

In from the cold? Reflections on participatory research from 1970-2005

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In From the Cold?
Reflections on Participatory Research
From 1970 - 2005

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Introduction

Participatory Research is a term which was first articulated in Tanzania in the early 1970s to describe a variety of community-based approaches to the creation of knowledge. Taken together these approaches combine social investigation, education and action in an interrelated process. The International Council for Adult Education provided a home in 1976 for what became the International Participatory Research Network, the means by which the ideas and practices of participatory research became more widely visible. Participatory research was a concept which, unlike most contemporary research paradigms, originated in the majority world. It originated in the rapidly expanding networks of non-governmental organisations in the 1980s and 90s. It has been the research approach of choice in many of the social movement interventions of the past 20 years. Participatory research and its sister concept participatory action research have in the past 15 years been taken up in many universities around the world both as a teaching subject and as a research method for graduate studies. One might say that, participatory research has come “in from the cold”, that it has come in from the margins to become an accepted member of the academic family.

This article explores the origins of the concept of participatory research, particularly from the vantage point of my own involvement in the movement. I am most often associated with what has become known as the liberatory school of participatory action research. The purpose of this talk is also to interrogate what “coming in from the cold” really means.

The International Participatory Research Network which was

associated with the International Council for Adult Education was begun in 1976. It expanded throughout the late 1970s and 80's and was responsible for giving visibility to a set of concepts and practices which have continued to stimulate social movement and social policy scholars and activists up to today. This article is highly personal and is a first effort on my part to put into print my reflections on the early period of the network and some of the persons and issues involved. Others will have other memories which will deepen or clarify what we did in those days already 30 years ago, but here at least is modest contribution to start with.

I served as International Coordinator of the International Participatory Research Network from 1977-to 1980 when Rajesh Tandon of the now widely known PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia...also 'dear one' in Hindi) took over. I moved on to serve as Secretary-General of the International Council for Adult Education from 1979-1991. From 1991 to 2001 I was a member of the Adult Education Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. From 2001 to the present I have been associated with the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Throughout this period, I have maintained an engagement in the issues and practices of participatory research.

Early Influences: Looking Back

I worked in Tanzania from 1970-1974 at the Institute of Adult Education of the University of Dar es Salaam. I had done my Doctoral studies in International and Comparative Education at UCLA and had written my Doctoral thesis on adult education and the development of socialism in Tanzania. My position in the Institute of Adult Education was that of Research Officer involved in a wide variety of research and

evaluation studies related to the activities of the Institute itself. I was responsible for teaching research and evaluation methods in the Diploma course for adult educators as well as having responsibility for the evaluation design and implementation of many of the large scale adult education programmes that were conducted at the time by the Institute. I was also active in disseminating research results in the field of adult education both nationally and internationally.

The most profound early influences on me were the ideas, strategies and programmes of the Tanzanian government of the day articulated most effectively by the late President Julius K. Nyerere. Nyerere, himself a former teacher, had written much about the capacity of education in an independent nation to unchain people just as it had been used by the colonial powers to enchain a people. The philosophy of Ujamaa and Self-Reliance, concepts of what we would call today Afro-centric development and local economic development were open challenges to the way that the rich countries saw the world. Tanzania and Tanzanians were in so many ways telling the world that the 'emperor has no clothes'. Nyerere and a generation of articulate and gifted leaders such as Paul Mhaiki in adult education challenged all who were working in Tanzania, nationals and expatriates alike, to look through a different lens to understand education, agriculture, development, history, culture and eventually for some of us even research and evaluation methods. We were all encouraged to 'meet the masses more' and while on a day to day basis this was difficult to understand, over time many of us were profoundly transformed.

In September of 1971 we had a visit by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian intellectual, to Tanzania. I was responsible for organizing that visit and for working with him during his stay. One of the things that we asked him to talk about were his ideas about research methods. Most readers will

remember Chapter Three in Pedagogy of the Oppressed where Paulo writes about what he called "Thematic Investigation". In his account he began to talk about understanding research as engaged practice, not a neutral dispassionate act but an act of solidarity and active support. One of the things that I did for the Institute was to edit and arrange for the publication of his talk as part of our new series called, Studies in Adult Education. His talk was distributed as simply, "A Talk by Paulo Freire".

Some passages from that 1971 talk,

First of all I must underline the point that the central question that I think that we have to discuss here is not the methodological one. In my point of view...it is necessary to perceive in a very clear way the ideological background which determines the very methodology. It is impossible for me to think about neutral education, neutral methodology, neutral science or even neutral God.

In social science it is easy to see that the ideology determines the methodology (of searching) or of knowing.

I think that adult education in Tanzania should have as one of its main tasks to invite people to believe in themselves. It should invite people to believe that they have knowledge. The people must be challenged to discover their historical existence through the critical analysis of their cultural production: their art and their music. One of the characteristics of colonization is that in order for the colonizers to oppress the people easily they convinced themselves that the colonized have a mere biological life and never an historical existence. (Freire, 71:1-5)

I have elsewhere described how I was also influenced by my own mistakes and false starts as a neophyte researcher (Hall, 71:5). One of my first tasks for the Institute was to do a survey of adult education needs for the Ministry of Adult Education which was setting up new programmes in all of the districts. In brief I found that the survey approach which I had

used did not produce any useful results. In fact I found that I learned more about what rural Tanzanians were interested in learning by sitting several evenings just listening to stories in the village bar than I had through a more seemingly scientific approach. And while I did not 'see the light' at any single moment, the accumulation of experiences and influences gradually led me like many others to thinking about knowledge and knowledge creation in new ways.

The work of Marja Liisa Swantz was another early influence. Marja Liisa Swantz was a Finnish born social scientist attached to the Bureau for Resource and Land Use Productivity (BRALUP) of the University of Dar es Salaam. She and a group of students from the University of Dar es Salaam including Kemal Mustapha who was later to become the African coordinator for participatory research were working in an engaged way with women and others in the coastal region of Tanzania. Through this practice she and the others began to articulate what she called "participant research". In an early BRALUP paper published in 1974 she notes,

Research strategies which developing countries such as Tanzania have followed have generally been patterned in the Universities of developed countries.

In planning research on a subject related to development one has to first answer some questions: Who are the beneficiaries of this research? What are the aims? Who is going to be involved? What approach and methods of research should be used so that the research would bring the greatest possible gains for development?

Research and researcher can become agents of development and change in the process while the research is being done... (Swantz, 1974:1-4)

During 1974-75, I was a visiting fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. It was at that time that

I began to find that people in many other countries were thinking along similar lines as those of us in Tanzania. Francisco Vio Grossi in Chile, Rajesh Tandon in India, even researchers in England and Europe. The connection between research, politics and action had been opened up never to be closed again. It was during that period at Sussex that I compiled a special issue of the journal Convergence on the theme of what I labelled 'Participatory Research'. That term was used because it seemed to be the best common description of the various approaches that were described within the issue. While I had begun to learn about the long traditions in Europe of action research, and Maria Liisa Swantz had been using 'participant research' to describe this approach for several years, the choice of the term 'participatory research' was first articulated simply as a descriptive term for a collection of varied approaches which shared a participatory ethos.

The first idea that something like an international network might be possible or welcome came with the response to the publication of the special 1975 issue of Convergence. The adult education community and related community development and activists bought out all the copies of the journal for the first time in the history of the journal. Requests for copies poured in from all over the world and the small item in my lead article inviting persons who were interested in exchanging information about their activities went from a trickle to a stream to a river. It was clear to me that many people in the majority world and people working with or for marginalized persons in the rich countries were actively engaged in research projects which were very different from the standards of the day in most of the universities of the world.

The next source of energy towards a network in this field came via the First World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education which took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1976. I served as

Conference Secretary and arranged for one of the sessions of the conference to deal with a questioning of the then orthodox research methodologies. Helen Callaway of Oxford University and Kathleen Rockhill of the United States both presented papers putting forward more qualitative and more ethnographic approaches to adult education. In the debates and committees which arose from the Dar es Salaam conference, a recommendation was made to the world adult education community that, "adult educators should be given the opportunity to learn about and share their experiences in participatory research" (Hall and Kidd, 1978). Important for the next steps in the eventual development of the Participatory Research Network was the fact that Ted Jackson, an activist adult educator from Canada was a participant at the Dar es Salaam conference as part of a study-travel course organized by OISE in Canada.

By then I was living in Toronto and working full time as the Research Officer for the International Council for Adult Education. Roby Kidd, the Secretary-General of the ICAE, had agreed that in return for organizing the Dar es Salaam World Assembly, he would support my interests in developing what I was calling the Participatory Research Project. The PR project was begun by myself, Ted Jackson and the late dian marino. As I mentioned, Ted had been working for several years as field coordinator for Frontier College in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada. Frontier College, Canada's oldest adult education institution had a long history of community engagement in learning and social action. Ted had a deep commitment to grass roots solutions, a prodigious talent for writing nearly perfect reports without revisions and an interest in getting involved with some kind of international networking. dian marino, was a graphic artist, printmaker and activist who read philosophical and theoretical texts the way many of us read mystery novels. Both Ted and dian were doctoral students in adult education at the University of Toronto. And however I

had imagined our work together, we quickly became a team and worked together as equals.

Our first decision was that we were not going to support or create an international network without being engaged in the practices ourselves. We took very seriously the critique that researchers in the rich countries created careers through projects in the majority world without ever taking the responsibility to analyze and take action in their own countries first. We noted that our first goal was to become engaged in a variety of participatory research projects or struggles in our own community and our own part of the world. Somewhat later in that year we were joined by Deborah Barndt, a photographer-sociologist, who had just returned from her own work and Doctoral studies in Peru. She was interested in joining our project. She shared our interests in the capacity of ordinary people to create knowledge and broadened our collective vision about the use of art, video, photography and music as part of the research and education process.

With a modest grant from the Hazen Foundation of New Haven, Connecticut, USA, we organized our first workshop in the fall of 1976 for mostly Canadian researchers to talk about the application of participatory research approaches in the Canadian contexts. It was the first time that we tried to articulate our vision in a collective form and see if there were others who would resonate with what we were doing. Jack Pearpoint, then President of Frontier College at our first meeting. Jack London, a radical adult educator from Berkeley California was there and 2-3 others along with Ted, dian and myself. I have not been able to find a copy of that first report, but what I remember is that Jack London, after hearing about how we proposed to fund a research collective doing activist research for working class or other oppressed groups and after having remained silent for nearly two days said, "Beware of cockroach capitalism".

The Cartagena Conference of April 1977

Paz Buttedahl, the Latin American programme officer for the ICAE had met Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia and found out from him that he was planning a world conference on "Action Research" which sounded very much like the kind of work that I had spoken of from Tanzania, England and now Canada. I was invited to present a paper to the April 18-24 meeting in Cartagena which was one of the most impressive intellectual experiences of my life. Orlando Fals Borda and many of his colleagues in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America had made decisions to use their intellectual skills and connections to strengthen the political movements associated with revolution and democracy of the time. Working as scholar activists these Latin American intellectuals had amassed a set of important experiences. Orlando Fals Borda through his links with the International Sociological Association had met others elsewhere who shared these visions. So to Cartagena came radical intellectuals from many parts of the world to debate new directions for the late 1970's and 80s. Orlando's profound vision of a science of the common people was at times sharply criticized by colleagues who felt that a more orthodox Marxist understanding of the role of an intellectual vanguard was the way to work. For those of us from the rich minority world what we saw was a sophisticated, committed group of activist scholars or militant intellectuals who totally and efficiently dismissed for once and for all the pretention of detached positivist science. The work of Fals Borda himself, of persons like Paul Oquist (writing on the epistemology of Action Research), of Ton and Vera Gianotten of Peru and the Netherlands, of Xavier Albo of Bolivia and so many other gave me and through me others in our group a huge burst of energy and enthusiasm. I sat with Orlando Fals Borda on a chair in one of the large halls and asked him for his support for a network which would respect the values and energies which had brought so many to

Cartagena. He was gracious and generous in his support but wanted to make sure that the countries of the majority world would be given the dominant role in driving the network which we were going to call participatory research. Orlando preferred the use of the term action research at the time, but some time later perhaps through interaction with the Latin American network of participatory research, he began to refer to this kind of work as 'participatory action research'. He was the first person, to my knowledge to ever use that precise combination of words.

In 1991 a book was published in the United States using the title "Participatory Action Research" without ever citing the work of Fals Borda, myself, Tandon, Brown, Swantz, McGuire or any of the thousands of both Northern and Majority world writers who had been using the same term. I was told that the term had been used in the late 1940's, but upon investigation, I found the following, "A second variety of action research may be called participant action research" (Chein et al, 1948:46). The point however is that this reference is at best an informal descriptive category that was not specifically taken up as a distinct approach to research and in any case does not say participatory. The specific term Participatory Action Research belongs to Fals Borda. I personally use both PAR and PR interchangeably.

Founding of the International Network

Upon return from Cartagena and afterwards a visit to Francisco Vio Grossi, who I had met while at the University of Sussex and who was living by then in Venezuela, I returned to Toronto and we started organizing an international event which would provide a forum to take a decision on starting an international network. That meeting took place in a boy scouts

training camp September 6-11, 1977 in Aurora, Ontario 45 minutes north of Toronto. I don't remember all the persons who came to that meeting but I do remember dian marino, Ted Jackson, Yusuf Kassam (Tanzania), Abdelwahid Yousif (Sudan), Per Stensland (USA), Helen Callaway (UK), Greg Conchelos (Canada), Paz Buttedahl(Canada), Francisco Vio Grossi(Chile), and a colleague from the University of Madras, India named Sundaram.

Among the most important political principles of the network was the insistence that each node or networking group working in the various parts of the world would be autonomous and self-directing. They would each be committed to building an international network but the Toronto group would not be in charge. The Toronto PR Group as it became known was to be one among equals engaged in a variety of community development, participatory research action and reflection activities. And while I was asked to coordinate the international network for the first little while, it was clear that the international coordinator would rotate and that it was more likely or more logically to be based in the majority world where the most intellectual leadership for this work was coming from and continued to come from. It is worth reproducing the definitional statement from that first meeting.

1. PR involves a whole range of powerless groups of people--exploited, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginal.
2. It involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process.
3. The subject of the research originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analyzed and solved by the community.
4. The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the

research are the members of the community.

5. The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development.

6. It is a more scientific method or research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.

7. The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, i.e. a militant rather than a detached observer. (Hall, 1978:5)

Development of the International Network

We deliberately chose the concept of a network for our organizational form. We had discussed ideas such as an international project, an organization, an association, a research council of some kind and others organizational forms. We wanted a structure which was horizontal in power terms, which allowed for and encouraged autonomous locally or regionally accountable nodes. We wanted structures which took the cues from the grass roots rather than the centre, and where power flowed according to the tasks at hand rather than funding, tradition, or imperial world divisions. We were also very much aware that the 'international' was a context which we could use to strengthen our local work and increase visibility for our ideas in the settings where we lived and worked everyday. We were among the first groups to develop and make intentional use of the concept of networking, an organizational form which has since become a nearly universal model for global collaboration.

By 1978 there were five nodes in the network: North America (Toronto- Budd Hall); Asia (New Delhi-Rajesh Tandon); Africa (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania - Yusuf Kassam); Europe (Netherlands - Jan de Vries);

Latin America (Caracas, Venezuela - Francisco Vio Grossi), We organized a series of meetings to increase awareness of our ideas, to deepen our understanding of our work, to build support for others who were trying such work and to show people in our various locations that our ideas had world resonance and relevance. And in all our work we honoured the fact that the majority world had been the intellectual source for these exciting new ways of working and continued to inspire us. We also recognized that our ideas were as relevant in Europe and North America as they were anywhere that people wanted to use research as a contribution to changes in power relations. Our definitions of participatory research were explicit politically, were seen as valid in all parts of the world where unequal power relations persisted, and highlighted the use of cultural approaches to knowing in our work.

1977-1980 saw a series of meetings held in various regions. In 1978 Jan de Vries hosted the first European meeting on Participatory Research at a folkhighschool in Oestgeest, Netherlands. He had written about research in adult education as a kind of guerrilla activity. Tom Lovett of the People's College in Northern Ireland was a participant among others. Francisco Vio Grossi hosted a first Latin American meeting and a meeting of the International PR Coordinators in Caracas at the Universidad Simon Rodriguez. In 1979 there were meetings in New Delhi organized by Rajesh Tandon, at Highlander Research and Education Centre hosted by John Gaventa and in Tanzania hosted by Yusuf Kassam. In 1980 in Ayacucho Peru, Ton and Vera de Wit of the Universidad de Ayachucho hosted a major Latin American networking meeting with the leadership of Francisco Vio Grossi, the Latin American coordinator and Orlando Fals Borda who brought the 'Cartagena stream' fully into the meeting.

It was during this period that we began to see that the ideas and

actions that we were committed to were far from readily accepted by authorities everywhere. While I found myself attacked intellectually by university professors in my field such as William Griffiths of the University of British Columbia, others such as Maria Christina Salazar, Colombian scholar and wife of Orlando Fals Borda, was detained by the police in her country for being perceived as being too close to political movements seeking deep changes for their country. It was during this time that we first used our international network for direct advocacy through a letter writing campaign to try and get Maria Christina released from prison. One of the highlights of our first "International Forum" on Participatory Research which was hosted by Ana Kranjc of Ljubljana, Yugoslavia was the appearance of both Orlando Fals Borda and Maria Christina newly released from prison and attending this as her first activity. The sense of joy which we shared at this moment is impossible to capture in these rather dry notes, but it was a wonderful moment.

There were 50-60 persons at that meeting. Thanks to Thord Erasmie of Linköping University and Jan de Vries of the Netherlands Adult Education Research Institute both the theoretical papers and the case studies have been reproduced (Erasmie, 1980; de Vries, 1980). Key conceptual issues which were discussed and debated in Yugoslavia included: role of the researcher; the idea of organic intellectuals; the nature of participation, the idea of popular knowledge, the relationship of historical materialism to our work and the links between local and broader struggles. It was noted in the summary report of the Forum that,

The conditions for successful application of the participatory research approach relate to complex historical and class forces, and must therefore be carefully assessed in every instance." (ICAE: 1980, 7)

The Participatory Research Group

The Participatory Research Group was the name we eventually took for our North American group. We maintained a close connection to the Secretariat of the International Council for Adult Education, but moved steadily forward as a self-reliant collective of activist research workers and educators. I remained as Coordinator of the group until June of 1979 when I was appointed as Secretary-General of the ICAE at the Meeting of the ICAE Board in Helsinki, Finland. Ted Jackson took over as Coordinator of the PRG, a position which he held I think until 1981, when he moved on the head up a Native Community Economic Development Programme at Trent University. Deborah Barndt took over from Ted Jackson before moving on to the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice. Lynda Yanz made a remarkable contribution to both the ideas of participatory research and the ICAE through her leadership on the issues of the feminist challenge to both participatory research and adult education. She continued the coordination of the PRG until 1990. Alfred Jean Baptiste, working out of East End Literacy in Toronto took over from Lynda in 1990 and while much of the networking functions of the group have been taken up by so many other organizations, he continues to carry out and support others who have interests in this work.

Among those whom I recall as having been members of the Toronto group at different times during the late 1970's are: Kathy Tobias Sullivan, Linda Harisim (now President of TeleLearning in British Columbia), Alan Etherington (Senior Partner in an Ottawa-based consulting group), Mutale Chanda (a Toronto-based consultant), Norm Mohamid, Mary Ellen Nettle, Lynne Dee Trudeau (Federal Ministry of Justice), Ross Kidd (consultant based in Botswana), Greg Conchelos (research and evaluation specialist in Peterborough, Ontario), Erma Stultz (graphic artist and publisher), Sharon

Lavallee (in Alberta), Al Vigoda (currently a communications consultant in British Columbia), Arlene Mantle (Canada's premier social movement singer), Bernadita Icaza (returned to Chile), Deborah Barndt (Professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University), Ted Jackson (President of E.T. Jackson and Associates and Director of a Carleton University Regional Economic Development and Training Centre). dian marino, one of the founding members of the group, and perhaps the most creative intellectual force to ever work in participatory research, died of cancer in 1993 at the age of 52. She was a Professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University at the time of her death. We worked with many others in both Canada and the United States who were creating ideas and projects along similar lines. Peter Park, who at the time was in the Sociology Department of the University of Massachusetts, shared many similar background factors such as the influence of Paulo Freire and links with Orlando Fals Borda. He was one of the very first voices in the US academic scene to make links with this kind of social movement work. John Hurst of the School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley was another pioneer in the taking up of participatory research within the academic world. He not only allowed students to study the materials, but in 1999 succeeded in founding the Centre for Participatory Research and Popular Education which is flourishing still. Phyllis Cunningham at Northern Illinois University not only pioneered the teaching of participatory research in academic settings, but added new dimensions to our understanding through work on housing and other social issues in the Hispanic and Black communities of Chicgo. Beverly Cassara wrote an early academic paper and encouraged people to engage in the subject when she was working at the University of the District of Columbia.

As I have mentioned the principles of our group were that we would

not do international networking in the absence of an engaged practice ourselves. Among the variety of projects and longer term work done during the period were: Waste and Water Use in Big Trout Lake in Northern Ontario; Video work with the Latin American Community of Toronto; Research with the Ontario Task Force on Native People in Urban Settings; Teaching ESL in factory settings; organizing of a Popular Art and Media Conference; Popular Theatre workshops; Occupational Health and Safety workshops. Much of this work has been written up in project reports and books. The single best collection of these materials can be found in the Resource Collection of the Catalyst Centre in Toronto.

The PRG produced a series of publications itself to promote and share the ideas of participatory research. The first six in a series of PR Working Papers were: Creating Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly-Budd Hall; Dene Learning for Self-Determination and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Study-Ted Jackson; PR-Research with Historic Consciousness-Bonnie Cain; Annotated Bibliography -PRG; Popular Theatre as a Tool for Participatory Research-Ross Kidd and Martin Byram; Drawing from Action for Action-dian marino. Other publications included several issues of REAP (Research Education and Action for Power) which shared research findings on a variety of multinational corporation issues with both the North American and global network. REAP was a model for global political economic analysis long before the globalization of the 1990's was 'discovered'.

During this period, the Sandanista Revolution in Nicaragua occurred. Deborah Barndt the other members of the group were very much influenced and inspired by the excitement of the work there. Both participatory research, with active support from Orlando Fals Borda, and popular education were taken up officially by the Sandanista government as official

ways of working. Deborah Barndt provided the leadership for an exciting conference held in Toronto in April 1981 called, "Breaking Ground: The Role of Popular Education and Research in Social Movements". This conference looked at case studies from Nicaragua (Francisco Lacayo), Quebec (Paul Belanger) and Highlander Centre in the USA (Myles Horton and John Gaventa). This conference not only spoke of popular education and participatory research but was organized along the principles themselves.

What was missing from this picture?

dian marino in her teaching at York University always asked students when reading the works of others to ask the question, what or who is missing from the story or the picture. As Patricia McGuire thoroughly documented in her 1987 book Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach, the early writings most often spoke in concepts such as the community, the people, the marginalized, the exploited, or the poor (McGuire, 1987). These terms rendered invisible gender and race relations or power. McGuire's work advanced our collective understanding of how gender and participatory research works together and how many of us, myself included, contributed to the silencing of women's perspectives through our own language and experiences. This is in spite of the active intellectual leadership in the field of women such as Maria Liisa Swantz, Deborah Barndt, dian marino, Vera Gianotten, Kathy Tobias Sullivan, Eileen Belamide or Grace Hudson. The language of the day allowed us for a period the silence the questions of difference.

The same may be said about race. While the roots of Participatory Research in Africa were framed in an anti-colonial Afro-centric perspective, the specificity of race both within the colonial and neo-colonial research experience and within the contexts of rich country experiences was somehow appropriated by the use of concepts of oppression, exploitation and so

forth. For example much of the remarkable historical work done by Fals Borda with the Costal peoples of Colombia was done with persons of African heritage; our early work did not elaborate the relationship of race to the notions of participatory research. Personally, I did not write about these obvious connections until I did the Introduction to the North American PR book on which Peter Park, Ted Jackson and Mary Brydon-Miller collaborated (Park et al, 1993).

Recent Developments

In 1997, under the leadership of Orlando Fals Borda of Colombia, a 20th Anniversary conference on participatory research was held in Cartagena, the same city where the first such event of 1977 was held (Fals Borda, 1997). Instead of 70-80 participants, there were 1851 persons from 61 countries. Some of the best known activist scholars of the 20th century spoke including Emmanuel Wallerstein, Manfred Max-Neef, Anges Heller, Robert Chambers, and Eduardo Galeano. The 1997 Cartagena conference brought together the various streams of participatory action research including both the liberatory stream and the Action Research, Action Learning and Process Management stream which has strong roots in Australia, England and the United States. Fals Borda's own views of the conference outcomes underscored the "complementarity of academic and popular knowledge" as a main result (1997:233). He noted that the discussions for the most part. "Set limits to rampant postmodernism and neoliberalism" (1997:234).

Susan Smith, Dennis Gillms and Nancy Johnson published *Nurtured by Knowledge: Learning to Do Participatory Action-Research* with the International Development Research Centre also in 1997. This book with a forward by Paulo Freire and a preface by Budd Hall has become one of

IDRC's best selling books. The ideas of participatory action research have taken firm hold in the practices of international development. Arguably the most authoritative evidence that the liberatory stream of participatory research has been accepted by the academy can be seen the *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* edited by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury and published by Sage (2000). The Handbook integrates both main streams of action research into a single volume thus closing the circle on participatory research which began its published life as an appeal to "break the academic monopoly" (Hall, 1982:13).

February 2002 marked the 20th Anniversary of PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia), the Indian-based NGO which has provided leadership to much of the majority world on the theory and practise of participatory transformation. In many ways the 20th Anniversary of PRIA served to launch a national integration of the principals of participatory research into grass roots work dealing with strengthening the role of women in local government structures in India.

Has Participatory Research really come in from the Cold?

What is the role of the Academy in participatory research? What has the Academy done with participatory research? What is the status of the knowledge generated in a participatory research process? I have been very troubled by these questions over the years and cannot pretend to have a clear sense of the appropriate role for institutionalized university involvement in our work. Participatory research originated as a challenge to positivist research paradigms as carried out largely by university based researchers. Our position has been that the centre of the process needed to be in the margins, in the communities, with women, with people of colour and so forth. Our experience has been that it is very difficult to achieve this kind of process from a university base hence the need for

alternative structures such as networks, centres. But how do we reconcile this with the fact that most of the authors in this book have strong university affiliations including myself?

I believe that many of us operate in situations of contradiction and self-conflict. Doubt may be one of our most identifiable common denominators. Doubt and humility may be one of the strongest contributions that our work collectively has to offer. If the research process is genuinely and organically situated in a community, workplace or group which is experiencing domination then we need not, I believe, be afraid that the knowledge which is being generated will be used for purposes that the community or group does not need or wish for. The difficulty arises because there are different uses of knowledge in the academy from those in community or workplace situations. According to the discourse of participatory research, knowledge generated, whether of localized application or larger theoretical value is linked in some ways with shifts of power or structural changes. As we know intentions do not always produce desired results, but those of us who have been working along these lines for a number of years share these assumptions. At a minimum we hope for a fuller understanding of the context and conditions within which we work or live.

Knowledge within the academy serves a variety of purposes. It is a commodity by which academics do far more than exchange ideas; it is the very means of exchange for the academic political economy. Tenure, promotion, peer recognition, research grants, and countless smaller codes of privilege are accorded through the adding up of articles, books, papers in "refereed" journals and conferences. Academics in the market place of knowledge know that they must identify or become identified with streams of ideas which offer the possibility of publishing and dialogue within appropriate and recognized settings. Collaborative research or at least

collaborative publishing is informally discouraged because of the difficulty in attributing authorship. Collaborative research with persons who are not academics by the standards of the academy is not common. And while academics in fact gain financially through accumulated publications of appropriate knowledge, community collaborators seldom benefit from such collaboration in financial terms. As can be seen academics are under economic, job survival or advancement pressures to produce in appropriate ways. And it is this structural pressure which plays havoc with academic engagement in the participatory research process. Is it not possible that in spite of one's personal history, in spite of ideological commitment, in spite of deep personal links with social movements or transformative processes that the structural location of the academy as the preferred location for the organizing of knowledge will distort a participatory research process?

Does this mean that there is no role for university-based folks to be engaged in participatory research processes? I do not believe that. Patti Lather did much to bring participatory research and other such ideas to the attention of the university educational research community in her highly acclaimed Harvard Education Review article on "Research as Praxis" (1986). I do however deeply believe that university or similarly accredited researchers are not required for a participatory research process to take place. Participatory research remains a tool which social movements, activists, trade unionists, women on welfare, the homeless or any similar groups use as part of a variety of strategies and methods for the conduct of their work. If they wish to invite a university-based group to become involved they need to set up the conditions at the start and maintain control of the process if they wish to benefit as much as possible. My guess is that countless groups make use of processes which resemble participatory research everyday without naming it or certainly without

asking for outside validation of the knowledge which is produced.

Participatory research deserves to be taught in universities, and is increasingly being taught. The academic community deserves to discuss and challenge and be challenged by these and other ideas which raise questions of the role of knowledge and power. Adult educators, community workers, social workers, primary health care personnel, solidarity co-operators, cooperative movement workers, multi-cultural workers, teachers and countless others who begin working after a university education deserve to study, read and experience the ideas which make up participatory research.

Academics also do not cease to become members of the community by going to work in a university. There are countless community issues whether related to toxic dumping, homelessness, high drop-out levels in local schools or unfair taxation policies which engage us all as citizens. Academics have some skills which can contribute to community action along with the skills of others in the community. Academics don't have to be "in charge" just because someone refers to a grassroots knowledge generating process as participatory research.

Academics, like others in society can also find ways to support alternative groups, structures and networks. In the late 1970's in Toronto, the Participatory Research Group had free office space thanks to the support of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Graduate students in many universities in Canada and the United States have worked as staff in a variety of community-based organizations because of initial interests from reading or hearing about participatory research. Universities precisely because they are accorded the monopoly of the knowledge business do have a power to confer some measures of legitimacy. As a friend of mine from Nicaragua once said during the early days of the Sandanista Revolution, "You have a certain kind of legitimacy

and we have a certain kind of legitimacy. We can work together". As in any other social or political work knowing our limits and our possibilities and working from the basis of honesty and integrity are the common sense best ways to proceed.

Challenges remain

Racism and the construction of knowledge

As I mentioned earlier, although we were working from the beginning from a position which gave epistemic privilege to people of colour in Africa or elsewhere, the forming of the discourse along lines of liberation, elimination of exploitation or in terms of anti-imperialist struggles meant that the question of race in the participatory research process was left to others to struggle with. In my own case my privileged white able-bodied straight male location gave me access to certain realms of power but also coated my eyes with scales that come off only slowly and with difficulty as time goes by. For a person such as me the question of making a social movement alliance with the struggles of African-Canadian or Aboriginal Peoples is one of choice. Society rewards me more for strengthening the hold of the powerful than lending my research analytical or political skills to trying to loosen that grip. I do not walk home along the main street of my city in the evenings hearing racial insults the way my African-Canadian colleague and neighbour does. I am not expected to speak for the white race the way he is expected to speak for an entire race. My informal social movement networks of accountability take race into account as only one dimension of social justice understanding. I am able to and do write, speak and organize in discourses or contexts where race is not central. In doing this I extend white privilege perhaps even as I espouse ideals or visions of inclusion. The dialogue about participatory research and race is necessary and the failure to extend it will place our work on the sidelines

of critical social thought.

Co-constructing knowledge with the 'rest of nature'?

We have begun to realize, perhaps too late, that our species has supported a way of living that makes many of us sad, poor, alone, frightened, or marginalized. But that speaks of the political, of the economic. We are informed in a variety of eloquent and ways that our species has also damaged the biosphere to such a degree that the survival of our own species can now be questioned. We live in a world where the dominant powers support a consumerist vision of a global market utopia. We live in a world that my colleague in Toronto, Edmund O'Sullivan calls, "a killing machine" (Hall and O'Sullivan, 1992:1). I often speak about the fact that the world is not OK.

Environmentalists including environmental educators believe that one of the factors which has allowed us to put our very survival at risk is that we have become alienated from the rest of nature, from the other forms of life which we share the world with. There are different theories about the nature of this alienation but it has something to do with our patterns of domestication and with the ways in which the enlightenment and scientific discourses which arose more than 500 years ago in white male Europe. The notion that the world is knowable in predictable ways and that we are able to separate mind from body, thinking from emotions has, arguably, made it easier for us to distance ourselves from the ancient knowledges of the world's first peoples and from ancient systems of women's knowledge.

Participatory research is a proposal for action that focuses on transformed understandings of the creation of knowledge among human beings. Our discourse looks at context, issues of social identity, webs of power and such seeking new forms of knowledge construction from places outside the walls of power and dominance. We think that at times we have found new ways to co-create knowledge. But can we imagine a

process of co-creating knowledge which might happen between ourselves and other forms of life, other species, trees, grasses, rocks? How is the rest of nature a participatory researcher? How is it that nature is both a site of new knowledge creation and a full or privileged participant in the creation of new forms of knowledge that will draw our rogue species closer to our more silent partners with whom we share this planet?

Social Movements and Civil Society as a location for theorizing

One of the most important and fascinating lessons from the past which we can use for the future is that Participatory Research was very largely theorized and disseminated from a social movement or civil society base. Among the original premises was the importance of breaking what we referred to as the monopoly over knowledge production by universities. This was not in the least a form of anti-intellectualism, but was a recognition that the academic mode-of production was and remains in some fundamental ways linked to different sets of interests and power relations than women and men in various social movement settings or located in more autonomous community-based non-governmental structures. Much of the energy and impulse for deepening the understanding of participatory research came from the social movement contexts in Latin America in Africa, in Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere. The 'people power' movement of the Philippines made wide and informed use of the concepts and practices; the movements of the rural poor in India the same; Aboriginal Peoples in Canada found these ideas important; the labour movement made reference to this way of working as part of the health and safety in the workplace activities; the democracy movements of Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil and more made use of and further developed participatory research as part of the social movement ways of working.

The participatory research network made it possible for the creativity and

knowledge making, or history making, capacity of all women and men to be seen at least partially for many of us in a profound way for the first time.

A permanent critical dimension

We did not find anything magic when we formulated what we call participatory research. We have touched upon and been touched often by the sheer power of human creativity and knowledge creating power through our work, but our work has also inadvertently reinforced already existing patterns of social inequality. While the university world explodes with new discourses on power in all its forms, the faces in the universities in my part of the world, the Resumes of scholars we hire, the forms of sharing knowledge we use, and the structures of learning and knowledge production have changed but little.

Still we know that without the struggles we have engaged in and continue to engage in, things might well have been much worse. We have entered into a period when all we know about knowledge will be changed. We are told to make choices about the world we want. How we view the construction of knowledge, the relationship of knowing to learning, the rights of all peoples to construct their worlds will shape our choice regardless of what we say. We have an obligation and a responsibility to continue to peel back the layers of confusion and certainty not only for the next few years but for the rest of our lives.

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