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Rodrigues Brandão, Carlos

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Participatory research and participation in research. A look between times and spaces from Latin America

Carlos Rodrigues Brandão

We acknowledge that *participatory research* existed in the past, and exists today within different *traditions.* We acknowledge the gestation of a "*Latin American tradition*" based on the pioneering experience of Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire. This tradition of *participatory research* can only be understood in its origins and its currentness, referenced to the social and political contexts of the time when it was instituted in Latin America, between the 1970s and 1980s. It made much use of the European and North American traditions, but possesses specific characteristics, beginning with its historical connection to the popular social movements and their emancipatory social transformation projects.
A few principles of convergence between different styles are presented and discussed.

Key words: Popular education, popular movement, social action, social transformation, participation

1. The social scenarios at the origin of the Latin American tradition of participatory research

Just as we see happen nowadays with the rise of proposals for emerging paradigms about the construction of knowledge through scientific practices, we believe that the multiple and differentiated experience to which we generally give the name of *participatory research* appears more or less at the same

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time in different places, originates from different social practices, articulates different theoretical fundamentals and methodological alternatives, and is to be used for unequal purposes.

A few scholars specialized in this subject usually trace one of the origins of *participatory research* to the studies by Kurt Lewin and other social scientists in the United States or Europe. As a rule such studies and research are oriented to a more dynamic, integrated and operational understanding of the social field regarding their applications to improve the relations of cultural actors involved in experiences of action negotiated in favor of some type of change or social development, with a view to improving one or several quality of life indicators.

Other persons prefer to associate *participatory research* with the work performed on the workers' survey of Karl Marx, acknowledging in its procedure a strategy for access by people and groups of the popular classes to reliable instruments of scientific knowledge on social reality. If we place on the one side words such as: social actors, conformity, participation, change, social development, and on the other words such as: social classes, conflict, mobilization, transformation, social revolution, we may have the boundary areas of the limits between one and the other tendency of an origin.

Thus, in an essay by Anthon de Schutter and Boris Yopo, in two passages that are near each other, we find these references:

> Budd Hall (1981) ... in his analysis of the origins of pioneering experiences that contribute to provide a foundation for Participatory Investigation, mentions the structured interview "L'Enquête Ouvrière", with French industrial workers, by Marx.
>
> ...
>
> Other important sociologists as far as the theoretical foundation of Participatory Investigation from the sociological standpoint is concerned, are: Bourdieu, Touraine, Lefebvre, Wright Mills. Relevant contributions to psychology are: the work of Adorno on fascism; of Fromm on authoritarianism and democracy; and the input of Carl Rogers about education, the participation of George Mead on socialization, and the input of Lewin about field theory should be highlighted (De Shutter/Yopo 1983, 59f).

Although the names of Marx and Lewin are most often quoted on the left and right, when it is a matter of tracing the pioneer sources of *participatory research*, a whole group of social scientists, educators and psychologists who create or participate in alternatives of research and/or pedagogical and/or social works focusing on more active and rather more critical and creative participation of the actors involved are remembered as co-creators of the fundamentals. Even if one acknowledges that, to a large extent, the different experiences of *participatory research* appear to the North, and above all to the South of the Equator, outside universities and as a reaction to the type of scientific approaches to the social question practiced there, in most cases it is the scenarios and subjects of the academic world that are remembered as its close or remote creators.

In Latin America, the best known practitioners of *participatory research* from its inception will recognize themselves as inheriting much more from Karl Marx than from Kurt Lewin, and more from Antonio Gramsci than from Carl Rogers. After indicating the two pioneer lines of the initial origin of participatory research, Libertad Hernández Landa and Luis Gabarrón provide the testimony of an European social scientist, at the precise moment when he turns around the meaning traditionally given to the academic vocation of science. Serge Moscovici, recalled by Gabarron and Landa, states that, *when Social Psychology begins to be dangerous, it will then begin to be a science* (Moscovici 1972, 66, apud Gabarron/Landa 1994, 79).

Whether they knew this statement or not, Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda and other educators and social scientists in Latin America were to remember it on many occasions. They were to repeat it and reinvent it, to advocate one of the most consensual principles of *participatory research* in the Latin American tradition. The idea that science is never neutral nor objective, above all when it intends to establish itself as an objective and neutral practice. The consequence of this point of departure of *participatory research* is that the reliability of a science lies not so much in the positive rigor of its thinking, but in the contribution made by its practice in the collective search for knowledge that will make human beings not only more educated and wise, but also more fair, free, critical, creative, participatory, co-responsible, and expressing solidarity. All social science in one way or another should

serve the emancipatory policy, and should participate in the creation of ethics that will found principles of social justice and human brotherhood.

When one recalls the beginning of participatory-style social investigations, sometimes the narrative of the "early days" appears isolated from its original social contexts, when they are not described in a vague form that is foreign to some events that are as essential as they are forgotten. We should recall that the early social experiences of participatory vocation arose at a historical time when the theoretical systems of present-day critique, associated with what was not rarely a hopeful proposal for social construction of the future, were renewed and multiplied.

Something visible in Latin America will certainly be true also in the case of the other continents. The different lines of *participatory research* constitute late alternatives of antecedent experiences of social action. They appear in the wake of a previous proliferation of experiences whose fundamentals and methodologies are not situated only among the epistemological dilemmas of social sciences. They are rather in new understandings of old dilemmas and in the emergence of new models of pedagogical interaction and social action. *Participatory research* does not create, but responds to challenges, and is incorporated in programs that put into practice new alternatives of active methods in education, and especially, the education of youths and adults; of group dynamics and reorganization of community activity in their organization and development processes; of formation, participation and mobilization of human groups and social classes previously placed on the outside of socio-economic development projects or re-colonized throughout their processes.

In the sphere of Latin America and other Third World regions, the expansion of *popular social movements* will give the different alternatives of transforming social action a new, sometimes radical connotation. A multiple re-reading of popular social action theories and procedures will draw the face of the identity of *participatory styles of social investigation*. Among events that range from the sphere of a small rural school to social mobilization processes on a national scale, at the dawn of the 1960s, everywhere there was a remarkable flourishing of interactive and social experiences. New proposals in which ideas and projects contained in concepts such as "action" and "partici-

pation" are interwoven with other words of which: "critique", "creativity", "change", "development", "transformation", "revolution" are good examples.

In an increasingly worldwide sphere, the UNO and its specialized agencies, such as UNESCO, sponsor and encourage alternatives of new alliances and ties to create renovating forms of social action, whose most limited border is that of a program of sectoral improvement of community health conditions. And whose most open border should be located in the projects of multisectoral socioeconomic development on a regional or even national scale.

In order to carry out "social organization", "popular mobilization" and "change" or "transformation" projects, new modalities of systematic production of knowledge on "local reality" are needed. The 1950s and 1960s saw the arrival and rapid dissemination of new models of social investigation. Old models of applied social sciences are re-created and new models are also worked through and put into practice. Above all in the Third World, researchers and social promoters of various theoretical, ideological, methodological and technical orientations participate in different projects investigating the "local reality", focusing on measuring "quality of life" indicators.

A common trait to the right and left of the many initiatives for association between research and social action is situated in a motivation to transform the investigations in popular communities into something more than a data-collection instrument. In turning the scientific work of data surveys into an activity that is also pedagogical, and in a way also overtly political. Since it is more active and more participatory, social investigation should become more sensitive to hearing the voices of the personal or collective addressees of the social action programs. It should also be able to "give a voice" to the women and men who in many previous investigations ended up by being reduced to the standard of number and to the anonymity of the silence of tables, and let them in fact "speak" with their own voices.

A gaze that is excessively attached to the world of universities, and less sensitive to what was happening on its shores or borders, in broad areas of Asia and Oceania, of Africa and Latin America, usually over-relativizes some social facts that were and still are actually the most important and even decisive in creating moments and contexts that rendered inevitable the rise of

participatory research, in the same measure as, at least in terms of Latin America, they gave it the most essential traits of its identity.

This is the time to recall that in little over a half century, the Third World has generated and expanded proposals and practices for popular mobilization that will configure the contexts of the different models of knowledge and social action, for which the different modalities of *participatory research* will be one answer amidst so many others. And even if we stand away for a moment in time and in space, it seems to us fair to begin by recalling that between the 1920s and 1940s, Gandhi and his followers innovated and recreated precepts and practices of a form of resistance to colonization, to which they were to give the name of *non-violent action*. The potential for active and participatory mobilization of this strategy for the decolonization of South Africa and later India, inaugurates a social procedure of political resistance whose power to transform people, human groups and nations, in our view merits a much greater remembrance than the innocent and formal proposals of Kurt Lewin, and others on similar lines.

In another direction, between the 1960s and 1970s, different ethnic and popular political liberation groups recreated different guerilla war strategies, as another response to European colonization. Experiences of decolonizing political action of this type, to a certain extent, do the opposite of Gandhi's dreams. But they result in political liberation, and we should not forget that through them, for the first time, Africa worked through and exported to Europe a *sociology of decolonization*, whose influence on social thinking in Europe would not be small.

Over this same period, and a short time later, Latin America too created, consolidated and disseminated throughout the continent and then Northwards and Eastwards, the first ideas and proposals for social actions with an emancipatory vocation, that provide a foundation and instrumentalize *popular education, liberation theology, the popular social movements* and, later on, *participatory research*.

When we ask ourselves about the true contexts of the origin of *participatory research* in the Third World, and especially, in Latin America, we could assign secondary importance for a moment to the epistemological questions of scientists from Europe and the USA. And we should then evoke the con-

crete social reality of experiences such as: *non-violent action, ethnic and popular resistance to colonization, popular movements, popular education and liberation theology*. Because it is in the wake of the thinking and action of people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Camilo Torres, Gustavo Gutiérrez, João Bosco Pinto, Leonardo Boff and Orlando Fals Borda, that on at least three continents the Third World disseminates some practices of *popular participation* as original and contesting forms, when faced with the different proposals for social development from Europe and the USA, seen mostly as new versions of ancient social practices with a neocolonizing vocation.

Some scholars who studied the cultural history of Latin America even recall that between the 1960s and 1980s, for the first time, thinkers and social activists located between Argentina and Mexico, exported to the other side of the Rio Grande and the Atlantic, theories and methodologies for actions that founded the *popular movements, popular education, liberation theology* and the Latin American tradition of *participatory research*.

Participatory research arises within these events, and almost always outside the universities and their scientific universe, although a part of its main theoreticians and practitioners come from them and work in them. Only a few years later, and encountering resistances, a few theories and practices of *participatory research* enter the Latin American university world and in general, more due to the work of students and a few teachers who are also activists of social causes, than through career faculty and researchers.

In most cases the different Latin American experiences of *participatory research* appear within the *popular social movements*, or emerge with a proposal to place themselves at the service of their emancipatory projects. Several times, from the 1970s until the present, *participatory research* was disseminated in the sphere and as an action instrument for work in *popular education*. Its authors, in the early days, were and many of them still are what until now we call militants of *popular education*. Somehow, in Latin America there was never a "participatory research movement", since between Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire those who instituted it and their followers acknowledged themselves to be advisory agents or direct participants, among educators and social scientists, in *popular movements*. They acknowledge

themselves as acting through a practice disseminated between the 1960s and 1970s throughout Latin America, and which in general later took on this name: *popular education*.

Yesterday as today, several of them were and continue to be Marxist-oriented social activists or militants who are part of *ecclesial base communities* and disseminators of the *liberation theology*. In the Brazilian case, participatory research is indirectly associated to the political and pedagogical action processes that gave rise to the Workers' Party (PT-*Partido dos Trabalhadores*), and to the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST-*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*), whose constant proximity to *popular education* and to the *ecclesial base communities* that had their origin in *liberation theology* is well recognized.

Research on epistemological or methodological origins of *participatory research* in Latin America achieves a broader, more complete gaze, when it takes into account the emergence of the many social units and *popular movement*s, with a transforming and emancipatory vocation, when they institute a few new alternatives for empirical investigation and, consequently, another scientific and ideological understanding of life and social reality, as well as of the fundamentals and role of science itself in society.

Thus, p*articipatory research* presented itself as an alternative of "participatory action" in at least two dimensions. The first: popular social agents are considered more than simply passive beneficiaries of the direct and indirect effects of research and the social promotion that results or is associated with it. Men and women from popular communities are seen as subjects whose active and critical presence assigns meaning to *participatory research*. In other words a research study is "participatory", not because popular social actors participate in it as supporting actors, but because it is projected, carried out, deployed through the active and increasing participation of such actors.

The second: in another direction, the social investigation itself should be integrated into popular organization trajectories and thus, it should participate in broad social action processes with a growing and irreversible popular vocation. An articulation of actions, in which *participatory research* is one among other instruments. A scientific, political and pedagogical instrument for shared production of social knowledge and, also, a multiple and important

moment of popular action itself. This alternative of social investigation is "participatory" because it is itself part of the flow of popular social actions. We are on a two-way street: on the one hand popular *participation* in the investigation process. On the other, the *participation* of research in the course of popular actions.

Participation is taken in a double sense. Because it has always been understood that as a means of carrying out *popular education*, research participates in social action also as a personal and collective practice with pedagogical value, in so far as something new and essential is always learned through practical experiences of dialogue and reciprocity in building knowledge. And, as a form of education with a value that is also political in so far as between the sphere of a small group and that of a community, a corporative sphere of popular work, or even a whole nation, it is expected that something will always be transformed in terms of humanizing the structures and the management processes of social life.

Thus, research is "participatory", not only because an increasing proportion of popular subjects participates in its process. Research is "participatory" because, as a solidary alternative to create social knowledge, it is part of and participates in relevant processes of a transforming social action with a popular and emancipatory vocation.

This will be the way we will have to take into account, that in a manner that was possibly more motivated than in Europe and the USA, *participatory research* was not usually thought of as an experience of social action with a value in itself, or as an action negotiated with only an instrumental content, and directed to solving some "community problem". At the time of its origins in the Latin American tradition, *participatory research* was rarely understood as something limited to performing some sectoral improvement of local or regional conditions of popular communities. In almost all its more disseminated forms, it was, and to a large extent is still thought of as a working instrument at the service of popular practices with a political value and a multiple and varied transforming vocation. The intention is not to improve or develop a few precarious aspects of social life. It is to create popular alternatives for the transformation of social structures that make this "life" require constant "improvement". This theoretical and political foundation was not

always fulfilled in practice, since on repeated occasions practical experiences were ultimately performed only once, occurred in parts of aspects of popular social life and did not manage to participate in a complex of social actions. And, actually, it is not always possible to speak about founding principles and proposals for *participatory research* action in its Latin American tradition, taking it as though it contained a unity of ideas, proposals and methods that in fact did not exist previously, and much less exist today.

2. The variation of names and a few differences in practices

Until the present, in Latin America, theories, methodological proposals and practical experiences of *participatory research* that inherit one of the various tendencies of full or partial Latin American origin, exist with those that came to us together with education, social promotion and/or community development program traditions, brought to us within the investigation and social action traditions of North America or Europe. This convergence of approaches, diverse in their names and also in their fundamentals and destinations, is what makes the task of seeking a consensus to establish what may be *participatory research* among us difficult and at the same time fascinating. On this issue, Marcela Gajardo, a Chilean educator, wrote the following in a book that was widely disseminated in Brazil in the 1980s.

> Contrarily to what happens on other continents, in Latin America there is no single definition of experiences that are representative of a participatory research style. What really exist are traditions of diverse thinking and practices that confer outreach and different meanings on this type of activity (Gajardo 1986, 10).

Since then, almost twenty years later, this original diversity has tended to increase even further, although the terms used to qualify the different participatory styles of research are the same as those from the 1960s to the 1980s. Since the times close to the rise of experiences of new participatory styles of social investigation in the three Americas, in Europe and in some regions of Africa, Asia and Oceania, we have been and continue to deal with a small plurality of titles and approaches. This fact would be of little importance, if

they were simply different choices for a same idea and for a same modality of applied scientific work.

However, where the European tradition made the terms uniform, the Latin American tradition multiplied names. Thus, words such as: *vocabulary survey, thematic research, active research, self-diagnosis, research in action, action-research, participatory research, participatory action research, popular research, militant research*, in the past expressed and today still express options that were now different and convergent, now unequal or even divergent. This plurality of names reveals a polysemy of new or renewed fundamentals or fragments (not rarely, more fragments than fundamentals) of a critical epistemology when faced with the model which is quite generally called "neo-positivistic".

Dealing with a different sequence of names, Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva provides the following explanation to her readers, in the *introduction* to her book *Refletindo a pesquisa participante:*

> In this paper I use the term participatory research as a generic denomination for participatory research styles considering the existence of diversified tendencies and denominations referring to emerging proposals and alternatives, such as: participatory research, participative research, action-research, participatory investigation, participative observation, militant investigation, sense of self, action study, confrontation research (Silva 1991, 13).

Marcela Gajardo recognizes three original approaches to research styles associated with an "awareness- building concept of education". These would be the approaches that acknowledge *participatory research* as a reliable alternative for opening scientific investigation to popular participation, "in creating and developing social and educational action programs". The three approaches are: *active research, research in action* and *participatory research* (Gajardo 1986, 18). Next Marcela Gajardo goes into details about them. *Thematic research* originating in literacy courses and education concentrated in the *popular culture movements* in Brazil in the 1960s precedes them, and it inaugurates the *pedagogical line* the author was talking about a few lines up. However, in the three modalities indicated, and in those into which they deploy, there is always the presence of an educational dimension. And this

pedagogical vocation would reach its end point in the *militant research*, where a party political commitment is established among the popular agents and the advisory agents.

Let us recall that with Orlando Fals Borda the proposal of *participatory research* should flow into the progressive construction of a *popular science.* A new science, able to think of itself, to think of the social world and to think of social transformations in a dialectical manner that is accomplished based on the presence, position and interests of the popular classes[1].

Among the authors who at some time attempted to classify *participatory research* styles, there are differences that make clear that it is almost impossible to establish a reliable listing of the different approaches and alternatives. Writing on the subject a few years after Marcela Gajardo, Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva recognizes the following approaches: a) *action-research* originating in the proposals of Michel Thiollent in Brazil, "whose basic characteristic is its connection with the resolution of collective problems by means of the joint participation of researchers with the interested groups"; b) *investigation action*, which goes beyond the previous proposal due to its intention to constitute itself as an instrument of popular sharing in the production of social knowledge, and due to its ties with broader processes of social transformation[2]; c) *participatory research* as a later form, already in the 1980s, arising in a continental context of authoritarian governments, as a form of reaction to the political control of social life and to military and neo-capitalist neo-colonization of the spaces of social life, especially in the case of the popular classes; d) *militant research*, in which, as we see, the participation of advisory agents is inverted. Because this is no longer an activity still and to a large extent run by the negotiated units of social action, and there begins to be a strong appeal to a transfer of the management of investigation and social

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1 One of the best typical presentations of the 1980s about this can be found in an article written by several persons together (Bonilla et al. 1999).

2 However, in Gabarrón and Landa (1984, 18) this modality appears as an innovation of the 1980s, which is not different from the participatory research of the next item, in Silva and Silva's classification. Namely: At the beginning of the 1980s the emerging tendency, which was rapidly generalized, was the modality of *investigación participante (IP);* or else *Participatory Research* in Toronto (Canada) *and pesquisa participante in Brazil.*

intervention processes to the hands of organized sectors of groups and popular communities (Silva 1991, 131-134)[3].

Doing what most investigators on this subject did, Anthon de Shutter and Boris Yoppo consider all denominations that appeared in Latin America around the 1960s, ranging from *thematic research* (investigation of the thematic universe) in Paulo Freire, to the proposals of *militant research*, as styles of a single emerging model: *participatory research*. Thus, recalling a few better known authors in each alternative, they listed them as follows:

> It should not be a matter for surprise that participatory research tends rather to a diversification of procedures and techniques than to a single doctrinaire model. We might mention a few alternatives: the action-investigation (Fals Borda, Moser, Huizer[4]); the militant investigation (Acosta, Briseño, Lenz, Molano); self-diagnosis (Sotelo); participatory survey (Le Boterf); awareness-building survey (De Oliveira); Operational Seminar (De Clerkc); experimental laboratory (Santos de Morais); the "taller experimental" (experimental workshop) (Yopo, Bosco Pinto) (De Shutter/Yopo 1983, 67f).[5]

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[3] Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva also mentions a fifth modality, *participatory observation*, which, however, does not appear in other authors, except in Nicanor Palhares Sá, from whom she borrows the expression that is more usual in Social Anthropology and disseminated years later through the faster dissemination of qualitative approaches at the Latin American universities (Silva 1991, 134).

[4] However, in an article published in Mexico, in 1983, the study leaves out Michel Thiollent, acknowledged by many, especially in Brazil, as the creator of a specific, well-known style of action research. The 11th edition of his book *Metodologia da pesquisa-ação,* also published in the Eighties, came out in Brazil in 2002. In the introduction of the original edition, Michel Thiollent anticipated the discussion around the meaning of the names and the value of the alternatives as follows: *one of the aspects about which there is not unanimity is that of the name of the methodological proposal itself. The expressions "participatory research" and "action-research" are often given as synonymous. In our opinion they are not, because action-research, besides participation, assumes that there is a form of planned action of a social, educational, technical character or other, which is not always present in participatory research proposals. Be as it may, we consider that action research and participatory research come from a same search for alternatives to the conventional research pattern* (Thiollent 2002, 7).

[5] We should call attention to a minor aspect that is apparently semantic, but important, in this case. Between the two languages, in Portuguese the word "pesquisa" (research) is used, where in Spanish the term "investigation" is preferred. This has been the source of some undesirable confusion up to the present time.

In broader studies on the origins of *participatory research* among us, what we see is the fading of an old web of *popular work* initiatives, such as experiences that generated the different styles of *participatory research* in Latin America. Different and plural, certainly. But somehow convergent in proposing themselves as an instrument of knowledge and critical understanding of axes and spheres of social reality in daily life. Among those who wrote about these various tendencies, there is always the acknowledgement that, in general, *participatory research* should be considered as a work instrument that is no less reliable and strict than academic research, in that it proposes itself as a more collective, more participatory and even more popular activity. And an instrument of systematic knowledge of social life is less scientific for intending to perform, within the practical experiences of "popular causes", a few new integrations and interactions between spheres of scientific, pedagogical, ethical and political competence. It is the manner itself in which each of these vectors of social action is more or less emphasized, in each concrete case, that which establishes major differences between the various participatory styles of social investigation.

3. Principles, proposals and practices of participatory research

Let us recall a few facts. Whatever the name originally given to the different proposals for participatory alternatives in social investigation, there are, as we briefly discussed earlier, a few convergent signs in Latin America:

a) The different proposals and experiences appear more or less at the same time between the 1960s and 1980s, in few places on the Continent, but they were soon disseminated all over.

b) They originate within different social action units that act preferentially with groups or popular communities;

c) Most of them will be put into practice in emerging *popular social movements*, or acknowledge that they themselves are at the service of such *movements*.

d) They inherit and rework different theoretical fundamentals and diverse styles of construction of models of social knowledge by means of scien-

tific research. Actually, there is no single model or scientific methodology specific to all approaches of *participatory research*.

e) Acknowledging themselves as alternatives for projects of interlinking and mutual commitment of social actions with a popular vocation, always involving "erudite" (such as a sociologist, a career educator or a human rights NGO) and "popular" (such as a Tarasco Indian, a unionized Argentine worker, a semi-literate peasant of the Brazilian Mid-West, or the Movement of Landless Rural Workers) persons and social agencies, they begin with different possibilities of relationships between the two poles of social actors involved, interactive and participant.

f) *Participatory research* studies assign to the popular agents different positions in the management of spheres of power during the research process, as well as in the management of the social action processes within which *participatory research* tends to be conceived as an instrument, a method of scientific action or a moment in a popular work with a pedagogical and political dimension that is almost always more ample and has greater continuity than the research itself.

g) As a rule, the different alternatives of *participatory research* appear during intervals between the theoretical and methodological contribution from Europe and the United States, and the creation or original re-creation of African, Asian and Latin American systems of thinking and social practices. It is not unusual for an approach identifying itself as "dialectical", to use, in practice, formal and quantitative procedures appropriate to neo-positivistic methodological approaches.

After this list of more or less common points, it would be useful to summarize here the operational principles that were more or less common and that, as variations, provided the foundation for the original experiences of *participatory research* in practically all of Latin America. Even if today they may seem slightly radical, and therefore outdated, we must take into account their relative currentness, above all in the experiences that preserve the ties between *participatory research* and the *social movements*. We allow ourselves

to follow in the steps of the book by Luis Gabarrón and Libertad Landa[6], already mentioned here. We recall that this list of founding principles applies even more faithfully to the ideas and proposals of *participatory research* as a service to the popular classes and movements. It is more than clear that these principles of social action through social investigation do not correspond to all alternatives of the times of origin, and with even greater reason, to their current heirs. We expand the form in which, in the original, each of the principles is presented, seeking to make the words of the text which are basing our work on more up to date. Next we discuss a few of them together.

> *The point of origin of participatory research should be located at a perspective of social reality, taken as a whole in its structure and its dynamics.*
>
> *One should start from the concrete reality of the daily life of the individual and collective participants in the process themselves, in their different dimensions and interactions.*
>
> *The processes and structures, the organizations and the different social subjects should be contextualized in their historical dimension, since it is the flow and organic integration of the events of such a dimension, which to a great extent explain a social reality.*
>
> *The traditional subject-object relationship between investigator-educator and the popular groups should be progressively converted into a subject-subject type relationship, based on the assumption that all people and all cultures are original sources of knowledge and that it is from the interaction between the different sets of knowledge that a shareable form of understanding of social reality may be built by doing research. Scientific and popular knowledge articulate critically in a third new, transforming knowledge.*
>
> *One should always begin by seeking unity between theory and practice and build and re-build the theory based on a sequence of critically reflected practices. Participatory research must be thought of as a dynamic moment in a process of popular social action. It is part of the flow of this action and should be done as something integrated and also dynamic. The*

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[6] I follow the ideas of Gabarrón and Landa (1994) in some cases altering the original order. Rarely have I found such a timely summary as this, and it may be found between pages 28 and 44 in full and with authors' comments.

questions and challenges that arise throughout social actions define the need and style of participatory research procedures. The process and the results of a research study interfere in social practices and, again, their course raises the need and the time to perform new participatory investigations.

Popular participation must take place preferentially throughout the investigation-education-action process. Increasingly, from one experience to another, the teams responsible for performing participatory research should include and integrate advisory agents and popular agents. It would be ideal that, at later moments, there be a culturally differentiated participation, but socially and politically equivalent and equaled, even if among people and groups coming from different traditions as to the contents and processes of social creation of knowledge.

The political and ideological commitment of investigators, both male and female, is to popular sectors and to their social causes. Even in an investigation connected to sectorial and provisional work, the purpose of a social action with a popular vocation is the autonomy of its subjects in the management of knowledge and social actions derived from it. It is also the progressive integration of the dimensions of knowledge of parts of social life on more dialectically interlinked and interdependent planes.

The political and ideological character of scientific and pedagogical activity should be recognized. Participatory research should be practiced as a clear and overt political act. There is no scientific neutrality in any research, much less in investigations connected to social action projects. However, to share in the social production of knowledge does not, basically, correspond to pre-ideologizing the assumptions of investigation and application of their results in party politics. In most cases, participatory research is a moment of popular education work performed together with and at the service of communities, groups and popular movements. It is from the constant, non-doctrinaire dialogue on both sides that an always dynamic consensus which can be modified should also be slowly constructed.

Investigation, education and social action become methodological moments of a single process directed at social transformation. Even when research serves a local social action, limited to a specific question of social life, it is its whole that is at issue. It is the possibility of transforming knowledges, sensitivities and popular motivations in the name of the transformation of an unequal society, which excludes and is ruled

> *by principles and values of the goods and capitals market, in the name of humanizing social life, that the knowledge of participatory research should be produced, read and integrated as an emancipatory, alternative form of popular knowledge.*

In what brings them near to each other, the alternatives of *participatory research*, in the Latin American tradition, dreamed of innovating, in whole or in part, the approaches that are known and have long been practiced as social actions based on scientific knowledge, by contributing new working alternatives to groups and popular communities. The theoretical and ideological gains possibly were and still are greater than their practical achievements. These new approaches were motivated to be something more than the other methodologies for the accumulation and application of knowledge coming from social investigations turned towards processes of social promotion and/or development.

They intended to re-create the terms of political critique to the customary interactions between knowledge produced by scientific research and the social actions derived from them. They aspired to the novelty of transforming social actions with a popular vocation, based on a systematic working through of knowledge, by means of social research deliberetely placed at the service of co-participatory experiences of solidary creation of knowledge, based on the ties between professionals and/or militants and the people, groups and popular units.

This is also the double meaning of the idea of totality in the original Latin American proposals. It is somewhat previous and has little to do with the complex and holistic totalizations of the emerging paradigms, between Edgar Morin and Boaventura de Souza Santos. Its source is Marxist and, in several documents, it appears as a "dialectical approach".[7]

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[7] One of the most original authors in this sense is Oscar Jara. One of his latest studies discusses the systematization of participatory experiences in popular education. Reading studies on the *systematization* of popular social actions is very timely, because, in its way, it represents an update to the 1980, 1990s and following years, of the original proposals of participatory styles in Latin America. Among the previous books, see: *Conocer la realidad para transformarla* (1991); *Investigación participativa – una dimensión integrante de la educación popular* (1990). In Portuguese it is possible to read his book: *Para sistematizar experiências* (1996).

The idea of a totalizing comprehension of social reality has to do with the integration of all partial knowledge in dynamic and integrated structures of social factors and processes, so that, whatever the "focus of knowledge" at the point of origin (a research on local health conditions, for instance), the research should involve, whenever possible, the interactions between the different planes and domains of inter-determining structures and processes of society. Thus, special attention should always be given to the dynamics of relationships and of the processes involved in the investigation, since a historical dimension is always and inevitably present.

This dynamics of history is important to reconstruct the recent past, it is even more so in looking between the present and the future. Because here it is not a matter of knowing how to "promote" or to "develop" something, but to transform the whole in which this "something" exists as it is, and so it must be transformed with all of the social aspects of which it is part. In *participatory research* it is always important to know how to train popular persons motivated to transform the social scenarios of their own lives and destinies, and not only to solve a few limited and isolated local problems, even if the most immediate purpose of social action associated with *participatory research* is local and specific. The idea that one only knows what one transforms is often evoked even today.

To this totalization principle is associated the idea that, as participants in moments of popular education, and in all of the desired dynamics of *popular movements, participatory research* is part of four purposes that are already known to us and that it is worthwhile to bring together here:

a) It responds directly to the practical purpose that it is to serve, as a means of knowing social issues to be worked on through participation;
b) It is a dialogical instrument for shared learning and, therefore, as we have already seen, it has, organically, an educational vocation and as such provides political formation;
c) It participates in broader and more continuous processes of progressive construction of popular knowledge and, at the limit, could be one more means of creating a popular science;
d) It shares with *popular education* a whole broad and complex history of empowerment of the *popular movements* and their members.

In its broadest and most integrated modalities, *participatory research* covers at least these four objectives, and, between approximations and differences, they are distributed among the previously enounced principles. Limiting oneself to the first objective is the equivalent of giving a still colonized character to the idea of "participation", corresponding to the alternatives in which subjects of the community are invited to participate in fractions of research, without any access to the process as a whole, and without any significant role in managing the effective directions given by a social action to popular groups and classes.

Limiting oneself to the first two objectives is the equivalent of a major gain, since the work of producing knowledge is no longer simply functional and utilitarian, but now also educational. It begins to form people who are able to integrate more consequently and to be co-responsible in social life. But this is also only going half-way, since it does not commit itself to what is essential: the purpose of a progressive decolonization and continuous popular empowerment; the purpose of increasing popular sharing in the management of one's lives and destinies, besides the possibility of emancipatory social transformation based on popular choices and horizons.

It is likely that between Europe and the United States, *participatory research* would mostly appear as a timely instrument to create new forms of scientific knowledge of social life. A timely means to re-qualify the relationships between the different types of interactive actors in social action projects, performed in the name of improving the quality of life indicators, or community or regional developments.

In Latin America, the original proposals for *participatory research* dreamed of going a bit beyond. They dreamed of reaching at least the frontiers of a possible social construction of other ideological and political alternatives in the management of knowledge; of creating a new "popular science" or, who knows?, the re-education of sciences themselves and their scientists, based on the choice of a vocation, democratically extended to the popular classes in sharing knowledge. Also of participation in the processes of transforming societies ruled by the principles of capitalism into societies oriented toward realizing some of the variants of new social expressions of socialism. This transforming and emancipatory horizon was always present

among us, at least in the modalities that are more disseminated and persistent among those who acknowledge themselves as being the heirs of Paulo Freire or Orlando Fals Borda.

Today there is a much broader variety of horizons and experiences. In several Latin American scenarios, *participatory research* invaded and occupied contexts of theory and practice that had previously been forbidden to them or open only with restrictions. It is not rare for government programs to present themselves under the consensus of "popular participation", and in several cases this also involves research activities in a community or extended sphere. Thus, also a growing number of academic studies performed in undergraduate and graduate university programs, present as their "methodological procedures" some of the acknowledged variants of *participatory research*. Authors avoided in the official courses on research methods and techniques in social sciences, in pedagogy and in programs derived from them, now appear in an ever-increasing number in academic work at any of the levels. For instance, education and environmental management programs rarely neglect to claim a participatory approach, and investigations "with community participation" are rather the rule than the exception.

There is no dominant tendency in any field and in any sphere of practicing *participatory research*. Even in the experiences performed with and at the service of the *popular movements*, what is seen are different alternatives of theoretical justification, methodological procedures, reading research data and texts, and finally practical applications of the results.

Within and without the university environment, the sphere of government power and, mainly, the sphere of non-governmental organizations and popular movements, the meetings and symposia to exchange ideas and experiences tend to be ruled more by the dialogue between differences than by any interest in creating unitary or dominant forms.

4. Forgetting the other

Even having published her *Pesquisa participante na América Latina* in 1986, Marcela Gajardo is one of the most "border-less" authors. Among the thirty-nine titles mentioned in the references, two are in French (Switzerland and

Canada) and two in English, one of them written by Paulo Freire. Other European or North American authors mentioned actually belong to the Latin American tradition, or are constantly in touch with it, such as the Canadian Budd Hall.

There is a much larger number of bibliographic mentions in *Refletindo a pesquisa participante,* by the Brazilian author, Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva, published in 1991. Among its one hundred and seven quotes, only one is in English and another one in French. Other authors from India, Europe or North America are included, with texts in Spanish or in Portuguese, presented at Latin American Symposia and Congresses. Several others belong, as Anthon de Schuter, Michel Thiollent, Tom de Wit, Vera Gianotten or Nelly Stromquist, to the Latin American tradition, and some of them live in a Latin American country or worked there for several or many years.

Among the almost hundred bibliographic mentions contained in *Investigación Participativa,* by Luis R. Gabarrón and Libertad Hernández Landa, published in Mexico in 1994, there are only five texts by European authors, all of them in Spanish. No book or article which could be considered a reference to the European or North American traditions is included. And the same happens in *Para sistematizar experiências,* by Oscar Jara, published in Brazil in 1996.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the bibliography of the twelve articles of *Participatory research and evaluation - experiences in research as a process of liberation,* coordinated by Walter Fernandes and Rajesh Tandon, and published in New Delhi, in 1981, is gathered at the end of the book and includes fifty-one titles. All of them are in English, including those by Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda. Although it is also a Third World country publication, and its subtitle together with the approach of most of the authors suggests convergence with a point of view that is very familiar to the Latin American tradition, a dialogue between Latin America and India appears to take place only in a small part. Except for Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire, only Francisco Vio Grossi appears representing the Latin American tradition, among all the articles in the book.

A book by René Barbier, *A pesquisa-ação* was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 2002. We know that Michel Thiollent, one of the

main *action research* theoreticians and practitioners in Latin America, is a French speaker. However, at no time is his name mentioned, even when, in the first chapter of the book, René Barbier reconstructs the *history of action-research*.

He divides this history into two moments: a period of emergence and consolidation between the years that precede World War II and the 1960s, with a clear North American predominance. A second period "of political and existential radicalization", with Canadian and European dominance, comes from the end of the 1960s to our days. On mentioning the countries in which this alternative of social investigation is disseminated, the author recalls Germany, Japan and France. But "it is in Canada, England and France, beginning in the 1970s, that there is a greater radical tendency" (Barbier 1977, 31).

On page 35 there is a passing reference to the Latin American tradition.

> In Latin America, radical sociology joined forces with the revolutionary militantism of Camilo Torres, Luis Costa Pinto, Florestan Fernandes, Orlando Fals Borda, and, in the same way, with the "pedagogy of the oppressed" of Paulo Freire, in Educação Popular (Barbier 1977, 51-58).

The contribution of the Latin American tradition will be practically forgotten from this page on. Of the sixty-seven books and articles listed in the bibliography, there are no references whatsoever to the Latin American authors mentioned on page 35, and only Nelly Stromquist, with an article in French, evokes the presence of the Latin American tradition.

On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and the Rio Grande, we simply ignore each other or forget each other. And this is a "brotherhood" procedure which is actually foreign to theoreticians and practitioners of *participatory research*. Because we are practicing an alternative of creation of human and social knowledge, where dialogue and recognition of the other, through the aspects in which he or she is different from us, always take up an outstanding position in our agendas of principles.

Participatory research is intended as a courageous leap beyond *participatory observation*. In this and in a large part of the qualitative approaches in social research, I discover that I am trustworthy. I can do this, because I can trust myself and not only the instruments which I place between myself and my "objects of research". I can trust my memory, my words and those of oth-

ers, my interlocutors. I can trust them "for me". For the effects of the process and products of scientific work that I control, interpret and use in my favor. In *participatory research*, I begin from double knowledge of trust in my "other", in the one I try to transform from an "object of my research" into a "co-subject of our investigation". I should trust him/her as in *participatory observation*, as my interlocutor, the one who as he himself / she herself says, draws for me the scenarios of life and destiny that I want to know and interpret. But I must go beyond this, since with him/her and on his/her behalf (much more than on my own) I must create a working context to be shared in the full sense of the word, as a process of constructing knowledge and as a product of knowledge known and put into practice through social actions of which he/she is (or should be) the protagonist, and I am (or should be) the supporting actor.

The acknowledgement of the contribution made by the other, the different one, and sharing their knowledge and experiences, should be a point of departure in the practice of *participatory research*. But, just as we see happen in other fields of academic research, they are not. Here too we quote ourselves, and "our people" repeatedly. Here too, we not only create tendencies and traditions, which is quite healthy. But we ultimately close ourselves into them or into their neighborhoods, as actors in brotherhoods. This, we may agree, is a denial of what we propose in theory and on other planes of practice.

It could be recalled that the abyss of language is still a powerful barrier, even among us, who supposedly have new ideas, are militants concerning rights and dialogues, and transgressors of the boundaries of conservative traditions that exist in the sciences and social actions. We ourselves have fallen into this trap right here in this article.

This must not be the reason, or at least it cannot be the only and most important reason of our reiterated forgetting of the other. A question then hovers over us: if we ignore each other and transform forgetting others who are not close to us into the very foundation of building our ideas and ideals, our dialogues, our theories, how can we expect to be able to create something that will break down barriers within and without the world of sciences? Something that really goes beyond the boundaries that we ourselves have created,

that re-creates, amongst the others of our peoples and all peoples of the Earth, something that will truly point to a New Human Being. The creator and the inhabitant of the "other possible world", as we are used to shouting on the streets of Porto Alegre, India and other corners of the Planet, during our world social forums?

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Author's address

Carlos Rodrigues Brandão
Rua Sampaio Ferraz, 392
Cambui
13024-431 Campinas. 5P
Brasil
E-mail: brandão08@ig.com.br

About the author

Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Brazilian, anthropologist, participant in popular social movements since 1961, one of the people who introduced participatory research in Brazil. He coordinated two collections of books by Editora Brasiliense of São Paulo: Pesquisa Participante and Repensando a Pesquisa Participante. Professor in the PhD Program on Environment and Society at Universidade Estadual de Campinas. Participant in the process of creating Pedra Branca – Comunidade Solidária do Saber (Pedra Branca – Solidary Community of Knowledge).

Translated by Hedy L. Hofmann