) to influencers and attention merchants. The latter derive exchange values by reselling that control to advertisers, who pay based on how much attention is gained (e.g., how long and how deeply the users watch the advertisements). Likewise, influencers grab customers' attention with *Instagram*, *TikTok* and *X* messages, and tweets, and seek to monetize their economic and political influences.

The attention economy is also reshaping politics and society. Trump epitomizes the post-truth attention-seeking celebrity, who created the Trump brand and now uses it as a politician. He draws attention via social media (e.g., *Fox News*, *X*, and *Truth Social*) as algorithmic filtering devices and echo chambers to connect politically like-minded individuals/groups. These allow him to caricature his opponents and deploy crowd-stirring soundbites and slogans (e.g., "Make America Great Again") that speedily appeal to the emotions (e.g., hopes, fears, and anxieties) of his populist social base. Other politicians need to respond to his simplified memes and theatrical style, enabling him to shape discursive, emotional, and political spaces. Such retooling of political communication in this attention age touches individual–social cognitions (and emotions) and polarizes society along new lines.

> Michael's public sociology and post-disciplinarity

In response to Michael's clarion call for public sociology, this development creates very fertile ground for practicing countermovements at the global level of third-wave marketization of the post-truth attention economy. Real utopias are the mediating link between Marx and Polanyi here, as they provide grassroots resistance that contests commodification of attention and cognition, though admittedly not always at a global scale. Examples of such grassroots action include "attention activism" of decentralized platforms and "attention sanctuaries" of digital detox at local levels that can be linked up with other (trans-)national scales. Apart from the scale issue, the commodification of attention covers micro-issues of human cognitions, feelings, and emotions as well as macro-institutional–computational foundations of attention as resource, currency, and manipulation through the control of behavioral information.

These changes may require us to stretch the sociological imagination further than before. Related countermovement publics may even have to imagine the need to re-mobilize public, policy, critical and professional sociologies as well as to combine subject areas in post-disciplinary ways to enhance our academic and communal knowledge. This involves moving beyond sociology and focusing on ideas and connections stemming from critical psychology, pedagogical and educational studies, computational science, media studies, discourse analysis, heterodox economics, and (international) political economy. The aim is to tackle this super-wave of the marketization of attention and cognition to enhance epistemological reflexivity on "real utopias" and promote greater institutional–agential performativity of these countermovements at different sites and scales. ■

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> Michael Burawoy Unbound

by **Heidi Gottfried**, Wayne State University, USA

Michael's graduate studies course on ethnography at the University of Wisconsin inspired my own initial research efforts to integrate feminism and the micro-foundations of a Gramscian Marxism in a study of "Flexibility as a Mode of Regulation in the Temporary Service Industry." His inspiration extended well beyond the merely theoretical, providing practical support for my first ethnographic foray. Michael, who worked from home, became my dispatcher, conveying job placements from the temporary help agency. Thus, my contribution to this special issue draws on a personal connection as well as critical engagement with his work to make visible the lineage of his labor studies in Antonio Gramsci's prison notebooks and later in conversation with Karl Polanyi.

> The ethnographic turn

Regarding these efforts, it's worth quoting Burawoy's reflections on Donald Roy, "the sociologist and working stiff," for the 20th anniversary symposium revisiting *Manufacturing Consent*. Michael began his rejoinder irreverently arguing that "we should resurrect our ancestors but to exalt them, to put them on a pedestal is to freeze them in time and to miss what makes them significant for the present." His prescient final words in that essay aptly capture Michael, the mentor, the activist, the scholar: "He began as a sociologist of industrial work but ended up bringing his insights home, exploring new approaches to the work of the sociologist."

Michael's legacy does not rest solely on his theoretical contributions. Combining an in-depth case study of everyday life from the Chicago School with the materialist tradition of Western Marxism, *Manufacturing Consent* anticipated and helped to pioneer the ethnographic turn in Marxism. Later, in *Global Ethnography* and *Ethnography Unbound*, Burawoy and his collaborators grounded the artful practice of ethnography in local histories, ranging from welfare offices in Hungary to homeless men on the streets of San Francisco to software developers in Ireland and to nurses transplanted from Kerala, India to Central City, USA. Feminist sociologists deployed Burawoy's micropolitical perspective in pioneering studies of emotional labor, masculinities and femininities (re)produced in the factory, the office, and the service encounter.

Both *Ethnography Unbound* and *Global Ethnography* represent links in the genealogical chain originating in Chicago and the University of Manchester. *Global Ethnography* rethinks the meaning of the "field" by highlighting the seeming paradox of ethnography as global when the methodology was intended for study of the local, thus freeing ethnography from the constraints of a single time and place. Burawoy then takes readers on a dizzying tour of theorists, including Jameson, Castells, Harvey, and Giddens, in a search of an adequate theory of globalization. In so doing, he excavates shared themes, thereby instantiating globalization in terms of the recomposition of time and space through displacement, compression, distanciation, and dissolution. From these thematic shards, Burawoy pieces together a theory of global ethnography.

> Sociological Marxism(s)

A peripatetic intellectual curiosity took Michael on excursions that plumbed the oeuvre of major social theorists to gain insights which renewed sociological Marxism for our times. "A Tale of Two Marxisms" reprises themes developed in the head-to-head matchup of Gramsci and Polanyi. While Gramsci and Polanyi converge in their responses to the contradictions and anomalies arising in particular historical conjunctures, a further excavation highlights different emphases of these two luminaries and their limits. Burawoy recruits Simone de Beauvoir and Nancy Fraser as protagonists in the family drama, acknowledging a theoretical flaw that he fails to fully overcome in his own work. He criticizes both Gramsci and Polanyi for their lack of attention to the family's internal organization when it comes to understanding the politics of the societies they described. Thus, Gramsci's touchstone essay, "Americanism and Fordism" allied the function of monogamous families to the management of Fordist production, whereas Polanyi saw the family as a possible bulwark against the destructiveness of the market and the commodification of labor. However, Michael's feminism stops at the family's threshold due to its thin theoretical understanding of gendered structures in relationship to class.

> The feminist pivot

Inspired by Burawoy, a more robust feminist political economy moves from micro-foundations to macro-

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“renewed sociological Marxism for our times”

structures to theorize the neo-liberalization of care work. Rethinking Polanyi through a feminist lens pivots on the insight that reproductive labor is a fictitious commodity and the countermovement in response to the marketization of care. Care work, in many domains, has become appropriated by markets. The increasing commodification of intimacy interjects more aspects of everyday life and social relationships into the market, where they become swept up into the circuits of capital. Capitalist reproduction involves a complex mix of waged (commodified) and unwaged (uncommodified) reproductive labor for ensuring life-sustaining processes. Unwaged work is just one input into household production that also relies on commodities purchased with money earned from waged work, both of which are necessary for household survival under capitalism. A contradiction, however, exists between the impulse for capital to extract a profit from commodified reproductive activities and the countervailing benefits of noncommodified labor underwriting costs of reproducing patriarchal and racialized capitalist social relations. Class differences (intersecting with gender and migration status) are at the heart of the dynamics of non-commodified and commodified homecare labor. The form of extensive privatization and commodification of reproductive activities rests on class, often coterminous with race. Lower income households rely on informal, non-commodified labor, while higher income households can afford market services, and profit more directly from tax credits and cash payments, but this almost always means highly commodified labor. In this historical conjuncture, counter-hegemonic movements are reimagining the social organization of care and reproductive labor.

> Lasting legacies

This short intellectual biography is situated in a similar political milieu haunted by the spectre of authoritarianism. Burawoy’s scientific Marxism, inflected through a Gramscian/Polanyian/feminist lens, demands a critical standpoint for achieving the “real” real utopias envisioned by his friend and comrade, Erik Olin Wright. Threaded throughout, from the Copperbelt in Zambia or the machine shop in Chicago to recent calls for sociologists to speak out on Palestine, is the necessity for historical renderings that reveal linkages between twists in the past that point toward possible futures. ■

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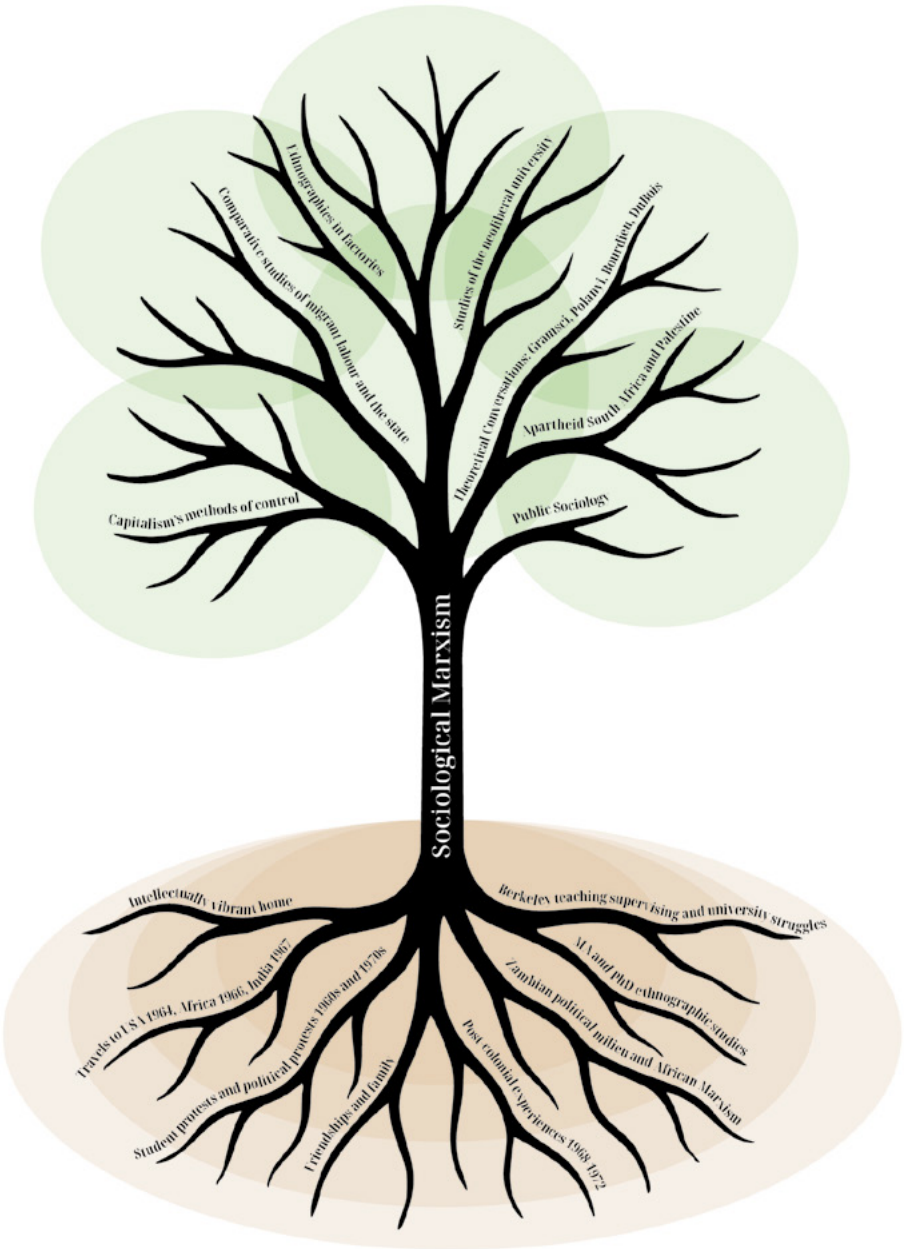
> The Tree of Michael Burawoy's Sociological Marxism

by **Michelle Williams**, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa



Tree of Burawoy's Sociological Marxism. Credit: Michelle Williams.

The indefatigable spirit and exceptional mind of Michael Burawoy was taken from us on 3rd February 2025. The callous act of violence of a hit-and-run driver in Oakland, California, put to rest the legendary scholar. Michael was my MA and PhD supervisor between 1995 and 2005. After I left Berkeley and moved to South Africa, Michael visited regularly and over the years became a very close friend and remained a mentor throughout. He's been one of my fiercest critics and most supportive allies. While I have tried to frame Michael's contribution to sociology and Marxism over his prolific life, I am no doubt biased and what I offer reflects the partiality of a student and friend who learned so much from her mentor. Michael always found ways to improve anything I gave him to read and I'm sure this piece is no different, though I

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hope he would be amused by my "tree of Burawoy's sociological Marxism".

> The roots of the tree

Michael Burawoy was a rare breed of scholar with his unflinching lifelong commitment to both sociology and Marxism. He applied his formidable intellect to both fields and found a way to combine them in incredibly productive and innovative ways. His commitment to both stems in part from his personal biography. He came to both sociology and Marxism through lived experience that was etched deeply into his sense of justice and fascination with the social world. His parents were Russian Jews who left Russia for Germany in the 1920s where they did their PhDs in chemistry but then left Germany for England in the 1930s with the rise of Hitler. His parents' home was an intellectually vibrant and politically engaged place. In the summer of 1964, Burawoy sailed across the Atlantic on a Norwegian cargo ship and spent the summer traveling around the USA selling books for a New York bookseller. The country was bubbling with the social energy of the free speech movement, civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam war protests, and urban uprisings. For the seventeen-year-old, the trip planted the beginnings of a sociological imagination that would find its moorings over the next few years during his forays traveling through India on third-class trains and hitchhiking across Africa.

After he graduated from Cambridge University with his mathematics degree, Burawoy took a job as a journalist in Johannesburg, South Africa, and after six months moved to the newly independent Zambia where he worked in the personnel department of a large multi-national company involved in the copper mines. Similar to the social vibrancy he experienced in the summer of 1964 in the USA, southern Africa was electric with political foment against apartheid and anti-colonial struggles. It was in Zambia that Burawoy was exposed to Marxism, post-colonial dynamics and intersections between class and race. His journey into sociology and Marxism solidified when he registered for a Master's degree in sociology at the University of Zambia. The three-member sociology department exposed Burawoy to Marxism, the extended case method, ethnography, and articulations of race, caste and class. He came to understand the power of sociology and social theory in understanding the world. His love for sociology was cemented! For Burawoy, sociology married to Marxism provided powerful tools to understand the world and lay the basis for changing it for the better. Indeed, it was through his own personal journey of discovering the world that he developed his unwavering fidelity to both sociology and Marxism. By bringing sociology into dialogue with Marxism he found new ground in sociological Marxism – a branch of non-doctrinaire Marxism – that placed society alongside the state and economy. He never wavered from this course and had little patience for the fashionable rhetorical posturing often found in the academy.

Over the next 50 years, Burawoy would become one of the most important sociologists of his generation. He was many things: a legendary teacher, a devoted supervisor, a sympathetic friend and colleague, a non-doctrinaire Marxist, and an extraordinary scholar.

> The trunk of the tree

Burawoy was an enthusiastic, even evangelical, sociologist and a brilliant Marxist who was gripped by questions about and the desire for emancipatory futures. He saw the role of sociology as to make visible the invisible, and the role of Marxism as to provide the tools to understand the social forces underlying the invisible. What made Burawoy so innovative was that he asked common questions in uncommon ways. For instance, while working in the Zambian copper mines, instead of looking at the way workers were responding to independence from colonial rule, he focused on the way management was responding, which led him to uncover the upward moving color bar as Africans entered management. Another example of his uncommon approach was that instead of looking for worker resistance on the shopfloor in his ethnography of the Chicago factory, he asked questions about why workers work as hard as they do, in an effort to better understand capitalism and its methods of control.

Burawoy understood that as long as capitalism exists, so too will Marxism. Like capitalism's evolution over time, Marxism also must rebuild itself to reflect the problems of the times. For Burawoy, this took specific form in his sociological Marxism. Drawing on Gramsci and Polanyi, Burawoy's Marxism looked at historically specific notions of society to understand capitalism's longevity as well as the spaces of hope beyond capitalism. His ethnographic method made visible the micro-foundations of capitalism, and his extended case method elaborated these investigations of micro-processes with macro-sociology. He thus brought to Marxism historical specificity that helped elaborate a dynamic Marxist theoretical tradition and brought to sociology an anthropological method forged in Zambia that highlighted the importance of micro-sociological investigations for social theory. For Burawoy, understanding "society" and its role in capitalism was the linchpin of both sociology and Marxism. In his 2003 article "Sociological Marxism" he explains that "society" inhabits the institutional space between the economy and society. Drawing on Gramsci's understanding of civil society interpenetrating the state and Polanyi's "active society" pervading the market, he argued that socialism requires the subordination of the market and the state to society.

> The branches of the tree

Burawoy refashioned Marxism first through his scholarship on labor regimes and workplace ethnographies, and then through his turn to civil society and the movements

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generated in advanced capitalism. This change marks a shift from the working class and the point of production to civil society as key to transcending capitalism. Burawoy's first phase of sociological Marxism focused on the workplace also married to his ethnographic method of the extended case study. By working on the factory floor alongside other workers, he saw the way capitalism generated consent on the shopfloor while continuously adapting to the changing conditions. Through a number of workplace comparisons in copper mines in Zambia, migrant workers in California and southern Africa, and factories in Chicago and Hungary, Burawoy developed a "living" Marxism that helped shed light on continually changing dynamics of capitalism through micro-foundations on the shopfloor.

After a series of thwarted ethnographic studies in Russia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Burawoy faced questions about the degeneration of socialism into capitalism rather than the evolution of capitalism into socialism. The fall of the Soviet Union was a turning point for Burawoy as he laid down his factory tools and turned from ethnographic methods to theoretical engagement with Marxism. He began by thinking through sociological Marxism and engaged deeply with Erik Olin Wright's "Real Utopia's" project. He then shifted to discussions between Marxism and a series of scholars: Gramsci, Polanyi, Bourdieu, and Du Bois. With the rise of neoliberalism and a new generation of resistance movements, Burawoy recognized the importance of struggles beyond the shopfloor. Thus, his theoretical forays also marked a shift from the point of production to civil society as a significant location for the emergence of new historical subjects. Michael Levien (in his 2025 article "Michael Burawoy, Sociological Marxist") makes a similar point by showing that his theoretical interventions led Burawoy down interesting tributaries reconstructing Marxism. At this time he developed his "Tree of Marxism" with Marx and Engels as the trunk of the tree out of which grew a number of branches: German, Russian and Soviet, Western, and Third World Marxisms; Bakunin and anarchist syndicalism; and social democracy. He used the metaphor of the tree to show the evolution of Marxism as well as the way in which some branches wither and others grow.

As he rose to the apex of the discipline of sociology first as Chair of the Berkeley sociology department, then as President of the American Sociological Association, and then as President of the International Sociological Association, Burawoy also shifted his focus to the neoliberal university and sociology more specifically. Again, the influence of South Africa on Burawoy marked this shift as he developed his ideas about public sociology. On regular visits to South Africa in the 1990s and 2000s, Burawoy encountered a new lively sociology that was deeply involved in the society around it. The juxtaposition to sociology in the Global North led him to develop a schematic rendering of four types of sociology: public, critical, professional, and policy sociologies. For Burawoy public sociology was the most important and central for social transformation. He positioned public sociology as a crucial bulwark for engaging civil society against rising neoliberalism (what Burawoy referred to as third-wave marketization) and recognizing the importance of the nation-state. He also called for the development of a global sociology that is locally grounded while pointing to the global.

> The tree of Burawoy's sociological Marxism

Burawoy's extraordinary intellectual journey can perhaps best be depicted in a tree of Burawoy's sociological Marxism. Similar to his tree of Marxism, he grew sociological and Marxist roots from a formidable body of work through sociological Marxism. For Burawoy, the roots of his tree are an intellectually vibrant childhood home, his early years of travel overseas, encounters with post-colonial societies, engaged sociology and African Marxism in Zambia, student and political protests, education as transformative, ethnographic and extended case methods, comparative studies, the power of social theory, and understanding the forces of capitalism. The roots grew into the trunk of Sociological Marxism. From the trunk, robust branches grew consisting of investigations of micro-forces in factories in Zambia, Chicago, and Hungary, on migrant labor and the state, theoretical discussions with Gramsci, Polanyi, Bourdieu and Du Bois, studies of the neoliberal university, comparative analysis of apartheid in South Africa and Palestine, and public sociology (see diagram).

Burawoy saw Marxism not as a fixed paradigm, but as an evolving theoretical tradition that helps shed light on specific investigations into the workings of capitalism and its methods of control. In this way, sociological Marxism comes alive as an ever-growing and branching tree from which new ideas continuously sprout and past analyses are "revisited" and reshaped.

While I have tried to depict Burawoy's extraordinary contribution to sociological Marxism in this short article, I am only scratching the surface. There is much more to glean from his prolific writings. And for those of us lucky enough to have been his students and colleagues, his extraordinary teaching, mentoring and supervising has left us with an inspiring guide and an incredible body of work to draw on. ■

Special thanks to Joanne Morrison for assistance with the tree diagram and to Vishwas Satgar and Peter Evans for their comments on this article.

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> Michael Burawoy, a Compass for Sociology in our Times

by **Geoffrey Pleyers**, FNRS and Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium, and ISA President (2023-27)

Michael Burawoy on August 28, 2024 in Porto, Portugal. Photo by Geoffrey Pleyers.

Michael Burawoy passed away abruptly on February 3, 2025.

The International Sociological Association (ISA) mourns one of its most influential and inspiring presidents, a remarkable and creative global sociologist, an advocate for a public sociology relevant to the people and civil society, an inspiring teacher who trained generations of sociologists, and an extraordinary human being.

Born in 1947, Michael Burawoy was first trained as a mathematician, until he casually read a book in sociology at Christ's College library in Cambridge. He completed a Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Zambia in 1972, along with his work in a copper mine. He then moved to the University of Chicago, where he obtained his PhD with a dissertation on Chicago's industrial workers, which would be published as his most substantial contribution *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago University Press, 1979). He would conduct similar extended fieldwork in factories in Hungary and in post-Soviet Russia.

As capitalism and exploitation increasingly relied on the commodification of knowledge, he analysed the impact of neoliberal policies in higher education and how knowledge production was cornered to extend the power of the market and the state. He defended a public sociology that aimed at producing knowledge relevant to citizens, social movements and civil society.

A Professor of Sociology at UC Berkeley for 47 years, he left an indelible mark on generations of students. A worldwide traveller, he built a global community of sociologists committed to research and analyses that aim at understanding the world and providing tools to change it. In 2022, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Johannesburg and, in 2024, the W.E.B. Du Bois Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award by the American Sociological Association.

He will have a long-lasting impact on the way we conceive sociology and its role in society. His work exemplifies how rigorous empirical research can inform and enrich theoretical debates, and vice versa. By integrating local, national, and global perspectives, he has offered comprehensive analyses that resonate across disciplines and inform public and policy discussions. He pleaded "to articulate empirical research with theoretical lenses". He was as passionate about ethnography as he was about theory. He was interested in analysing the actors as much as the structures of society, which he did with a Marxist lens that he contributed to revisiting and diffusing. Throughout his career, from the copper mines of Zambia to his instrumental role in reestablishing W.E.B. Du Bois as a major founder of American and Global Sociology, through to his struggle to defend public education open to students from different social backgrounds, he stood against and analysed injustice connected to race. He was as passionate about books as he was about people, the people he met in fieldwork, in

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his class, in academia and in life—four spheres that were never split in Michael's life and work. He was generous as a man, as a teacher, and as a scholar.

Michael was our compass when it came to reminding us why sociology matters in our times and why it is worth devoting so much time and energy to doing and teaching sociology: "Sociology helps students understand how society is collective, the role of race, of class, of gender. Sociology is the scientific study of inequality and the oppression this entails. Sociology studies the very exclusions promoted by the conservative forces. But we study exclusions not to advance them but to recognize and publicize them, and to better understand how they can be contested and reversed." (in Miami, March 10, 2024).

Michael left us at a time when we most needed his leadership, his energy, his tireless work to help us understand our world, his example as an extraordinary teacher, his faith in relevant public sociology, his openness to a truly global dialogue, his in-depth and rigorous sociological analyses based on months of ethnographic fieldwork working in factories, his quest for social and epistemological justice, his indefatigable struggle for peace and justice in Palestine and in other parts of the world, and his unique energy, commitment and enthusiasm.

Michael's leadership, commitment and passion leave a profound mark on the ISA and the global sociological community. As the founder of *Global Dialogue*, ISA's online magazine, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year, he sought "to foster international debate and discussion on contemporary issues through a sociological lens". As ISA Vice-President for National Associations (2006-2010) and then ISA President (2010-2014), he travelled the world to share his enthusiasm for the relevance of critical and public sociology in our times. He inspired thousands of sociologists with his analyses and convictions and touched them with his kindness, generosity and integrity.

He leaves a global community of sociologists in a sudden mourning and facing a huge void. After a first online tribute to celebrate his life and legacy on Saturday, February 8, further tributes were organized at the ISA Executive Committee Meeting in Johannesburg in March and the ISA Forum of Sociology (July 6-11) in Rabat, Morocco, in addition to initiatives taken by ISA Research Committees, Working Groups and Thematic Groups.

Michael Burawoy's contributions will continue to shape how sociologists understand and engage with the world. We invite you to listen again to his Presidential address at the 2014 ISA World Congress in Yokohama, in which he offered his vision for sociology, global dialogue, and justice. We will open access to the article of this address and his other contributions in Current Sociology.

Michael has not only left us a celebrated work. He also dedicated his energy to building spaces and tools to bring sociologists together, the ISA being one of them. Only together may we live up to maintaining and developing his legacy, animated by the firm conviction that sociology matters in these challenging times. ■

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> Michael Burawoy: Sociology as a Vocation

by **Nazanin Shahrokni**, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Michael Burawoy was more than a sociologist; he was a builder of sociology – not only through his theoretical contributions, but through the institutions he shaped, the relationships he nurtured, and the global solidarities he forged. He transformed the discipline into a reflexive and practice-oriented field – one that interrogates power, centers the margins, and bridges critique with imagination, theory with action.

In this spirit, I reflect on Michael's contributions and highlight his enduring impact on the discipline, its methodologies, pedagogies, and global articulations.

> Living sociology: embodied practice, reflexive method

Michael's sociology was not just a theoretical orientation; it was a lived practice, grounded in movement, struggle, and historical consciousness. His final book, *Public Sociology: Between Utopia and Anti-Utopia*, synthesized decades of reflection on sociology's dual imperative: to critique existing conditions while cultivating the imagination of alternative futures. Michael gave precise meanings to these contradictory impulses. Utopia, for him, was not a blueprint for a perfect society, but a dialogic and collective imagining of alternatives, a necessary force that keeps critical thought alive. Without utopia, he cautioned, sociology becomes a mirror of despair. Anti-utopia, in contrast, was the disenchanted but necessary skepticism that tempers naïve optimism. Sociology, for Michael, lived in the tension between these poles – between the desire for transformation and the recognition of what hinders it. In that tension – between what is and what could be – he cultivated sociology as a vocation.

At the heart of Michael's project was a critique of the discipline itself; a sustained effort to remake sociology from within. He challenged sociology's Eurocentrism, its closed canons, its reproduction of privilege. Though he stood at the very center of academic prestige, he constantly worked to decenter himself – foregrounding Du Bois, feminist thought, and Global South epistemologies. He inhabited the margins by choice – always reaching outward and downward: into communities, workplaces, and the lives of those experiencing precarity.

In his 2004 ASA presidential address, he famously sketched four types of sociology: professional, policy, critical, and public. These were not separate silos, but a vision for an integrated, dialectical practice. Public sociology, for him, wasn't the soft wing of the discipline, it was its conscience. He made sociology accountable, insisting that we ask: For whom do we produce knowledge, and toward what end? His call for public sociology was a call to reconfigure the very foundations of what counts as knowledge. As he often said, public sociology is not outreach; it is a conversation that transforms all participants.

This commitment extended to how Michael engaged with movements. He practiced what he theorized. He moved seamlessly between seminar rooms and picket lines, between ISA meetings and the factory floor. From labor union activism in South Africa and Zambia, to the anti-apartheid movement, Occupy Oakland, graduate student organizing, and solidarity with Palestine, Michael's work blurred the line between the academic and activism.

This transformative vision of sociology was inseparable from his methodological commitments. Central to Michael's intellectual legacy is the extended case method: a research approach that did not seek to generalize outward, in the usual deductive sense. Instead, it extended from the contradictions observed in everyday life toward an understanding of the broader social structures that shape them. Reflexivity, for Michael, was not confession, it was a theory of knowledge.

This methodological commitment found further expression in one of his most enduring contributions: *Global Ethnography*, a collaborative project with nine of his graduate students. The book introduced the concept of grounded globalization: a distinctive method for understanding global processes not through abstract models

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"Michael's conviction was that theory must be built from below, in dialogue with lived realities"

or macro flows, but by tracing how global forces are refracted through specific, localized experiences. Together, these approaches – the extended case method and grounded globalization – reflected Michael's conviction that theory must be built from below, in dialogue with lived realities, and always attentive to the structural conditions that make knowledge possible.

> Teaching sociology, practicing dialogue

For Michael, teaching was not subordinate to research: it was the foundation of a transformative sociology. He frequently rejected the notion that pedagogy was neutral. Teaching, like research, was situated within broader power structures, especially within the neoliberal university. In *Laboring in the Extractive University*, he diagnosed the university as a site of exploitation, where both students and instructors are often alienated from the process of learning. Yet he also saw in the classroom potential for radical imagination; a space to cultivate sociological inquiry as both critique and care.

He often said: "Our first public is our students." In his eyes, each student was a story worth hearing, a challenge worth exploring. He created a space where learning was collective, where ideas were debated fiercely yet generously, and where knowledge was never hoarded but shared. As his student, I came to see that Michael's greatest gift was building a community where we could recognize and cultivate each other's insight and potential. He treated our personal struggles not as distractions, but as entry points into theoretical analysis.

He modeled an ethics of solidarity in the classroom; regularly crediting students in his publications, recognizing the labor of teaching assistants, and mentoring them as intellectuals, not aides.

He was, without doubt, one of the most beloved teachers of his generation. But more importantly, he redefined what teaching could be and taught some of his most memorable lessons in the street: in teach-ins at Sproul Plaza at the University of California, Berkeley, and on picket lines. For him, pedagogy and teaching were inseparable from political commitment and collective struggle.

As for many of us, his mentees, Michael Burawoy did not create a school of thought. He created a community of practice; one defined not by discipleship, but by disagreement. He didn't want to be followed. He wanted to be argued with. We do not all follow a particular theoretical paradigm – not even Marxism, which so deeply shaped his own work. What unites us is not methodological conformity or ideological alignment, but a common orientation to the world: a belief in the urgency of sociological thinking, and its capacity to illuminate – and reshape – the conditions of our lives. His sociology was deeply embedded in, responsive to, and accountable for the political and ethical challenges of its time, and so is ours.

Michael's commitment to pedagogy as labor was directly linked to his commitment to global sociology.

> Global sociology: from solidarity to structure

For Michael, the ISA was not merely an administrative platform but a laboratory for realizing his vision of global sociology. He rejected the idea that simply expanding global participation – through conferences, collaborations, or citations – was sufficient. Instead, he called for a deeper transformation of the discipline's epistemic structures. Drawing on broader debates about "provincializing Europe," Michael has argued that sociology must confront its Northern biases and redistribute intellectual authority. Internationalization, for him, was not about inclusion into a dominant model, but about cultivating a dialogical, polycentric sociology rooted in mutual recognition and the vitality of national traditions.

Michael called for a shift from the vertical integration of knowledge, where theory is produced in the Global North and data collected in the Global South, to a horizontal structure of exchange, where theoretical and empirical contributions emerge from all parts of the world. Global sociology, for Michael, was not the study of the global; it was the globalization of sociology as a discipline: connecting voices, redistributing authority, and enabling a more just and inclusive production of knowledge. His vision of global sociology was not extractive. Instead, he emphasized reciprocity. One might say that, for him, globalizing sociology required globalizing its very conditions of production.

Under his leadership, *Global Dialogue* was launched as a multilingual magazine that would circulate sociological debates across linguistic and geopolitical boundaries. Translated into 15 languages, it embodies his insistence on multilingual, multivocal, polycentric sociology. He knew that translation is not merely technical, it is political. He supported initiatives to expand the ISA's regional reach,

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democratize its structures, and support scholars in politically or economically precarious environments.

His 2008 visit to Iran, where I had the privilege of accompanying him, captured this ethos. He refused to let visa regimes, sanctions, or state repression – and borders, whether political, linguistic, or disciplinary – determine whom he engaged with. When Iranian sociology was isolated by international sanctions and domestic repression, Michael insisted: "If they can't come to us, we must go to them." And he did, determined to ensure that Iranian sociologists remained part of the global conversation. Where others saw a pariah state, he saw an intellectual community. His thirst for seeing, listening, and learning – and his gift for making all those around him feel seen, heard, and validated – left an indelible mark among his Iranian colleagues.

In Iran, Michael's role as an empathetic interlocutor coexisted with the unrelenting pull of the consummate ethnographer within him. Instead of confining himself to Tehran's comfortable enclaves, he ventured beyond the sanitized experience of the capital, riding buses in and between Iran's smaller towns. "How else would you connect to people?" he challenged us. We laughed as we reminded him, "Michael, you don't speak a word of Farsi!" Yet language proved to be no barrier. Michael had an uncanny ability to inhabit spaces, to absorb and reflect the textures of local life. He was never a distant observer; he was a participant in the unfolding stories of those around him. Whether chatting with a bus driver, haggling with a vendor, or exchanging ideas with university professors, he broke through every wall with his genuine curiosity and that trademark humor, forging connections that transcended words. He taught us that the ethnographic encounter was not about language mastery, but about human curiosity and dignity.

When asked what message he had for Presidents Ahmadinejad and Bush, Michael replied: "Make it mandatory for presidents to take Sociology 101." In today's climate, where political leaders increasingly defund and delegitimize the social sciences, his quip reads less as a joke and more as a prescient critique of the estrangement between power and critical knowledge.

In the aftermath of Michael's visit, the Iranian Sociological Association established a dedicated section on Public Sociology, now one of its most vibrant and active branches. I had the privilege of translating his call for public sociology and helping introduce the concept to the Farsi-speaking academic community. His work resonated deeply: numerous books and symposia on public sociology have since been organized, and key texts, including Michael's essays and interviews, were translated; Iranian sociologists embraced his vision of engaged, critical scholarship; and upon his passing, the Association held a special commemorative event in his honor. National newspapers reported on his legacy, underscoring the enduring impact of his visit and ideas on Iran's sociological landscape.

For Michael, global sociology was a practice – of listening across borders, of translating across difference, and of insisting that knowledge is never truly global unless it is shared, struggled over, and spoken in many tongues.

> Carrying the project forward

In today's landscape of deepening inequality, rising authoritarianism, climate breakdown, and global displacement, Michael's insistence on a public, critical, and hopeful sociology is more urgent than ever. He taught us that sociology must respond to the conditions of its time, and that it thrives in moments of crisis; not despite them, but because of them.

To carry forward his legacy means sustaining the values he exemplified:

- critical inquiry rooted in dialogue and humility;
- teaching as a site of mutual transformation;
- research that engages publics across divides;
- a refusal to separate analysis from responsibility.

And perhaps that is the legacy he leaves us with at the ISA: not just a set of concepts or typologies, but a way of doing sociology that is at once critical, dialogical, and deeply committed to the world it seeks to understand. ■

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> Michael Burawoy: Between Resilient Marxism and Public Sociology

by **Ruy Braga**, University of São Paulo, Brazil

On the night of February 3, 2025, Michael Burawoy was fatally struck by a vehicle near his home in Oakland, California. The driver fled but was later arrested. Michael's death marked the loss of the most important contemporary Marxist sociologist, whose career had repositioned Marxism within the university after the collapse of bureaucratic state socialism, while maintaining an organic link between theory and struggles for human emancipation.

Michael retired in 2023 from the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, after 47 years of dedicated service to students, colleagues, and advisees. Since the 1970s, with the publication of his classic *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* – a work that revolutionized labor studies – he stood as a pillar of critical Marxism, rooted in empirical rigor and open dialogue.

Throughout his life, Michael was a legendary teacher, capable of captivating packed lecture halls with charisma and humor, while also giving personal attention to individual students. In class, he used to memorize several names in each session, quietly noting them down on the board; by the end of the semester, he could recall nearly every student. As an advisor, countless accounts attest to his care, engagement, and fraternal support of students' research. Over four decades, he supervised 84 dissertations, often integrating his advisees' projects into ambitious global comparisons that produced influential collective works. His graduate seminars were as sought-after as his undergraduate courses. Michael's dedication reflected the deep sense of solidarity that inspired his research and shaped his method.

> An innovative and inspiring journey

In the history of sociology, Michael is the foremost reference for the "extended case method," derived from the Manchester School of Anthropology and formalized in his *Sociological Marxism*. More than an analytical tool, it is a rigorous approach to empirical inquiry, uniquely effective in connecting micro-experiences to macro-processes of social reproduction and transformation. The method applies reflexive science to ethnography: drawing the general from the particular, moving from micro to macro, and linking the present to the past in anticipation of the future. Through it, Michael demonstrated how workers' experiences at the point of production reflect broader social structures. As a participant–observer, he emphasized the moral grounding of Marxist sociology: human history is socially constructed and can therefore be socially reconstructed – ideally in more just ways.

Values such as solidarity, justice, equality, and freedom were, for Michael, inextricably linked to scientific practice. Rather than deny them, sociologists should reflexively embrace their heuristic potential. His empirical and epistemological foundations arose from unusual sites for an academic: a Zambian copper mine, a Chicago engine plant, a Hungarian steel mill, and a Russian furniture factory. Working in four countries as a machine operator, furnace worker, and personnel officer, he refined his analytical lens from the shopfloor, examining four major historical transformations: African decolonization, Fordist consolidation, the collapse of bureaucratic socialism, and the rise of neoliberalism. His theoretical synthesis combined heterodox Marxism – drawing on Gramsci, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Fanon, and later Du Bois – with the radical sociological tradition of C. Wright Mills, Alvin Gouldner, and Karl Polanyi.

In the early 1990s, alongside his close friend Erik Olin Wright, Michael launched an ambitious project to reconstruct "sociological Marxism," defined as the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist social relations. They aimed to rescue Marxism's emancipatory potential, weakened after the fall of state socialism. Göran Therborn described this as "the most ambitious project of resistant Marxism" of the early twenty-first century. It unfolded in two complementary directions: Wright's "real utopias" project and Michael's "public sociology." Both encouraged the sociological community to engage critically with diverse publics, inside and beyond academia, as part of a broader movement for social transformation. Each became president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), and Michael later served as president of the International Sociological Association (ISA), following a vigorous campaign in 44 countries promoting his vision of public sociology.

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“human history is socially constructed and can therefore be socially reconstructed – ideally in more just ways”

> Public sociology

Public sociology, as Michael conceived it, is a reflexive and critical sociology oriented toward extra-academic publics and committed to emancipatory values, including justice, freedom, equality, democracy, and solidarity. Michael often quipped that if political science studies the state and economics studies the market, sociology studies civil society, its contradictions, and historical challenges. Unsurprisingly, public sociology resonated with progressive social movements resisting the commodification of labor, nature, money, and knowledge worldwide, particularly after the 2008 global financial crisis. At the same time, he emphasized the necessity of studying regressive movements, including the authoritarian nationalism that spread during the 2010s and fuels the global far-right today. Public sociology, he argued, is essential for exposing the structures and processes underlying these “morbid symptoms” (Gramsci) of contemporary autocratization and for strategically supporting democratic renewal.

After completing his presidency of the ISA in 2014, Michael returned to Berkeley and became head of the faculty association, defending contingent instructors working under precarious conditions in California’s public universities. His active support for the 2023 teaching assistants’ strike reaffirmed his lifelong commitment to social justice. Across his life, his activism was vast and consistent: supporting Zambian independence, opposing South African apartheid, championing feminist struggles against sexual harassment in universities, joining mobilizations against the war in Ukraine, and denouncing the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza – the subject of his article, published posthumously. In the history of global sociology, no one has combined fieldwork in so many countries with such profound political engagement in humanity’s fundamental causes. Michael must be remembered as an unrepentant Marxist, a teacher of solidarity, and a public intellectual who transformed sociology into a tool of emancipation.

> Burawoy in Brazil

Michael established his first direct ties with the Brazilian sociological community in 2007, participating in the Latin American Congress of Sociology (ALAS) held in Recife. On that occasion, he also delivered lectures at major universities, including São Paulo, Campinas, Porto Alegre, and Rio de Janeiro. At the time, he was serving as vice-president of the ISA and actively promoting “public sociology,” a proposal he had formulated a few years earlier and widely debated since his election as ASA president.

From this initial encounter onward, Michael visited Brazil regularly, frequently invited to participate in seminars, congresses, and academic events. His presence at the Brazilian Sociological Society (SBS) and the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Social Sciences (ANPOCS) became a reference point, making him one of the most recognized international sociologists in the country. Through these engagements, Michael developed a unique relationship with Brazilian sociology, marked by the receptivity to his ideas and direct dialogue with scholars and institutions.

This recognition was not only symbolic. Bibliometric surveys using SciELO data from 2010–2024 place Michael among the fifteen most cited international sociologists in Brazilian journals, highlighting both the relevance of his work and the capacity of his public sociology to engage with critical Brazilian traditions, consolidating an engaged and globally connected sociology.

Substantively, Michael’s presence in Brazil had a decisive impact on the research projects developed by the Center for the Study of Citizenship Rights (Cenedic) at the University of São Paulo, which hosted him on several occasions – the most recent in 2023 – and with which he maintained fruitful collaborations across multiple fronts. His influence also shaped my own intellectual trajectory, guiding the reconstruction of critical sociological Marxism grounded in empirical inquiry and the refinement of the “extended case method” to analyze transformations in the Brazilian working class.

Dialogue with Michael significantly strengthened the perspective of public sociology within Cenedic, a project whose foremost figure was Chico de Oliveira. It is no coincidence that Chico wrote the preface to the book I co-edited with Michael, *Por uma sociologia pública* (*For a Public Sociology*), symbolizing the convergence of distinct critical traditions – Latin American Marxist reflection and an international public sociology – into a shared intellectual and political horizon.

During his last visit to São Paulo in 2023, Michael participated in the launch of my book *A angústia do precari-*

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ado: trabalho e solidariedade no capitalismo racial (The Anguish of the Precariat: Labor and Solidarity in Racial Capitalism), dedicated to analyzing transformations of the working class in the United States. The book directly engages with W.E.B. Du Bois, the Black American sociologist who had become Michael's most recent intellectual "obsession" and on whom he was preparing a book at the time of his death. Michael's engagement with Du Bois renewed one of the central agendas of his public sociology: the critical reconstruction of the sociological canon through incorporation of historically marginalized intellectual traditions.

This legacy has flourished in Brazil. Recent initiatives, such as those of the Afro-Cebrap group, have promoted the dissemination of Du Bois's work in Portuguese, incorporating his thought into Brazilian social sciences and expanding interpretive frameworks by foregrounding the racial question and the global historical relationship between capitalism and racism. The convergence between Michael's and Du Bois's proposals strengthens globally articulated public sociology while offering Brazil an interpretive framework to deepen the critique of racial capitalism, linking it to international theory and national historical experience.

> Last meeting

The last time I met Michael in person was in Johannesburg in October 2024. I dropped him off in front of the apartment of our dear friends Michelle Williams and Vish Satgar, after one of those memorable dinners he always insisted on paying for. I was living in South Africa because, more than a decade earlier, Michael had shown me the unique importance of the sociology produced in that country – and for that, I remain deeply grateful.

That day, we said goodbye while discussing the details of his participation in the Brazilian Congress of Sociology in July 2025. He intended to speak about the ongoing massacre of the Palestinian people and expressed concern about the political climate at the university for addressing such a sensitive topic. I assured him he would be welcomed by a public eager to hear him and to recognize him for what he truly was: the greatest Marxist sociologist of his generation. ■

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> Burawoy and the Craft of Global Public Sociology: Dialogues with Russia

by **Pavel Krotov**, Pitirim A. Sorokin Foundation, Boston, USA, **Tatyana Lytkina**, Komi Science Center, Russia, and **Svetlana Yaroshenko**, St. Petersburg Association of Sociologists, Russia

Michael Burawoy in the field, in Komi, 2002. Photo by Tatyana Lytkina.

Michael Burawoy, a renowned social theorist and proponent of public sociology, passed away at the age of 77. Throughout his life, he dedicated himself to sociology – revealing hidden societal boundaries, addressing various forms of inequality, and fostering connections across communities, including within the discipline itself.

Michael was, and will remain, a multifaceted luminary in sociology – a friend, mentor, and colleague to us. His scholarly contributions and legacy will endure, particularly for those examining the trajectory of neoliberal capitalism and the vulnerability of civil society to market and state pressures. In this brief tribute, we reflect on a singular aspect of his remarkable career: his connections to Russia and our collaborative endeavors to comprehend the dynamics of capitalism, the lived experiences of the Russian people, and the potential of public sociology to effect social change.

> The inception of the labor movement under state socialism

In 1986, at the onset of perestroika, Michael, accompanied by Erik Olin Wright, traveled to Moscow to engage with Soviet sociologists from the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences in a comparative study of class consciousness in the USSR and the United States.

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Michael Burawoy in a public debate at the European University at St. Petersburg, 2015. Photo by Tatyana Lytkina.

During ten days of "frustrating but revealing" discussions, significant ideological and interpretive divisions became apparent – particularly concerning Marxist categories and the hesitance of Soviet scholars to openly analyze the contradictions inherent in real socialism.

Subsequently, each scholar pursued distinct paths. Wright did not return to Russia. In contrast, Burawoy endeavored to initiate a comprehensive ethnographic study of Soviet industry, akin to his research in Hungary. He perceived Soviet socialism not as a tragic deviation from the socialist ideal but as one of its manifestations – state socialism – meriting critical and empirical examination. He posed inquiries regarding labor organization, worker consciousness, and the paradox that labor movements emerged more robustly in state socialist regimes than in advanced capitalist societies.

> The transition to market capitalism

In 1991, Burawoy began participant observation at a furniture factory in Komi, examining a hypothesis initially posited in his book *Manufacturing Consent* (1979) and later elaborated in *The Radiant Past* (1992, with Janos Lukács). He differentiated between control over the labor process (relations of production) and control within the labor process (relations in production). Under Soviet conditions, workers exercised the latter due to systemic shortages, as managers relinquished operational control to ensure continuity of production. This paradoxical autonomy exemplified both the flexibility and resilience of the administrative-command system.

Initially aiming to compare Soviet and Hungarian labor under late socialism, the field results revealed a disintegrating command economy that was increasingly supplanted by barter-based exchange, resulting in disorder rather than self-organization. The factory became a space of anarchic fragmentation, fostering the rise of commercial capitalism and a nascent oligarchic class.

From 1992 to 1994, the research extended to Vorkuta's coal basin, where mine strikes and reforms were in conflict. A sociological analysis of all twelve mines, conducted in collaboration with a World Bank project, highlighted the harmful effects of shock therapy. Workers, disillusioned by market liberalization, gradually abandoned collective resistance – "bowing before the angel of history."

> Market pressures, gendered shifts, and economic involution

As industrial enterprises collapsed, wage delays became widespread, and compensation was sometimes provided in the form of overpriced food. Economic activity shifted to the domestic sphere.

Starting in 1994, Burawoy and Lytkina investigated workers' survival strategies through household interviews, developing a theory of post-socialist transition, inspired by Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*. Burawoy echoed Polanyi's view: *markets cannot generate society without either destruction or resistance*.

In post-Soviet Russia, this resistance emerged as increased domestic labor, a revival of informal economies, and the commodification of labor, money, nature, and care – each embedded in culturally significant social relations. Interviews revealed a stark gender divide. On the one hand, women became de facto heads of households, compensating for men's loss of status and employment. On the other hand, women's kinship-based support networks often substituted for the failing state. The entrepreneurial spirit of working-class women, both within and outside the

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household, including those involved in small businesses in trade or service, prevented them and their families from escaping the cycle of deprivation.

Together with Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina termed this "involution" – a regressive adaptation that preserved survival at the cost of social reconstruction.

> Neoliberal state pressure and the logic of exclusion

The Involution Project was hosted at the Institute for Socioeconomic and Energy Problems of the North (ISEEP) at the Komi Science Center. Burawoy's fieldwork and openness to collaborative dialogue transformed empirical challenges into conceptual inquiries.

A new initiative emerged: analyzing Russia's selective social welfare system post-1996. Together, we examined how rural and urban residents gained or lost "officially poor" status, and how poverty itself was shaped by policy.

Despite his Marxist roots, Burawoy embraced theoretical pluralism and agreed with the prospect of applying William Julius Wilson's theories of urban poverty to the Russian context, demonstrating how empirical grounding can rejuvenate theoretical categories.

As labor rights eroded and lawful strikes became nearly impossible, the state abandoned labor market regulation. Simultaneously, poverty definitions narrowed. Moreover, as the number and composition of people experiencing poverty increased, the state changed the rules for registering "those in need of support". It disciplined people with low incomes, widening the circles of those excluded from the right to social protection. Bureaucratic distancing – by the state, policy experts, and unions – left society isolated in a "primitive struggle for survival," where denial of poverty became a survival strategy, and class identity dissolved.

> The commodification of knowledge and public sociology's resistance

Later, Burawoy turned his focus to the university, where knowledge and academic labor were increasingly commodified under neoliberal regimes.

In 2007, at the invitation of Svetlana Yaroshenko, he delivered lectures in St. Petersburg on the topic of public sociology. He returned in 2015 to present "Sociology as a Vocation" and participate in a roundtable on the future of Russian sociology.

Burawoy emphasized sociology's mission to unify rather than divide, functioning as both a scientific and moral-political discipline. He championed the return of enriched sociological knowledge to marginalized publics. Though aware of the structural constraints facing Russian public sociology, his optimism and experience overcoming barriers informed his belief that professional and public sociology could coexist and thrive.

In 2015, amid rising academic pressures, he urged sociologists to resist the uncritical pursuit of academic performance metrics, historicize their own struggles, recognize the personal as social, and develop empirically grounded, locally relevant theories – whether borrowed or shaped by the Russian context.

He advocated for solidarity among sociologists and active engagement with a self-organizing civil society, emphasizing the transformative power of collective inquiry and its public relevance.

> Michael as a living embodiment

Michael Burawoy brilliantly integrated his passion for sociology with an acute awareness of the inequalities spawned by global capitalism. His cross-national research – including in Russia – demonstrated that sociologists are a potentially "dangerous" intellectual class: aligned with civil society, alert to mechanisms of inequality, and capable of transforming individual suffering into collective action.

Above all, we remember his attentiveness, openness, generosity, and wisdom. He listened with genuine respect, bridging divides, dismantling hierarchies, and fostering equality in daily interactions. His insights into structure and agency were forged through deep, empathetic engagement with workers' lives.

To us, Michael Burawoy was not only a theorist of public sociology – he was its living embodiment. ■

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> Michael Burawoy: Public Sociology and Optimism of the Will

by **Fareen Parvez**, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Michael Burawoy lecturing outside Wheeler Hall at UC Berkeley. Photo by Ana Villareal.

Michael Burawoy was my PhD advisor and was in my life from 2001. I had the privilege of sharing a rich and wonderful dialogue with him for 24 years. My last email to Michael was just a few hours before I learned of his passing, sharing with him my thoughts for a Palestine teach-in that he generously encouraged. Just minutes after teaching his brilliant 2000 essay, "Marxism after Communism," I received a voicemail and then read the devastating email.

It's both painful and heartwarming to help honor his legacy. Reaching across national divides was so important to Michael from the start, and then through his work with the International Sociological Association and his extensive travels to meet sociologists wherever they were across the world, over the last fifteen years.

Michael had about 80 graduate students whose dissertations he chaired. Many came to him because of their interests in labor or the former Soviet Union and post-communist transition. And many others because of his support for ethnography, global comparative work, or his Marxist approach to sociology and the world. I'm in the last category, which also means I didn't, at the time, engage with a lot of Michael's empirical work. But I'm now in the process of discovering it and devouring as much of it as I can. Every time I go back to Michael's writings, I'm struck by the poetry that's embedded in how he wrote. The passion that he communicated in real life is very much alive on the page.

> The morally responsible ethnographer, sociologist, and Marxist always

As an ethnographer, Michael worked as a machine operator, as a radial drill operator (I'm not even sure what that is!), in a rubber factory, in a champagne factory and in a furniture factory up in the Russian Arctic (which, I joked with him, I wanted to visit). Michael's early work >>

was about race and class in the copper mines of Zambia. He wrote about the bases of how workers consent to their own exploitation in the American factory, production processes, and the different state interventions and ideological regimes that sustain them. He also addressed actually existing socialism in Hungary and the Soviet transition to capitalism. He had a sustained engagement with Polanyi and the changing nature of countermovements; and an elaborate and years-long engagement with Bourdieu and more recently the sociology of Du Bois and the larger project of decolonizing the canon. He wrote a good deal on ethnography and my favorite book, *The Extended Case Method*, and of course on reconstructing Marxism. Michael also wrote critiques of the neoliberalization of the university, racial capitalism in South Africa, and finally, among his last projects was his commitment to Palestine; understanding it as a case of settler colonialism, drawing out a comparative analysis with apartheid South Africa, and above all galvanizing and reminding American sociologists of our moral responsibility to speak out to reduce the suffering of Palestinians.

> Michael's work as poetry

I want to share just a few short favorite passages of the poetry in his writing:

"What is positive science? For Auguste Comte, sociology was to replace metaphysics and uncover empirical laws of society. It was the last discipline to enter the kingdom of science, but once admitted it would rule over the unruly, producing order in progress out of chaos. Thus, positivism is at once science and ideology." (*The Extended Case Method*, p. 31)

"In the view of reflexive science, intervention is not only an unavoidable part of social research, but a virtue to be exploited. It is by mutual reaction that we discover the properties of the social order. Interventions create perturbations that are not noise to be expurgated, but music to be appreciated, transmitting the hidden secrets of the participants' world." (*The Extended Case Method*, p. 40)

"Is there not something special that warrants our support for the Palestinian cause? […] Perhaps, the ongoing massacre of Palestinians is the most egregious, the most barbaric atrocity of all. It takes place live on our screens; it is in our face; it is inescapable. The unconditional support of Western powers on the side of Israel gives it world historical significance. For a sociologist it is not enough to declare whose side you are on and then move on; as sociologists we embed our political commitments within a theoretical framework. In a period of 'postcoloniality' the systematic and transparent repression of Palestinians by the Israeli state makes it unique, compelling us to re-examine our own past, giving new salience to 'settler colonialism,' as the debris of decaying Empires."

These were only three out of countless passages that are just as beautiful.

> Personal influence and the public sociology agenda

I'll now share a bit about Michael's influence on me and my work. And then I'll say a few things about public sociology.

When Michael retired in 2023, I wrote some reflections, as did his other students. I'm sharing a small piece of that here. I started graduate school in September 2001. Two weeks later, Congress voted to invade Afghanistan, and the world would never be the same. I remember Michael's Soc 101 lectures in those early weeks, where he boldly critiqued the impending war and brilliantly got a lecture hall full of students to think critically about 9/11 and its aftermath (at a moment when American nationalism was at an all-time high). I knew then I was at home.

Within a couple years, Michael was carving out the public sociology agenda, and the excitement and energy around this was palpable and shaped my remaining years. As Michael wrote in "For Public Sociology" (2005): "Many of the 50% to 70% of graduate students who survive to receive their PhD, sustain their original commitment by doing public sociology on the side – often hidden from their supervisor.' Today, while I don't have a supervisor per se, it is indeed public sociology on the side that has sustained me.

Michael's influence today on my thinking is subtle but deep and unshakeable. My work on religion and madness in Morocco reflects what I learned through him about Fanon's psychoanalytic work in Algeria and the sociological roots of trauma. My research on household debt in India takes me back to my first love of Marxism, that he nurtured. Indeed, Michael's Marxism was my sanctuary.

I gravitated to Michael not only because of his intellectual and personal charisma but because I saw alienation and class in everything I was studying, whether it was how people thought about the pornography industry (my MA thesis that Michael served on) or types of political mobilization among Muslim minorities (my dissertation he supervised, and eventual book).

> The teacher of analytical thinking whose point was always to change the world

Michael encouraged me in my ethnography to avoid the hegemonic sites of power and global cosmopolitanism and to focus instead on more marginal cities in my field sites of France and India. So I ended up studying Lyon in southeastern France and Hyderabad, in South India. And I'm so thankful for this, to have lived and learned in the margins.

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Through Michael, I learned to think analytically, and when I'm stuck in my ability to form an argument, I go back to the 2x2 table he was so fond of and find the clarity and sharpness that are otherwise so elusive.

Michael of course shaped my understanding of ethnography. Grappling with profound ethical questions and power relations in the field, studying subaltern Muslim communities, I knew Michael was with me in spirit. And I quoted him in my methodological appendix in my book.

Again from *Extended Case Method*: "On whomever's side we are, managers or workers, white or black, men or women, we are automatically implicated in a relation of domination. As *observers*, no matter how we like to deceive ourselves, we are on 'our own side,' … (Goldner 1968). Our mission may be noble – broadening social movements, promoting social justice, challenging the horizons of everyday life – but there is no escaping the elementary divergence between intellectuals, no matter how organic, and the interests of their declared constituency."

Michael lived and breathed Thesis 11: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."

I think his students would all agree he believed foremost in changing the world and in revolution more than in theory for theory's sake or knowledge for the sake of knowledge. This drives me in all that I do; indeed, it haunts me. But it has a funny place in American sociology. I remember years ago I got a very negative evaluation from a student in my class. They wrote, "Professor Parvez's class is useless – unless you want to be a communist revolutionary." I wasn't sure whether to be insulted or to wear that as a badge of honor. I'd like to think Michael would have laughed and been proud. As Zach Levenson wrote in a tribute essay, "Michael couldn't stand empiricism, but he was equally repulsed by theoreticism. The task of sociological Marxism, he thought, was to carefully navigate between these twin pitfalls."

Another exemplary thing in Michael, that I hope has influenced me, was his willingness to change as the world changed. Again, this was true to his understanding of Marxism. Although he taught his social theory class in a very particular way for decades, he came to embrace Du Bois and embarked on a whole new conversation and began changing his theory course. Before Du Bois, he had had a long encounter with Bourdieu. (I remember him enrolling as a student in Loic Wacquant's graduate seminar on Bourdieu and grumbling about how much homework he had!) I was lucky to have been part of that cohort of students that debated and argued about the limits and potentials of a Bourdiesian perspective. Michael had such a deep need to understand and clarify his own theoretical lenses, and it was thrilling to share a small part of that dynamism.

> Optimism of the will and moving forward

Michael had written in 2011: "Antonio Gramsci is famously associated with the phrase, 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. Pessimism of the intellect refers to the structural determination of social processes, setting limits on the possible. Politics, on the other hand, requires optimism, concerned as it is with collective will formation, dissolving limits and striving for the impossible. …Optimism of the will calls for pessimism of the intellect, and vice versa. They are Siamese twins."

Though I had some indications, I don't know if Michael believed that the crises in the US were becoming deeper and deeper and the contradictions would eventually ripen to the point of moving toward socialism. But Michael was always excited and supportive of contemporary social movements, from Occupy Wall Street to the movement for justice in Palestine, something he had talked about occasionally over many years.

But he would often remind us that our number one public was our undergraduates. And to the extent that we are in a Gramscian war of position, the university is inside the trenches. Raising the morale of our students, helping them see that something is rotten to the core of our capitalist system, that yes, they can and must change the world, for those of us in education, this is perhaps our most important task.

In his characteristic humility, Michael always used to say that public sociology was mainstream sociology in much of the Global South, from South Africa to India; that he wasn't making a particularly new intervention when it came to advocating for the idea that our work as sociologists must be accountable to or engaged with the public. I think he was learning from activists and sociologists in the Global South.

> Organic public sociology: process or ethics

He wrote, again in 2011: "Public sociology cannot be the name for bad sociology, it cannot be vanguardist or populist but must aim for a dialogue [with labor] on the basis of what we know as sociologists" (2011: 75).

We must keep having these exchanges across the Global North and Global South, continuing to dismantle this binary towards a real solidarity that Michael so embodied in his practice. We must keep sharing knowledge in a real multidirectional way, to share our insights with communities on the ground and with social movements. We won't always agree, and for those of us who are ethnographers, our arguments may not always be what communities want to hear; but you dialogue and debate, and in that process, we move forward – and this is what constitutes a tradition.

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Based on a 2021 essay he wrote, my sense is that it was increasingly important to Michael that public sociology go beyond traditional means of writing for the media, op-eds and radio, but to engage with activists and communities in an "organic public sociology." For me personally, this is the direction I've been moving in. There's no blueprint for how to do it, and I'm very much learning by doing. I try to find that sweet meeting spot of sociological analysis and theory, and the lived realities and face-to-face communication with those most impacted by the violence and suffering we want to fight; whether alongside refugee communities, migrant workers, or working-class activists protesting in the streets.

While Michael didn't get into the weeds of navigating those power relations or how exactly to have those dialogues, especially across the class divide, I think we can still learn from his example. Specifically, I wonder if organic public sociology could be a process or an ethics.

Michael would never have articulated it this way, but based on his example, I think perhaps organic public sociology has to do with a commitment to science but also a commitment to engaging people with the heart, and a type of moral conviction and character.

> Michael's legacy: humor, energy, optimism and ethics to support us on shaking ground

What are some parts of Michael Burawoy's character that impacted so many hundreds of us around the world, perhaps thousands? He had an openness, a belief in the intuitions of others, a kindness and humility, and a true democratic spirit: the belief that you could learn from anyone, an ethics of treating everyone with respect, from his students to the custodial staff in the building. Don't get me wrong, he could be impatient, and he had no tolerance of intellectual laziness or grandstanding. But Michael had so many publics, across the Global North and the Global South, and what gave integrity to his public sociology was this ethic, his way of being.

I mourn the fact that I won't be able to have these conversations with Michael about public sociology and organizing in dark times. But in my stages of grief, I think about taking all the things I loved, his humor and energy and optimism and ethics, and making them my own. I think that's the journey now for all of us who were in his orbit and who were able to learn from him and take in his blessings. He wrote in *The Extended Case Method*, "when the ground beneath our feet is always shaking, we need a crutch." For me, Michael Burawoy's corpus of writings (which I consider his poetry) and his ethics (which I had the privilege of witnessing) will be that crutch. ■

This piece is based on comments delivered on March 1, 2025, at a webinar in honor of Michael Burawoy by the Social Theory Network, based in Bangladesh. The webinar was titled "Public Sociology & the Global South." A first version was published in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*.

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> Labor Process and Production of Hegemony: Burawoy's Contribution

by **Aylin Topal**, Middle East Technical University, Turkey

I first met Prof. Michael Burawoy in person at the Conference of the Council of National Associations of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in Ankara in 2013. At the time, he was serving as the President of the ISA. Since then, I became an active member of the ISA and Michael and I remained in contact, meeting at ISA conferences and exchanging emails on important political events. He was truly a transdisciplinary social scientist. I, as a political scientist, became a member of the ISA thanks to his welcoming attitude and firm transdisciplinary question-driven research.

Michael and I had a common friend: Erik Olin Wright, whom we lost in 2019. Erik reflected deeply on life, death, and the afterlife in his journal articles while battling leukemia. I remember exchanging emails with Michael about Erik's materialistic lens, embracing the idea that our physical bodies return back to the universe in the form of stardust: a profound connection to the cosmos. I know that Michael embraced this deeply humanistic approach of reintegration into the natural world. Not only will he continue to exist in the form of stardust, but he will also be read and cited by many scholars examining the nature of the capitalist labor process and dynamics of class struggle. This piece is to honor his contribution to the literature.

> Labor power

The production process occupies a central place in economic theory. After all, the definition of economy starts with production, which can be defined as transforming objects with a specific use value into objects with a different use value. Therefore, production corresponds to production of a new use value. It is the power of labor acting on the means of production to transform the objects that produce new use value. This transformation and the new use value are meaningful for markets to the extent that they correspond to a higher exchange value.

At the core of capitalist production lies a central antagonism. In the capitalist markets, laborers do not own the means of production with which they have to interact to produce the higher exchange value. For this to happen, capitalists have to invest in labor power. This investment in labor power is inevitable for capitalists because labor power is uniquely capable of transforming objects and producing new exchange value that exceeds the previous exchange value of the object. Investing in labor power is profitable to the extent that the value laborers create is higher than the exchange value of that labor power. The wage is the exchange value of labor, which is a socially determined level sufficient to reproduce labor power and maintain the laborers' families. Meanwhile, capitalists have to make profit by making the laborers work more than the time that is necessary for the creation of new value equal to the wage of their labor power.

Therefore, the capitalist labor process inevitably extends beyond the production of use value and the exchange value of labor to encompass the production and private appropriation of the socially produced surplus value. The capitalist labor process involves the relations between production aimed at maximizing the extraction of excess unpaid labor, on the one hand, and maximizing the exchange value of labor power beyond the minimum subsistence level, on the other. Despite the centrality of these tensions embedded in the social relations of production, detailed research and engaged debate on production and the labor process were largely lacking until the 1970s.

> Pioneering critical works

In 1954, a group of social scientists sought to study labor relations and industrial systems across different countries in a comparative perspective focusing on economic development, labor markets and state–business–labor relations (aka industrial relations). The central motivation for those studies was the desire to discover the universal patterns of industrialization along with *sui generis* labor relations and industrial formation shaped by the cultural and political context in each market. The research of this group, funded by the Ford Foundation, yielded a co-authored volume in 1960, entitled *Industrialism and Industrial Man* by Clark Kerr and others. The book focuses on the influence of the leaders of industrialization in each country on the actual path of the industrialization process. These studies failed to go beyond the modernization theory framework emphasizing the role of "industrialization elites" mediating between workers and employers for stability and economic growth. Their functionalist conception of causal relations, ahistorical character and tendency towards tautology did not initiate any debate outside their own circles.

Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* published in 1974 was one of the pioneer works in critically examining the centrality of the labor process in capitalist society. Braverman argued that capitalism refers to the emergence of modern techniques but in its due course corresponds to widespread erosion of skills

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"the interplay between coercion and consent obscuring the exploitative nature of capitalism"

both in factories and offices. He reads the history of capitalism as one of deskilling the masses while skilled labor had been confined to a very small number of laborers including engineers and managers. Deskilled labor, on the other hand, becomes an interchangeable appendage of the machines. In short, Braverman underlined that Taylorism is "nothing less than explicit verbalization of the capitalist mode of production."

Braverman's deskilling argument bears striking similarities to the themes depicted in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) criticizing the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and the capitalist labor processes. Fragmenting complex tasks into repetitive and simple ones alienates workers from their labor and their sense of purpose and value are consumed by machines. It is true that the technical division of labor in the capitalist production process inherently shapes the labor process; a complicated production process is not an undifferentiated process, but rather one that is internally fractured through the capitalist division of labor. As different branches of production compartmentalize this process, laborers do not engage with all the transformations that the commodity goes through but usually interact with it at a particular stage in its production. This powerful critique of the capitalist labor process inspired other works and successfully sparked a heated debate on the labor process among scholars across various fields.

> Insight from Friedman and Edwards: the need for ethnographic research

Once Braverman stripped the veil off the capitalist labor process, the debate focused particularly on a very simple yet crucial question: Why do workers work as hard as they do? This leads one to ask: How do workers internalize the fundamentals of capitalism that constrain them? Critical responses to these questions came from Friedman, Edwards, and Burawoy. Andrew Friedman emphasized another face of capitalist labor control, a more humane face. He claimed that, instead of direct control or supervision, workers are provided with a "responsible autonomy" in which they comfortably identify themselves with the aims of the firms. Friedman highlights the variability and adaptability of managerial control shaped by the resistance strategies of workers. Similarly, Richard Edwards offered a more nuanced perspective on the relational and strategic nature of workplace relations.

Edwards noted that Braverman's analysis tends to generalize the main features of Taylorism throughout the history of capitalism. The scientific management principles of Taylorism left their bold mark on labor process control through the twentieth century. Yet, it should still be regarded as one form of control management. Edwards identifies three models, simple, technical, and bureaucratic, each representing a different management strategy. He introduces the concept of "contested" workplaces, where control is not necessarily absolute but constantly negotiated between workers and management. Therefore, as opposed to Braverman's passive portrayal of workers, Edwards places significant emphasis on the conflict-ridden nature of workplace relations and workers' resistance. Although both Friedman and Edwards incorporated the agency of workers into their analysis, they failed to satisfactorily respond to the puzzling questions.

To answer the question of how it is that workers consent to their own exploitation within the capitalist labor process, the researcher needs extreme empathy. Understanding a subject's perspective in social science is a complex and often challenging endeavor. The researcher needs to suspend assumptions and theoretical preconceived ideas to authentically grasp the lived experiences of others. True empathy is also limited as the researchers' perspective is shaped by its social context. To be able to expand beyond the limits of empathy, the researcher needs direct access to the subjects' reality. Therefore, ethnographic research is necessary to be able to answer these questions about the labor process.

> Burawoy's foundational ideas

Michael Burawoy did not only have extraordinary intellectual rigor but also a deep sense of empathy, commitment to humility and reflexivity. With these qualities, he contributed to the labor process debate. The main difference between him and other scholars was that he tried to answer these questions not from the researcher's distant objective position but by deriving answers from his subjective experience as a factory worker. He spent significant time working in factories and this profoundly shaped his understanding of workplace dynamics, worker consent, and the interplay between labor and the capitalist labor process.

His *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* is based on his experiences as a factory worker at the Allied Corporation machine shop in Chicago. Burawoy starts precisely with questions of how workers actively assume and reproduce the role of management. He notes that possible answers to these questions should be sought within the capitalist labor process, as it manufactures both consent and commodities. Similarly to the case of Friedman's "responsible autonomy" conceptualiza-

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tion, Burawoy notes that workers perceive themselves as having choices.

It is precisely this illusion of choice that makes workers actively internalize the rules of capitalist control over the labor process. As a machine operator, Burawoy lived the daily routines and social interactions of the factory floor. He narrates how he himself had felt the pressures of production quotas, managerial control, and relations among the workers when dealing with such pressures. He provides valuable details about how workers sought to exceed production quotas in order to gain rewards or extra breaks. He argues that these game-like strategies that he calls "making out" constitute elements of consent to their own exploitation. He also claims that emphasis on the concept of control obfuscates the actual working of capitalism. Rather, he emphasizes the interplay between coercion and consent within the labor process obscuring the exploitative nature of capitalism.

> Production politics in capitalist, socialist, and postcolonial societies

He later expanded these foundational ideas to a broader global, macro-level context in his next book *The Politics of Production* published in 1985. In this book, he focuses on the political and institutional frameworks of production in different spatio-temporal contexts. He suggests "production politics" are determined by state policies, labor markets, and the dynamics of the class struggle. Under these determinants, the organization of work and the shopfloor are shaped into different labor regimes and systems of production politics in capitalist, socialist, and postcolonial societies.

In capitalist societies, he emphasizes the importance of management, given the priority of profit maximization. He points out how labor laws, welfare policies, and ideological elements maintain control over the workers. In the state socialism of the Soviet Union, negotiations between workers and managers over bureaucratic control often lead to conflictual relations due to the mismatch between the state's priorities and workers' needs. These elements foster socialist production politics, offering different incentives for manufacturing consent and establishing resistance mechanisms. Lastly, for post-colonial production politics, Burawoy takes his level of analysis to the global scale to make sense of how imperialist relations continue to determine labor processes in the post-colonial context. His elaborations on how global capitalism shapes labor regimes inform his perspective on neoliberal labor processes.

> Burawoy operationalizes Marx's analysis, highlighting the imperative of productivity

With these two complementary books, Burawoy provides a comprehensive framework for understanding labor processes, linking the everyday experiences of workers to broader political and economic forces. Therefore, he highlights the importance of connecting the analysis at different levels. He also suggests that control and consent, as elements of the capitalist labor process, should be considered together, as they correspond to the two-sided nature of capitalist social relations of production. He notes that labor is simultaneously empowered and repressed in the workplace, as part and parcel of the concerns with rendering hegemonic a particular conception and condition of the relations of production.

Burawoy's analysis necessarily brings the imperative of labor productivity to the fore. He effectively operationalizes Marx's analysis of the labor process. Working life is objectively organized around productivity. –> It is productivity that creates surplus value. –> Self-valorization of capital to the greatest possible extent is the driving motivation of capitalists. –> When the owner of money finds free labor power on the market and possesses it, money becomes transformed into capital to be accumulated. –> Social labor in collectivities is more productive than individual workers. More precisely, labor is productive as collective power. –> The aim of capitalism is to increase profitability as much as possible. –> For more accumulation, the capitalist buys labor power from large numbers of workers in order to increase the productive power of social labor. –>Therefore, numerous workers are employed and work together side by side, whether in the same process or in different but connected processes, in order to increase productivity. This chain of argument brings us to what Marx calls "co-operation of workers." What is more, co-operation of workers is conducted in accordance with a plan that is crafted by the managers and supervisor on behalf of the property owners.

Burawoy's framework notes that the division of labor is not the end but the means to attain productivity. The capitalist system, therefore, reproduces itself through the productivity of labor, as increased productivity of labor means greater production of surplus value. One fundamental way to increase productivity has been to increase the technical division of labor. Therefore, management is to facilitate productivity, not necessarily to execute the division of labor. Prima facie, laborers individually produce parts of the commodity, but production is indeed a social process. It is the collective labor that produces the entire product. Therefore, the capitalist labor process produces hegemony simultaneously by turning workers into isolated individuals as well as by keeping them as part of the collective labor force. As proposed by Marx, the collective power of social production is brought about by organizing labor "into one single productive body", for the purpose of improving its productivity.

> Burawoy's framework for the production of class hegemony

Burawoy notes (as does Marx) that capitalists and their management strictly control the labor process. The subjugation of labor to capital is the formal result of the fact that the worker works for and consequently under the con-

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trol of the capitalist. Essentially, the command of capital defines the requirements for conducting the labor process itself. Directing authority is necessary for harmonious cooperation and the development of productive organizations. Therefore, the work of directing, superintending, and adjusting the labor process becomes one of the functions of capital. Yet, the motivation of capitalists to control the labor process is not confined to increasing cooperation and productivity. Capital and labor are inherently in a struggle over the control of working time and the appropriation of the surplus product. Management and supervision are crucial tools in combating an upsurge of revolt in the workplace. The element of consent is constantly implicated in Marx's analysis. However, since Marx was writing primarily a political text – as opposed to Burawoy's sociological text – he does not address the question of how and why the working classes consent to management.

Burawoy's studies provide an insightful framework for examining the production of class hegemony, focusing on how the capitalist labor process impedes the rise of antagonistic forms of consciousness. However, he notes that workers often feel discontent and frustration in the workplace due to the pressure of production quotas, strict supervision, and repetitive tasks. It is not precisely class consciousness but rather the consciousness of an opposition that expresses itself in new modes of action. Although workers consciously recognize that the business is one of making a profit by extracting the surplus value they produce, their demands are merely for dignity and autonomy. Thus, workers' objective relations to the means of production certainly generate conflicts which shape workers' experience in "class ways". As Thompson suggests, class is always present in forms of frustration and discontent, yet these tensions do not necessarily express themselves in class consciousness.

Burawoy employs Gramsci's framework of hegemony, which combines consent and coercion with moments of collective will formation. Gramsci provides a rich theoretical and conceptual framework that helps us understand the transformation of individual subjectivity within the totality of praxis as moments of collective will formation. Burawoy's narrative illustrates how workers' daily experiences diverge from one another, undermining their collective identity and collective will formation. This is why workers compete with each other, for example, to meet their individual quota for extra benefits. Their individual economic interests could be making it difficult for sections of workers to act in solidarity.

As Filippini notes, Gramsci defines individuals as stratified, contradictory beings constituted in their relationship with society. Therefore, the individual is seen as a "collective man" constructed by common sense, changing continuously within the ideological terrain. Burawoy notes the importance of the ideological terrain in *Politics of Production*, although he does not go into country-level analysis. Nevertheless, Burawoy underlines the fact that he refers to the US context where the absence of a political and intellectual leadership of the working class leads to competition of workers among themselves. Hence, stratified and contradictory individual interests are a result of the inability of the workers to translate their interests into a collective organism.

As Panitch and Gindin note, Burawoy conforms trade unions as a central hegemonic apparatus of the working class that could draw different fractions of the working class into a dialogue and translate between their different practices. It is clear that the labor process, without collective political agency, would not allow different segments of the working class to transcend their economic–corporate moments on the basis of the solidarity of interests, even in the purely economic field. Even worse, under the global neoliberal assault, workers are dispossessed of the capacity of their trade unions as the principal political organization for the actions of the subaltern classes.

> In lieu of a conclusion

Burawoy's work is motivated by two propositions: a) the fundamental reality of the worker's life is shaped at the workplace; and b) changes in the labor process relate to changes in the composition of capitalism. From these propositions, it is still necessary to provide analyses of the neoliberal transformation of the organization of work and its impact on the formation of workers' collective will.

It is evident that accelerated privatization in the neoliberal era has had an actual impact on workers in privatized companies who tend to lose their jobs *en masse* and are deprived of their social rights. Yet, workers have shown very weak signs of discontent towards these privatization policies. More research is needed regarding the absence of symptoms of restlessness in relation to privatizations.

New studies should highlight the centrality of the labor process and the experiences of laborers in earning their living, along with an analysis of hegemony and counter-hegemony under neoliberalism. It is also pertinent to note that, in the neoliberal era, workers' experiences in the workplace may vary. Rather than identifying and analyzing a unified and coherent neoliberal labor process, new studies should adopt initial standpoints that reflect the notion that the labor process takes different forms and shapes in other sectors of the economy. Michael Burawoy's methodological and conceptual framework will continue to guide new ethnographers in coming to terms with their fieldwork experiences. ■

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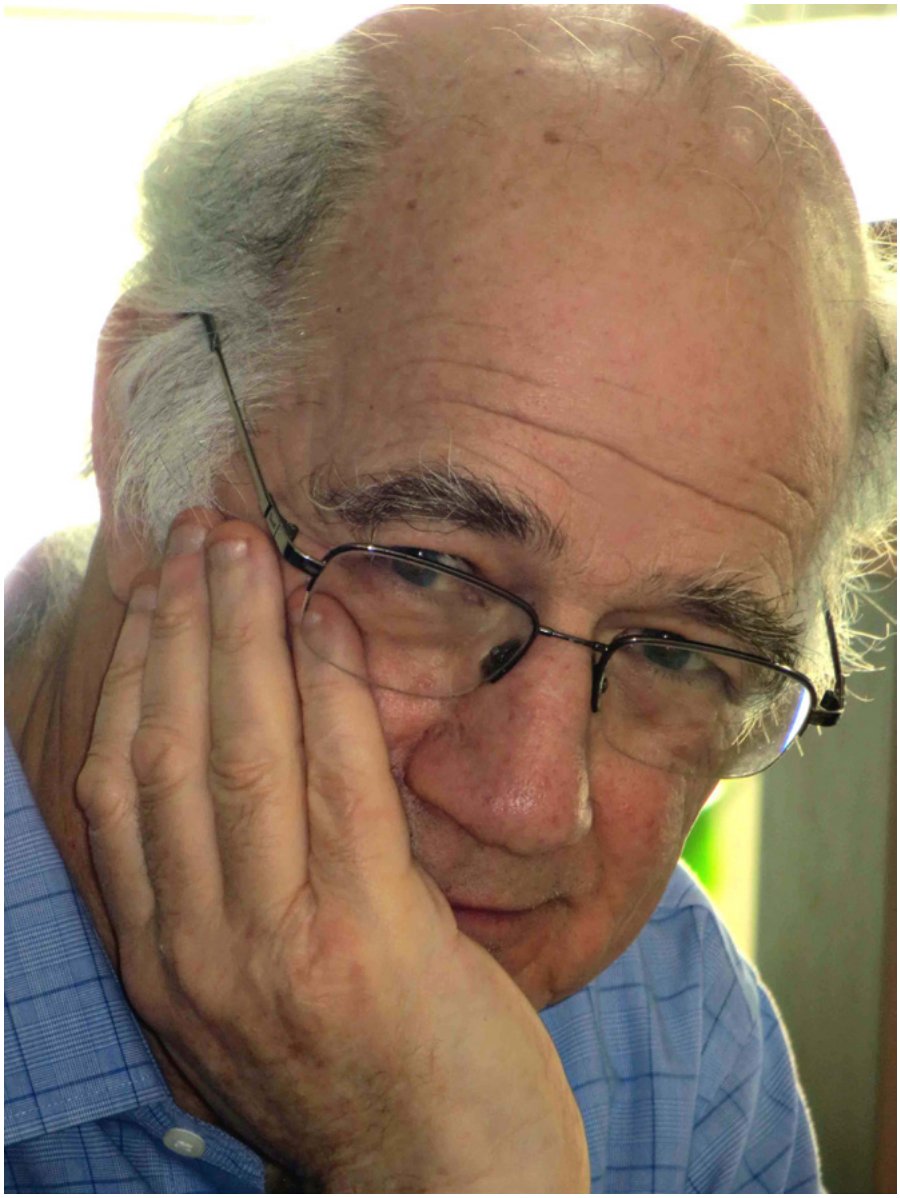
> Encounters and Debates with Michael Burawoy

by **Ari Sitas**, University of Cape Town and University of Stellenbosch, South Africa



Michael Burawoy during a lecture on the National University Kiev-Mohyla Academy in Kiev, Ukraine. Photo by Volodymyr Paniotto, on Wikipedia.

I was introduced to Michael Burawoy's work in 1979. Eddie Webster, my teacher, came to me clutching a fresh book, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism*. He insisted that I had to use this book in the lectures I was to give as his replacement at Wits. "This is a perfect companion", he insisted, "to Huw Beynon's *Working for Ford*", which was to form the core of the lectures. So, there I was trying to understand how hegemony was to be procured and secured by workers' coping mechanisms through games on the shop floor. The book was based on his experiences of working in a setting like the one that

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Elton Mayo had studied in the 1920s, where he discovered that workers coped through informal networks of solidarity. But unlike Mayo, Michael *worked* there as he was to work from factory to factory in order to fathom the politics *in* production. That was the gift of his second book, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism*.

I subsequently discovered how close he was to Eddie Webster and the popular historian Luli Callinicos who were my mentors and he extended his generosity of friendship and care to me since we met face-to-face in Durban in 1989. He was fascinated by the work we were doing within the workers' theatre movement in the militant trade union movement and how we practiced our own "public sociology". We debated vigorously the prospects of the social movement that was all around us steeped in the so-called Natal Civil War.

He subsequently hosted me in Berkeley's Sociology Department twice, in 1993-1994 and 1999-2000. He actually got me out of the throes of having to chair the Media and Culture committee of the civil war's peace accord, where we were asked to spin progress to the press during the day and face the restart of the violence each night. It was an unforgettable year as he passed me on to his many colleagues and friends – Peter Evans, Michael Watts, Gillian Hart, Asef Bayat, Michelle Williams, and even Manuel Castells – who were all ears and care about the transition in South Africa. Michael was already transfixed by post-glasnost Russia so the comparisons of transitions were flying around as seminar ghosts. I had to return to South Africa for the first real democratic elections to be an ANC voting monitor.

The image of Burawoy whizzing around on his sporty bicycle and helmet from Oakland where he lived to campus and near to Monterey Market, where we lived and the constant "you must read this" and "no, you read that" kept us going, as I was becoming more and more familiar with his effort to theoretically justify the ethnographic work that made him a sociological figure of note.

There were many meetings in the years to come as South Africa was becoming a second home: he visited as soon as I moved to the University of Cape Town in 2010 where he also introduced me to AnnMarie Wolpe, his long-time friend. The ageing feminist nabbed me on the spot to serve on the Harold Wolpe Trust, in memory of another friend and sociologist. He wanted to be part of the launching of my *Mandela Decade* book, which the Trust hosted but he had pressing international commitments. He tried to make me work with him during his ISA presidency, but I was tired of continuing with the Association after I had spent eight years animating its cogs and spindles.

In 2012 we were teamed up by Sumangala Damodaran at Ambedkar University in Delhi to debate our respective qualitative work on shopfloors and working-class communities. We disagreed on truth and lies! What I mean is: his access of factory spaces was based on not revealing his actual objective and watering his Marxian influences down to HR talk! But I never had access in Apartheid South Africa through managerial networks but rather through shop stewards and their trade union officials. We also disagreed on the word "ethnography"– being of some Greek descent I always harbored an aversion to a word that means "inscribing" the "ethnos" onto your subjects!

Then again, we met in Johannesburg as he was working on his Bourdieu book with another good friend, Karl von Holdt. Then again online in Freiburg about public sociology and the circulation of sociological ideas, hosted by our friend Wiebke Keim. Then again in Cape Town to discuss the University system and its new managerial ethos. And finally, we got together in Johannesburg to pay tribute to our friend Eddie Webster, hosted by Sarah Mosoetsa and Michelle Williams. He also paid tribute to another retired but audacious friend: Jackie Cock.

Michael was to be killed in Oakland a few weeks later.

We lost a remarkable sociologist of the workplace and of the practice of sociology, and a great synthesizer of sociological macro and micro trends. There is a lasting image of his restless theatricality: the pacing, the chalk, the quadrants he would draw to express categories, his laughter and his horror at the atrocity we were becoming. He left us with his reflections on the rise of authoritarian populism and genocidal violence. ■

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> Michael Burawoy: A Lighthouse

by **Shaikh Mohammad Kais**, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Professor Michael Burawoy has been a lasting source of inspiration for numerous sociologists from the Global South. He challenged the idea of "one sociology for all" and passionately defended the existence of "many sociologies around the globe." His writings and speeches emphasized the pivotal role of sociology within the South, questioned the hierarchical global division of intellectual labor, and argued for theories grounded in the lived experiences of our societies.

Working in Bangladesh, I was profoundly influenced by his perspectives on a decolonized and emancipated sociology. I was introduced to Michael in 2008, when Professor Syed Farid Alatas invited me to participate in a conference in Taipei in 2009. I was still a very junior researcher, unsure of myself. Michael, with characteristic generosity, helped me shape my abstract and paper for that first international meeting. I will never forget that encouragement. Around the same time, I also received support from other senior scholars such as Professor Raewyn Connell, which further strengthened my commitment to exploring a distinctly Southern sociology.

Michael's well-known framework of four types of sociology – professional, policy, critical, and public – pushed me to reflect on the state of sociology in Bangladesh. Out of that reflection, I developed the idea of what I later called "hybrid sociology." By this, I mean a sociology that depends heavily on theories and methods imported from the North, while relying on empirical data from the South. This hybrid state is, in itself, a symptom of crisis: a discipline shaped by dependency, unable to stand on its own intellectual foundations fully. In much of the Global South, sociology has been shaped by such dynamics, drawing on external paradigms while neglecting indigenous knowledge and the realities of our own societies.

This hybridization does not happen by chance. It emerges in societies where certain conditions are widespread: dependency on external academic resources, the dominance of imported ideas over local creativity, the lingering effects of colonization, and the marginal position of Southern scholars in the global hierarchy of knowledge. These conditions create a sociology that looks outward for recognition and validation, rather than developing confidence in its own intellectual resources.

Bangladesh offers a clear example. In my country, sociology has long been vaguely defined as a discipline and continues to face theoretical, methodological, and institutional weaknesses. Universities struggle with structural and administrative crises. The discipline often imitates Eurocentric frameworks rather than generating theories rooted in local realities. Professional associations remain weak, while neoliberal reforms in higher education further erode the possibility of building a self-sustaining field. This situation has produced what I call a hybrid sociology – one that reflects the tensions, dependencies, and crises of our academic world.

Yet, this crisis also presents an opportunity. To transform sociology in Bangladesh and in other Southern contexts, we must reform curricula, generate theories and methods grounded in indigenous knowledge, demonstrate the practical relevance of sociology to our societies, strengthen national and regional associations, and encourage a generation of open-minded and self-reflexive scholars who are committed to their responsibilities in and for their communities.

In developing these ideas, Michael's influence was decisive. He not only inspired me with his theoretical insights but also engaged directly with my own attempts to conceptualize hybrid sociology. He read my drafts, offered feedback, and encouraged me to refine my arguments. What impressed me most was not only his intellectual brilliance but also his humility. For a young, unknown scholar from Bangladesh to receive such attention from one of the leading figures of global sociology was both surprising and profoundly motivating.

Beyond his intellectual influence, I will never forget Michael for his warmth and humanity. At conferences, he was approachable, humorous, and generous with his time. I recall him asking me about the food and hospitality at Academia Sinica during a Conference in Taipei, and then jokingly announcing, "When Shaikh says it's good, then it's

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“public sociology, the critique of Northern hegemony, the defense of engaged and decolonized knowledge”

good indeed!” At the 2023 Melbourne World Congress, I found myself following him around, taking pictures together like a paparazzi. He laughed at my antics and played along with good humor. Later, when he learned about my election to the Executive Committee of the International Sociological Association (ISA), his congratulations were full of joy and genuine encouragement.

For me, Michael was truly a lighthouse. Just as ships rely on the guiding light to navigate through darkness, I relied on him for clarity and direction in the often-confusing world of global sociology. His legacy – public sociology, the critique of Northern hegemony, the defense of engaged and decolonized knowledge – has shaped my intellectual journey and will continue to guide many others in the Global South.

Michael also launched *Global Dialogue*, the magazine of the ISA, which created a platform for voices from around the world. Our team in Bangladesh had been considering hosting an international conference under its banner, and I had hoped to invite Michael to Dhaka. Sadly, that wish will never be fulfilled.

Dear Michael, your memory will remain forever etched in my heart. You illuminated paths for so many of us. May you rest in peace. ■

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> Honoring Michael Burawoy:
A Marxist Lens on South Africa's Minibus Taxi Industry

by **Siyabulela Fobosi**, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

Michael Burawoy stands as a towering figure in sociology, particularly in the realm of public sociology, where his ethnographic methods and Marxist insights have reshaped understandings of labor, capitalism, and state power. His work has provided a critical lens through which scholars analyze systems of exploitation and resistance within capitalist economies. In paying tribute to Burawoy's scholarly contributions, we find that his theories remain profoundly relevant in contemporary studies, including those examining South Africa's minibus taxi industry.

Burawoy's seminal work, *Manufacturing Consent,* published in 1979, laid the foundation for understanding how workers navigate exploitation under capitalism, often consenting to their own subjugation through workplace structures and state policies. His critique of state interventions and capitalist reforms offers a powerful framework within which to dissect the dynamics of informal labor markets. Nowhere is this more pertinent than in South Africa's minibus taxi industry: an informal yet essential sector that emerged from the apartheid-era's spatial segregation and continues to operate under conditions of precarious labor.

The deregulation of the industry in the late 1980s, which allowed for rapid expansion, aligns with Burawoy's notion of "strategic selectivity", whereby state policies deliberately favor formalized capitalist enterprises while neglecting or marginalizing informal economies. This theoretical perspective helps explain why successive government interventions, including the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP), have failed to substantially improve the livelihoods of minibus taxi workers. Instead, these interventions have largely served the interests of capital, modernizing infrastructure while failing to address labor conditions.

Sociological inquiries into the minibus taxi industry, such as my own, echo Burawoy's insights into labor fragmentation and the structural exploitation of workers. My research illustrates how minibus taxi drivers, operating without contracts, benefits, or legal protection, face economic insecurity and are subjected to market-driven competition that erodes their bargaining power. My analysis of state policies

Cover of the 1982 revised edition of Manufacturing Consent. *Credit: The University of Chicago Press.*

reinforces Burawoy's argument that reforms within capitalist structures often prioritize economic efficiency over workers' rights.

As Burawoy's work reminds us, meaningful change requires more than policy shifts; it demands organized resistance and structural transformation. Applying his Marxist framework, scholars and activists can advocate reforms that prioritize labor protection, equitable state subsidies, and collective bargaining for minibus taxi drivers. These efforts not only honor Burawoy's intellectual legacy but also advance the struggle for justice within informal labor sectors.

Michael Burawoy's commitment to public sociology underscores the necessity for engaged scholarship in confronting social injustices. His work remains a guiding force for those seeking to unravel the contradictions of capitalism and advocate equitable labor relations. In honoring his contributions, we reaffirm the role of sociology in fostering a more just and humane society. ■

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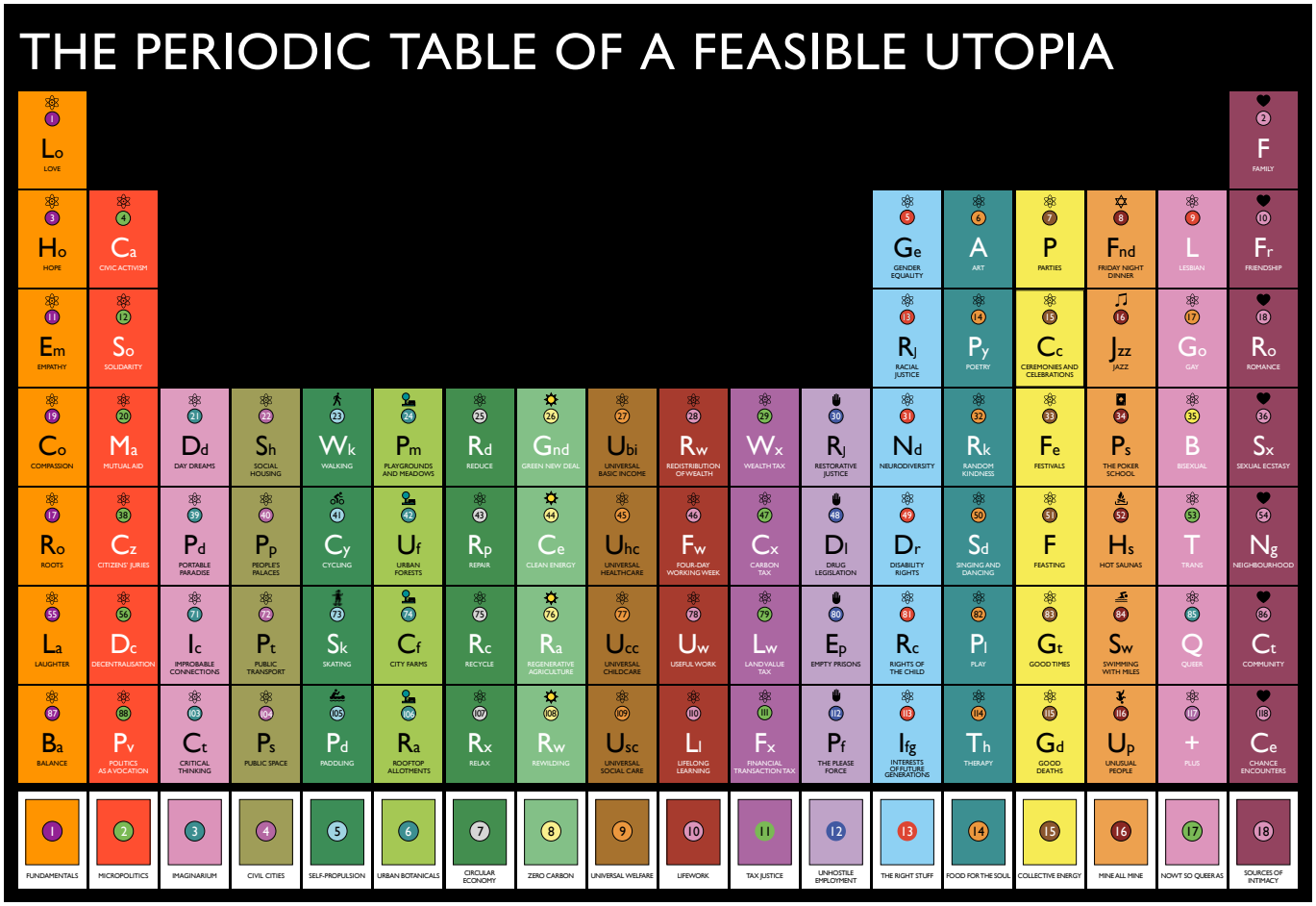
> The Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia

by **David Goldblatt**, independent sociologist and journalist, UK



©David Goldblatt *www.feasibleutopias.org*

The "Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia" is an art installation by David Goldblatt that replaces chemical elements with components of a desirable, plausible society.

I'm not quite sure where the idea for the Periodic Table came from, but I put it down to lockdown madness. However, I know it had many elements. I first encountered it in an encyclopedia as a child. I remember the sheer design pleasure of its rows of coloured rectangles and its mysterious nomenclature. As a former chemistry student, I respect and wonder at its scientific and intellectual elegance. As a reader of Primo Levi's *Periodic Table*, I saw with delight that the Table could be turned into such rich metaphorical territory, a grid of both electron structure and emotional structure.

Of course, there is no shortage of alternative periodic tables – scan the internet. You'll find coffee, Yorkshire, swearing, some funny, some not, but Mendeleev deserves better. Something deeper? Something more surprising? I had been thinking about manifestos – artistic, poetic, political, and others – and wondered if, in an era of such shattered attention spans and fragmented consciousness, they might be too long, too textual, and too linear to survive. What, in the

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age of Instagram, would a manifesto for utopia look like? My answer, and there are a lot of others yet to be discovered, was The Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia.

It lived its first life in pen and pencil in a sketchbook, then it went digital, then it was printed up on cardboard and hung for an afternoon on a vast wall that an arts project lent me. Later on, I was making posters, like the one you see Michael reviewing, and staging the Table in an empty shop in a rundown mall in the centre of Bristol.

We transformed the shop into a pharmacy called Utopian Chemistry and invited the public to explore the Periodic Table. If they stayed, we suggested to our visitors that we had no monopoly on wisdom. Was there an element in their vision of utopia that they would like to add? If they did, we made it up. We printed two postcards of the element, gave one to them as a gift, and placed the other one on the wall to create a second work of art: The People's Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia.

Michael Burawoy was very enthusiastic about the Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia, viewing it as some graphic representation of Erik Olin Wright's "real utopias". I think Michael would have loved this interactive and popular version, especially the crazy, intimate, and off-kilter conversations with people about what the world could be like, often with folks who didn't have the chance to have utopian thoughts as much as they would have liked. I think that probably goes for all of us. ■

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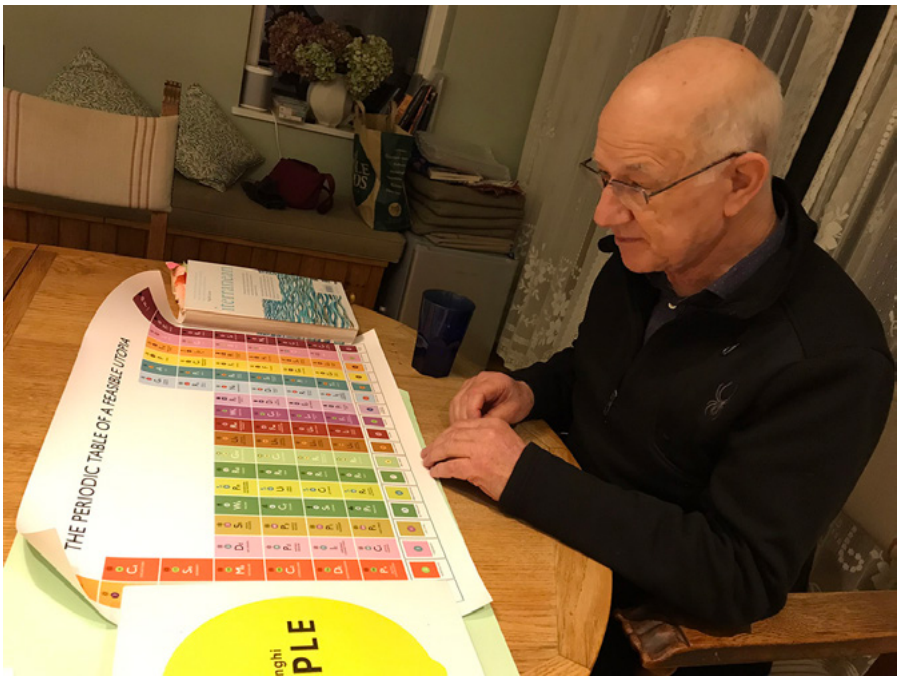

Michael Burawoy looking with interest at a poster of the "Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia" in London, 2024.

Visitors of the "Periodic Table of a Feasible Utopia" arts installation staged in a shopping mall in Bristol, UK, were invited to add their own suggestions to create a second "people's" periodic table.

> A Time for Sociology

by the **International Sociological Association**

At a time when state leaders are promoting distrust in science and attacks on the social sciences are multiplying;
At a time when fake news circulates more widely and with greater impact than research-based analysis;
At a time when many political leaders are spreading hate speech and denying part of the population the right to full citizenship;
At a time when the dehumanization of entire categories of people is once again becoming a widespread tool for asserting and consolidating power;
At a time when scientific evidence is being denied in order to dismiss systemic environmental and societal emergencies;
At a time when states are repressing those who speak out against genocide and systemic violence and racism;
At a time when an unprecedented concentration of wealth allows a small number of multimillionaires to control mass and social media;
At a time when humanity is facing interconnected global crises that will determine the lives of generations to come;
At a time when academic freedom is under threat, even in established democracies;
We believe that critical interventions by social scientists are more essential than ever.
And we reaffirm the values and commitments at the core of our work as researchers, educators, and public intellectuals.

We stand for:

• A **rigorous sociology** based on facts and analysis, that rejects simplistic narratives and embraces the world's complexity;

• An **independent sociology** that reminds us that the words of the powerful are not always true, and that a lie repeated a thousand times is still a lie;

• A **critical sociology** that questions rising inequalities and challenges the myth of the self-made man, the simplistic emphasis on markets and consumerism, and alpha masculinity;

• A **public sociology** that engages in civic debates, not from a pedestal of alleged intellectual superiority, but in dialogue with those striving to transform society and defend the common good;

• A **general sociology** that resists the risks of hyper-specialization and fragmentation and addresses the urgent issues of our time;

• A **global sociology** that learns from researchers and social actors from different parts of the world how to understand and meet the challenges of the 21st century, and contributes to building a sense of shared humanity.

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“sociology has become an indispensable tool for living together on a finite planet”

We firmly believe that social sciences and academic freedom are intrinsic to democracy and must be protected and promoted.

We believe that informed, historically grounded, and sociologically relevant public debate is vital to understanding and navigating the crises of our times.

We are convinced that sociology not only helps us understand the world, but also to build a more just, livable, peaceful and sustainable future.

At a time of climate change, war, rising inequality and hatred, sociology has become an indispensable tool for living together on a finite planet.

The declaration was presented by **ISA President Geoffrey Pleyers** at the **5th ISA Forum of Sociology in Rabat** on July 6th, 2025. It is supported by ISA former presidents Sari Hanafi, Margaret Abraham, and Michel Wieviorka; ISA current vice-presidents Allison Loconto, Bandana Purkayastha, Elina Oinas and Marta Soler; as well as Kaja Gadowska, President of the European Sociological Association (ESA), Jesús Díaz, President of the Latin American Sociological Association (ALAS), and Pablo Vommaro, President of the Latin American Council for Social Sciences (CLACSO). ■

Rabat, July 2025

We collect endorsements by individual sociologists and by members of the wider social sciences community. Join us by adding your name to this collective statement of commitment and solidarity, filling out this form.

ISA International Sociological Association

GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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