Bénédicte Meillon, Sept. 2013

**Transcript of Online Lecture**

**with a Focus on Academic English**

1. Global Sociology : Lecture One, by Professor Michael Burawoy

Well, welcome to all of you, students, here and global viewers, to a new experimental course called “Global Sociology Live”. We are coming, we are broadcasting to the world from Berkeley, the University of California, Berkeley, and this is an experimental project that we are doing together with the International Sociological Association. This is a course at Berkeley called ““Global Sociology Live” and I am co-teaching it. My name is Michael Burawoy, and I am co-teaching it with Laleh Behbehanian. And the cameraman, who I just spoke to, is Matt X and he will be with us throughout the semester doing all the photographic work.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about this course. It’s gonna be global in many different ways. First of all, we are going to make what happens in this room, in this seminar, accessible to the world, via U-Tube Berkeley, on the one hand, and on the other hand the ISA website. So it’s going to be globally accessible.

Second, we’re going to spend our time talking with sociologists from all over the world, sociologists that actually have a global perspective, and we will also be talking to sociologists that are located here in Berkeley and in other places in the US, and we will even be talking to non-sociologists, one or two. So we have this global vision, as coming to us by our communication with also some interesting academics, but also, who knows, some non-academics from different places. That’s two ways in which it’s global.

But there’s this third, is that, you know, myself and Laleh, we both have had a long interest in global issues. We’ve done research in different parts of the world. Laleh has done research for many years in Egypt and in the Middle East, and is now studying terrorism – an interesting topic about which she will tell us more later in the semester. And I have done research in Africa, in the Soviet Union, in post-Soviet Russia, In Eastern Europe, in Hungary as well as the US. So we both have this interest in global issues and we’ve spent some time in different parts of the world.

But it’s global also in a fourth way, in that the students, you have also very diverse backgrounds. You’re all Berkeley sociologists, but as Berkeley sociologists, have many different interests, and have come from many different countries and I think that will become clear as we develop this discussion. What will happen is every week, every Wednesday, Berkeley time between one and two o’clock in the afternoon, we will assemble here and we will have somebody who will be interviewed or give a lecture for 50 minutes, and then will be interrogated by the thirty students who are in this class. And we will do a little bit of preparation beforehand, on Monday. So that’s the plan for the semester. And the project is, I suppose, another dimension, another way in which this is global, is that we’re trying to think what on earth global sociology might mean. We’re not very sure, and that is my role today to give you an intimation of how I think about it; but a project is an unfolding project. What could it possibly mean to say that we are engaging in a global sociology, apart from the fact that we have global audiences and global participants and global interest. What is global sociology? And that is the question that we have to ask today.

So, let me begin. Now, before we can even ask the question of global sociology, we have to ask a prior question, and what is that prior question? What is sociology? Now, you would think that we would all be clear with sociology and what sociology is. What is sociology? Anybody has a sort of simple idea what sociology is? Any thoughts? Sociology is the study of…? Anybody’s been in my 101 sociology class? What is sociology for Durkheim? […] It is the study of moral facts, moral rules, well, that’s Durkheim. But we, you know, D’s writing you know, in the last decade of the nineteenth century. But we today think probably that sociology today is the study of society. Now the problem is that though we are sociologists – now I shouldn’t say this publicly but I will – we don’t really know what society is. Now, those economists, they know what the market is, they know what the economy is, and that’s why they’re so effective in propagating their discipline. We sociologists are a bit unclear about what society is.

So I wanna start by saying – Well, I’m going to define society in a particular way. I’m going to draw on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and his conception of civil society. That’s where we will begin, our understanding of what sociology is. Antonio Gramsci writing at the end of the, well, writing in prison actually in the 1930’s, argues – a very Italian Marxist – argues that what is so interesting about the development of modern capitalism is the rise of what he calls “Civil Society” at the end of the nineteenth century, in basically Europe. And what is this Civil Society that he talks about? It is a set of organizations, associations, movements, that exist outside both the state and the economy. And these organizations, autonomous religious associations, charity organizations, these organizations began to emerge he says towards the end of the nineteenth century. And they, he argued, absorbed a lot of, redirected a lot of dissent into Capitalism. So he argues that we have a new phenomenon that is neither state nor market, but is outside both, and actually enters a relationship with the state and the economy.

And that is where we begin. In fact we can probably represent this pictorially. – And, Matt can you follow me to the board? Very good, Okay. – The picture that Gramsci presents to us is: Here is the economy, here is the state – I always love to represent the state as a triangle. You know, what are we taught in high school? We’re taught that the state has these three branches, right? The executive, the legislative and the judiciary. So there are three branches, you might say. – But Gramsci says that something here is called “Civil Society” and he is interested actually in the relationship between the State and Civil Society. He’s interested in the ways in which struggles develop in the end of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, how struggles develop in Civil Society and how important they are in changing the civil order. So that’s the idea of Civil Society.

Now, sociology – that is my claim – sociology is the study of the world from the standpoint of Civil Society. So sociology studies the organizations in Civil Society, trade unions, political parties, even the families sometimes in Civil Society, but it also studies the economy, the market, but from the standpoint of Civil Society, the consequences of the market for society and how society upholds the market. And sociology also is some political sociology, that is studying the state from the standpoint of Civil Society, that is to say: what are the social conditions, Civil Society conditions, for an effective state, and how does the state shape and reshape Civil Society? So sociology is the study of the world from the standpoint of Civil Society.