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**“One sows the seed,
but it has its own dynamics”**
An Interview with Orlando Fals Borda

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Alfonso Torres

This interview deals with the issue of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the life of Orlando Fals Borda from its beginnings in the sociological investigation of the land problem in Colombia, through social organizations and political participation, to the relationship of the academia to society. The alternative paradigm of social research is based on a new relation, as a unique process, between theory and practice. This is the “seed” that today develops multiple and diversified enriching dynamics.

Orlando, we would like to talk to you about participatory research in your life history, and a first concern of ours is about your personal experience before the formalization of PAR. What were the first insights or roots of it?

Fals Borda: I think there were some family roots. In my home my mother was a very intelligent person, a bluestocking really, author of dramas and cantatas and things like that. She had a lot of social sensitivity, as a leader of the Presbyterian Church she was involved in the work with women, for instance. She was the president of the Women Society of the Presbyterian Church and organized a national campaign against cancer in a radio station. She was

one of the first women in Barranquilla who had one hour of radio time at the Atlántico station in the thirties.

My father, who was also an intellectual, was a very esteemed school teacher in Barranquilla. He had already written some pamphlets, articles, and was a journalist of the La Prensa newspaper in Barranquilla. He was always very attentive to my intellectual development, because I remember that he brought me reading-books, beginning with the Sopena series, short stories by Perrault... and then he began to raise the level, and among the books he brought to me I remember very much Los Bedas. Then he talked to the school principal and asked him to give me the handbook for Greek. Of course I liked these languages. I enjoyed Latin, so much that I wrote an essay in Latin when I was in the sixth grade of high school. I wrote it in Latin!

Then you moved from high school to college in the United States...

Fals Borda: Yes, but first I went to the Cadet Military School. I was saved by my mother, because I had already decided to stay in the military. After a year and a half I received a letter saying that there were possibilities, I could stay at that school or go to the United States with everything paid for. Then I left service.

Did you go there to study sociology?

Fals Borda: No, I didn't know anything about sociology, I didn't know that there was something like that, it happened by chance in the United States. My majors were English Literature and Music. Nothing social. There I was initiated, I turned to music and literature, and period. But in the penultimate semester I saw that an old professor, who was a sociologist, was offering a course on sociology based on a text he himself had written. So I took this sociology course, but that was it. When I returned to Barranquilla I became the conductor of the choirs of the Colegio Americano and the church. I arrived by the middle of 1948 or before, in 1947, and after 1948 was the death of Gaitán. I was in Barranquilla and there was a rather strong rebellion. I became inspired and wrote a short cantata. It had the title "Message to Colom-

bia” and a patriotic tone, asking for the peace that would unite the Colombians, for the country’s reconstruction. I had this concern for the situation, but it was expressed in the form of music, in a cantata.

So your studies in Iowa focused initially on Literature and Music, then you went back to the choir in Barranquilla...

Fals Borda: *But I was involved not only with music, I was also the director of a Presbyterian Youth Center (PYC). That was interesting, the pastor of that church was Richard Shaull, who would later become one of the founders of liberation theology... He had a very different view of the pastor’s role and gave that youth center a social dimension that many people still remember in Barranquilla, because it was a kind of driving force to change the way of thinking and acting in the churches. This Presbyterian Center had cultural and sports activities: classic Spanish theater plays were performed, painting exhibitions with the help of Alejandro Obregón, literary activities with Álvaro Cepeda Samudio... This whole coastal group was acting around the PYC. We were friends, I was a schoolmate of Álvaro Cepeda, we graduated in the United States, and our friendship lasted until his death.*

What that space represented was determining for you, wasn’t it?

Fals Borda: *Yes, because it was an educational space for lots of people, young people.*

Was the PYC Richard Shaull’s initiative?

Fals Borda: *No, it was mine. I had it because I had been the president of the youth society before going to the United States. So I already had my friends there, also from the choir. I was very connected to the church, very connected, to such an extent that one of these missionaries who used to come invited me to become a pastor. But my activities were much more than religious ones, they went beyond religion. What attracted me in the church were not the dogmas nor the Bible verses, it was the music that was sung there.*

Through the PYC I enabled the Presbyterian Church to exert influence on the society of Barranquilla and the coast, and this is where all those non-religious activities fit. Thus it was a kind of lay church that was very open, very tolerant and ecumenical, it was also attended by some nuns. My great friendship with Shaull went on, and when he was appointed as a pastor to the Presbyterian Church in Bogotá, it happened that I also moved here. I left Barranquilla and I came here, and had the boldness of introducing myself as a sociologist in Bogotá.

Was that in 1951-52?

Fals Borda: This was in 1949, after Gaitán's death and after the message that I had composed for him. So here Shaull appointed me as the choir director of the church of 24th Street. Oh, that was an extraordinary experience, because there weren't many choirs in Bogotá, I mean four voices choirs. Shaull was supporting all these things, he thought not only about the Bible, but about culture, other activities, society, well-being, the happiness of youth, because all of us who were with him were young, I wasn't older than 25-26 or so, 24.

I met Shaull again in Europe when he was already a liberation theologian, after I had left the university and was at the United Nations in Geneva. I was invited to hold a conference on Latin American Problems in a lecture series in which Shaull had already participated. I had some texts written by him and chose a topic that was premonitory: "Subversion and Development in Latin America." This was an attempt to approach the concept of subversion from the positive point of view, rather than the negative as it appears in the dictionaries.

How is it that you arrive in Bogotá and introduce yourself as a sociologist?

Fals Borda: I had come under the pretext of teaching English at the Colegio Americano. But I became quickly bored and then I remembered some of the things that sociologist had taught me. So I decided to approach the Minister of Education, Fabio Lozano, and I told him I was a sociologist and had just arrived from the United States. By coincidence a UN project was being de-

veloped under his auspices at that time, I believe it was called Pilot Municipality for administrative matters, and the municipality of Viani, Cundinamarca, was chosen as pilot project. And I told him that I was very much interested in the project, and the Minister said they were going to appoint me as the person in charge of the archives, because there were many disordered papers in that office. He also said I had to go and live there. This was the problem, because he told me to go there and organize the archive, but I shouldn't establish any contact with the people in the village. He hired me as a technician, not as a sociologist. Of course, I arrived at the village and the first thing I did was to become friends with the local priest, offering to be his organist for the mass. I organized the archive in ten days, and about eight days later my boss, Ospina, arrived and saw the organized archive. But the first thing people told him was that I had established a close relationship with the priest and the mayor and that I used to go to the bars to drink beer. He said: You haven't complied with the rules, so I'm going to dismiss you. If you don't want to be dismissed, submit your resignation. I was fired from my first position as a sociologist after 20 days because I had established contact with the people. This was really the beginning of my sociological career. And then, I don't know exactly how, I found a short book published by two lawyers from the Ministry of the Economy who had worked with an American who was a sociologist. It was a study on Tabio, Cundinamarca, which turned out to be the first modern sociological study conducted in this country in 1948. I had no idea of who they were, nor Lynn Smith, who was a Sociology professor in Minnesota. This was the first book on rural sociology written in this country. And professor Smith had the good idea of including, as an appendix to this study on Tabio, the forms of the survey, from which he extracted the information that he then quantified for the analysis of Tabio. There I learned what was the simplest tool of sociological research, the survey. I became very much interested in this booklet, and I still have it. It illuminated me in relation to the work to which I would devote my entire life.

As I was unemployed, I decided to see how I could make use of the little I knew. One of the things that I knew was English, and then I saw an announcement made by an American company, Winston Brothers Company, which was building dams for the national government, one in Sisga and the

other one in Neusa. They needed a bilingual Spanish-English secretary, so I went there. I was appointed as the personal secretary of the dam's director. I had to go to the camp in Sisga. This was out in the field, and they were calling and hiring workers, genuine peasants from that region to work on the construction of the dam. Little by little I became known and ended up becoming the leader of the camp. But since they were hiring workers, I got to know some who were from a trail between Sisga and Chocontá. The company's trucks went there every day to pick these workers up, took them to the camp in the morning and drove them back to their homes by the end of the afternoon. All of them were rooted in the field, they were peasants. I became friends with them, with two or three of them, and they invited me to their homes. I acquired the custom of staying with them in their homes every weekend. Then one of the families adopted me as a son, and I went to live there. Theirs was an extremely humble house, built directly on the earth, with a straw roof, practically without doors. This was a typical family, made up of mom and dad, both of them fairly old, two brothers, the worker who was in Sisga and a grandson and me. This became my family. I learned all about life, they taught how to pull the potatoes from the ground, how to guide the oxen, how to use the sickle... I became a peasant, wearing poncho and sombrero, just like the peasants who lived there. I began to talk like them and to dance. I learned how to dance torbellino and bambuco, to play guitar and to sing with them.

There I began to accumulate the data. The trail was called Saucio. Many years later the peasants told me that there were discussions in the bars and the homes about who I was, that I was a Communist who came there to collect data, that I asked so many questions, about how many children I had, how many women. They recalled one thing that I had done out of ignorance about the people's customs and beliefs. As I had read about physical anthropology and the measures of the human body, one day I brought a scale in order to weigh them. Afterwards they told me about their resistance to being weighed, because being weighed meant that their sins would be weighed and so they wouldn't go to heaven, and that if they weighed them in this life, they wouldn't be weighed in the afterlife. And here I was inviting them to be weighed and end up in hell! This was physical anthropology, the measure, as

it was assumed that social science should be just like physics: precise, measurable.

Well, at the end there were a few brave ones who let themselves be weighed, and since nothing happened to them and they were happy, the others followed suit. I got some interesting anthropological data. Actually I don't know how I was accepted, in view of my origin in a city from the coastal area and the fact that I was working in a dam without any connection with anyone there. I went to 70 families in that trail, and there was a danger that they would shut me out as a Communist, because there was this rumor around: This is a Communist who came here God knows what for, suddenly they will raise our taxes... I decided to take the bull by the horns, so I went to talk with the local parish priest and explained him what I was doing. It turned out that he was an extremely nice and open priest, I think he talked to someone at the company, certainly with my boss, but the reports he got were positive, because on the next Sunday he gave me his blessing from the pulpit. From that moment on Satan was gone! From then on a great friendship developed between me and that priest, and of course also his family, because it turned out that his sister had married the son of the most important rancher in Saucio. Until then I had stayed only with the peasants and had never gotten involved with the farmer until the priest introduced me. I went into the ranch looking for knowledge. I sort of completed the geopolitical balance of that region, but this time with the parish priest's blessing, and the farm's owners supported me so much that they opened their archives to me and showed me all their title deeds, the ranch's origins, it had been formed in the original Chibcha territory.

How long did you stay at this company and connected to the region?

Fals Borda: In 1951 I was still the camp's leader. At that time the Winston Brother Company published a magazine in English. One day they asked me to write some reflections about the region, an introduction into Colombia or something like that. I sent it to the company, whose headquarters were in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The general management was located there. They liked the article very much. When the general manager came from Minneapo-

lis in order to inspect the work at the dam in Sisga, he asked me, "Wouldn't you like to go to Minnesota? We need someone who speaks Spanish there, and since you know everything about this area, it occurred to us that you could be the person who coordinates the work in Colombia." I told the manager, "Look, I'm very thankful and I'm going to consider your offer, but I propose a condition, which is that you allow me to submit my sociological study at the University of Minnesota in order to get my master's degree." The guy accepted it, and he paid for my trip and paid for everything, but I had to fulfill my duties at the company's office. This was the toughest period in my life because of the work load, because I had to do all the professional work and to be a full time student: two complete work loads. Fortunately the salary was very good, so good that I was able to buy a car and I had a house; very good salary! Besides, my previous bosses were now my subordinates! There I had the problem of how to present the texts, I had already completed my studies, on the basis of professor Smith's survey. I approached professor Nelson, that was his name, and entered the master's program. He had written a rural sociology book on Cuba. He told me, "Show me the materials you have collected in Saucío." I had pictures, maps, analyses of the surveys, all the information. Do you know what that professor did? He made a phone call to professor Smith, who was teaching in Florida, as he saw that my work was a result of the Tabio study and was connected to him. He said to him, "I have a student of yours here!"

This methodological, ethical-political concern of connecting the other to the production of knowledge didn't have much weight yet...

Fals Borda: This had not been born yet, but it came up later, when I started writing my master's thesis on the Saucío trail, which was then developed in my book Campesinos de los Andes [Peasants of the Andes]. In one year I completed all the master's program requirements, but I was burned out! I stayed at Winston Brothers all the time, which was favorable to me. I then got the master's degree, and professor Smith in Florida began to make arrangements in order to enable me to do my doctorate in sociology with him. He finally succeeded thanks to the Guggenheim Foundation in New York, where

he was an advisor. The foundation gave me two grants to cover the doctoral program's costs. In Florida I did my doctorate with the thesis on El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá [Man and Land in Boyacá], which was published as a book even before Campesinos de los Andes.

Did you come to Colombia in the period you did the doctorate?

Fals Borda: *Yes, I came here four times to work on the doctoral dissertation in Boyacá, because of the problem of the small rural properties and the poverty in Boyacá that had gotten professor Smith's and my attention. He later wrote a book on Colombia with the Ministry of Economy, a monograph on Tabio. This was the birth of rural sociology in Colombia. This book was my Bible during the initial years.*

It's necessary to highlight the poverty and the rural problem as essential elements to explain the situation of backwardness and the present violence in Colombia. Violence as a political phenomenon in Colombia began in the rural areas, it was a clash between peasants that was induced from top down, pushed by the politicians, by president Ospina Pérez himself, or by minister José Antonio Montalvo, and then by president Laureano Gómez. These are horrible figures of Colombian history, because they are to blame for much of what occurred later, because the motto that Montalvo spread from Congress was to combat by any means: this was the command he gave the conservatives to fight the liberals.

I mention Boyacá in the sense that the book containing my dissertation had the subtitle "Foundations for a Land Reform"; this is still a pending problem, and it touches the roots of the national issue. The subtitle led me to the Ministry of Agriculture. When the book came out with proposals on how to make a land reform in Colombia, this was the first time that the agrarian problem was described in this way, even though previously there had been attempts made by socialists, such as Gerardo Molina, Antonio García, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, but they were politicians. Really, some people think that the book on Boyacá is the best one I have written. When the book was published, I was unexpectedly called by Augusto Espinoza Valderrama, the minister of Agriculture of the Alberto Lleras administration. He told me, "Well, I have

read your book and I liked it very much. Come here in order to put it into practice." Praxis... I was foolish enough to get involved in praxis (this was in 1958-59). This is precisely one of my weaknesses: the bias toward practice, rather than only academic theory. Well, what one learns and finds out should have some resonance or recognition in order to transform the flaws one finds in society – of which there are many – but this has been the formal, historical, traditional function of sociology since it was founded by Comte.

Is it in this context that you met Camilo Torres?

Fals Borda: I had already met Camilo before I went back to Florida. We met here in Bogotá. He came from Louvain to Bogotá for a short period of time, and, if I remember correctly, he was going from Louvain to Minnesota. He was taking some courses on economic sociology, we ended up meeting and saw that our interests were very similar, and this opened further doors later on.

Was it then that the idea of the School of Sociology arose?

Fals Borda: Yes and no. This is the way things were: The minister of Agriculture, Augusto Espinosa Valderrama, called me by the middle of 1958, when I came to work in Boyacá. By that time the rector of the National University was Mario Laserna, and the dean of the School of Economy was the best social scientist I have ever known. He was an economist, but an economist with a heart, humane, not like the inhumane economists who are today in charge of the National Planning. He was Doctor Luis Ospina Vásquez, a great historian. He dove into the archives and was not afraid like the economists today, who don't study if they don't have a computer in front of them. He wrote that famous book, "Industry and Protection in Colombia." He and I became very good friends, so he came to the School of Economy and made a campaign for the opening of a Sociology Department in the School of Economy. He managed to persuade the rector, Laserna. Thus by the end of 1958 the creation of the Sociology Department was approved, but I had no idea of all this.

Augusto Espinosa called me and persuaded me. I said to him, "Yes, why not? You can appoint me." Five days after that, Laserna called me in order to tell me that the Sociology Department had been approved and I was supposed to be its first director. What should I do? I had had this experience of two jobs in Minnesota. But I felt it had to be very well thought through, and I almost refused to take on the two things, since I would enter the Ministry [of Agriculture] as vice-minister in charge of the technical continuity. But I decided to accept both things, and it was excellent! I accepted both things, since it was not illegal, but it was very heavy. It was something positive because this decision enabled me to get two kinds of support, a governmental one and an academic one, and I managed to combine them. For instance, when we began to think about publishing things at the university and started the series of sociological monographs, which ended up having 30 or 40 titles, the National University had no money for publishing nor for research, the only ones who insisted on these things were the members of the Sociology Department. Since the University had no funds, I published them through the Ministry of Agriculture, and they were published in the name of the Sociology Department of the National University, and nobody knew where they came from. I don't know whether this was speculation or what, but everything was for the sake of science. The first monograph was written by François Houtart. I took advantage of his visit to Bogotá to deliver a conference on the problems of religious mentality in cities. I asked him to give me the text, I translated it into Spanish and it became the number one of the monograph series. This lent itself to several public relations purposes and to advocate for the new Sociology Department.

How was the experience of constituting a research group?

Fals Borda: After the decision to approve the Department had been made, Camilo Torres showed up. He visited me at the Ministry of Agriculture and we talked about how to start that year of study. The semester was just about to start, on January 15th or 20th, and the students were enrolled in other courses. The problem was how to start that Department in that same semester in order to take advantage of the enthusiasm of the university authorities.

Then the two of us made a small leaflet explaining what sociology was all about, what had to be done and what was expected from it. As the enrollment lines were long at all departments, Camilo and I personally handed out the leaflet to the students in those lines. This is where the first 21 students came from.

Camilo and you were the only ones with academic education in sociology?

Fals Borda: We were the only ones. The other person who came later, María Cristina Salazar, had to go to the Xaverian University (she accuses me of it whenever she can) because there was no way for her to stay at the National University. She had studied at the Catholic University in Washington, had a PhD and arrived one year later. The first ones were Camilo and myself. Camilo took on all the courses on methodology and I was in charge of the theoretical ones, and we started right then.

I managed to get some professors who were not sociologists nor professionals, but they seemed to me to have a good orientation and to be loyal. One of them was a teacher of Social Science at a school in Corozal, Sucre. I chose him there and asked him, "Do you want to teach Sociology in Bogotá?" He accepted the invitation and moved with his family to Bogotá. This was Carlos Escalante. He was a school teacher, not a university professor. I brought him to the Department, and he is still teaching Sociology. And the other acquisition was the Department's secretary, who was also from the coast. We had two or three people from the coast: Carlos came from the coast, this secretary too, he was from Magdalena, and myself.

A year and half after the Department had been formed, Doctor Luis Ospina Vásquez left the deanery and the new dean began to interfere in the Sociology Department's growth, which at that point depended on the School of Economy, since he was jealous of the Department's growth. At that time we were using just one room in the School, I think it used to be the infirmary. There they gave us one office and an empty bookshelf. One day, when the economists had upset us a lot, we found out that at the entrance to the university, on 26th Street, there was the structure of a house that had burnt down, probably due to incautiousness. Families of professors used to live in that

house, and now it was totally abandoned. So we said, "Let's leave this office, there's nothing in here. Let's occupy that house, no matter how burnt down it is." Thus at one late afternoon the 21 students and ourselves carried the two pieces of furniture, marched as a caravan through the three blocks that separated us from the building and took over the house. We stayed there, but after ten days the Economy Department people realized what had happened and said, "No, you have to leave the house." They wanted to call the police, saying that we were invaders. But we showed them that we had set the house in order, cleaned and painted it. On the basis of this structure I got through the Ministry of Agriculture enough funds to turn that house into the building it is today, into the School of Sociology.

The advantages of being in the Ministry...

Fals Borda: *The advantages came afterwards. I spent two years in this adventure, two years directing the Ministry and two years directing the Department.*

Was the INCORA office related to the Department?

Fals Borda: *Of course, the first contact made by INCORA (Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma Agraria: Colombian Institute of Land Reform) in order to investigate the agrarian problem was with the Sociology Department of the National University. Besides, I was the chairperson of INCORA's Technical Committee, with Camilo. He was a member of INCORA's Board of Directors and I was chairing the Technical Committee.*

Why did María Cristina go to the Xaverian University?

Fals Borda: *The Xaverian University had opened the School of Sociology with María Cristina, but when they realized that she was a friend of ours at the National University, they fired her, they expelled her and closed down the School right away. This was very sad, something very abusive done by the rector of the Xaverian University. She had started to teach modern sociology*

there, in the same line that we had followed two years before. She came to a point when she had to decide how to improve the teaching and research in her Sociology Department at the Xaverian University. Since she was a friend of Camilo Torres, she created a Consulting Committee that included him, Andrew Pearse (a UNESCO professor) and myself. When the Jesuits heard about the meetings that María Cristina was having with this “subversive” group, they dismissed her.

How did you get to the research on violence, were you in the Ministry or outside of it?

Fals Borda: After two years I was appointed dean. The School of Sociology had been created in 1961. Then the work became harder and I resigned from the Ministry. So I could devote myself full time to the university. Actually the presence of Sociology in the university had opened up some new things, it was like a fresh wind. Research is the first thing to be mentioned, because, incredible as it may seem, the National University did no research whatsoever, except for the Natural Science Institute. In Social Science there was nothing, as there was no Social Science as an area of study. There was a course on sociological theory taught by Bernal Jiménez at the Law School. It was the Law School that had Sociology. The teaching of sociology was in the hands of lawyers. With the School of Sociology we began to move. As I had governmental contacts, they became international. This is when I started to bring the best sociologists of Latin America and the Latin American Program of Studies on Development (Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios del Desarrollo: PLEDES) was created. Some of the best sociologists from the United States and from Spain came too. The School acquired prestige. When there was no longer enough space for us in that small building that we had rebuilt with our own hands and the Ministry's help, the government requested an international credit from the USAID in order to construct a new building, a very complete and beautiful building where the Department is still located. This building was inaugurated in 1961 with a Latin American Congress of Sociology.

In what you were doing and working, what could have been leading to the Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

Fals Borda: *Yes, the seed was there with Camilo's presence. His contribution was commitment, commitment to the popular struggles, to the need of social transformation. But how do you find that out in the university? You find it out through a self-critique of the frames of reference that they had taught us in Europe and the United States, both to Camilo and to me. Because this frame of reference was supposed to have the final word in the professionalization of the Social Science that was conditioned by the positivist and functionalist, i. e. Cartesian school. It was obligatory to be precise, very objective, very neutral, imitating the physicists, who were presented to us as the ideal scientists. This was the frame of reference I had. You talked about the social fact, the social problem, facts, but the very talk about facts is not very reliable, it is limited. A fact can be positive, or negative, or whatever, but a fact is to be analyzed and measured, it is to be understood and that's it. But when it comes to applying this frame that comes from a functionalist analysis of a more or less stable society such as the North American society, a model of social balance, of order in society, rather than disorder, conflict remains out of the picture as something harmful, as something marginal, inconvenient or dysfunctional, as people used to say at that time, it was not functional for society. If you apply to this conflictive society, that is full of violence, a model designed to understand social balance, not social change, and designed even less to understand conflict, then there is a clear flaw here, a maladjustment of the explanation and analysis. Of course, Camilo had already realized it, and then he began to talk about the new kind of Latin American sociology. This is when he presented this point of view in Buenos Aires, I think it was in 1961. Camilo and I found out about the existence of the documentation fund of the official Committee for the Study of the Causes of Violence that had been appointed by president Alberto Lleras. The secretary of this Committee was Monsignor Germán Guzmán Campos, who had the good initiative of keeping this documentation. Camilo convinced me that we should visit Monsignor Germán Guzmán, who at that time was the parish priest of Libano, Tolima. So he and I made the expedition, and Roberto Pineda Giraldo, the husband of*

Virginia Gutiérrez, joined us. Roberto and Virginia were both anthropologists, and they had become orphans when Laureano Gómez closed down the Higher Normal School. They found a mother in the Sociology Department, and all of them came in mass, all of them joined us, it was a great thing. The three of us made this expedition to Líbano in order to convince monsignor Guzmán. There we saw the file and persuaded him to come to work at the School of Sociology. He fulfilled the formalities to leave the parish and came to us with all his things, and we worked together writing the first volume on violence. We did it in secret, nobody knew what we were doing because it was very delicate. We had decided to say things mentioning names, dates and places. We had all the necessary documentation at our disposal. In analyzing this work, its intensity, the nature of the conflict, the whole scheme that I had brought from functionalism broke up in my mind; you cannot explain it with the frame of reference that I had learned in my teachers' classes. As a conclusion to this volume I wrote down the first expression of my abandonment of that functionalist model. We had to take a much clearer stand of commitment to the solutions, and that's why the book on violence ends with 27 or 30 recommendations to the government, to Colombian society, the church, the university, to everybody on how to solve the problem of violence. If you read these recommendations, even today they sound very logical, obvious, very feasible. But they were never complied with. They were inspired precisely by our feeling of commitment to something that would serve society. A sociology committed to social transformation.

Is there a reading of Marxism in order to arrive at this committed sociology?

Fals Borda: In the meantime several monographs had already been published in the series of the School of Sociology, and all of them actually ended with recommendations. It was applied sociology, very much inspired by activity, by praxis. To your surprise, I had never had classes on Marxism in the United States, at no university. I had not read Marx, not even when I wrote this final chapter of the second volume on violence. In this chapter I only get to the stage of the theory of social conflict. But our attitude and intention as sociologists talking about this phenomenon demonstrated that there was a

need for an inner transformation, of feeling, of attitude, and this is what we called commitment. And Camilo takes it on and transmits it to his own interpretation and afterwards to his life, his self-giving. The idea of commitment to the problems of society in order to solve them, first to understand them and then to solve them, is one of the roots of participatory research.

Does the political mediation appear in this search to solve the social problems?

Fals Borda: *Yes, because at that time it was obvious, as it is said in the book on violence, that violence begins because of the existing political problems. And then the economic problems are added to them, and later the religious problems, the cultural problems and all kinds of problems, until it gets to the drug traffic. In other words, violence grew as a phenomenon with many heads, in a hydra that you could only cut off from below, from the neck, which is what no government has ever wanted to do. The recommendations addressed directly this neck of the hydra. To cut it off. This was the commitment, to do things thoroughly and well. However, this was one of the roots of PAR. And this we owe to Camilo Torres Restrepo.*

To a large extent the category of commitment has ethical roots, in the previous tradition of social science nobody had used it...

Fals Borda: *Sartre, however, used it later. I think Marx did talk about a commitment to the working class. I do think that in the 19th century there was more awareness of the need of change than in the 20th. Precisely because of this technician or scientist eagerness on the part of the social scientists, of my teachers, who said you had to be scientific according to the model of natural science and forgot that the physicists, whom they worshipped so much, were already making that leap to what we later called the andropic principle and then to the principle of the quantum physicists, the principle of indetermination. Now, if the physicists begin to talk about indetermination, what is left of that objectivity, of that accuracy and measurement of the phenomena they observe? Zero. They have been much more honest, much clearer*

in scientific terms than the sociologists, who should have recognized this obvious fact, that the observable is not absolute and has interpretation and re-interpretation. Now even the mathematicians are looking for interpretation.

Did the first research experiences with the peasants take place after you left the National University?

Fals Borda: *No, it was before. The Communal Action is born with the Saucío School. This was a child of the research I had conducted about the Andean peasants. This experience was made in 1958.*

How did the Communal Action emerge?

Fals Borda: *Partly from the news that something similar was being done in the Philippines through the Inter-American Housing Center (CINVA), of which I was an adviser. There it was realized that the action of the organized community could solve many problems by employing what was then called local labor. At the CINVA they had invented a machine for manufacturing better bricks that lowered the cost of buildings. This was really an invention to make the social housing about which people talk so much. We all learned to make bricks. Two experiments were conducted together with CINVA, one in Tabio and another one in Saucío. The one in Saucío was successful, the other one in Tabio was not. Why? I believe it was because of the relationship of love that I had with the people. Because of the ties. There are two works that I have written with love: one is Campesinos de los Andes [Peasants of the Andes] and the other one is Historia doble de la Costa [Double History of the Coast]. The school in Saucío was built in a record period of three months with that little machine that CINVA had brought from the Philippines and with the engineer who was also hired by CINVA. He was an excellent architect who made the floor plan of the school that is still standing there, it's a national monument. The Communal Action was born there, the first Board of Communal Action in Colombia was the board of that school in Saucío. What happened then? That experience remained there, and when I was already in the Ministry I took several ministers there for them to learn. I took the minis-*

ter of Agriculture, Augusto Espinosa, and his successors, as well as the minister of Education, Abel Naranjo Villegas. He was the first one to give Communal Action the green light. What was it that he did? Abel Naranjo Villegas, Education minister of the Lleras Camargo administration, discovered the importance of communal action and learned from the experience that was being made there. And then he asked Camilo and myself to write the rough draft of the decree that contained the first official regulation of the Communal Action.

How was the research with peasants continued from the School of Sociology?

Fals Borda: When I entered the National University, the peasant experience in Saucio was already going on since 1950, and of course I introduced in the School of Sociology the practice of going out to the field in order to investigate the social, economic, political and cultural reality. In this respect we were very different from all existing Departments and Schools. There was always a lot of resistance on their part because they were very purist in the classical, scientific European tradition, which means discussion of ideas, mostly in the routine communication of ideas, of knowledge, but then this insistence of Sociology on going out to the field gradually broke that resistance, that Cartesian eurocentrism. This came to the point where very direct relations were established between the National University and the government in the area of social development policies, of land reform; this was something very important, because the policy of the Colombian Land Reform Institute (INCORA) got its first research and institutional support from the School of Sociology of the National University. The first contract was signed with the purpose of investigating the land problem in Cunday, Tolima. So we went there on horseback with the students, and this was an expedition, there was a formal contract. This meant a direct participation of the university in the search for solutions to concrete problems. It was the beginning of this new concept that meanwhile has already gained a lot of strength, which is the concept of participatory university, a worldwide movement that connects the university to society.

The topic of land reform is affirmed as a concern in your research field from that time on...

Fals Borda: *Yes, I have always been a rural sociologist, this was confirmed with more certainty by my profession. After getting into the knowledge of reality with Camilo and other professors we began to feel the tensions between what we had learned and what we saw in the field. There is a tension that was solved in favor of new models, of alternative paradigms, and this alternative paradigm, which was no longer Cartesian, was little by little consolidated in the Participatory Action Research (PAR). In the beginning I was against considering it as an alternative paradigm, in order not to frighten even more the routine intellectuals and academicians. Because to say, "What about another paradigm, a different way of understanding reality?" and to say that Descartes was not right, that Hegel was wrong, etc., no... this was too daring. And I thought that PAR was first and foremost a research method rather than a whole complex of knowledge; it was method, it was work in the field and with results that were much different from what it would have been with an application of functional positivism. This doctrine or this form was then taken to the World Congress in 1977 in Cartagena.*

Was it being produced in this relationship between university and reality?

Fals Borda: *In 1968, after Camilo's death and the university crisis, the strikes, etc., I withdrew from the university; I gave it completely up and didn't return for 18 years. This was in 1970, and I did it in protest against academic routine and the lack of support to that which we thought should be researched and transformed, because the interesting thing there was the emphasis on action, on investigation for transformation. This was our scheme: research what for? Well, to transform. Why? Because there is injustice, there is exploitation, and the world has to be more satisfactory, particularly the Colombian part of the world. In this was a crisis in the School. I stayed 18 years outside of the university constructing PAR.*

Was it a search outside academia?

Fals Borda: *Yes, totally outside. This idea was not even born in Bogotá, but in Geneva, Switzerland, with a group of Colombians who used to meet in my office when I was the research director of the United Nations' Institute for Social Development, whose headquarters were in Geneva. I was already gone since 1968, a short while after Camilo's death. This was the same year when I married María Cristina. In Geneva we Colombians – there were five of us, anthropologists, sociologists and economists – managed to create the “La Rosca” Foundation of Social Research and Action, with the idea of returning to Colombia in order to put it into practice. And this is what happened. I completed my two years term in Geneva and came here.*

How was the group made up?

Fals Borda: *I was the only sociologist in formal terms; the other members were Víctor Daniel Bonilla, an anthropologist, and Jorge Ucrós, and Gonzalo Castillo, who was a theologian. It's interesting that two of these comrades were former Presbyterian ministers and myself too; the most interesting thing is that half of that group of six social scientists were Presbyterians. The other one was Augusto Libreros, an economist, who was professor at the University of the Valley. This was a very strong intellectual challenge that forced us even to study Marxism and to put it into practice; Marxism was our alternative paradigm.*

And was Freire also in Geneva?

Fals Borda: *He was also there. All that converged in Geneva, and it was a very important ecumenical moment. But once we had developed that, let's say the intention, we decided to come back to Colombia in order to put it into practice. We returned by the end of 1969 with an expectation, and the “La Rosca” Foundation of Social Research was formalized here in Bogotá. With this decision we started to put into practice together in Colombia, and the methodology was developed because of this decision to go out again to the field, now without the ballast of the academic institution, without the stock-*

ade of the academia. We were completely autonomous. But how did we manage to do it? With the support of the American Presbyterian Church and of the Dutch government. This was the first time that a European government gave direct support to an NGO. The Colombian peasants and the "La Rosca" Foundation of Social Research took on the ethical responsibility of managing the funds. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Development has continued to support us, to the point that they paid our air fares to the Second Congress in Cartagena in 1997.

On the other hand we had the support of the churches. Because of the contact of the three Presbyterians this became definite. This was the moment when in the United States a very special committee was constituted. It was called Self-Development of the Peoples of the Presbyterian Church, which also broke with its tradition of supporting North American missionaries. And that was the big problem, because the American missionaries in Colombia who previously had gotten funds directly from the Presbyterian Church accused us of being Communists and said that for this reason the Church should stop supporting us. This was done mainly by those who were in Córdoba, where I was working with the peasants. We had divided the country: I was in the Atlantic Coast, Augusto in the Pacific Coast, Gonzalo in Tolima, Víctor Daniel in the Valley and the south. This is where we started, and after that we entered other rather risky fields, such as the magazine Revista Alternativa, with Gabriel García Márquez.

At that moment the academia... to have broken with the academia in order to run the risk of constructing something different...

Fals Borda: The extraordinary thing was that we got enough resources, both from a Church and a government... two pillars. And then there was the Revista Alternativa with the support of Gabriel García Márquez and other intellectuals. The best Colombian journalists were there, and it was a school, a school with a new approach, a new way of presenting and interpreting the news... For me as an academician this was a big challenge... they rejected my first articles because they were too heavy... My section was called "Forbidden History", the new history of Colombia, because it was more daring

than the one advocated by Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, and many people preferred this more critical approach, but of course the two approaches were convergent. There was a whole cascade of events that began to change the meaning of the lives of many.

In the work with the peasants in the Coast, whose major purpose was of methodological nature, what was the greatest finding or the greatest confirmation that you got for the later research proposal?

Fals Borda: *The insistence that theory and practice should go hand in hand, not as separate stages or moments. There had to be an interpretative rhythm, but of a common process, of one and the same process. This is what we have called the reflection-action-rhythm, a nursery which was later developed in practice and the concrete effects, in the application of knowledge. This was the radical difference vis-à-vis the academia. Because the basic question was: knowledge what for and knowledge for whom? These questions were not asked by the academia.*

Where did the idea of organizing the 1977 Congress come from?

Fals Borda: *I think it came from the international relations that "La Rosca" developed from 1970 onwards. Through my trips abroad I discovered persons and institutions that ended up being very convenient for that. I met people such as Mohammad Anisar Rahman, who is co-author of the book Action and Knowledge. He's an economist from Bangladesh living in exile. He was the director of the participation programs of the WLO. This was limited participation, directed participation, manipulated, tutored participation. The contact with Rahman led things toward an authentic participation. We began to hear that there were similar attempts in several countries, and the interesting thing was that all these countries were from the south, from the Third World: in India, in Mexico, in Egypt, in Brazil...*

It was like a stone-pit...

Fals Borda: *Yes, because even Stavenhagen was in it. This is when he wrote his great article on “de-colonizing social science” for the North-American and English anthropologists. It was published in their official journal and caused a scandal! And in this article he already quotes “La Rosca” and my work as well as the emphasis on action and practice. At that time he was in Mexico, and in Brazil there was Paulo Freire, although he lived in Geneva...*

Although the contact with Freire wasn't permanent, there was a mutual influence, of one on the other...

Fals Borda: *Yes, of course, and soon practice itself forced us to see each other, as when we supported the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, for instance. We went there together. Afterwards in Africa. Another tendency also emerged, the Finnish one with Marja Liisa Swantz. All this took place during the same years, from 1969 onwards. There was a kind of “international telepathy”, a coincidence. Marja Liisa had gone from Finland to Tanzania. She is a sociologist and is still teaching at the University of Helsinki. In Tanzania she also sowed the seeds. She's one of the great pioneers of PAR in the world. In Asia we had Rajesh Tandon in India. In Mexico we had Stavenhagen and others, and many more in Brazil, in Chile, in Colombia.*

Let's come back to the 1977 World Congress in Cartagena...

Fals Borda: *After discovering these five groups from several countries, we persuaded UNESCO to fund the Congress, along with the Bank of the Republic of Colombia. These two institutions funded the Congress. I had a proposal, my report on praxis, a chapter that later became part of the book *Por la praxis: el problema de cómo investigar la realidad para transformarla* [For Praxis: The Problem of How to Research Reality in order to Transform it], which was then translated into several languages and reproduced in Europe. A Swiss whose name is Heinz Moser participated in the Cartagena Congress. After it he created a working group in Germany and Austria to translate our papers into German.*

Out of Cartagena came a discussion on militant research that reached Nicaragua...

Fals Borda: *Yes, the issue of militant research was discussed in Cartagena on the initiative of the Venezuelans, of Roberto Briceño, who is still there at Central University of Venezuela, where he is research director. The militancy that he had in mind was mainly Gramscianism, but it was interpreted as political militancy, mainly of the Communist party kind, which caused resistance. Then the tone was lowered until it got to the level of popular, grass-roots participation, citizen participation.*

From the Congress up to the present, what have been the key elements in the research proposal that you consider relevant?

Fals Borda: *After the experience of "La Rosca" we have the magazine Revista Alternativa, the books that were published in Punta de Lanza: we published good books: La historia de la cuestión agraria en Colombia [The History of the Land Issue in Colombia], La subversión en Colombia [Subversion in Colombia]; I published new editions of Hombre y la tierra en Boyacá [Man and the Land in Boyacá] and Campesinos de Los Andes [Peasants of the Andes]. This was a time of writing, reflecting, systematizing. After that came the Nicaraguan Revolution and the connections with the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL), as well as with Freire. In Cartagena there were many popular educators. Since then popular education, research and social science have come closer to each other. This found expression at CEAAL's world assembly for adult education in Buenos Aires in 1985. A very interesting discussion on popular participation and research occurred there. This discussion with Rodrigues Brandão from Brazil was published in a book by the "Instituto del Hombre" in Uruguay. This was a wonderful booklet because it summarized the status quaestionis up to then.*

What about the work of the Double History?

Fals Borda: *Yes, the last volume was published in 1986. I had gone back to the area and I was in it. I spent 12 years working in the Coast. I moved to Mompox, to Sincelejo and to Montería. This was also the time when we were put in prison because of the persecution of the M-19. I was in Mompox working on the local history and María Cristina was here, she continued here at the University, in the Department of Social Work of the School of Human Sciences. María Cristina spent 14 months in prison and I was released after two weeks due to the international pressure on president Turbay Ayala. It was a pile of telegrams from all over the world protesting against my imprisonment, so Turbay gave the order to release me quickly. But it was very Machiavellian, because he released me and kept María Cristina in prison, as it was a way of punishment. For me the decade of the eighties consisted of some more research on the field, but also of reflection and systematization of the methodology, which resulted in La historia doble de la Costa [The Double History of the Coast], my magnum opus... I went to work on the field with everything that we had in conceptual and methodological terms. I was able to include this in channel b of the Double History. At the same time, however, the territorial movement, the territorial organization emerged. This emerged with Mompox. In 1986 a series of regional and local meetings were held. While I was in Mompox, I realized how absurd were the internal administrative borders in Colombia. I'm referring to the political map. Mompox was in the harbor of a river that belonged to Bolívar, and on the other side of the river was the Department of Magdalena, and the nine villages located in the other side of the river, i.e. in the side of Magdalena, did not belong to Bolívar and were located next to Mompox. Their children attended the schools in Mompox, the main market was in Mompox, they crossed the river everyday back and forth, in short, it was a space that in social, economic, cultural, educational and religious terms belonged to Mompox. I kept saying, "This country is very poorly distributed in its territorial divisions," so we began to propose, together with the local intellectuals, the teachers of the local schools in Mompox, the creation of an independent department: the "Departamento del Río", by separating sections from Magdalena, Bolívar and Cesar. This was the beginning of the movement, it began with the teachers. They continued to be my main source of political support. For instance, at the elec-*

tion for the Constituent Assembly I was a candidate in the list of the M-19, and 90% of the teachers of the Mompox Province voted for me: 90%! Thus a voice of protest was raised from the province: "We want a new department with autonomous provinces!" As a consequence, several meetings are held with the teachers, mainly throughout the Mompox depression. The first one was in Mompox, the second in Magangué, the third in San Marcos and the fourth in El Banco. Thus an extremely powerful voice of the teachers was raised, as well as of the politicians who began to join this movement for independence, for autonomy of the provinces. A big meeting was organized in El Banco, bringing together representatives of all those villages, and this is where the motto *The Insurgence of the Provinces* came up. This is the title of a book that I brought to the university when I returned to it in 1988. It was my first book at the Institute for Political Studies and International Relations (IEPRI) of the National University and the second publication of the Institute. I highlight this book because it was like the spark that put the prairie on fire, asking for a new territorial organization in Colombia. It was the voice of the province.

This is what brought you to the National Constituent Assembly two years later...

Fals Borda: *Ideas have a dynamics of their own, one just sows them. But there's also something bad to this, and this is what I see at this moment in regard to PAR. It was sown with the purpose of being radical, for radical changes in society, for a profound transformation of things. But once it is established, when it is institutionalized at the universities and adopted everywhere as part of a cathedra, then the idea is so to say castrated and one is no longer very satisfied.*

By turning it into a classroom topic, you kill the dynamism it once had...

Fals Borda: *That's why I have insisted that PAR should not be taught in a classroom, but to go out into the field and should be continued in the course of time. It shouldn't be subject to the formal rules of the academia because*

this contradicts its entire philosophy. If the university and the professors are committed to keep the continuity of the field work, it's OK. And this is the first rule I have set for what is now called participatory university, which is different from university extension. This is the meaning of the discussion I have just proposed to the rector of the University, Palacios, in the letter I sent him. He talks about university extension as an activity in which the university goes out to see what's going on, but without any commitment. The idea of participatory university implies a PAR that is faithful to the original insights.

What other developments has PAR had?

Fals Borda: Actually the idea has been enriched from many angles. In the philosophical angle we have the English school with Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, who speak of the participating worldview. They have worked out this idea, which is rather comprehensive and of course provides orientation. This is a philosophical school that moves beyond Husserl's phenomenological school, which was our starting point. With the philosophy of the participatory worldview, it affirms us further in what we mean philosophically.

On the other hand, as far as the practical side is concerned, the school of action research came up, the school of Sussex in England, with Robert Chambers. This is the quick and easy application of action research to solve concrete, short-term problems. They call it Quick Participatory Diagnosis (RPD). These are localized actions. Chambers was in Cartagena in 1997 explaining it. Rather than being divergent, it's convergent, but gives PAR a more practical aspect, and it was even the bridge that brought PAR to the World Bank. The World Bank had to create an internal participation group in order to impose its rules of popular participation on the agreements and contracts it signed with governments. Today there is no World Bank agreement that does not contain a clause on the application of PAR or the quick diagnosis. They begin with the diagnosis and then continue with PAR, if they want to be consistent. And on this side we had the addition of the wonderful experience the Australian educators made with the Aborigenes. This was also an

extraordinary thing because the problem of the Aborigenes in Australia was worse than the situation of the Indians in Colombia. They were destroying this people, this culture, until these educators, Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, discovered PAR. How did they discover it? Through the book For Praxis, the article of that book of mine that had been translated into English. They translated it into the aboriginal languages, and this is how the idea of the living school with aboriginal teachers came to transform the situation in Northern Australia.

This is action research in the school...

Fals Borda: In my view, one significant branch is in Australia. Besides, Kemmis has a very intense contact with Spain. They invited him all the time to deliver conferences on this kind of participatory and emancipatory education. Another consequence is what has been called process management, which means getting closer to companies and economists and has its main expression in Norway. This is the group from Scandinavia that came to Cartagena under the leadership of Stephen Toulmin and Bjorn Gustavsen. They had just published the book Beyond Theory to bring it to the 1997 Congress.

The Congresses have been propulsive forces for the idea, in this way innovative elements are presented...

Fals Borda: That's the way it is. The first one of this series took place in Calgary, Canada, in 1984. There I found out about what they were doing with PAR in Australia. A delegation of Aborigenes came, and it turned out that they knew everything about our ideas. This was impressive. Then they invited me to go to Australia. The Aborigenes welcomed me there and made me son of the clan, which was beautiful! They made the ceremony for me. I spent a week with them, and they invited me to fish with them. We are all descendants of crocodiles, and they gave me a very beautiful name, Gamba, which means the encounter of waters, the water of the sea with the fresh water of the rivers.

Since all things generate criticisms, some of them are positive and lead to revisions, others perhaps not...

Fals Borda: *Yes, once the university had adopted PAR: the first one was Calgary, in Canada, they started to co-opt the idea. This happened very quickly in Europe and the United States.*

What happened in this co-optation of the proposal by the academia?

Fals Borda: *The corporation ends up gaining, the university ends up gaining, the institution ends up gaining and PAR loses part of its strength. But this is something that I cannot avoid, because one sows the seed and it acquires its own dynamics, it falls on good soil, it falls on bad soil, it falls on unfertile ground, it grows or fails to grow according to these circumstances or the contexts, and this goes beyond the strength of any person. Every university or every intellectual group has the full right to adapt this idea to the circumstances of its own work, its needs in terms of implications, transformations... At these moments I do think that there are new developments, related to the application. The last Congress in Pretoria, for instance, put much more emphasis on process management than on popular participation, differently from the Congress in Australia that had emphasized popular participation.*

Each Congress emphasizes something...

Fals Borda: *Pretoria emphasized process management, which is also an Australian trend. Process management is related to the administrative aspect in institutions, in companies, in governments, how you put all these ideas into practice in the traditional administrative, practical and institutional context.*

What are at present the axes of the debate, the key points that research should focus on?

Fals Borda: *Well, in Australia I insisted that one of the central problems at this moment for the successive congresses was the problem of co-optation.*

What does co-optation mean? What consequences does it have on theory and practice? This is one of the foci for debate. The other one is that of the participatory university. Because this is an internal challenge, which means that the university becomes something different from the academic, German, Christian model of the 19th century. The impact of PAR should lead to the elimination of the schools and departments in the universities. Education should be done with the thinking turned towards the world, life, the context, rather than the academia. It means to educate in the real problems. It forces to change the schools and departments within the university and to create structures on the basis of social problems and cultural contexts, rather than on the basis of the institution's formal problems.

There is a level of research that has to do with the academia and this is the basis on which it should be discussed...

Fals Borda: *But by transforming the academia, which amounts to an application of PAR, an internal self-application.*

Are there other topics for debate?

Fals Borda: *The third one would be to really examine whether we are facing a new paradigm or not. I think it's time to do it. In 1977 I was against this mainly for reasons of, let's say, prudence, of modesty, because it wasn't a fair competition to Hegel, to Kant, to Habermas. But in 1997 in Cartagena some people insisted on it. There was a Swiss there, Heinz Moser, who said openly, "We're in the face of a new paradigm in social science and we've got to work." He said it very clearly, but it never had any repercussion. Now I do believe it's time to do it.*

A paradigm that also has to be revitalized itself...

Fals Borda: *Reason's idea of participating worldview is a step in that direction, towards this alternative paradigm. The steps are already being made, that's the way I see it, and this will be a very important revolution in the sci-*

entific conception of all sciences. This revolution can already be seen, even at the National University. Take the mathematicians, for instance. One could ask, "Well, what does mathematics have to do with PAR?". A lot, so much so that they proposed a new discipline: ethnomathematics. What is their problem? How to teach in order not to scare, and secondly, how to communicate what mathematicians discover without the jargon that separates them from the rest of humankind. So they got some indications that PAR had responses to these concerns, and it's true. The problem of communication and the problem of vital teaching, of a teaching committed to reality.

What Stenhouse calls significant learning...

Fals Borda: Clearly, since to educate means to research. There are six groups of ethnomathematicians in the world, one of them in Colombia, at the School of Mathematics of the National University. Professor Myriam Acevedo told her students to think about the teaching of mathematics to the indigenous people in the Amazon region. They wrote a terrific thesis that has more of an anthropological than a mathematical character. It was for the master's degree at the School of Sciences. This was four months ago. I was appointed as one of the examiners of the thesis together with the mathematicians: what about that? Well, they approved the thesis with honors. This opens up a new perspective, and we're going in that direction, as I have already insisted on the continuity. They have already appointed another group of young mathematicians for another thesis in the Amazon region.

If the university wants to get closer to reality, it has to open itself to other paces and times...

Fals Borda: Look at the positive symptoms at the National University, which I had to leave because at that time the climate there was not good. But later, when I returned, after 1988, the Program of Relationships between the National University and the Community (PRIAC) was carried out, which initially involved mainly social workers and sociologists. Afterwards the agronomists, the medical school, the nursing school, the dentistry joined it.

The possibility of realising the potential of the university was brought about by doing work at the margin of the university, from the outside, rather than inside.

Fals Borda: This was the secret formula. I think it was all right this way. Now, as an old person, I see it in a relaxed manner. The most satisfactory thing was that last year the dean of the School of Human Sciences invited me to give the opening class. He brought the whole School of Human Sciences together, all disciplines under the same roof to listen to a professor. This is when I talked about the new paradigms, and then I let it out. The lecture is published, because they made a booklet that sells out every time they print it, and it is also a chapter of the book on the Colombian Crisis. I was very pleased with it. Then came the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the Sociology Department. Then the professors who were there did talk about PAR.

The proposal is now in the hands of other people who will continue enriching it...

Fals Borda: Although I believe that this evolution in the Human Sciences was more due to the pressure made by the students than by the professors, more from below than from above. There are new professors now, they don't belong to my generation. They are excellent professors, very concerned with things, as Gabriel Restrepo, for instance. He has been one of the great professors in the internal evolution of the School of Sociology.

About Fals Borda

Orlando Fals Borda, Colombian sociologist, researcher and historian. He is one of the creators of Participatory Action Research as an alternative paradigm of social science in Latin America. Founder of the School of Sociology at the National University of Colombia together with Camilo Torres Re-

strepto. He was the second chairperson of the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL), after Paulo Freire.

Some of his main works are:

Campeños de los Andes (1955)

Revolución inconclusa en América Latina (1970)

Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual (1970)

Conocimiento y poder popular (1985)

Historia doble de la Costa (1979-1986)

Por la praxis: cómo investigar la realidad para transformarla

About the interviewers

Lola Cendales, Educator-researcher of the working team of Educational Dimension (Bogotá, Colombia).

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