

PREFACE

My 4-year stint with the Ford PhDs, which had brought me to the University of Witwatersrand for three weeks every year, had come to an end. Karl von Holdt, then Acting-Director of SWOP (Society, Work and Development Institute) invited me to come to Wits for a semester on a Mellon Visiting Professorship. I would work with students and faculty and also give public lectures. There was interest in my giving lectures on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, which I had previously done in at the University of Wisconsin. As at Wisconsin the idea was to bring in faculty and students from different departments and offer another side to SWOP's activities.

But this would be a different experience altogether as Bourdieu was not the popular theorist in South Africa that he was in Wisconsin. After all, Bourdieu was not only a theorist *of* the north and *from* the north, but more specifically *of* France and *from* France, which made him more unfamiliar than Anglo-American theorists. His convoluted style of writing, his elliptical sentences, his erudition, and his philosophical grounding – in sum say his deployment of cultural capital -- makes his work challenging to access.

As I had done in Wisconsin I sought to interpret Bourdieu by presenting his ideas in relation to Marxism -- a series of imaginary conversations between Bourdieu and Marx, Gramsci, Fanon, Freire, Beauvoir, Mills and myself. Bourdieu makes reference to Marx, indeed his work is a deep engagement with Marx (as well as Durkheim and Weber) but Marx never receives a sustained examination. As for Gramsci, Fanon, and Beauvoir his scattered references and footnotes are contemptuous, while Freire and Mills hardly get a mention. Nonetheless there are some interesting parallels and convergences with these theorists that more often than not evaporate under closer examination. My endeavor was to rescue these figures buried in Bourdieu with a view to problematizing both Bourdieu and Marxism. The Marxists I chose – and I realize Mills had an ambiguous relation to Marxism -- were all concerned with developing a theory of superstructures or ideological domination and, therefore, most convergent with what lies at the center of Bourdieu's opus, the theory of symbolic domination. These theorists also had important things to say about intellectuals and the public face of social science and here, too, there was much to debate as Bourdieu was and still is the preeminent public sociologist of our era. Like Marxist theory, Bourdieu was always concerned with the relation of theory and practice.

Still, this was South Africa, and even if Marxism had more currency here than in other parts of the world, it was nonetheless flagging, and moreover Bourdieu's concerns with symbolic domination seemed removed from the South African situation where physical violence seemed far more salient, something about which Bourdieu has little to say beyond some of his early writings on Algeria. My original intention was to try and show the significance of Bourdieu to the New South Africa, this was after all a time of the struggles between ANC Youth leader, Malema, and COSATU President, Vavi, struggles that might be seen as precisely open warfare of a symbolic kind with Vavi even calling for a "life style audit" – effectively calling into question the basis of ruling class "distinction", a questioning that would be difficult to imagine in France with its settled symbolic order. It was also the time of preparation for the World Cup, a spectacle if ever

there was one that absorbed the attention of the entire population, masking the real interests at play. Again the symbolic world of postapartheid South Africa could not be disregarded. Still, it might be argued that the significance of Bourdieu might be the non-applicability of his ideas to South Africa, that his ideas are irrevocably Northern or French.

The 8 conversations held over a period of 6 weeks in February and March, 2010 brought in crowds from different quarters of the university, and each presentation was followed by heated exchanges. They were made all the more interesting by Karl von Holdt who consistently defended Bourdieu against Marxist detractors, showing how his ideas do have validity in South Africa. My own attempt to incorporate South Africa into these conversations proved to be paltry and wooden and so, when it came to writing up the lectures, I invited Karl to respond with his own reflections. He has done this in an exceptional manner, in a sense returning Bourdieu to where he began his sociological life – Africa. After all many of Bourdieu's abiding ideas are taken from his interpretation of the Kabyle kinship society. It was from his studies of the Kabyle that he developed the notions of symbolic capital, misrecognition, habitus, male domination, and so forth. Bourdieu applied those ideas to French society, and Karl has taken them back to Africa, pointing to the symbolic dimensions of township violence, the power of the concept of habitus, the disciplinary mode of education, and the place of intellectuals in contemporary South Africa.

If I presented a rather arid conversation between Bourdieu and Marxism, Karl has extended the conversational mode to one between northern and southern theory but based on more than three decades of engaged research. Karl brings to the forefront a subordinate register in Bourdieu's writings, the dimensions of struggle, crisis, and social transformation. He does not engage with Bourdieu's writings as a combat sport, he does not dismiss or ignore either myself or Bourdieu but uses Bourdieu to construct a dialogue about South Africa both yesterday and today. So we now offer a set of conversations on conversations in the hope that of sparking further debate and discussion about the trajectory of South Africa, the continuing vitality of Marxism, and the relevance of Bourdieu's thought to different contexts.

This has been a conversation I have had with many people – in Berkeley with Loic Wacquant, Dylan Riley, Cihan Tugal, Gretchen Purser, Ofer Sharone, and Fareen Parvez, in Madison Wisconsin with Erik Wright, Gay Seidman and Matt Nichter, in South Africa with Bridget Kenny, Oupa Lehoulere, Peter Alexander, Irma Du Plessis, Prishani Naidoo, Michelle Williams, Vish Satgar, Eric Worby, Shireen Ally, Tina Uys, Andries Bezuidenhout, Sonja Narunsky-Laden, Ahmed Veriava, and Jackie Cock. Most importantly, for the last 45 years, I have had the fortune of listening to and learning from two great interpreters of South Africa -- Luli Callinicos and Eddie Webster.

Michael Burawoy

Prefatory remarks

I was at first daunted and then delighted by Michael's invitation to collaborate in a very unusual project – an extended series of theoretical engagements between towering figures of 20th century Marxism (and its 19th century founder) and sociology, and between Michael and myself. Where Michael presents a tightly argued and highly disciplined exposition of central problems in the theorisation of social reality, developing these over eight chapters, my responses to each chapter take a looser, more reflective form, probing some of the themes explored in the preceding chapter in relation to the complexities and perplexities of transition and social change in South Africa.

In my reflections I do not seek to respond comprehensively to Michael's analysis, or to the arguments of Bourdieu and his interlocutors, but rather respond to an element in the chapter that captures my attention and sparks a series of reflections on our social reality and the struggle to understand it and change it. At times, therefore, my reflections are oblique, tangential, at odds with the central arguments in the previous chapter. I circle a problem, engage it at odd angles, pose questions. I take as my main foil the central arguments and concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael's critique of these, rather than those of his interlocutors. In doing this I draw on the research project I am currently leading into the social dynamics of collective violence, based on a collaboration between SWOP and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, as well as fragments of political autobiography.

The thread tying these reflections together is the attempts to think coherently about social order and the limits to order, about disorder, resistance, social change and violence in the context of colonialism, apartheid and decolonisation. This necessarily entails also grappling with a critique of the dominant sociological paradigms of the West – precisely what is necessary in a sociological, and political, dialogue between North and South.

Karl Von Holdt