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<CHAPTER TITLE> From ‘critical engagement’ to ‘public sociology’ and back: a critique from the South

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Much of the literature on the political engagements of sociologists has been framed by Michael Burawoy’s concept of ‘public sociology’. The aim of this chapter is to develop a critique of this concept, drawing from the writings and practices of a group of sociologists at SWOP in Johannesburg, South Africa, and replace it with the concept of ‘critically engaged sociology’ – ‘engaged sociology’ for short – which emerges through interaction between sociologists and movements in the struggle for change, and which captures more clearly than ‘public sociology’ the richness and complexity of this kind of engagement. Doing this entails the simultaneous critique of the North Atlantic domination of global sociology (Bhambra 2007, 2014; Keim 2011, 2017) and the production of a southern theory that provides a better concept of our world – and this is done by retracing a four decade process of concept formation and dialogue between Burawoy and, notably, Eddie Webster, one of South Africa’s most eminent sociologist and SWOP founder, as well as others at SWOP.

Before proceeding, it is useful to provide a brief synopsis of the difference between the two concepts. ‘Critically engaged sociology’ focuses attention on the following:

- The all-important intersection between the sociological field and the political field, which is the foundation for the specific form of sociology we are discussing, in contrast to the silence of ‘public sociology’ on this matter.
- A critique of sociology as a field of domination in which the dominant sociologies tend to be aligned broadly with the status quo in society, in contrast to ‘public sociology’ which presents the sociological endeavour as one characterised by pluralism between different sociologies or a division of labour between them.
- A distinctive process of knowledge production that is generated in the tension between the political field and the sociological field, that carries symbolic power in both these fields, and is potentially conceptually innovative, in contrast to ‘public sociology’ which is silent about knowledge production and conceptual innovation and tacitly allocates them to professional sociology.

In developing this argument, the the work of others in the SWOP orbit is used and built on, and particularly Eddie Webster, who first developed the concept of critically engaged sociology, Sakhela Buhlungu, who was for many years deputy director of SWOP, Alberto Arribas Lozano, a Spanish anthropologist who joined SWOP as a postdoctoral fellow in 2015-17, and Wiebke Keim who conducted doctoral research on South African labour sociologists, of whom three were located at SWOP – and of course Michael Burawoy, long-standing colleague, research associate and more recently advisory board member at SWOP.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part I lays out a critical account of the dialogue between Michael Burawoy and SWOP over some three decades, focusing specifically on the process of concept formation that has taken place on both sides: on the one hand, the elaboration of ‘critically engaged sociology’ in SWOP, and on the other, the elaboration of ‘public sociology’ by Burawoy. The second part turns to the concrete research practice of new SWOP researchers, in order to ascertain what is distinctive about the process of knowledge production through research within the practice of critically engaged sociology.

<2> Part 1: forging the concepts

The late 1970s and early 1980s was a period of significant change in South Africa, with the growth of an increasingly assertive set of popular movements and the strategic attempts of the apartheid regime to reform the structures of domination. Responding to these developments, the young sociologist Eddie Webster described the dilemmas of South Africa's social scientists – to engage with the broader crisis by providing policy support for the regime reformers, to retreat into professional academic social science or adopt a social science of liberation which meant working 'to link their theory and knowledge more clearly to the practical activity taking place among the majority of South Africans'. Here Webster is not just discussing career options, he is presenting a moral and political choice, which is at the same time a *critique* of both political pragmatism and the retreat into professionalism. He then goes on to discuss the tensions within a 'social science of liberation': working with organisations in struggle raises dilemmas of accountability and autonomy and meant negotiating the 'distinction between the tactics of political struggle and the methods of social science'. The solution, he suggests, 'is not to abandon social science but to transform it' (Webster 1982). The following year he established SWOP in the Sociology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) as a locus for research with and on the labour movement (see Webster, this volume).

The perspective articulated here was developed out of the 'practical activities' of the previous decade, when Webster worked with other students and young academics around the charismatic Durban lecturer, Rick Turner, to support the emerging trade union structures with education programmes and a labour journal, the *South African Labour Bulletin*. But he was quite explicit that this was not an expedient project in which the University was simply a base for activism; he was completely committed to a form of activism that forged a new social science and a transformed University. Consistent with this commitment, Webster was elected president of the Association of Sociologists in Southern Africa the following year. In his presidential address he discussed the changing paradigms in South African sociology and identified the emergence of a new 'critical sociology', which incorporated but was not limited to Marxism, as the most significant trend (1985).

A decade later Webster returned to the problem of accountability and autonomy at the intersection between the academic and political fields with their different tactics and methods, drawing on ten years of research with trade unions through SWOP:

> Pressure exists on scholars to make a clear declaration that their research and teaching should be constructed as support for, and on behalf of, particular organizations. To prevent this subordination of intellectual work to the immediate interests of these organizations, I prefer the stance of critical engagement. Squaring the circle is never easy, as it involves a difficult combination of commitment to the goals of these movements while being faithful to evidence, data and your own judgment and conscience. (Webster 1995:18)

While there is a growing nuance to Webster's articulation of 'critical engagement', the central concern remains the intersection between the scholarly field and the political field, and the creative tensions between them. This is where the first phase of SWOP's conception of its practice ends, with Webster's development of the ideas of a social science of liberation, critical sociology and critical engagement.

In 1990, the year that negotiations between the ANC and the apartheid regime began, Michael Burawoy was invited to address the ASSA conference, where he

> was stunned and exhilarated by the involvement of sociologists in the trenches of civil society, the ardent debates that emanated from those trenches and the originality of their theories of race, state and society. How different they were from what I had become accustomed to in the United States – a hyper-professionalised sociology that fetishised its separation from society… (Burawoy 2009)

He also spent some time at SWOP, where he had been invited to participate as an advisor on the Deep Level Mining research project that was being conducted for mining employers and unions. By the time of his return in 2003 to address the sociological association (in its new form as the South African

Sociological Association, SASA) on the dilemmas facing South African sociology, he acknowledged that his paper would not have been possible without his ongoing dialogue with Eddie Webster 'both about the changing face of South African sociology and the peculiarities of American sociology' (Burawoy 2004, footnote 1). It was at this conference that he introduced the concept of 'public sociology' to South African sociologists.

Inspired by his experiences in South Africa, Burawoy had developed the idea of 'public sociology' as a counter to the staid and self-referential 'professional sociology' that predominated in the US. This led him to develop a typology of sociologies arranged in four quadrants – professional sociology and critical sociology both addressing academic audiences, and public and policy sociology, addressing audiences beyond the academy. Through addressing the structure of US sociology, and reflecting on the relationship between the different elements, Burawoy hoped to legitimate 'public sociology' and foster a greater engagement with social issues by US sociologists. But in undertaking this project, the concept of public sociology lost the critical edge entailed in Webster's account of SWOP's practice. Burawoy argued that all four sociologies were necessary to the health of each, and that they constituted a division of sociological labour through which the multiple commitments of sociology could be met.

Thus, public sociology needed the professionalism, autonomy and legitimacy of professional sociology in order to strengthen its own interventions in the public sphere, while professional sociology was enriched by the discovery of fresh research problems that surfaced through the activities of public sociology. Critical sociology, on the other hand, needed urgent engagement with current social problems provided by public sociology in order to avoid a self-referential narcissism. Professional sociology was assigned by Burawoy the role of guardian of the sanctified protocols and procedures of the sociological discipline, which is essential for the integrity of sociology, including the other three sociological practices. In the process of elaborating this template, though, public sociology loses its own professional, research and theory-making capabilities, or appears to outsource them to other quadrants of the template.

These tensions were evident in Burawoy's presentation to the SASA conference. His paper begins by drawing a strong contrast between the 'hyper-professionalised American sociology' and the 'engagement of sociology, much of it Marxist, with the issues of the day' in South Africa, a contrast which casts interesting light on the 'peculiarities of American sociology' which requires 'a strange idea' – 'public sociology' for something 'which in South Africa is taken for granted' (Burawoy 2004). In his discussion of South African sociology, he draws on Webster's concepts of the social science of liberation and critical engagement. By the middle of his paper, however, he reverts to his typology of four sociologies which, he argues, constitutes an abstract template of universal categories, albeit drawn from an analysis of US sociology, which serve to 'illuminate the history of South African sociology' and its dilemmas and potential future trajectories (Burawoy 2004:20). Instead of building on its own indigenous traditions, South African sociologists should think in terms of the structure of US sociology, and 'critical engagement' and the critical sociological practices it entails are absorbed into that 'strange idea' from the US – 'public sociology'! The tensions in this process of (mis)translation across vastly different social realities is captured in the final footnote, which notes that 'the work of SWOP at the University of the Witwatersrand is noteworthy for its attempt to bring all four sociologies into concertation in developing a new research programme'. Thus, SWOP appears to reassemble the four different sociologies into a new whole when in fact they were never separate to begin with.

This is not to say that the attempt to develop a comparative perspective on different traditions and schools of sociology globally nor that the attempt to develop abstract categories to facilitate this is a priori misguided. But it does demonstrate the pitfalls in attempting to translate concepts between different social realities – let alone doing this in a power-laden context, such as that constituted by the domination of US sociology globally. Burawoy's template has travelled mightily, sparking symposia and publications in the US, many countries in Europe, Brazil, China and Russia, amongst others. Certainly, this would not have happened with concepts developed in South Africa: it was the

translation into the US, and the position of Burawoy in US and global sociology (president of the ASA, then president of the ISA) that made this possible. Ultimately, the template becomes prescriptive: if a national sociology is not so structured, that is because it is underdeveloped and should be so structured. This is relatively how Burawoy presented his template at the South African Sociological Congress in 2003. But from our point of view it could be said that the heart of the concept went missing in translation.

The question, really, is why we would want South African sociology to resemble US sociology? From the point of view of our society, on the periphery of the global capitalist order, shaped by four centuries of domination by the West, racked by the contradictions of poverty, inequality, race, violence and coloniality, it is appropriate that our sociology be predominantly a critical, public and policy sociology, all of them grounded in professionalism, which seeks to change the way we see the prevailing order of things, rather than a sanctified professional sociology preoccupied with the minutia of the prevailing order. From here, US professional sociology appears more as an enforcer of orthodoxy than as an agent of critique and change. Viewed in this light, the structure of US sociology presents a distortion of the original thrust and heart of sociology – which is to *critically* know our world. Burawoy's initial impulse was right:– to attempt to transform US sociology in the direction of what was being done in South Africa, not the opposite, which was to present the template of US sociology as a model for everyone else. Indeed, Burawoy, reporting to an Italian readership its reception by his South African audience, commented that they 'looked at me whimsically: what is this public sociology – isn't all sociology public? Why do we need the qualifier 'public'?' (Burawoy 2007)

I think it is fair to say that there was always a degree of ambivalence in SWOP towards this typology. On one hand, the conception of 'public sociology' appeared to point towards our practice, but on the other it seemed to reduce its complexity – which includes elements from all four sociologies – to something rather simplistic. Nor does it speak to the real frisson of our practice. The notion of public sociology seemed somehow lifeless and lacking in dynamism, compared to a practice that combined knowledge production and innovation, social engagement out of which concrete policy proposals and organisational strategies emerged, and the deployment of political and professional judgement in a context of personal bonds and political hazards – a turbulent, productive space that Burawoy termed 'the Southern Windmill' in his wonderful evocation of the life and work of Eddie Webster (Burawoy 2010). Nonetheless, we started using the term, as is pointed out by our postdoctoral fellow Arribas Lozano (2018). It provided a shorthand that had become internationally comprehensible – and since after the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, SWOP researchers were increasingly active internationally, this made sense. Perhaps we also felt 'recognised', since our practice was now engaged with in many different countries, even if in a mediated fashion. And at the same time, we ceased theorising our own practice.

Sakhela Buhlungu's (2009) article on the decline of labour studies in South Africa straddles a transitional moment in theorising out of SWOP. Like the all of the SWOP sociologists at that point, he deploys Burawoy's term 'public sociology' to describe the practice of labour sociologists in South Africa, but at the same time critically inflects it with the distinctive features of the South African practice. Notably he recapitulates Webster's insistence on the tensions at the intersection between scholarship and political engagement, and moreover stresses the way sociology was shaped by those with whom it engaged, alluding as well to the way publics (particularly labour movements) appropriated ideas from the sociologists and imbued them with new meanings. The encounter between sociologists and publics is thus a moment of creative meaning-making on both sides. Exploring different phases in the relationship between public sociology and trade unionists, he surfaces explicitly the question of the whiteness of virtually all labour scholars and their privileged relationship with the small number of strategically positioned white intellectuals in the unions, with whom they tended to share many assumptions. Finally, he argues that as the labour movement became more powerful and self-sufficient, and engaged in alliance with the national liberation movement, it became more critical of labour sociologists from the universities, and insisted on engaging on its own

terms, particularly after the transition to democracy. This meant that critical perspectives arising from the scholarly autonomy of labour sociologists, including a black sociologist such as himself, led to their rejection by trade unionists. The stress in Buhlungu's analysis is on the contestation over and mutuality of knowledge production, and the provisional nature of the relationship between the public sociologist and the organic public they work with. In making these arguments, he anticipates those of Arribas Lozano a decade later.

It was Burawoy's enthusiasm for public sociology and for the SWOP project that reawakened us to some of the issues at stake. In 2013 Burawoy invited the author, as the new director at SWOP, to participate with a global network of 'public sociologists' in addressing his students in a weekly sequence of virtual lectures at Berkeley University, which led the author to grappling with these concerns afresh. Webster's concept of 'critical engagement' was resurrected as an alternative to the concept of 'public sociology', in an analysis of the author's own engagement with transformation at a public hospital (von Holdt 2014). The concept of critical engagement should be expanded to include not only the critical engagement with popular organisations beyond the field of sociology, but also a critical engagement with sociology itself: a critical engagement *within* the field of sociology inspired by popular struggles *beyond* the field of sociology.

This critical engagement took place across all four quadrants in Burawoy's schema providing a critique of professional sociology and critical sociology, and generating a critical policy sociology rather than the policy sociology beholden to the dominant forces in society envisaged by Burawoy. This way of thinking reveals that, 'the field of public sociology is necessarily a contested one because of its intersection with the public domain, itself a site of symbolic struggle over the meaning, hierarchies and directions of the social world' (Von Holdt 2014). Moreover 'sociology is itself *a field of power*, characterized by domination and contestation' in which policy and public sociology constitute, not separate quadrants, but a continuum with two poles, and likewise professional and critical sociology (Von Holdt 2014). The continuity with some of the analysis presented by Webster in 1982 should be clear – namely, the fact that critical engagement is driven by the intersection between sociological and political fields, that it constitutes a critique of dominant forms of sociology, and aims not only to contribute to the transformation of the social world, but also to the transformation of sociology itself.

My chapter, together with the other chapter in the volume of *Current Sociology* derived from that teaching experience and coedited by Burawoy, provoked Burawoy to a substantial revision of his theory of public sociology, presented in the same volume. In his preface, Burawoy recognised that his own theory of public sociology had been concerned with 'a crit who is let ique of academic knowledge' rather than the political practice of social engagement and adopted the author's argument that public sociologists operated in the intersection between the academic field and the political field – 'precarious engagements' on a 'treacherous political terrain' (Burawoy 2014a). Moreover, he fundamentally revised his theorising of US sociology, replacing the pluralist typology of four different sociologies, each playing a vital role in the division of sociological labour and overseen by the scientific protocols sanctified by professional sociology with the concept of sociology as a field of domination with 'a continuum between dominant and subordinate interests, between professional and critical sociology, and between policy and public sociology' (Burawoy 2014b: 148).

Nonetheless, Burawoy's revision still lacks the idea on which critical engagement insists – that is, that the engagement with subaltern movements transforms sociology itself through the production of new knowledge, and not only empirical knowledge, but also new concepts through which to know the world something which Burawoy recognises in SWOP and discusses with great perceptiveness in his article on Webster (Burawoy 2010). Given that this new knowledge emerges out of research with, and on, the subaltern world, it constitutes a *kind of critical sociology* – critical of the structures of power in the social world, but also critical in relation to the sanctified canon of established sociology – which is very different from the US version of critical sociology enshrined in Burawoy's typology

where it has an attenuated relationship with the world of social struggle. The space of critical engagement, then, is not an occasion for conveying the hallowed truths of sociology to the masses, but a dynamic space shaped by the tensions and contradictions produced within political fields *as well as those internal to sociology*, which combines elements from all four of the quadrants in Burawoy's schema (von Holdt 2014). The critically engaged sociologist is therefore engaged in contestation across several different fronts. Contrast this with the rather more anodyne concept of public sociology and it becomes clear why to us in SWOP the latter seemed to point towards but fail to reflect our own practice.

The next step in the engagement between SWOP and Burawoy was the intervention by Alberto Arribas Lozano, a strong advocate of the co-production of knowledge between researcher and the researched. Drawing on his experience in the field of anthropology in Spain, in Europe more broadly and in Latin America, he presented a much stronger critique of the Burawoy template than anyone had produced in SWOP before (Arribas Lozano 2018). He argues that the concept of 'public sociology' projects the peculiar structure of US sociology as a hegemonic universal, that it empties 'public sociology' of the radical content that had been integral to critical engagement and liberation sociology, and privileges 'professional sociology' for no good reason other than that it is dominant in the field of US sociology. Finally, and perhaps most important for Arribas Lozano, the concept of public sociology fails to consider the distinctive processes of knowledge production entailed in critical engagement, and the possibilities for the co-production of knowledge in particular. It will be clear how much author's analysis in the preceding pages owes to Arribas Lozano's intervention. Inspired by his observations, this chapter endeavours to return to the practice of critical engagement as it has developed within SWOP *without* pursuing the detour through US sociology entailed by naming it 'public sociology', in order to understand our practice afresh so as to develop and deepen our concept of it – and then, hopefully, reinsert this concept into the field of global sociology.

In addition, Arribas Lozano challenges us in SWOP to think more carefully about our own processes of knowledge production. In the second part of this article, the author challenges and reflects critically on the concrete research practices in two projects in order to demonstrate, firstly, the distinctive nature of critically engaged research; secondly, to explore the tensions between the production of academic and political knowledge; and thirdly, to reflect on the relationship between that research and theory-formation.

Which is to suggest that the space of critical engagement in the global South is not only a space of knowledge production, but that that knowledge production may constitute a *counter-hegemonic* sociology. Here the research of Wiebke Keim (2011; 2017) into critically engaged South African labour studies is valuable. She focused on four South African sociologists, of whom three were located at SWOP, and concluded that such sociology may constitute a counter-hegemonic current that provides fertile ground for theory-building with the potential to 'make original contributions to the advancement of the discipline' internationally (2017:22). I would add that, if such a sociology is to be counter-hegemonic, which is to say engaged in a contestation over hegemony with the dominant forces in the field – the dominant sociologies of the North Atlantic – it needs to entail a critique of precisely those dominant forces. But to engage in such a contestation requires of sociologists in the global South, such as ourselves, firstly to make the time to work more consistently and rigorously on concept formation, and secondly to be more assertive in inserting conceptual work and the concomitant critique of hegemonic sociology that it implies into global disciplinary forums. While it is important to work and publish locally – since a counter-hegemonic sociology can only be as strong as its local base – this is insufficient: it has to find ways of engaging more systematically in global arenas.

Here it is worth considering the question of South-South engagement. While it is true that, even if SWOP had been more assertive at a theoretical level in global forums,[2] our concept of liberation sociology and critical engagement would have been unlikely to gain the kind of global traction that the concept of public sociology gained, produced as it was by a prominent and globally active US sociologist such as Burawoy, but nonetheless it might have gained a very significant traction of a

different kind in other peripheral sociologies emerging in relation to very intensive cycles of popular struggle. Here the 'coincidence' that an anthropologist, Shannon Speed, invented the virtually identical concept of critical engagement in order to capture very similar tensions to those noted by Webster, in her work with an indigenous Mexican community engaged in land struggles, suggests a profound resonance across disciplines and national contexts on the global periphery; (Speed notes the importance of her own identity as a 'mixed race' Native American raised in Los Angeles in the US for how she approached this project) (Speed 2006). And indeed, a counter-hegemonic sociology will tend to resonate more strongly in other peripheral sociologies – or social sciences – than in those of the sociological centre – although here, of course, the difficulties of translation become even more complex in the context of diverse languages, whether these are colonial languages such as English and Spanish, or even more difficult, indigenous languages.

The critique of 'public sociology' laid out here should not by any means be taken to mean that collaboration and mutual learning between critical sociologists of the South and the North must not take place. The series of engagements between Michael Burawoy and ourselves has been richly productive in both directions, and continues to be so, ranging across not only the practice of engaged sociology, but also the work of Marx, Bourdieu (Burawoy and von Holdt 2012), and Polanyi, in addition to the work of Burawoy and Webster themselves. In the case of the process of dialogue and concept formation discussed here, Burawoy has drawn on the practices of SWOP and others to develop the conceptual weaponry for contestations within US sociology, while his work has provoked us to engage with and against that weaponry, in the process deepening our own understanding not only of our own critical practice, but also of the relationship between US and South African sociology, and the necessity to challenge this and its tacit hegemonic practices. The very same process then requires Burawoy to rethink how his own conceptions may not only contribute to challenging the domination of US professional sociology in the field of US sociology, but also obscure the nature of its domination and in some sense reproduce its domination internationally. This dialogue begins to reveal the hazards of concept translation across social realities, and the way translation itself is not innocent but shaped by the relative power of the concepts to be translated – power that is constituted by the field of domination in which they are embedded.

Thus, the dialogue between critical sociologists in the North and the South, the centre and the periphery, can be enormously productive and challenging while at the same time – given the structure of global sociology – reproducing or obscuring the workings of appropriation and domination in the global field.

There are of course material reasons for this. The resources for knowledge production – funding and time for research, large numbers of graduate students, academic associations and conferences, journals and publishers (Burawoy 2004) – are limited in peripheral locations such as South Africa, and the practices of critical engagement in political fields tend to be all-consuming, with the result that we don't think of ourselves as producing high-level theory, and fail to devote the necessary time and resources to this task. In other words, we collude in our own domination. Countering this requires that we commit ourselves to investing time and resources into the conceptual project. Concept development is a slow process, requiring a constant revisiting of the problem through the lens of new empirical research and new readings – a process the author calls 'slow sociology', which requires working against the immediacy of the pressures ratcheted up on academics by the neoliberalisation of universities, on one hand, and the demands of critical engagement in political fields on the other.

Before turning to an empirical examination of the practice of critically engaged research, it is important to address one final question which is posed implicitly by Buhlungu's article – that of the racial identity of the South African sociologist. In other words, the question that needs to be posed: *who is the 'southern sociologist'*?. In the exchanges considered here the dominant voices are those of two white men – Webster and von Holdt – in dialogue with a white man from the US. To what extent then, is our concept of 'critical engagement' and of knowledge production shaped by our social position as South Africans of settler descent?

The experience of working on a publication with militant black students during the #FeesMustFall protests of 2015/16 illuminates the question. #FeesMustFall brought the issues of popular struggle right into to the institution where SWOP is based, the University of the Witwatersrand. How should a progressive research institute such as SWOP respond? It was decided to support the students by providing the space and resources for them to produce a written account of their struggle. Given that the students are scholars-in-training, and that one of their critiques of the University centred on the academic appropriation of black stories and lives, it was obvious that there should be a high degree of student control over the writing and production of the publication. Nonetheless, the proposal was met with a high degree of hostility and suspicion by students, taking three months of negotiation to establish a clear mutual understanding. This process entailed a harsh critique of the author as a representative of the un-decolonised white professoriate, of SWOP as a colonial, masculine space, and of our compromising relationship with COSATU and thereby the ANC. The control of funding, editing and content of the publication had to be negotiated in detail, and they welcomed the opportunity to interrogate the funders on what their agenda was. The author was forced to concede a much greater degree of control to the student collective than he had initially envisaged, in the end managing the funds in consultation with the students, and exercising a degree of ethical oversight in relation to the possibility of inflammatory language (which in the event proved unnecessary).

Once the terms of the arrangement had been settled, the authoer was welcome to participate in meetings, give advice and support where it was useful, and defend the project in the University. The result was an important publication and a record of many aspects of the student struggles of which both the students and SWOP could be proud. This moment clarifies the historic positionality of the 'Southern theorist' in SWOP as white and male, and the bearer of an oppressive inheritance in the form of settler colonialism, a University saturated by coloniality and Northern theory, and pose a stark necessity for decolonisation – one of the core demands of the student movement. This process not only suggests the co-production of knowledge, but the appropriation of knowledge production by the Black subaltern in an encounter which silences the 'Southern theorist' before reconstituting the relationship on a different basis. The implication is that the concept of 'critical engagement' still needs to undergo further critique and development – or replacement – by critical black scholars.

<2> Part 2: The practice of critical engagement: political knowledge and sociological knowledge

In this second part of the chapter, the authorI delves into two case studies in order to explore the processes of knowledge production in the turbulent intersection between the academic field of sociology and the political fields in which we sociologists engage. Possibly the most substantive difference between 'public sociology' and 'critical engagement' centres on whether this kind of sociological practice involves a distinctive process of knowledge production, or on the other hand, involves the public projection of knowledge that is produced and validated elsewhere through traditional research processes? And if such sociology is a site of knowledge production, does this knowledge have specific qualities that make it different from the kind of sociology produced in other ways e.g.such as through 'professional sociology'?

The key point to bear in mind in this exploration of knowledge production, is that critical engagement takes place in at the intersection between two or more fields – between the sociological field and the political field or fields in which the engagement takes place. The knowledge that is produced therefore has tomust work in both these fields – it has to constitute both *sociological knowledge* and *political knowledge* – knowledge, that is to say, that has the symbolic power to address a political problem, which is not the same as a sociological problem. There is a tension between sociological knowledge and political knowledge since they have tomust accomplish different kinds of work, and it is precisely this tension that Webster's concept of 'critical engagement' addresses. The sociologists

navigating this tension has have to temper their political 'commitment to the goals of these movements' with sociological rigour – that is, keeping faith with 'evidence, data and your own judgement and conscience'.

From the point of view of knowledge production, the question that should be understood we want to understand is whether there is something distinctive about conducting research under these conditions – that is to say, is there something distinctive about producing knowledge which must work in two different fields at the same time? Are there specific tensions that distinguish this kind of sociological practice from sociological research that is conducted solely within the sociological field for professional sociological purposes? And does the knowledge produced in this way have the potential not only to empower those who are dominated to challenge their domination in the political field, but as well asalso to generate insights that disturb the sociological field itself, providing the basis for a critical engagement with the dominant paradigms in *this* field – a counter-hegemonic sociology in Keim's words?

I pursue tThese questions are pursued through accounts of two different research projects that researchers in at SWOP have undertaken in the period since the negotiation of democracy in South€ Africa. The first describes research conducted on strike violence during the platinum strikes which culminated with the Marikana massacre and produced a rupture in the relationship between SWOP and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The second explores the contestations over knowledge production in a major SWOP project to understand processes of mining, rural stratification and dispossession in rural South Africa, and the intersection between scholarly work and a very different political field to that constituted by labour struggles, namely the field of tribal politics and constitutional litigation.

<3> The rupture of Marikana

SWOP's origins lay in its research on the world of work and support for the struggles of the emerging black trade union movement. This work continued after the negotiation for democracy, as the new ANC government enacted legislation and established institutions founded on the struggles, demands and institutions that had already been forged in the mass labour struggles of the 1980s, entrenching the union movement at the centre of a system of national collective bargaining, labour rights and tri-partism. SWOP researchers conducted research ranging from workplace studies under the guidance of joint union-management committees to national surveys of union members for trade unions, as well as research for government's Department of Labour, and more strictly scholarly studies, often PhD research into the world of work and local trade unionism. By and large this research was shaped by tacit assumptions that the new democratic labour regime was progressive, and in some cases contributed to strengthening those institutions and labour's role within them.

One such study, undertaken in the platinum mines of Implats, the second biggest platinum mining company in the world, placed SWOP at the epicentre of the platinum strikes in 2012, when the first of these strikes erupted at this company. Crispen Chinguno was conducting his PhD research on strike violence in the mining sector under joint supervision by the author and another SWOP professor, and had identified one platinum mine which had been racked by a series of extremely violent strikes. He had just chosen Implats as a contrasting case where the highly institutionalised relationship between

the NUM and management, and the union's solid support among workers, seemed to contribute to a relatively non-violent labour relations climate. There were numerous strikes in the years after the democratic settlement, as there were across the entire mining industry, but at Implats these had largely been without violence.

Chinguno found lodgings in the informal settlement nearby one of the Implats mines and began establishing relationships with the workers. Just two weeks later the rock drillers launched a wildcat strike across Implats, demanding that their skills and centrality to production be recognised with an occupational wage increase. They rejected union representation or negotiation, elected their own workers committees, and demanded direct negotiation with management. Management refused and insisted that the strikers had to follow the established procedures and negotiate through the trade union. The strike rapidly turned violent, with workers assaulting the union shaft stewards, driving them out of the mine and establishing a 'violence committee' to punish strike breakers. The very institutionalisation that we had hypothesised as the basis for stable industrial relations and peaceful strike action had been forcibly rejected by the workers and collapsed within a matter of days.

Despite mass dismissals and an intensive police presence, workers held to their strike for six weeks and only settled when a substantial increase was granted across the board. A few weeks later workers at Lonmin downed tools in a very similar pattern, rejecting the NUM representation and demanding direct negotiations. Violence in the strike escalated even more rapidly, with ten deaths including strikers, NUM representatives, company security guards and police officers, before the shocking massacre of 34 strikers by police paramilitary units. A similar pattern – though with much less violence – emerged in the Amplats strike that started soon after. Within months the NUM had been rejected across the three biggest mining companies on the platinum belt, and a previously insignificant splinter union, Amcu had been invited by the strikers to come and recruit members. Within a year, this union had replaced the NUM as the dominant union in the platinum industry with 100,000 members, while a shattered NUM, previously the biggest affiliate in COSATU, sustained huge membership losses.

The question of critically engaged sociology and knowledge production is raised particularly acutely in this situation , where the political field constituted by trade unionism and labour struggles was fundamentally disrupted, undergoing rapid transformations and shifts in power over the period of research and after. In order to pursue this question, it is necessary to reflect on Chinguno's shifting position and allegiances in relation to the union hierarchy, and the way knowledge was produced in his interaction with officials, shaft stewards and workers.

To begin with, Chinguno (Interview with Chinguno, November 2019) was introduced to the regional structures of the NUM on the platinum belt by the deputy president of the union, with whom he travelled from Johannesburg to a union funeral in Rustenberg. The deputy president and the regional unionists knew the work of SWOP well, and welcomed Chinguno, sharing with him some of the problems they were experiencing with the Implats branch – the largest in the union at the time. As a former worker and trade union activist himself, Chinguno found it easy to establish good relationships with the NUM unionists. They described tensions between the branch structures, made up of leading shaft stewards at Implats, and the region, as well as tensions within the branch structure and between it and its members. The branch was highly unstable they said, with representatives elected and recalled frequently, so there was clear dissatisfaction and contestation among the workers as well. They hoped that Chinguno's research, with its focus on violence and non-violence, would help them to understand some of these tensions.

Chinguno thus entered the research context as a sociologist familiar with and committed to trade unionism and was seen as such by the union leadership. There was an understanding that his research would be meaningful to the trade unionists and would help them to gain a better understanding of the problems they were experiencing. The research was not initiated by the union, let alone characterised by the co-production of knowledge advocated by Arribas Lozano, but information was shared and access facilitated on the understanding that the research results would be useful and it would be

shared, as was known to be standard practice by SWOP researchers. Chinguno himself understood his project to be not only an academic PhD project, but one that would be valuable to the union and help it to overcome some of its problems.

Chinguno was then introduced to the branch leadership by the vice president and began exploring relations between the union shaft stewards and the company, on one hand, and their relations with workers on the other. He was taken by the shaft stewards to a tavern where they used to socialise and drink informally, and there Chinguno met many other workers. He noticed tensions between them and some of the shaft stewards and began establishing close relations with the ordinary workers. He became aware of their deep grievances with, and distrust of, the union structures and felt that it was necessary to pay close attention to their views. This also required that he distance himself to some extent from the shaft stewards; not only was it necessary to earn the trust of the workers, but he also noticed that the union structures operated as gatekeepers, attempting to control who he had access to and who he interviewed. This did not change his own understanding of his research – he still assumed that what he discovered among the workers would be of value for the union to overcome the problems it was experiencing and close the gap between its structures and its members. Shaft stewards, on the other hand, began to cool towards him.

Thus, even before the strike started, Chinguno found himself negotiating multiple layers and complex power relations within the union. His mandate from the official structures and the endorsement of his research was increasingly irrelevant the further down the hierarchy he went. Some of the leading shaft stewards, and experienced shop-floor members of the union, also knew of SWOP's research and surveys with the union and welcomed him. But as he 'drifted away from the shaft stewards and towards the workers' he became known to them simply as a student who was interested in understanding the union, rather than as a representative of a research institute that supported trade unionism. Nonetheless, grassroots workers were hugely generous with their time and support, taking him along to meetings and discussions, and sharing their grievances and hopes with him. When the strike started, therefore, Chinguno was already well placed to track the unfolding developments.

The knowledge that was emerging through these shifting engagements with trade union officials and structures, and ordinary members, was subtly changing in its focus and meaning. From being knowledge of weaknesses that had the potential to help strengthen the union, it became more profoundly critical. Since the strike constituted in essence a fundamental critique of the union and the way shaft stewards and officials had become enmeshed in company institutions and procedures, transforming them into a power that dominated and contained workers, the knowledge that was produced through Chinguno's close involvement with the striking workers became a fundamental critique of the entire corporatist edifice through which the union had been incorporated into the company and de facto performed a managerial role in containing conflict. Through the process of critical engagement with the union and its members, a new critical sociological knowledge was constructed that went beyond what was initially anticipated. The giant trade unions that had been tempered in revolutionary struggle through the 1970s and 1980s were revealed as compromised and weak, enmeshed in the current order of things and acting to incorporate workers into the system of domination rather than challenge it. The sophisticated and complex architecture of industrial relations that these trade unions had been so active in creating was revealed as destructive and fragile. The result was a sociological knowledge that was potentially explosive – both in the political field and in the sociological field.

While Chinguno still saw his research as valuable to the NUM, the union leadership increasingly saw him as a hostile agent. Once the dust had settled he spent an afternoon reporting to the regional structure – by this time the old guard had been voted out of office and replaced with new officials – and they seemed to find his analysis useful. But the union was collapsing across the platinum belt, and many of the workers Chinguno was closest to had joined the new rising union, Amcu.

In fact, the NUM leadership proved entirely incapable of absorbing what had happened. The national officials who attended various SWOP seminars and conferences attacked Chinguno and SWOP for

their betrayal. They variously ascribed their collapse across the platinum belt to a management plot to replace the NUM with Amcu, or a 'third force' project to attack the ANC by means of driving the NUM out of the region. More than a year later the NUM invited SWOP to address a leadership strategic workshop. There they made it clear that they had expected of SWOP, with which they had enjoyed such a long-standing relationship of mutual trust, that it should rally to their defence in their hour of crisis rather than join with their attackers. They were still convinced that they had done nothing wrong, that they had delivered consistent and previously unimaginable benefits to workers, and that their collapse was therefore inexplicable unless through the workings of a devious and malevolent force. The NUM and the Tripartite Alliance in which it was a leading force closed ranks, adopting a siege mentality. It became clear that the political field – and the position of the NUM in it – had shifted so dramatically that, for the union, no intersection with the sociological field was possible. What they wanted was political propaganda, not critical sociological analysis. Sociological knowledge became impotent with no traction or symbolic power for the NUM. In fact, the research engagement with trade unions was always characterised by tensions, negotiation and shifts, as argued by Buhlungu (2009), and as demonstrated in the case of the NUM by Webster's chapter in this volume.

This was not the end of engagement in the political field, though. Chinguno produced an accessible SWOP Working Paper, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order* (2013), which was widely distributed among workers on the platinum belt. While the NUM shunned it, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA), which by then was the biggest COSATU affiliate and was engaged in critical internal discussions about the political significance of the Marikana massacre which would lead ultimately to its rejection of COSATU's alliance with the ANC, and its expulsion by the union federation, ordered 2000 copies for its 2013 Congress so as to ensure a deeper Congress debate about the disaster that had befallen the NUM.

Turning to the sociological field, what was produced was a powerful critical knowledge regarding the character of the NUM, COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance, as well as the corporatist industrial relations regime that had been put in place after apartheid. By exploring the internal workings of this form of unionism, it was revealed as an important anchor of the current order of things, but a precarious one in the face of a determined workers' insurgency. This critical knowledge presented a new view of the order of things in post-apartheid South Africa and had the potential to contribute to a critique of dominant sociological narratives. This process reveals the critical stance at the heart of the practice of engaged sociology – a critical engagement not only with social partners in political fields, but also with theory in the sociological field, as aforementioned in this chapter. Thus, what Burawoy calls 'public sociology' is revealed as a critical sociological practice in its own right, one that may generate new knowledge and theory.

Of course, this was not the only possible outcome. Chinguno was astute enough to gravitate towards the workers who represented the critique and risk the disapproval of officials and shaft stewards. It need not have been like this. He could have chosen to continue working with the latter, on the grounds that SWOP had a historical allegiance to them, and that he was committed to a knowledge which would strengthen the union. But the critical spirit which animates engaged sociology made Chinguno sensitive to the tensions between union structures and members and drove him to pursue a deeper understanding. While this produced critical sociological knowledge, the result in the political field was the production of knowledge that had lost its power and become unintelligible – at least in that part of the field occupied by the NUM.

Chinguno's account of his research journey illustrates the importance of the *autonomy* of the critically engaged sociologist – an autonomy that is integral to our understanding of critical engagement. However, it also demonstrates how complex, negotiated and nuanced this autonomy actually is, especially so with deep ethnography in the context of the power-laden structures and allegiances of the political field. In the end, the decisions on how to proceed depend on individual 'judgement and conscience' as Webster argues – on professional judgement, in other words. Professional sociology in

this sense is integral to the practice of critical engagement, rather than occupying a separate quadrant as in Burawoy's template.

In fact, there was another sociologist, an Italian PhD student, conducting research on the NUM at the same time as Chinguno. In contrast to Chinguno, this student worked very closely with the NUM structures and shaft stewards and observing the manner in which the shaft stewards managed his research and set up interviews for him was one of the reasons that contributed to Chinguno distancing himself from them. The result was a very different kind of sociological knowledge, one that focused on an analysis of the nature of the union organisation and its internal bureaucracy (Botiveau, 2017). Botiveau's book presents an illuminating analysis of the internal dynamics of the union in historical perspectve, and argues that the 2012 collapse was the result of an internal leadership style that constrained democracy and reduced the interaction between leadership and membership. It is not that this study is wrong or weak, but that it is significantly circumscribed in its perspective. By contrast, Chinguno's profoundly *engaged* research strategy aligns his work with a more fundamental critique of the union and its place in the industrial relations system, requiring an interrogation of the prevailing sociological concepts in the field of South African industrial sociology.[3]

The changing historical conditions with the transition to democracy – the replacement of an insurgent trade union movement allied with a liberation movement and later an incorporated trade union movement allied to a ruling party – may indeed have terminated the possibility of critical engagement as undertaken by SWOP in the 1980s. However, there are several other arenas in which oppressive conditions have given rise to popular challenges to domination, and in which a critically engaged sociology may thrive. One of these is the struggle by rural communities against dispossession of their land.

<3>The sociology of land struggles and engagement in the field of law

The second case study used in the exploration of the dynamics of knowledge production at the intersection of the sociological field and the political field, concerns SWOP's research on the impact of mining in rural communities in the North-West province. In fact, the sociological field in this case intersects with two politically relevant fields – the field of tribal politics and the field of law, rendering it even more complex than the trade union case previously discussed.

This research project emerged as an extension of SWOP's already existing research on the platinum mining belt and was facilitated by a large-scale multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation which, uncommonly for a social justice funder, believed that fundamental scholarly research could yield insights which could fruitfully inform social justice strategies. The project brief was to research the diverse patterns of mining penetration, land dispossession and chiefly authority in the different regions of the platinum belt with contrasting land histories and, in addition to the deep scholarly insights which might help inform strategy, to produce more immediate analyses which could support constitutional litigation in support of the village communities who bore the brunt of dispossession, including other strategies adopted by NGOs and communities. Thus, the tension between the production of academic knowledge and the production of political knowledge that could be effective in the legal field was inscribed in the project from the beginning (the intersection with the field of tribal politics will be dealt with in the chapter by Mnwana in this volume).

The broad context for this study was the penetration of mining, particularly the massive expansion of platinum mining, on the new mining frontier in the former tribal homelands in South Africa which are characterised by communal land tenure – which in turn is conditioned by the complex interplay between customary practices and precedents, and colonial and apartheid appropriation and codification in law. The net effect is that the chief acts as the custodian of the land that is communally held and that is allocated to and used by households according to long-standing local precedents and practices. The strategy through which mining companies have gained access to platinum deposits has been to strike a deal with chiefs in their capacity as 'representatives of the community' (for which no

legal basis exists) for the 'tribe' to be allocated a shareholding in the mining company, in exchange for the right to mine the land. In practice, this has meant the enrichment of the chiefs and their allies, and the dispossession of the village communities and the loss of their traditional rights to use the land.

One of the cases researched by the SWOP team was the Bakgatla ba Kgafela Traditional Authority area. Some of the village communities in this area had quite acrimonious relations with the Bakgatla chiefs and had engaged in various disputes with them. One reason for this was that, historically, they had not been part of the Bakgatla people, but had migrated from different areas and settled there, and had been forced to come under their sway because of the policies of the South African state to only recognise tribal communities. Deep research by the SWOP team revealed oral and documentary evidence for the claims by leading clans in these villages that their ancestors had in fact purchased the farms from white farmers but had been forced by the colonial and apartheid legal regime to register these farms as part of the Bakgatla tribal trust. The research also showed that the communities were highly differentiated, with different groups joining at different times, and that despite the purchase of the farms by the forefathers of specific families, the land had actually been managed communally according to customary procedure without major distinction between original purchasers and other families. This knowledge had of course rich sociological implications, and simultaneously a quite explosive political potential in both the legal and tribal political fields.

The research experiences described by Mnwana (Interview with Mnwana, November 2019), the main field researcher who led the student researchers in the field and the drafting of the Working Paper, resonate with those of Chinguno in the labour field. From the onset, it was both a rigorous sociological and historical research, and potentially explosive political knowledge. It was understood to be such by the members of the research team and leaders and activists in the three villages selected for research[4] – though it was not clear exactly in what ways the political knowledge produced by the research would be useful. The research was not conducted for a specific purpose, such as a court case, but many in the villages felt it would help highlight the injustices they faced and make their struggles visible to the wider world.

Despite this shared political understanding, the autonomy of the critically engaged researcher was extremely important and had to be continuously negotiated in a field of complex relationships, allegiances and powers. According to Mnwana, 'the political implications and pressures required that our research be more rigorous even than normal academic research. In order for the results to be credible, we had to get accounts from all different sources and work hard to avoid manipulation by one or other group that attempted to capture our work and prevent us from talking to opponents or rivals. We made the case that for this research to be credible we had to be objective and speak to everyone. For example, we insisted that we would speak to the chief even though the villagers were locked in opposition to him. We also insisted that we would speak to women in order to get their understanding of the history and the meaning of the land. We demonstrated in practice the meaning of powerful research and what it could do, so they came to understand and trust us and our stance' (Mnwana Interview, 2019).

Accountability was established through reporting back to community meetings to validate research findings – these were accompanied by a lively debate in which new information emerged. The results, according to Mnwana, was research of a better quality than ordinary 'professional' sociology because 'it had undergone a very rigorous process of criticism and scrutiny'. It constituted 'a true slow sociology'.

Mnwana's account suggests that critically engaged sociology is necessarily rooted in a distinctive process of knowledge production which is both autonomous and accountable to the community and rigorous in its methodology, while being acutely attuned to complexity by virtue of the requirements of the political fields in which it constitutes an intervention. Indeed, Gavin Capps, who was the research leader of this project, and co-author with Mnwana in drafting the Working Paper, was able to draw on his own experience as an expert witness in an earlier and very similar case to ensure that the Working Paper was carefully drafted to avoid the hazards of the legal terrain.

A year after the Working Paper had been published, the encroachment of one of the mines partially owned by the Bakgatla chiefs on the land of one of the villages prompted the community to approach lawyers for help in drafting a legal challenge. The translation of sociological knowledge into legal knowledge is a complex one. In this case, the social justice lawyers involved decided that the historical evidence of private land purchase on the part of the original purchasers provided the best possible basis to challenge the power assumed by the chief over the land of the villagers. This meant constituting the client as an association of land purchasers whose land the Bakgatla chiefs had no right to alienate – a strategy which drove a deep wedge into the solidarity of the community. This decision was criticised by other land activists and social justice lawyers on two grounds: firstly, that it would split the community into landowners who have much to gain and the rest of the community who had everything to lose; and secondly, that there was no case in law to contest the mines' access to the platinum resources on the basis of private land rights, since the relevant mining legislation had separated mineral rights from surface rights and explicitly provided that mineral rights trumped land rights.

Mnwana refused to support the case as an expert witness because he objected to the splitting of the community through this legal strategy, but the SWOP Working Paper was included by the lawyers in the documents supporting their case. The case went to the High Court and was duly lost. The lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court where the appeal was defeated. The next and final step was to take the appeal to the Constitutional Court. At this point one of the most experienced land activists in South Africa, the director of the Land & Accountability Research Centre (LARC) Aninka Claassens submitted an expert affidavit on behalf of the Xolobeni community who had applied to join the case as *amicus* to the court. Xolobeni as the amicus put forward a somewhat different argument against the land grab by the chiefs and the mining company, based on the fact that the *informal* land tenure rights of communities on communal land (as distinct from private ownership) are explicitly protected by the Constitution, and indeed by a law enacted by Parliament as directed by the Constitution(The Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act of 1996 (IPILRA). The reason for this Constitutional and legal protection is that informal land rights are particularly vulnerable to further erosion, given their lack of formal definition and the historical context of colonial and apartheid dispossession. Therefore, Claassens argued, the Bakgatla village communities – all of them, not just the private landowners – are protected both by the Constitution and the law from expropriation without consultation. She was able to use the SWOP Working Paper, which was already before the court, to support her argument explanation of the complex history of the land, including the history of land purchase.

The Constitutional Court's judgement ulimately upheld IPILRA requiring the consent of all those whose land rights were affected before the termination of rights and the eviction of rights holders. The judgment struck a potentially deadly blow against the unholy alliance of government departments, mining companies and chiefly authorities, which have colluded to dispossess so many rural communities of their land, homes and livelihoods. Claassens maintains that the Working Paper drafted by Mnwana and Capps, and the research that underpinned it, was crucial to this victory and makes a point about the power that specifically *academic* research has in the legal system because of the authority and prestige of academic professionalism (Interview with Claassens, January 2019). This comment adds a further twist to how the intersection of the sociological and political fields is understood, in the sense that the sociological field itself has the status to confer on research a significant symbolic power in at least some political fields – precisely because of the *professional* autonomy and rigour of the scholarly researcher.

This case demonstrates the complexity of the the translation of sociological research into the legal field. The researcher needs to be vigilant to ensure that the research is not mis-translated and that the researched community is not prejudiced as a consequence. In the sociological field, however, the research has produced an innovative sociological analysis of powerful interests that combine to dispossess poor villagers, and how this is accomplished. The substantive contribution will only be

apparent over the next few years as various publications, including three or four books, are finally completed.

Together these two cases demonstrate the distinctive features of research as the foundation of knowledge production[5] in the practice of critical engagement. Most importantly, researchers are located at the intersection between two very different fields, the sociological field and the political field, in the simultaneous endeavour to produce political and sociological knowledge. There is thus a political relationship between the researchers and the community or trade union; the high stakes of the political knowledge mean that there is a struggle on the part of different interests to appropriate the researcher and the research, while the researcher is simultaneously broadly partisan *and* critical, accountable *and* autonomous. This imparts dynamic tensions and a potential for depth of analysis. Specifically:

1. The research sites present a differentiated and power-laden field, in which individuals and networks are embedded in hierarchies, structures of domination and processes of contestation over a range of political and social stakes. This makes the negotiation of commitment and autonomy a complex process. The Marikana case presents the limits of the combination of commitment and autonomy: the explosive nature of the sociological knowledge ruptures the relationship with the NUM, commitment is trumped by autonomy, and the two fields become unintelligible to each other. On the other hand, it can be argued that the more radical commitment was to the insurgent workers who drove the union out of the mines, so that the political commitment to the overall goals of a democratic workers movement overrode the specific commitment to the union.
2. It is the very intersection between sociological and political fields, with all its attendant tensions, that accounts for the power of both the sociological knowledge and the political knowledge that is produced from this turbulent space. While there may be tensions and difficulties with the translation of research findings from one field to another, these two forms of knowledge are not totally divorced. On one hand, political knowledge gains significantly from the data and rigour of the sociological research in terms of the richness of its findings and its status as academic research, which in turn rests on the autonomy of the researcher. On the other hand, sociological knowledge gains immeasurably from the nuance and complexity that is attained precisely because of its high political stakes to the community or movement that is being studied, and because of the scrutiny with which it is interrogated not only by those being researched, but also by critical outsiders and opponents such as lawyers, judges, companies.
3. The complexities of the practice of critically engaged research demonstrate a combination of sociological practices that are, in the public sociology model, split off into separate quadrants – public, critical, professional and policy. Here they are integrated in a complex blend that makes for a particularly rich sociological practice.
4. Finally, these two cases suggest limits to the kind of co-production advocated by Arribas Lozano. In complex and power-laden political fields whose dynamics are not fully understood by the researcher prior to undertaking the research, selecting a specific stratum of participants with whom to collaborate in defining the purpose of the research may align its results with the interests of that particular group – with the leadership of a union branch or with a particular clan of land owners, for example, to the detriment of social justice outcomes. Hence, in contrast, critical engagement suggests a significant degree of autonomy.

<2> Conclusion

In this chapter, an examination of a process of sociological concept formation was conducted focusing on the practice of politically engaged research over four decades of interaction between a sociologist located in the centre of sociological production, in the US, and a group of sociologists located in a

South African research institute on the periphery of sociological production. The lifelong collaboration and friendship between Michael Burawoy and Eddie Webster, and the institutional durability of the research institute which meant that concept formation could be extended over two or three generations of sociologists, presents an opportunity for reflection that is perhaps unique in its reach, since it allows an analysis across both time and spatial dimensions.

In contrasting the concept of critically engaged sociology, forged in engagement with movements in the struggle against apartheid, with the concept of public sociology, elaborated from the example of South African sociology by Michael Burawoy in his attempt to revitalise US sociology, the author has shown how dialogue and mutual learning entailed processes of translation, appropriation, domination and contestation as well. The emergence of the concept of 'public sociology' subordinated and silenced the concept of 'critical engagement', and the latter must be resuscitated in order to contribute to the emergence of a decolonised southern sociology with counter-hegemonic potential.

The second half of the paper investigates empirically the process of knowledge formation through critically engaged research in order to deepen our understanding of this kind of sociological practice. this is done through an analysis of two SWOP research projects which demonstrate how engaged sociology is committed to the production of political knowledge and sociological knowledge in a complex interaction between autonomy and accountability, partisanship and critical distance, in which each form of knowledge influences and strengthens the other. Each of these terms – 'critical' wherein autonomy rests , and 'engaged' points towards partnership – is essential, and it is out of this tension that new knowledge and, potentially, theoretical innovation may emerge.

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[2] Here I am referring specifically to critical engagement; SWOP sociologists have in fact been active and influential globally in many ways – in the ISA and in establishing the *Global Labour Journal*, to take two examples.

[3] A contrast in the opposite direction to Botiveau's book is that by Alexander et al (2013) which appeared very soon after the momentous events of 2012. Like Chinguno's research, Alexander et al embedded themselves with the striking workers at Lonmin, but unlike him, committed themselves to a political intervention in support of the strikers in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. While it collates important information and a vivid account, it does not seek to make a critical intervention in the sociological field (of course this does not exhaust the authors' contribution to the sociology of the strikes and massacre – see Alexander 2014 and the powerful book by Sinwel and Mbatha (2015?). Thus, neither Botiveau nor Alexander et al exhibits the full range of 'critical engagement' in both the sociological and the political fields.

[4] Mnwana was known to them, as he had conducted some of his PhD research in the very same villages.

[5] I distinguish between research as an element within knowledge production, and the totality of activities involved in knowledge production as a whole. To fully grapple with the production of knowledge through the practices of critical engagement would require investigating the full trajectory from research in the field to the drafting of political texts, on one hand, and scholarly outputs on the other, in order to discern the framings, pressures and compromises involved in each through, for example, the interactions with peer reviewers, editors and publishers, as well as academic reviews, and not only with the pressures and compromises involved in the formation of political knowledge. To date most of the evidence in the literature on critical engagement and public sociology is *reflexive* – that is to say, it is self-reporting of practitioners. What we need is an analysis by sociologists who are *outside* the research process who would be able to bring a different perspective to bear.