

Remembering Michael Burawoy

(1947–2025)

isa International
Sociological
Association



Introduction

In February 2025, in the days following the tragic passing of our beloved friend, mentor, and comrade, Michael Burawoy, we gathered virtually from across the globe. Hundreds of us — students, colleagues, friends, and activists from every corner of the world — came together on Zoom to share our grief, to honor his monumental life, and to find solace in community.

As speaker after speaker shared powerful tributes, something remarkable and spontaneous began to unfold in the chat box. It transformed from a simple messaging feature into a living, breathing memorial — a digital tapestry woven with heartfelt anecdotes, cherished memories, and profound reflections on how Michael had shaped our lives and our thinking. Messages of love, quotes that captured his spirit, and photos that brought his infectious smile back into view poured in, creating a collective, real-time chronicle of his impact.

It became immediately clear that this spontaneous chorus of voices could not be allowed to fade. The raw, heartfelt, and beautiful memories shared were too precious to be lost to the ephemerality of a Zoom call. This e-book is our effort to preserve them. It is a collection born from a collective desire to hold onto a piece of the light that Michael brought into the world.

This collection is introduced by a foreword from Geoffrey Pleyers, President of the International Sociological Association (2023–2027).





Keeping the Conversation Alive

Foreword by Geoffrey Pleyers, ISA President (2023–2027)

Michael Burawoy was passionate about people. He wove deeply personal relationships with thousands of people across all continents. He was genuinely interested in the human beings he met during his fieldwork, in his classrooms, within academia, and in everyday life, four spheres that were never separated in Michael's work and life. He was generous as a teacher, as a researcher, as an intellectual leader, and, above all, as a human being.

In the days following his tragic passing, the ISA received hundreds of messages from colleagues around the world, all testifying to how inspiring a sociologist he was and how extraordinary a human being he remained for so many. This memory book gathers some of those voices.

The International Sociological Association was Michael's home. It is a community he contributed to building like no one else. Michael travelled the world to bring the ISA to dozens of countries and to bring countless young and brilliant sociologists into the ISA. Through his speeches, his presence, and his seemingly inexhaustible energy, he inspired thousands of us to believe in a genuinely global sociology.

In the months following his passing, the ISA organised three tributes to Michael. The first one, held online on February 8, 2025, just five days after the tragic accident, brought together more than 800 colleagues. We could not believe that Michael was no longer with us and gathered to mourn together, but also to celebrate his life and legacy. A second tribute was organised by the ISA Executive Committee during its annual meeting in March 2025 at the University of Johannesburg, which had awarded Michael a Doctorate Honoris Causa in 2022. This tribute showed Michael's strong and long-lasting influence on the ISA and the way we conceive our role in the ISA and the missions of the ISA. The third tribute, organised by ISA Research Committees, with the participation of Michael's former students and three of his successors as ISA President took place in July during the ISA Forum of Sociology in Rabat.

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Dozens of other tributes were held by universities and national sociological associations. In those I was able to attend, in Brazil, South Africa, and India, I heard how Michael had built a genuine dialogue with sociologists in each country: engaging seriously with their societies and their sociologies, listening attentively to their analyses, and encouraging them to take a stronger place in global sociology and within the ISA.

A recent special [*issue of Global Dialogue*](#), the ISA magazine Michael founded and which is currently edited by Breno Bringel, brings together 17 contributions that illuminate different dimensions of his sociological legacy in different countries, from the United States to Russia, Japan, Brazil and Bangladesh. His work exemplifies how rigorous empirical research can enrich theoretical debates, and how theory, in turn, can illuminate social realities.



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Michael's last book, *Public Sociology*, stands as a kind of intellectual autobiography and will remain a key reference for future generations. This memory book sheds light on other dimensions of Michael's influence on so many of us. It brings together more than 40 accounts by colleagues based in over twenty countries across all continents. These voices come from different generations, institutional positions, and political contexts: students and senior scholars, activists and teachers, close collaborators and distant admirers. What unites us is a shared recognition that Michael's presence shaped not only our ways of doing sociology, but also our ways of being in the world.

Taken together, these accounts offer a glimpse of the void he has left, as a sociologist and a human being. They also show the global sociology Michael practised: demanding, committed, always in dialogue and deeply human. The geographical diversity of the contributors mirrors the breadth of his intellectual and personal influence. The intimacy of their memories reminds us that his legacy cannot be reduced to concepts, theories, or institutions alone.

These shared memories, and the many tributes organised throughout the year, remind us that the "global" in global sociology is something that must be actively built. From Berkeley and across the world, Michael has helped create a global community of sociologists who share his conviction that sociology should be both rigorous and socially useful, engaged with citizens, social movements, and civil society.

Michael Burawoy remains a compass for sociologists in our time. He defended a public sociology aimed at producing knowledge relevant to citizens, social movements, and civil society. When we feel overwhelmed by the news, when the world seems to be moving in troubling directions, or when we wonder whether sociology still matters in dark times for democracy, we can return to Michael's books and articles, listen again to his lectures, and reread his speeches. He keeps reminding us why sociology matters, and why it is worth devoting so much time and energy to doing and teaching it: "Sociology helps students understand how society is collective, the role of race, of class, of gender.

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Sociology is the scientific study of inequality and the oppression this entails [...] We study exclusions not to advance them but to recognise and publicise them, and to better understand how they can be contested and reversed" (in Miami, March 10, 2024).

We miss 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.

We miss his unique energy, his enthusiasm, his smile, and his kindness.

With this collection of accounts, we seek to keep our conversation with Michael alive, and to renew our commitment to building together a public, critical, and global sociology that is deeply human, fed by theory, fieldwork, built in encounters and dialogues, and nourished by a quest for justice.





For those who were unable to join us, or for those who wish to revisit the moving tributes from the session's speakers, the full recording of the commemorative event is available to watch. The spoken tributes, which inspired many of the chat messages you will read in this collection, can be viewed at the link below.

[Watch the Online Tribute to Michael Burawoy \(8 February 2025\)](#)



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Hyun Ok Park

During the visit to Toronto in last Sept, Michael told me that the foods he had at many homes were vastly different from those in restaurants in Iran, thanks to all women cooking them at home.

From Veronica Montes

I had the opportunity to exchange a few words with Michael last August 12 at ASA in Montreal. His smile and gentle voice filled my heart with enthusiasm. I wasn't his graduate but his mentorship skills got to me throughout one of his graduate student in the 80s, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. Michael, you will be missed but your legacy will fill our minds and soul with a commitment to make this world a better and just place to everyone. You will always live in those who believe that another world is possible. Love and rest in power. As we believe in Mexico, our loved ones who passed never die as their pictures occupy a place in our altar. This Michael's photo I took at ASA in Montreal will be in my dia de muertos altar. He will never be forgotten.



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Golnar Teimouri

Michael bringing his class to the picket line, Berkeley 2013.

From Elise Herralá

2010 or 2011, protesting with theory class.





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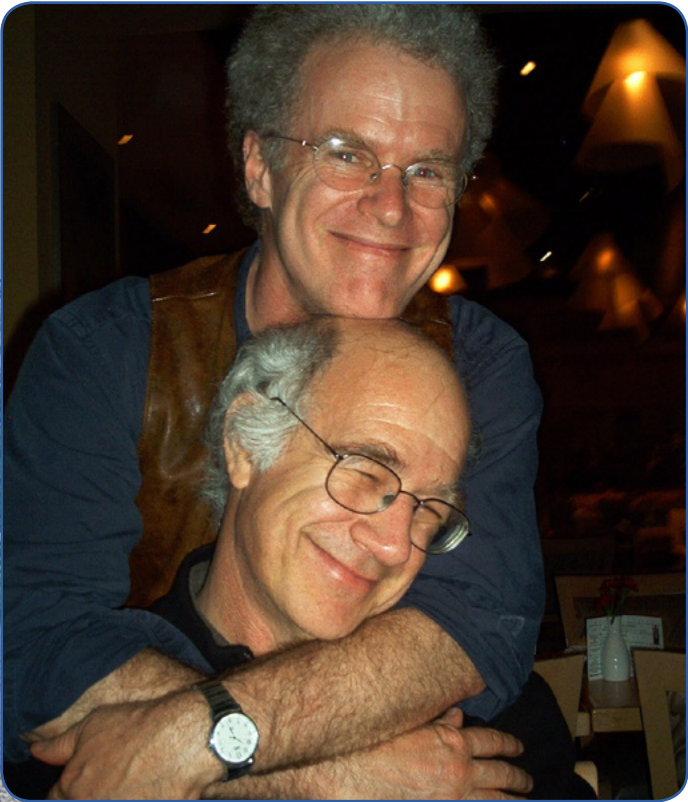
Memories from Zoom chat box

From Emily Ruppel

I was on this hike! After walking for twenty minutes or so, one of us asked Michael, "Michael, how long is this hike?" "Oh, twelve miles or so."



Memories from Zoom chat box



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Memories from Zoom chat box

From Cinzia Solari

I walked back to my grad student office after a meeting with Michael about my MA paper. I excitedly explained to my officemate Michael's feedback and my plan for what I would do next. My fellow grad student got quieter and quieter as I spoke, and I noticed a look of sympathy in her eyes. She patted my back and said, "Cinzia, I don't know why you are so excited. He basically told you your paper is shit and you have to start over." I paused and replied, "Yes, that's true. But he also convinced me this project is worth my time and work." That was Michael's gift. I always left his office feeling better than when I went in, chomping at the bit to delve deeper or change course. I am so grateful for his feedback, encouragement, and love.

In my first year at Berkeley, Michael invited my cohort to his apartment and Arlene Kaplan Daniels was there to give us "how to survive grad school" advice. She told us to pick our dissertation chair wisely because, she said, in your professional life, most of your pain and all of your joy would come from that relationship. Arlene explained that your chair will be a "significant other." I feel I followed Arlene's advice. Michael was and continued to be a great significant other in my life. I love and miss him.



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Nicole Rankin

Proud to be one of his former social theory students from 2016-17 and to this day I refer to his class — in discussions of capitalism with my peers, how he was somehow able to take something as complex as Lenin's theory or Gramsci's war of position and break it down with visuals and draw it on a chalkboard, and how he'd delightfully award students' point of view in class with an exclaimed "BB!!!" for bloody brilliant. His work will carry on through each and every one of us , and his impact his immeasurable.

From Paolo Parra Saiani

I will not forget your intelligence and your smile. And your hats!



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Zachary Levenson

I always loved how he'd remove his watch before every talk or lecture and leave it there on the desk...

From Golnar Teimouri

Everytime I talked about home (Tehran), he never mentioned he had been to Tehran. I know that was his way of making sure -i was the center of our conversation and not make it about him.

From Kemi Balogun

I took my theory qualifying exams with Michael at Berkeley. Everyone knew that doing theory class with him was a rigorous but generative process, including taking two semesters of graduate-level theory and observing his theory undergraduate courses in a year-long sequence. His ability to enliven theory and infectious energy (jumping on tables in a room of 200 students was a regular occurrence!) was an inspiration. His ability to break down theory through diagrams and 2x2 tables still helps me this day. His moral clarity and global engagement will never be forgotten.

From Nabila Islam

Last time I saw Michael, at ASA 2024 in Montreal, he greeted me by saying: "I see you everywhere!" I had truly thought that I'd continue to see him everywhere for many years to come. He will so so missed!

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Michael Gibson-Light

Michael frequently visited University of Arizona to speak and meet with colleagues, former students, and friends. While he was there, he always carved out time to engage with grad students as well. He was my “grand advisor” in a true sense: he didn’t just happen to be the advisor-of-my-advisor, but he took the time to ask for updates on my work and share his thoughts whenever we met, whether over a meal in Arizona or simply in passing at ASA conferences. Rest in power.



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Jordanna Matlon

Michael agreed to be a discussant for my book at ISA Melbourne. Tragically, my mother died just days before our panel, and I canceled my trip. Despite my mourning, I did not want to miss the experience of Michael — one of my absolute favorite people — engaging my work. So there I was, up at 4am, Zooming in. We connected later at ASA, and I opened my heart to him about my loss. He listened deeply and shared profoundly personal stories from his own life. It was a healing conversation that I still hold onto when I grieve her.

Michael later wrote to me,

"Yes, Jordanna, I don't think one ever recovers from the death of one's parents, but one just gets used to the idea. But one can continue communing with them, having conversations with them, remembering them. One of the great things in life is memory. I've no doubt that your own children will console you in these times of grief. Best, Michael."

We are all Michael's children. May we be there for each other now.

From Ana Vidu

I was a sad sociology student in Spain, about to drop out of sociology in my 3rd year undergrad, when I first met Michael in 2010, at the ISA Conference, right after he became ISA president. He said: the world needs sociology, everyone needs sociology, everywhere. And... long story short, I soon became a proud sociologist inspired by him. I then spent 4 months at UC Berkeley working with him in 2015 and recently, a 2-years postdoc, sharing so many moments that shaped my way of living sociology, the world, and of course my teaching... We recently had a conversation about research, taking position and never fear to start again.

Memories from Zoom chat box



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Alexandra Coffin

I was in Burawoy's advanced theory course on the evening of November 8, 2016. I truly believe that tethered me through the powerlessness of that chaotic night, and he did his damndest to keep us grounded, focused, and active in the months after. It's been eight years, and now we're here, and while he's gone I can still feel that tether.

On my graduation day, he told me, "You'd make an amazing investigator" and gave me a rare hug.

I'm now applying for my private investigator's license and focused on police accountability.

From Miranda

Michael was the very first person outside of my household that I hugged, once it was safe to do so, post-pandemic. He was, quite simply, a truly wonderful human being.

From Gabriel Hetland

Lovely to hear all these memories. Flooded by grief and memories... biking with Michael in Oakland and Berkeley, he rode like a joyful maniac, and learning so much from him in so many ways (how to teach, how to be a colleague, how to think, how to change the world) and knowing it'll take my whole life to absorb all his lessons. Thank you all for sharing. It helps with the almost unbearable grief.

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Rubén G. Rumbaut

In Spanish, the word for “remember” is “re-cordar,” literally “to pass through the heart.” Your words in this time and place of remembrance — from Raka to Mara to Areej to all who spoke, your words passed through all our hearts.

From Esmaeil Khalili

Thank you. We, in Iran, share our deep grief of his loss with great sorrow. He played a unique role in connecting sociologists around the world, both as the Vice-President of the International Sociological Association for National Associations, and as the President of ISA. We never forget his unique role in current sociology.

From Leah Carroll

Thank you for sharing this wonderful anecdote about Michael’s trip with you to Ramallah. Of course Michael dared to speak the truth. Free Palestine!

Michael’s syllabi were a work of art, with each week’s topic bringing up questions that the following week’s readings addressed. They set such a high bar!

From Siri Hettige

Close to midnight here in Colombo but how can I keep away from this very event dedicated to Michael who had a deep impact on me and my work as a sociologist.

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Dan Ferrand Bechmann

J'ai eu plusieurs échanges très féconds avec Michael en France, à Berkeley et à Uppsala. J'ai beaucoup appris de lui à propos de la sociologie publique. C'est très triste qu'il nous ait quittés si tôt.

(I had several very fruitful exchanges with Michael in France, in Berkeley and in Uppsala. I learned a lot from him about public sociology. It is very sad that he left us so soon.)

From Fatima Zahrae

Michael's work on defending and sustaining public education has deeply influenced my perspective as an educator. His critical analysis of neoliberal policies and their impact on public schooling has sharpened my understanding of the systemic challenges teachers face. His scholarship not only provided me with the tools to critique these structures but also reinforced my commitment to advocating for equitable and accessible education. His work continues to inspire those of us dedicated to strengthening public education as a democratic institution.

From Gokhan Savas

The world has lost a giant, but his ideas will echo through generations. As a Turkish sociologist, I am deeply indebted to Michael Burawoy's vision of public sociology as an intellectual bridge between the academy and the struggles of everyday life. His work challenged us not only to understand the world but to change it. His legacy will forever inspire those of us who believe that knowledge must serve justice. May he rest in power.

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Lúcia Ferro

Michael was a sociologist of incredible passion, enthusiasm and humility. We owe him public sociology and a stronger global community of sociologists for whom social inequalities are at the centre of research and intervention concerns. He strongly supported several colleagues, young researchers and students, had extraordinary energy to accompany us at all times and was extremely professional and dedicated. I leave here a photo from the opening session of the European Sociological Association Conference held in Porto, in August last year where he delivered a keynote speech on the situation in Palestine from an analogy with South African apartheid (with Anália Torres, ©Farinha). Condolences to his family, friends and all the colleagues. You will be greatly missed, but your memory will be eternal, Michael. RIP.



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Adam Mrozowski

As a community of critical labour scholars, we are deeply moved and shocked by the sudden loss of Michael Burawoy. We had the pleasure and honour of hosting Prof. Burawoy's lectures and workshops in Wroclaw, Poland a few years ago. Michael was one of the most inspiring and kindest people many of us, including myself, have met in our careers. He supported us in Poland in many ways, he inspired us and helped us to understand our efforts to build bridges with labour movements and to organize in our own workplaces and universities. I would like to share here his lecture in Wroclaw: "The Public University — A Battleground for Real Utopias" — lecture by Michael Burawoy. Michael, Rest in Power!

The link: <https://youtu.be/EXM3ax4sOkw>

From Gay Seidman

It is amazing to me how many of the things being said today echo my own interactions with Michael, as his advisee, as a teaching assistant, and as a collaborator. He had such insight and energy, and such generosity to all of us — but as several speakers have pointed, he also had an extraordinary commitment to using his sociological toolkit and his status as a faculty member to protect the vulnerable, and to promote social change. He will be so missed — but we will always carry those memories, and I think we will all continue to be inspired by them.

From Emily Ruppel

A key way to honor Michael is to continue fighting for a free Palestine.

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Ana Vidu

Michael touched so many lives, so many people — from all over the world — have moving stories that we will never forget. He was not only appreciated, he was loved. Always getting a quick reply to that email and the best advice to all professional ins and outs. Always been on the right side of history, from his position supporting survivors of sexual harassment in academia in the late 70s to his recent position in favor of Palestine. We will keep his legacy alive and the privilege to have known him — and be guided/ mentored by his knowledge and generosity — is a gift of life.

From John Hall

A horribly terrible, tragic loss of a great human being who just also happened to be a prophet for sociology. I feel deeply for those who were closer to Michael than I. Please understand that he is an avatar for many more of us and, I hope, for generations that follow.

From Ann Mische

I so appreciate all of these memories and words. It is so crushing and we need him so much. We also need all of you. Teaching him in my theory class next week. More students will keep hearing his voice and learning with him.

From Alexandra Coffin

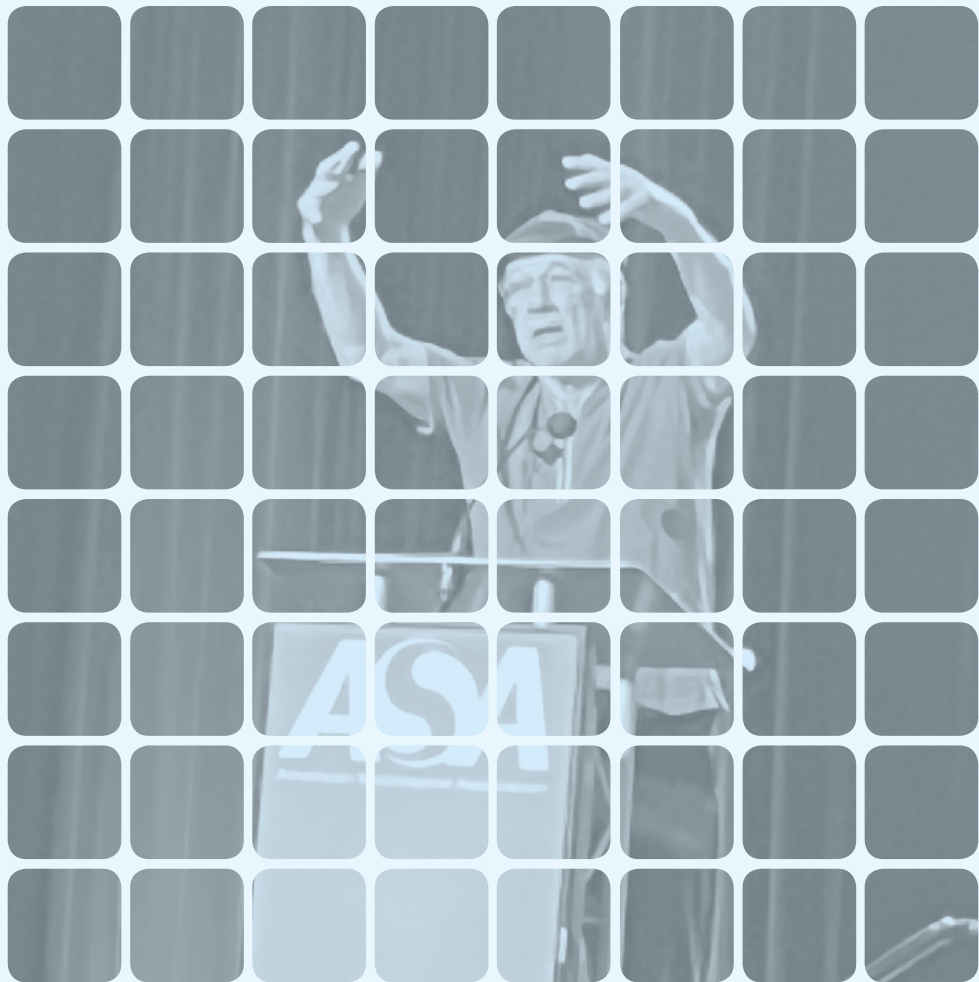
So much knowledge died with him, but the wisdom that will never die is held within each of us. Thank you so very much everyone.

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Petya Ilieva-Trichkova

Condolences to the Michael Burawoy's family and also to his so big academic family! Thank you all for organizing this tribute and for the strength to speak in such a moment! I didn't have the chance to attend his lecture in Sofia (Bulgaria) in 2013, when he delivered a lecture on public sociology and he was awarded a badge of honor with a ribbon of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Namely his work on public sociology was most influential for me at a later stage. But my last memories of Michael Burawoy are from the ESA conference in Porto 2024, when he was so full of energy and passionate in his keynote speech and this is how I will remember him. He will be deeply missed to all of us but I believe that his spirit and ideas will live on.





Memories from Zoom chat box

From Bill Bielby

All my days won't be dances of delight when I'm gone
And the sands will be shifting from my sight when I'm gone
Can't add my name into the fight while I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here
(Phil Ochs)

From Stéphane Dufoix

Thank you Sari. Thank you for using the present tense talking about Michael.



Memories from Zoom chat box

From Raka Ray

"The effort is more important than success" so absolutely Michael!

From Miranda

He loved teaching with all of his heart, and he taught with all of his might...

From Millie Thayer

Mara Loveman, we will learn how to carry this weight.

From Deepthi Shanker

Rest and Rise in Peace , Prof. Michael.

From Lesley Wood

He lived his vision, 100%. What a mensch.

From John Torpey

Thank you all for your beautiful remembrances. Michael was one-of-a-kind.

From Abdie Kazemipur

A Persian poem, a fitting description of Michael's legacy: "One day, finally... my leaves will fall off... One day, finally... my eyelids will fall down ... But, the air in the garden will always carry... the fragrance of my beliefs".

Memories from Zoom chat box

From Camilo Tamayo Gomez

I will never forget the first time I came across Michael Burawoy's work. I was still finding my way as a sociologist in Colombia, trying to balance theory with real-world impact. I knew I didn't want to do research that just sat on a shelf, I wanted it to matter, to contribute to real change. But I wasn't sure how to bridge that gap between academia and activism. Then I discovered Public Sociology, and everything clicked.

One of the moments that really stuck with me was hearing Burawoy speak at the ISA World Congress of Sociology in Yokohama. I had already read *Manufacturing Consent*; and was fascinated by how he used participant observation to show how workers unknowingly reinforced the very systems that exploited them. But hearing him in person? That was something else. His energy, his conviction, his belief that sociology should do more than just analyse the world, it should help change it, was infectious.

During the Q&A, I worked up the nerve to ask him a question. I wanted to know how to balance rigorous academic research with real engagement in the struggles I was studying in my home country of Colombia. He paused, gave me this thoughtful look, and then said something that has stayed with me ever since: "The challenge isn't just to study the world but to be in conversation with those who live it every day. Theory must be accountable to practice, and practice must challenge theory".

That simple idea hit me hard. It validated everything I had been feeling but hadn't yet put into words. From that moment on, I knew that my work, whether on transitional justice, human rights, or social movements, had to be deeply engaged with the people and communities it was about. It couldn't just be about analysing power from a distance; it had to be about co-creating knowledge with those who experience it firsthand.

Memories from Zoom chat box

Burawoy's influence has shaped so much of what I do. When I started working on creative cartographies and transmedia storytelling, it was his emphasis on public engagement that pushed me to think beyond traditional academic formats. I realised that storytelling, art, and participatory research weren't just creative add-ons, they were essential tools for making sociology truly public.

Even now, whenever I find myself caught between the pressures of academic expectations and the need to stay true to the communities I work with, I hear Burawoy's words in my head: "Sociology is a conversation, not a monologue", and that's exactly the kind of sociology I want to do.

A series of quotes from the event's speakers, captured by Lester Kurtz:

Nazanin Shahrokni

He left us not just a path to follow, but tools ... a network of independent thinkers.

Michelle Williams

He was a restless soul who wanted to see a better world. He hitchhiked across the African continent.

Everyone he met and interacted with around the world felt they had something special with him. ... The global sociology community is what Michael built for us.





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