

For Michael Burawoy: A Tribute to a Life of Thought and Action

Section: Society and gender

written by Sari Hanafi | February 5, 2025



This is news too cruel to believe, too sudden to accept. Michael, you are gone, and yet you are everywhere. Only three weeks ago, we sat together in Cambridge, speaking of Gaza and Syria, of struggles that animated your restless mind. The day before you left us, we exchanged emails about a statement supporting BDS, a cause you carried with conviction, hoping to rally former presidents of the International Sociological Association to push the current Executive Committee toward courage. You were never just a scholar, never merely an academic voice in the wilderness. You were a guide, a force, a mentor, a friend—the kind of thinker who did not merely theorize justice but pursued it with relentless passion. I owe you so much. You took my hand and led me from the narrow corridors of professional and policy sociology into the vast, unruly terrain of public sociology. But more than that, you unmapped my thinking, urging me to embrace global sociology.

How do we imagine public sociology without your unyielding presence, without your tireless interventions? Your wisdom was never distant, never encased in ivory towers—it was lived, argued, practiced. You wrote a beautiful preface for my forthcoming book, *Against Symbolic Liberalism: A Plea for Dialogical Sociology*. When you saw my cautiously optimistic

position on Syria, you wanted to add a paragraph on how I put my dialogical sociology into practice. You believed, always, that theory must breathe, that it must find its way into the fabric of lived experience.

In Cambridge, I urged you to write your autobiography, and you promised me you would. But fate has stolen you too soon. We are left with the work you have done, but not the work you still had to do. The world still needs your boundless energy, your unwavering commitment to justice, your fearless questioning of power.

Michael, you were not just a theorist. You reshaped the very practice of sociology, making it urgent, engaged, and alive. Your ideas do not die. Your presence does not fade. You are not gone; you are inscribed in every struggle for truth, every act of intellectual courage, every fight against injustice.

I grieve this immense loss. But I do not say goodbye.

Your memory is eternal.