Part Four
Critical Sociology

The 1960s and 1970s were awash with theories of modernization that urged Africa and other postcolonial nations to advance by following the course of Western development. Indeed, leaders of many new nations tried to replicate that history by implanting Western institutions – a combination of markets, planning, and democracy. When these transplants failed to put down roots, modernization theory argued that the soil was too infertile, that Africa was too stuck in its past, inheriting an indelible culture inimical to development. In Zambia I learned the flaws in this theory, and that there were other forces holding back development.

It was there that I first read the compelling Marxist critiques of modernization theory by a Latin Americanist, Andre Gunder Frank (1966), on the development of underdevelopment – that is, the development of the metropolis comes at the expense of the periphery. This meant that the Third World cannot advance without cutting itself off from the First World. As I left Zambia, other treatises were in preparation and about to appear. Walter Rodney's (1972) account of how Europe underdeveloped Africa was published; the Egyptian social scientist Samir Amin (1974) was advancing his theory of accumulation on a world scale. These critical works underlay Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) world systems theory that argued that

it was one thing to be the first nation to develop capitalism, it was quite another to develop capitalism in the midst of already established and powerful capitalist nations.

One epicenter of this rising Marxism was in the neighboring country of Tanzania at the newly created University of Dar es Salaam. Encouraged by President Nyerere and his socialist visions, there emerged a Marxist school of social science led by such figures as Walter Rodney, John Saul, Mahmood Mamdani, Giovanni Arrighi, and Issa Shivji. They examined the internal obstacles to development posed by class structure and class interests inherited from colonialism. These were all critiques of capitalism that, in one way or another, pointed to an as-yet-unrealized socialism. The Marxists were making a double critique: of capitalism itself and the ideologies that justified it.

My Zambian teachers and research had cultivated in me an academic habitus with an irreversible Marxist disposition. But I was also drawn to Marxism's Siamese twin – sociology – that I had absorbed as part of my training. At this point sociology was still largely immune to the Marxist virus, though new strains coming from the Global South were making inroads. Apart from a nostalgia lingering from my earlier visit to the US, I wanted to tackle modernization theory on its home terrain. I wanted to understand how conservative sociology had become such a powerful influence the world over. I, therefore, paid another call on my benefactor, Edward Shils, seeking to revive his proposal that I undertake a PhD in the US. With his help I managed to scrape into the PhD program at the University of Chicago. Perhaps he thought my errant ways would be rectified in the punitive atmosphere of that esteemed university. Still, I was a risky prospect, so I received no financial support. I thought that my mathematics degree, that had proven to be so useful in Zambia, would at least get me a research assistantship. But the head of the National Opinion Research Center, located at the university, told me there was nothing doing and it would be a mistake for me to enroll in the program. Ignoring his

advice, I sank my Copperbelt savings into Chicago's PhD program. Given my interests in Africa and India, Chicago seemed to be an appropriate place – the home of the Committee on New Nations that had been dominated by such anthropologists as Clifford Geertz and Lloyd Fallers, as well as sociologists Morris Janowitz and, of course, Edward Shils himself. But I arrived too late. By 1972 the Committee on New Nations had been disbanded and the interest in "new nations" was more or less abandoned, at least in sociology.

After the excitement of the interdisciplinary seminars at the University of Zambia, sociology at Chicago proved to be decidedly tedious, smugly complacent in its provincialism. There was certainly not a sniff or a whiff of Marxism. Critical sociologists had been forcibly removed three years before I arrived: Dick Flacks and Marlene Dixon had been let go and radical students had been expelled. It was not all darkness, however. There were one or two bright lights in the sociology department – Richard Taub, who taught political sociology, and Barry Schwartz, who taught social psychology. But, for me, William Julius Wilson was the brightest light. Without his support – moral, political, and material – I would not have survived Chicago sociology and I would not be writing this book.

Bill encouraged me to pursue my interest in South Africa's racial order. So I delved into the South African historiography, as it was then, very much influenced by my teachers in Zambia and, in particular, by the appearance of Jack and Ray Simons's *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* in 1969. Centered as it was on the relation between class and race, their approach was glaringly different from the existing US sociology of race, which was struggling to extricate itself from race cycle theories, assimilation theses, and prejudice studies. Through Bill I was introduced to an insurgent paradigm of racial domination, sparked by the civil rights movement. Though representing relations between white and Black as a relationship of domination was a radical move for

US sociology, it remained far behind the historical studies of South Africa that examined the dynamics of race and class. Accordingly, I embarked on my first critique of US sociology – its limited vision of "race relations" (Burawoy 1974).

As I was struggling with a cumbersome Marxist framework of "base" and "superstructure," Adam Przeworski set me on new paths. A new professor in political science, he introduced me to the then-fashionable French structuralist Marxism. His seminar on Marxist theories of the state transformed the way I thought about theory, and Marxism in particular. In Adam's seminar I developed a Marxist approach to migration that centered on the role of the state. My interest in migration had been first stimulated by my teacher Jaap van Velsen, who saw circulatory labor migration in Southern Africa as a function of capitalism's search for cheap labor. I wanted to advance Jaap's ideas by showing that labor migration was not a peculiar attribute of "backward" Africa but could also be found in advanced capitalism. Thus, I explored the parallel system of migrant labor that was the foundation of California agribusiness (Burawoy 1976a). The study calls into question not only the foundations of modernization theory, but also the sociological reduction of migration to independent forces of "push" and "pull." There was no way, I claimed, to study labor migration without also studying its place within capitalism and recognizing the importance of the state.

The third project in critical sociology was my dissertation, which stemmed from my interest in industrial work, first cultivated on the Zambian Copperbelt. Again, the original impetus was to compare workplaces in the Global North and the Global South and to show that such differences as existed were the product of capitalism on a world scale. My research took place in the midst of the renaissance of Marxism and, in particular, the rediscovery of the "labor process" inspired by Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) – a historical examination of the

transformation of capitalist work, a rewriting of Marx's Volume One of *Capital*. Industrial sociology had been dominated by employer concerns about the "restriction of output." The quiescence of labor in the 1950s and 1960s, however, had thrown industrial sociology into abeyance, creating the vacuum into which Marxism marched. I focused my attention not on "restriction of output," but on the opposite, the inexplicable intensity with which workers devoted themselves to production or, in Marxist terms, how it was that workers actively participated in their own exploitation. The book that emerged from the dissertation was called *Manufacturing Consent* (1979).

Each in their own way, these three studies challenged conventional sociology: the euphoria of race relations theory that assumed racism was either skin deep or had its own self-sustaining autonomy, the ethnocentrism of modernization theory that deemed Africa to be responsible for its own "backwardness," and the instrumentalism of industrial sociology as an arm of management. In each case my critique was embedded in an open-ended, experimental Marxism that opposed utopianism with the anti-utopian structuralism then current in Marxist circles. After leaving graduate school I would draw on these three studies to explore the distinctive features of South Africa's racial capitalism – how the state enforced a system of brutalizing labor migration alongside a system of racial despotism in the workplace. Inspired by the new historiography of South Africa, I showed the limitations of a widely held sociology of race as seen through the lens of class – namely, Edna Bonacich's theory of the "split labor market." I devote the fourth and last chapter on critical sociology to my long essay originally titled "The Capitalist State in South Africa" (Burawoy 1981).