

Remembering Michael Burawoy, Keeping the Conversation Alive Foreword to the Memory book “Remembering Michael Burawoy”

Geoffrey Pleyers, ISA President, February 2026

Michael Burawoy passed away a year ago.

Michael 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.

To celebrate his life and keep the conversation alive, the ISA has released the memory book [“Remembering Michael Burawoy”](#), an initiative by Anna-Maria Kutateladze Wagner. It 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.

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.

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.

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 ([available here](#)). 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.

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.

Michael's last book, *Public Sociology*, stands as a kind of intellectual autobiography and will remain a key reference for future generations.

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. 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.