

# Reconstructing Burawoy: Theorizing Migrant Labor, the Politics of Precarity, and Postcolonial/Racial Transformations

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## Abstract

Michael Burawoy's writings lay a foundation for critical sociologies of immigration, social movements, race, and postcolonial society. To realize these promises, however, it will be necessary to reconstruct Burawoy, as he has done with the theories of so many others. In this piece, I trace my own engagements with Burawoy in three areas: migrant labor, the politics of economic precarity, and postcolonial and racial transformations. For each area, I show how Burawoy laid a foundation for subsequent analysis, which I sought to take forward in my own work. These reconstructions reveal just how valuable Burawoy's theories are to the advancement of critical sociology.

## Keywords

Marxism, precariat, immigration, race, social movements, postcolonial

## Introduction

Michael Burawoy is one of sociology's greatest prizes. He is an amazing teacher and mentor. He has helped to shape the discipline through his leadership in professional associations, most notably as president of the American Sociological Association (ASA) and the International Sociological Association, where he promoted ideas of public sociology and global sociology. And he has produced a remarkable body of scholarly work, from studies of the labor process to methodological interventions to varied works of Marxist theory. Burawoy may have formally retired from his post at the University of California-Berkeley, but these contributions will remain with us. It is a tremendous legacy.

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In this piece, I recount my own engagements with Burawoy-as-theorist in three areas: migrant labor, the politics of economic precarity, and postcolonial and racial transformations. My goal is twofold: to honor Burawoy's intellectual contributions, and to show how they lay a foundation for a critical sociology. In particular, it reveals that Burawoy's work has much to offer toward developing critical sociologies of immigration, social movements, race, postcolonial society, and the politics of the state. To realize these promises, however, it will be necessary to reconstruct Burawoy, as he has done with so many that came before him. Reconstructing Burawoy has been central to my own trajectory. My hope is that by retracing this trajectory, I will begin to reveal just how valuable Burawoy's theories are to critical sociology.

## Meeting Burawoy

My first encounters with Michael Burawoy were not scholarly or intellectual. I remember him playing soccer with us at a department picnic during my first year in the sociology graduate program at the University of California-Berkeley. Then there were the enthusiastic emails that he would send in the buildup to the department holiday party, remarking the impending 'return of RLP!' (or something to that effect; I encourage you to ask Burawoy what RLP means and see if he remembers). At the beginning, I mostly knew him as department champion. But I got a glimpse of Burawoy's sociology when I attended my first ASA meeting in summer 2004, where he gave an inspiring Presidential Address about public sociology.

I entered the sociology PhD program with an interest in inequality, particularly racial inequality. I loved taking courses in the Sociology of Education, Racial and Ethnic Relations, and Social Stratification and Class Analysis. Moreover, I was excited about a paper that I had written about tracking in early childhood education, using nationally representative survey data. Yet, I was also grasping for something more. I knew that I wanted to develop a deeper analysis of capitalism and its entanglements with race, though I was not quite sure how to do so. Somebody suggested that I consider serving as a Teaching Assistant for Burawoy's undergraduate Social Theory course, and I remember feeling lucky when I got the position—it was almost like getting into graduate school all over again. This proved a turning point. I was quickly enamored by Burawoy's renditions of the Marxist tradition and its confrontations with sociology and feminism (many are recounted in Burawoy, 2003a). These ideas seeped into my early thinking about the dissertation. Burawoy was kind enough to take me seriously when I showed him my absurd plan to study the global articulation of race and class. 'Best to start in the semi-periphery', he said.

This was my introduction, from soccer to dissertation brainstorming. Over the next two decades, I would build on Burawoy's thinking as I sought to develop my own sociological contributions. This included research on migrant labor systems in the United States and South Africa, and then my dissertation project, which compared resistance by the 'precarious working class' in the same two places. After graduating from Berkeley, I landed in a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Johannesburg, where I focused more specifically on local politics, community organizing, and protest in and around Johannesburg. This culminated in my book, *Fractured Militancy: Precarious Resistance in South Africa After Racial Inclusion* (Paret, 2022).

My goal in this piece is to highlight some of the connections between my own work and Burawoy's. Part of the connection is methodological. My work grew increasingly ethnographic, even if I did not quite use the extended case method (Burawoy, 2009), and notions of public sociology linger in the background (see Paret, 2022: 155–159). But I focus here on theoretical connections. Combined with his indefatigable commitment as a mentor, it was as a theorist that Burawoy helped me develop as a sociologist. As an emerging scholar, I was often hesitant to elaborate these connections because I did not want others to conclude that I was merely replicating or transmitting Burawoy's ideas. Nonetheless, his sociology served as a constant source of guidance and inspiration.

Highlighting my own theoretical connections to Burawoy is in the spirit of his own emphasis on theoretical reconstruction, and the development of research programs or traditions (Burawoy, 1990, 2009). This is an approach that aims to build upon the insights of others, while at the same time advancing their research agendas by addressing anomalies and weaknesses—that is, by reconstructing theory. In developing my own scholarly contributions, I sought to reconstruct Burawoy's theories of migrant labor, anti-market countermovements, and postcolonial society. For each area, I show how Burawoy laid a foundation for subsequent analysis, which I sought to take forward in my own work. In doing so, one might say that I was advancing a Burawoyan research tradition.

## Migrant Labor

My first major engagement with Burawoy-as-theorist revolved around the study of migrant labor. In the 1960s and 1970s, insightful theorizing and analysis of migrant labor became central to Marxist research on southern Africa (Arrighi, 1970; Legassick, 1974; Wolpe, 1972 see also Arrighi et al., 2010). Building on this research, Burawoy (1976) published a now-classic article that develops both a theoretical framework for understanding migrant labor, and a comparative analysis of migrant labor in South Africa and California. Theoretically, Burawoy argued that the defining characteristic of migrant labor is the separation of labor force maintenance (providing for workers' daily subsistence) and labor force renewal (the filling of open positions by new workers). The processes are separated geographically, but even more importantly, they take place in different political and economic systems. This separation underpins the 'cheapness' of migrant labor, because 'a proportion of the costs of renewal is externalized to an alternate economy and/or state' (Burawoy, 1976: 1053).

For Burawoy (1976), this defining feature of migrant labor applied to both migrant mine workers in South Africa and migrant farm workers in California. In both cases, he argued, the separation of maintenance and renewal turned migrants into cheap labor. Crucially, however, the mechanisms for maintaining the separation varied between the two places. In South Africa, an 'overarching state' (p. 1077) intervened to organize production and the market through an explicit policy of legalized racial hierarchy—colonialism and apartheid. Conversely, in California, state intervention was more limited and market competition between 'domestic' and 'migrant' workers was more prevalent. If both systems constituted migrant workers as cheap labor, they did so in quite different ways.

This article proposes a research program on migrant labor. At the core of this program is a focus on the relationship between the economic and the political; specifically, the varied ways in which states organize the reproduction of migrant labor and, in turn, the cheapness of that labor. Likewise, it poses the question, cheap for whom (Burawoy, 1976: 1055–1057)? While employers may benefit, states may accrue considerable costs, for example, in relation to border security and the regulation of movement. Beyond just economic costs, emphasis on the capitalist state also calls attention to the political costs of migrant labor, and the conditions under which particular migrant labor systems—that is, configurations of labor maintenance and renewal—are reproduced, or not. To what extent do spectacles of enforcement at national borders (Brown, 2010) enhance or undermine the legitimacy of the state or political elites?

I sought to further this agenda through a critique of Burawoy (1976). I took him to task for obscuring historical variation in the two cases; for overstating the contrast between them by downplaying the role of the state in the United States and capital in South Africa; for missing the overarching logic of the state and how it connects the different mechanisms that reproduce the cheapness of migrant labor; for assuming that processes of maintenance and renewal are always separated, and thus that the movement of migrant labor is necessarily circular; and perhaps most ironically, given Burawoy's (1979, 1985) groundbreaking work on the labor process, for not paying enough attention to migrant worker positioning and weakness at the point of production (Paret, 2011,

2014). In early rejections at sociology journals, my reviewers were defensive on behalf of Burawoy. Whether due to my own flawed execution or their limited perspectives, my early reviewers did not appreciate that I was, in fact, attempting to advance Burawoy's research agenda. And so I moved beyond the sociological core, publishing in outlets such as *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (Paret, 2011), *Latino Studies* (Paret, 2014), and *Citizenship Studies* (Paret, 2015a).

My key intervention was to identify two different ways of organizing migrant labor, which involved expanding the scope to highlight border policing and the realm of production. Burawoy (1976) emphasized a singular 'invariant structure' (p. 1052) of migrant labor, defined by the relationship between the state and a specific form of labor force reproduction: the separation of maintenance and renewal. In contrast, I (Paret, 2011, 2014, 2015a) argued that we must focus on the triangular relationship between (a) the state, and particularly immigration enforcement; (b) the integration of migration workers into the division of labor and their exploitation at the point of production; and (c) labor force reproduction. With this framework, I reinterpreted Burawoy's migrant labor system as one defined by 'exclusion through legalization' (Paret, 2011: 68). In this system, immigration enforcement funnels migrant workers into legal employment contracts, organizes the exploitation of workers in a specific industry, and facilitates the externalization of labor force reproduction costs.

Yet, a given political economy may organize migrant labor in varied ways. I argued that there was also an alternative system—what I called 'inclusion through illegalization' (Paret, 2011: 68) or simply, 'illegalization' (Paret, 2014: 515)—which varied from Burawoy's migrant labor system on all three dimensions. In this alternate system, the key role of the state was to produce a spectacle of immigration enforcement at the national border, in combination with heightened internal surveillance that underscored the vulnerability of migrant workers to possible deportation or removal. Reliant on generalized fear and political vulnerability, rather than employment contracts, this system was compatible with the spread and exploitation of migrant labor across a wide range of industries, rather than confinement to a single industry (e.g. mining, agriculture) as in the study by Burawoy (1976). This system was much more expansive, and enabled the settlement of migrant workers with their families rather than periodic circulation between sending and receiving societies. Here, reproduction costs could be kept low not by externalizing them, but rather by subjecting migrants to low standards of living and spreading the costs across multiple workers within households (Paret, 2011: 68).

Armed with this reformulation, I reinterpreted Burawoy's analysis of the United States and South Africa. For the United States, I showed that there was a crucial shift from exploitation based on legalization in the agricultural sector, during the Bracero temporary labor program (1942–1964), to a much more expansive system, in the post-1986 period, based on the reproduction of migrant illegality, the spread of migrant workers throughout the economy, and family settlement (Paret, 2014). This meant that the migrant labor system that Burawoy (1976) identified as 'invariant' was in fact disintegrating at precisely the time when he was writing. For South Africa, I showed that Burawoy missed a parallel shift in the character of migrant labor with the rise of the apartheid regime after 1948. The apartheid regime institutionalized a new system that exploited Black migrant workers not just in agriculture, but also in the booming manufacturing sector (Paret, 2011: 69–78).

I went on to argue that the contemporary migrant labor system in the United States, like its South African counterpart, exhibited a process of apartheid policing (Paret, 2015a). Rooted in the differentiation of migrants into 'non-citizen insiders' with legal residence rights and 'non-citizen outsiders' without them, apartheid policing simultaneously stabilized migrants as permanent or long-term residents, enabling the growth of the migrant workforce, and marginalized migrant workers as politically vulnerable outsiders, including exploitation at work.

Showing how border policing restricts the mobility of workers from developing countries, and in turn the political vulnerability of workers constituted as racial outsiders, this analysis contributed to an emergent analysis of ‘global apartheid’. It underscored how apartheid policing reproduces racial inequality through specific mechanisms, which do not necessarily require an explicit ideology of racial exclusion (Paret, 2015a: 320). In subsequent contributions, I extended the analysis both empirically and theoretically. Empirically, I showed how migrant labor systems in the United States, Persian Gulf, and China relied on varied forms of political differentiation and exploitation (Paret, 2018a: 6–7). Theoretically, I used the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa, which confronted both a growing labor surplus and popular opposition to spatial segregation, to theorize variation along two dimensions: first, a labor dimension, with migrants constituted as a source of either exploited labor or surplus labor; and second, a spatial dimension, with the differentiation of migrants based on either an international or an ‘internal’ border (Paret, 2021: 115–118). This framework enabled me to characterize very different contemporary migration regimes in the United States, China, South Africa, and Palestine/Israel (Paret, 2021: 120–128).

This tour suggests that Burawoy’s 1976 article laid a foundation for a vibrant research program on migrant labor. Central to this research program is consideration of how the state organizes processes of production and reproduction, and thus the political underpinnings of what makes migrant labor cheap. It also probes us to unpack what ‘cheap’ means. As Burawoy (1976: 1057) puts it: ‘While ‘Cheap for whom?’ may appear to simplify the problem, it still remains inordinately complex, and the problems of comparison – that is, Cheap for whom with respect to what [i.e. compared to what alternative] and under what conditions? – are still with us’. In a world full of migration, both international and ‘internal’, this agenda is a fruitful point of departure for analysis and comparison.

## **Prekarious Politics**

While I began working on a dissertation about migrant labor systems, it was not to be. After experiencing the contentious township politics of post-apartheid Johannesburg, and then getting thrust into the Occupy Movement back in Oakland, I grew increasingly interested in the politics of resistance—particularly questions of solidarity amid conditions of heightened economic insecurity. As I made this shift, the character of Burawoy’s influence on my work shifted as well. Rather than engaging directly with his work, as I did in the case of migrant labor, I began instead to adopt a kindred analytical approach, one that was notably inspired by Gramsci. This was a more indirect engagement, but one that had a more profound influence on my scholarly trajectory and contributions.

If Burawoy’s (1976) article on the functions and reproduction of migrant labor provided a foundation for my pre-dissertation research, it was a later article on Sociological Marxism (Burawoy, 2003a) that would guide me through the dissertation and beyond. The article came out in 2003, just as I was entering the graduate program at Berkeley and a couple of years before I began to work with Burawoy. I would later discover that the article encompassed many of the arguments that Burawoy put forward in his undergraduate Social Theory lectures, which traced a Marxist intellectual tradition from Marx to Lenin to Gramsci to Fanon. To these, the article added consideration of scholars such as Nancy Fraser, Giovanni Arrighi, Beverly Silver, and Partha Chatterjee. This was the kind of sociology that I wanted to do.

The central thesis of Burawoy’s (2003a: 194) Sociological Marxism is that ‘the dynamism of “society,” primarily located between state and economy, is a key to the durability and transcendence of advanced capitalism’. To develop this thesis, Burawoy himself stands on the shoulders of two giants—Karl Polanyi and Antonio Gramsci—who both emphasize the key role of society

within capitalism. The article is a *tour de force*. It begins by situating Sociological Marxism within the historically fraught relationship between sociology and Marxism, tracing the different biographies of Polanyi and Gramsci, and identifying the two authors within distinct lineages coming out of classical Marxism; Gramsci following Lenin, and Polanyi following Lukacs. From here, Burawoy uses Polanyi and Gramsci to elaborate a theory of the genesis and functions of society, its relationship to class struggle and hegemony, and finally, to the different forms that society assumes across nation-states within global capitalism. The article closes with proposed directions for future research on postcommunist society, race and postcolonial society, gender and the public/private divide, and transnationalism.

My initial explorations leaned more toward the Polanyian side of Sociological Marxism. In Burawoy's (2003a: 217–223) view, Polanyi points us to the role of 'active society', which responds to the commodification of nature and humans and the devastations wrought by the market. My dissertation was a comparative study of immigrant worker resistance in the United States and community-based mobilization by the urban poor in South Africa (Paret, 2013). What united these seemingly disparate cases was that they both represented struggles by insecure layers of the working-class, layers that were experiencing in dramatic form the insecurities that came with neoliberal marketization, precarious work, and disappearing safety nets (see also Paret, 2015a, 2016b, 2018b). This was Polanyi's active society in motion.

The struggles that I was focusing on did not appear unique. Indeed, at the time, struggles by the so-called precariat (Standing, 2011) were spreading across the globe, from the Arab Spring to the *indignados* and anti-austerity protests in Europe to the Occupy Movement in the United States. These movements captivated both Burawoy and myself. He pushed them to the center of a new emphasis on global sociology, which included his Presidential Address to the International Sociological Association (Burawoy, 2015). Burawoy's address proposed that we think of the new social movements as Polanyian countermovements, responding to varied combinations of the commodification or ex-commodification (expulsion) of nature, labor, money, and knowledge. For my part, with colleagues Carin Runciman and Luke Sinwell, I began to explore the differences between protest in South Africa and prominent examples like the Arab Spring and Occupy that were captivating the world (Paret, 2017b; Paret et al., 2017; Paret and Runciman, 2016). Runciman (2017) went head-to-head with Burawoy (2017), questioning the extent to which his characterizations of the new global protest applied to South Africa, as well as his insistence that sociologists might play an important role within these movements.

For Burawoy (2015: 20–21), the precarity of labor rests in both the commodification of the reproduction of labor power, and the ex-commodification of labor via either exclusion from wage labor altogether or relegation to informal or otherwise insecure jobs. Like Burawoy, I was interested in understanding the character of precarity and, even more importantly, how working classes were forging collective solidarity within its midst (Paret, 2015b, 2016a, 2016c). In South Africa, this meant wrestling with widespread protests emerging from residential areas on the urban periphery, where unemployment loomed large. I found that notions of place-based community were absolutely central, enabling residents to construct some degree of collective power despite their economic weakness (Paret, 2018c, 2020). Following Jennifer Chun (2009), a fellow Burawoy student who drew heavily on Nancy Fraser's notion of recognition, I argued that symbolic demands for dignity and recognition were central to the struggles of the precarious working class, as were demands directed toward the state rather than employers (Paret, 2013, 2015b, 2016b, 2018b, 2020, 2023).

Building on Burawoy's reading of Polanyi, I sought to show that the most precariously situated layers of the working class were capable of forging collective solidarity, and thus pushing for social transformation. I challenged accounts that tended to assume that such layers were too weak and fragmented to have a noteworthy independent political orientation, and were thus malleable pawns

that could instead be manipulated by external forces as part of political struggles separate from their own (Davis, 2004; Standing, 2011; Wacquant, 2008). In contrast, I argued that the economically insecure, the precariat and the urban poor, had a politics of their own. This was not the politics of a solidaristic or homogeneous society, as Polanyi's analysis often appeared to suggest. It represented, rather, an 'agonistic' version of Polanyi, as Mike Levien and I called it, where the most disadvantaged groups led countermovements for social protection (Levien and Paret, 2012: 728). Understanding the oppositional and fractured character of society required turning to the other side of Sociological Marxism.

## Postcolonial and Racial Transformations

In Burawoy's (2003a) framing, Polanyi theorizes the relationship between society and the market. This helped me to understand the sources of mobilization, and also some of the parallels between the United States and South Africa. Yet, my emerging arguments about community, symbolic politics, and the state were pulling me instead toward the Gramscian side of Burawoy's Sociological Marxism. This was a sociology focused less on how society responds to the market, and more on how society and state combine to absorb challenges to capitalism (Burawoy 2003a: 220). Of course, civil society is also the site where oppositional collectives and ideologies emerge, holding the potential for transformative challenges.

Following Burawoy's (2003a: 245–248) insistence that we take this analysis to postcolonial society, I began to theorize postcolonial politics in terms of an opposition between 'included society' and 'excluded society', with the latter representing an important site of struggle (Paret, 2017a). I drew a parallel between Frantz Fanon, Mahmood Mamdani, and Partha Chatterjee, each of which elaborated the included/excluded distinction: Fanon distinguished between the national bourgeoisie and working class on one side, versus the peasantry and lumpenproletariat on the other; Mamdani drew a distinction between citizens and subjects; and Chatterjee distinguished between civil society and political society. Building on these accounts, I theorized the terrain of political and economic exclusion as a crucial site of postcolonial politics (Paret, 2017a). This was the beginning of my attempt to make sense of my extended fieldwork in the townships and informal settlements around Johannesburg, including interviews with activists who were driving the country's widespread community protests.

With a focus on the South African case, my book (Paret, 2022), *Fractured Militancy: Precarious Resistance in South Africa After Racial Inclusion*, represents the culmination of my thinking about precarious politics while turning to questions about postcolonial society and the racial order. I did cite Burawoy a few times. But rather than a sustained engagement with Burawoy's writings, it is his general approach to thinking about the postcolonial situation that looms much larger in my analysis. If my earlier ruminations on precarious politics drew heavily from Nancy Fraser (1997), who Burawoy (2003a: 248–250) draws on to bring a feminist analysis into Sociological Marxism, *Fractured Militancy* leans heavily on Fanon and Chatterjee, who Burawoy (2003a: 245–248) incorporates to address postcolonial transitions and the racial order. My intervention was to link Fanon and Chatterjee via the Gramscian notion of passive revolution, which I define as 'an elite-led reorganization of society that preserves the existing order through demobilization and limited reform' (Paret, 2022: 4). I argue that South Africa underwent a *passive revolution through racial inclusion*, in which elite class struggles took place on the terrain of racial inclusion and democratization.

My analysis proceeds from the vantage point of the impoverished Black neighborhoods on the urban periphery. I show how the formal dismantling of state-approved racial exclusion, and thus the formal inclusion of previously excluded racial groups as citizens with equal rights, facilitated

the reproduction of a highly unequal capitalism marked by persistent racial disparities and extreme economic insecurity. The passive revolution through racial inclusion, in other words, reproduced precarity. It also had a seemingly contradictory influence on popular struggle. The passive revolution simultaneously encouraged popular resistance, which called attention to the betrayed promises of the democratic transition, and sowed the seeds of division, most crucially by engendering competitive struggles over access to scarce state resources. Fragmentation appeared in varied forms, including divisions between residential areas, the employed and the unemployed, the native-born and foreign-born, and those with different political ideologies. The urban poor were highly mobilized, but divided. It was a fractured militancy.

Through this analysis, I show how Burawoy's Sociological Marxism enables us to make sense of the complex relationships between capitalism, race, and social movements (see Paret, 2022: 139–141). This involves a shift from the major theories of social movement studies to what I call 'capitalist politics'. Rather than resource mobilization, and following Polanyi and Fanon, the analysis reveals that the excluded can mobilize without resources. Furthermore, following Gramsci, it shows that the economy and class structure set limits on the possibilities of class formation, but without determining the outcome. In this case, economic precarity amplified the significance of residential areas (place-based community) and demands for collective consumption. The state, political parties, and community groups thus became more central than unions and employers. With respect to the popular idea of political opportunities, I show that, in South Africa, expanding opportunities were tethered to the passive revolution of capital. Rather than advancing resistance, the passive revolution demobilized society and encouraged narrow, competitive struggles. This emphasis on capitalist politics also calls for a shift from collective action frames to questions of solidarity, political orientation, and movement building. Indeed, in the South African case, activists were fragmented despite sharing a popular set of framing devices around notions of 'service delivery'.

The concept of passive revolution also helps us to make sense of racial transformation. In the Preface to *Fractured Militancy*, I draw a parallel between widespread local protests in South Africa and the emergence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the United States, particularly the local uprisings sparked by police killings in Ferguson, Baltimore, and Minneapolis. The uprisings in the United States and South Africa both emanated from Black residential areas marked by concentrated poverty and disproportionate levels of unemployment. And in both instances, such conditions represented the deferral of Black liberation, set against a history of anti-racist mobilization that brought political change without economic transformation. If there were important parallels, however, there were also key differences. Most notable was the way in which BLM blossomed into a moment of national reckoning while South Africa's protests remained localized and fragmented. In the Conclusion of *Fractured Militancy*, I explain this divergence by pointing to the different forms of passive revolution through racial inclusion in the United States and South Africa, which engendered different kinds of political change (much more thorough in the South African case) and in turn different forms of popular mobilization in the wake of formal racial inclusion. Perhaps most importantly, the passive revolution in the United States produced struggles around civil rights that incorporated a multiracial middle class, whereas in South Africa it produced working-class demands for redistribution that failed to attract middle class support.

Burawoy's Sociological Marxism thus gave me a lens through which to make sense of popular struggles in the era of precarity, as well as racial transformations in the United States and South Africa. In doing so, it enabled me to make interventions into current bodies of literature on race and social movements, as well as other areas such as immigration and urban sociology that I have not had space to elaborate here. At its core, what I believe the lens of Sociological Marxism allows or encourages is for scholars to integrate analysis of capitalism into the many subareas of sociology that often do not take capitalism very seriously. It is a bridge that leads toward a critical sociology.



For Burawoy (2003a: 199–200), Sociological Marxism ‘distinguishes itself from sociology in four ways’. It understands society as a historical product of modernity, the configurations of which determine the fates of capitalism and socialism. It identifies society as an institutional realm that is closely tied to both state and market, and shot through with divisions of race and gender. It recognizes society as ‘Janus-faced’, meaning that it may either stabilize capitalism or provide a ‘terrain for transcending capitalism’ (199). And finally, it becomes an indictment of capitalism, drawing on ‘sociology’s own antipathy to utilitarianism and totalitarianism’ and absorbing it into a ‘democratic socialist project!’ (199–200). Within my own work, I have sought to illuminate these dynamics and aspirations through sustained attention to the collective struggles of the precarious working class, and particularly their varied relationships to anti-racism and formal racial inclusion.

## **Standing on Burawoy’s Shoulders or Walking on Two Legs**

Burawoy is known for dialogue. As Blume Oeur (2022: 560) remarks, he exhibits a ‘steadfast commitment to intellectual meetings—imagined conversations between theorists—that nurture a reflexive Sociology’. This was clear in Burawoy’s courses, where he consistently pit theorists against each other to illuminate their unique contributions. This penchant for paired comparison came out in his work on Bourdieu, which saw Burawoy staging imaginary ‘conversations’ between Bourdieu and various Marxists, including earlier versions of himself (Burawoy, 2019; Burawoy and von Holdt, 2012). But it was there well before, for example, in his dialogue between Skocpol and Trotsky (Burawoy, 1989), or between different forms of science (Burawoy, 1998). Sociological Marxism is a dialogue between sociology and Marxism (Burawoy, 2003a). Burawoy’s methodological interventions, such as ethnographic revisits (Burawoy, 2003b) or the extended case method (Burawoy, 2009), also lean on conversations of one kind or another. And today he aims to expand and decolonize the sociological canon by constructing conversations between Du Bois and the big three of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim (Burawoy, 2021). Indeed, Burawoy theorizes the sociological canon as ‘an assemblage of relations among theories that develop through dialogue’ (Burawoy, 2022: 575). In the vein of his earlier Sociological Marxism, he now calls on sociologists to incorporate Du Bois by ‘walking on two legs’, by which he means a dialogue between two different conversations, one within the sociological canon and the other within Black Marxism (Burawoy, 2022). One is reminded here of Burawoy’s interventions around public sociology. This is an approach, he explains, that ‘brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7). Phew. That is a lot of dialogue!

When one is formally a student of Burawoy, they must attend to and manage a somewhat different dialogue: between Burawoy as mentor and Burawoy as theorist. With regard to the former, the contributions are tremendous. His commitment to students is remarkable. It was evident in the long list of office hour slots that would appear on his office door, always full within moments of being posted. The acknowledgments that appear in the many dissertations that he helped grow into books represent a further testament. Yet, the balance between Burawoy as mentor and Burawoy as theorist is not so clear. At least in my own experience, he never pushed me to incorporate or cite his own work. Although, of course, there was never a huge distance between his guidance and his publications.

As a Burawoy student, then, I also found myself ‘walking on two legs’, developing a dialogue between two different conversations. On one leg were my face-to-face conversations with Burawoy. These were most prominent during my time as a graduate student, and while I am fortunate that they have continued over the years, these conversations are becoming less prevalent. On the other leg are my conversations with Burawoy the theorist—of migrant labor, of precarious politics, and

of postcolonial and racial transformations. These have been steady, and I feel fortunate to have found a scholar whose work I find so inspiring and useful. Through this journey, and my varied attempts to reconstruct his theories, it has been a productive joy to stand on Burawoy's shoulders. As much as I miss the in-person conversations, I am grateful to have the other leg to stand on.

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