Participatory Research in Latin America as Political Engagement

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Abstract
In a first part the text brings the search of Latin America for its self-interpretation on the base of some selected authors like José Martí, José Vasconcelos, John Mackay and Richard Morse. In this trajectory, the concept *people* changed its meaning from a holistic to a more differentiated one, that supposes a cleavage between local elites and the socially dominated groups. In a second part the text argues that this new interpretation underlies the emerging of participatory research in Latin America, understood by its pioneers Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda primarily as a combination of research and political engagement in favor of *the people* defined as a collective of oppressed social groups struggling for its emancipation.

Keyword: Participatory research; Emancipation; Latin America

Investigación participativa en América Latina como compromiso político

Resúmen
En una primera parte, el texto reconstruye la búsqueda de América Latina por su auto-interpretación sobre la base de algunos autores seleccionados como José Martí, José Vasconcelos, John Mackay y Richard Morse. En esta trayectoria, el significado del concepto *pueblo* cambió de una visión holística a otra más diferenciada, que supone una división entre las élites locales y los grupos socialmente dominados. En una segunda parte, el texto sostiene que esta nueva interpretación subyace al surgimiento de la investigación participativa en América Latina, entendida por sus pioneros Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Paulo Freire y Orlando Fals Borda principalmente como una combinación de investigación y compromiso político a favor *del pueblo* definido como un colectivo de grupos sociales oprimidos que luchan por su emancipación.

Palabras-clave: Investigación participativa; Emancipación; América Latina

Introduction

Participatory research in Latin America has emerged in different contexts and has been developed over a very long time. It would be a mistake to describe it as a monolithic unit; it has never become a unified school or something like that. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics that make the different experiences fit without difficulty under this common name, assumed by the protagonists themselves. In this text I want to focus basically on one of them: participatory research or participatory action research in Latin America as an academic-political activity, usually carried out as part of the struggle for liberation from poverty and domination. Therefore, it clearly takes side by, and engages itself with, the dominated. It does so facing the cleavage between dominant and dominated groups that permeate all countries of this subcontinent, in a hardly imaginable dimension for those who live in a well-being, democratic society. This outstanding feature of participatory research reinforces the close relation between science and social context. Or, in other words, it makes once more clear that every kind of research is part and parcel of a specific social formation and influences the balance between social groups.

Before exploring this topic, I will briefly remember, based on few authors, how intellectuals in the subcontinent have tried to establish a differentiation with other regions, with other peoples.[1] Some authors consider that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Latin America was searching for an identity. An identity that could reveal its uniqueness facing the Other. This Other at first was basically Europe. After the War of Cuba (1895), the United States replaced Europe in a response to the beginning of its imperialist phase in the region.

In regard to this last theme, namely the relation between the United States and Latin America, the manifestations have gone from a romantic admiration that saw in that country an ideal model, to the historically well founded accusation of a long record of political and military interventions, of cultural domination and of repeated attempts of vassalage, against which resistance is called (Tickner, Cepeda M. e Bernal 2015). Mirian Warde brings some historical examples of romantic admirers, like an engineer named Paula Soares, who in 1869 commented the educational system of the USA and wrote “Oh if we could imitate them! If we could forget the old and corrupt formulas to which we are subjugated, forgetting that we also live on the American continent!” (Warde 2000). She also mentions the editorial of a local newspaper from 1835 who says: “The United States was colonised and educated by philosophers; Brazil instead, by rude criminals and degradeds”. Thus to this day it is possible to find such self-loathing intertwined with feelings of admiration of the USA.

The United States’ successive alliances with sectors of the local elites in combating liberation movements, the recurrent deposition of democratic governments, the imposition and support of authoritarian regimes, and the repeated blocking of the development of democratic states of law, based on citizenship bestowed with equal rights and duties to each member of the respective society, all that contributed to merge the struggle of subaltern

1 Later it will be explained why, following the use made by the commented authors, in this text *people* is the designation of a collectivity as such, not of several individuals. For this reason it is sometimes used in the singular, other times in the plural.

groups against the domination by the local elites with the aforementioned anti-American sentiment. These same alliances between foreign imperialists and local elites deepened an internal polarisation, which was born along with the colonisation. This polarization made unfeasible such a kind of solidarity between employers and employees as could be found in some European countries during the peak of the social welfare regimes. In countries with welfare regimes this collaboration allowed the introduction of co-management (*Mitbestimmung*) in organisations, a reasonable income distribution and social assistance through public policies, not allowing the existence of an economic, political and social abyss between the dominant sectors and the dominated groups in the society. A trusting relationship even among unequal social groups seems to have been important in Europe in allowing the development of action research.

I will start by remembering some moments in Latin America's search for understanding itself, because it seems to me that it helps to understand how Latin American participatory research was developed and why it is considered a political-academic activity that in some aspects differentiates itself of the European tradition of action research.

Latin America searching for its self-understanding

The young Cuban Jose Martí, while in Guatemala in 1877, wrote: "After the natural and majestic work of American civilization was interrupted by the *conquista*, with the arrival of Europeans, a strange people was created, not a Spanish nor an Indigenous one [...]; it is a mestizo people who, after reconquering its freedom will develop and restore its own soul [...]. The whole work of our robust America will inevitably have the seal of the *conquista* civilisation; but it will improve, it will advance and surprise with the energy and the creative impulse of a people that in essence is distinct, superior in noble ambitions." (Martí 1983, p. 10).

In Martí's text, the focus is still on the fight for independence against Spain. The antagonism between the two Americas, which would become a few years later the tonic of another work, *Nuestra América,* is still very subtle here. But the text contains a certain romanticism with respect to the new people that should emerge strong, vigorous and full of virtues as a result of a forced *mestizaje* (race mixture) and the long colonial subjugation. In 1877 there were still seven years before the first of almost two hundred military interventions of the United States in the subcontinent that followed with the aim of stifling the freedom and sovereignty aspirations of the Latin American peoples.

The conviction that below the Rio Grande river a new and superior civilisation, the noble future of humanity, was emerging, was expressed again in the mid-1920s. The Mexican José Vasconcelos, in his book *La raza cósmica* (Vasconcelos 1983), published an "exalted allegory of the Ibero-American peoples as being the forgers of a new race that will finally culminate the yearnings of the human race" (Lorenzo Avila, in the presentation of the book). Vasconcelos is dealing with the neo-Darwinist theses of natural selection and with theories about pure races, which placed specific peoples of the North as superiors and disdained mestizo peoples as inferior. The author was instead convinced of the contrary. He does not deny that up to now only "a race with plenty of vices and defects has been formed

in the Iberian Continent. But it [e.g. this new race] is bestowed with malleability, able to develop quickly comprehension and emotions, the fertile elements to germinate the future species" (1983, p. 46).

Vasconcelos really trusted the people that resulted from the *conquista*. This new people will have to dispose some of its legacies received from Portugal and Spain and "discover new areas in its spirit" to fulfill its mission. For, according to the author, "only the Iberian part of the continent has the spiritual, race related and territorial ingredients that are necessary for the great enterprise to initiate the universal era of Humanity". Soon the time will come when "from the mestiso race of the Ibero-American continent", from this "people for whom beauty is the greatest reason of all things", which has "a fine aesthetic sensibility and a love of deep beauty, and which is oblivious to every bastard interest and free from formal locks", from this people will emerge the last great race of humanity, the race "which will fill the planet with the triumphs of the first truly universal, cosmic culture" (1983, p. 48-49). As can be seen from these quotations, the author had a practically unsurpassed optimism about the future of the Latin-American peoples.

A few years later, in 1932, John Mackay, a Protestant Scottish missionary who had adopted the Latin-American continent as his field of work, published the book *El otro Cristo español* [*The other Spanish Christ*] (1989), with a very different vision as that of Martí and Vasconcelos. Mackay suspects that the Christ who was brought to Latin America was not the one born in Bethlehem. This original Christ inspired e.g. the monk Bartolomeu de las Casas and other defenders of indigenous people in the continent. For Mackay, the Christ from Bethlehem "wanted to come to South America, but he was prevented", he was "imprisoned in Spain". Consequently, in this continent he "was little more than a stranger since Columbus until to the present" (1989, p. 114). Who in fact came to Latin America, according to Mackay, was "a Christ who was born [...] in North Africa […]. He came with the Spanish Crusaders to the New World [...] and he became naturalized in the Iberian colonies of America". In these lands he appears as "a Creole Christ, a Christ whom one knows living as a child or death as a corpse". This Creole Christ lacks of "the constituent features of the Christian religion: the spiritual experience and the internal ethical expression" (1989, p. 139). For Mackay, religiosity and local culture, and in particular the texts of its songs, express a particularly sad and passive Christ. It is not necessary to share Mackay's missionary goal to consider that his analysis of the Spanish Christianity that was brought to America seems very lucid when he describes its authoritarianism and its inability to pervade everyday life with some ethical-theological orientation. This Christianity has done little to make known the gospel's message of liberation and of a radically egalitarian solidarity. Its fruit, on the contrary, was education for the passivity of the poor and oppressed people. Or, as Mariategui (1976, p. 142) wrote: "The missionaries did not impose the Gospel; they imposed the cult and the liturgy, fitting them sagaciously to habits of the *índios*".

Against this passivity Martí (1983, p. 19) calls: "We should make common cause with the oppressed, and so strengthen the system opposite to the oppressors' interests and habits of command" (p. 19). In very different perspectives, Mackay and Martí call for engagement, with the intention of transforming the reality of the subcontinent. They do not expect a natural and gradual development, as Vasconcelos did. They are convinced that

only deliberate action can change the people's unacceptable situation. But while Mackay with *El otro Cristo español* and Martí, in his early writings (1984), turned their critique against the Spanish oppression, a few years later Martí began to point out an internal social cleavage in the Latin American peoples: a dominating elite exploits and oppresses the weakened majorities. The romantic vision of integrated nations or races living in perfect harmony disappears and gives place to the unveiling of an abyss between social groups or classes. One of the most lucid analyzes of the social polarization, contemporary of Mackay, is Mariategui's book *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* [Seven essays of interpretation of the Peruvian reality], published in 1928 (Mariátegui, 1976).

A late but original holistic analysis has been presented by Richard Morse in *Prospero's mirror*. This author conducted long-term research during decades in Latin America, especially in Brazil. He assumes that in Latin America there is a long tradition of mirroring the United States, and intends to re-signify this mirroring. Morse points out that "during the last two centuries an American mirror has been shown aggressively to the South". Now it would be necessary to "turn that mirror back". He believes that his country is in a crisis of self-confidence, therefore it seems to him that it would be "appropriate to the USA to confront itself with the historical experience of Ibero-America, no longer as a case study of a frustrated development, but as the experience of a worthy cultural option" (Morse, 1988, p. 14). The author explains that Prospero comes from a literary figure used by José Enrique Rodó in the text *Ariel*, in 1900, and used later (1907) as title of the book *El mirador de Próspero*.

Although "mirador" is strictly an observation tower, for Morse it is not at all equivocal to associate it with a mirror. Anyway, central to Morse is Prosper. In *Ariel* Prosper was an "old and venerable master" who fights against democracy in a time when the Continent showed strong influences of Comtian positivism. But according to the interpretation, this master "was not a benevolent and sagacious intellectual, but the paranoid coloniser". It will be this interpretation, confronted with the long history of military intervention, of fomenting military coups and cultural domination, which allows Morse to place the prosperous United States as Prosper, and Latin America "as a mirror image in which Anglo-America can recognise his own illnesses and it's problems" (1988, p. 13). It is not surprising that with such a thesis in his book Morse spent unsuccessfully 10 years looking for a publisher in the United States. According to the news of his death (New York Times, April 28, 2001), "His most influential work was perhaps Prospero's Mirror, published in Spanish in 1982 and in Portuguese in 1988, but never entirely in English".

To Morse, turning the mirror does not simply mean reversing all the signs of an evaluation that saw the United States as model, as an example plenty of success, on the one side, and Latin America as the condensation of backwardness on the other. He contrasts "two worlds" in the New World, recounting their origins, retracing their roads and showing the crossroads where certain influential choices have been made. According to Morse, the Anglo-Saxon culture has flourished in the United States as a successful mass culture, as very successful in individualisation, but it has failed by the inability to produce individuality. The southern part of America has instead preserved its holistic heritage of the Iberian peninsula. Consequently it was successful in avoiding the isolation of people from each other and the degeneration of social relations. Morse is convinced that instead of

presenting itself as a model, the United States should learn a little more modesty and learn from the Ibero-American culture, to whom the author recommends more self-confidence.

The publication of the book was followed by a heated debate, specially in Brazil (Arocena e León 1993). I want to mention here just one reaction, namely from Simon Schwartzman, reprinted in Arocena and León's book. Schwartzman highlights a series of material achievements of US-American society and emphasises that, despite possible problems such as those diagnosed by Morse, that society "still preserves a repertoire of creativity, pluralism and capacity for moral commitment", which would be incompatible with Latin America's "provincialism and corporatism". Schwarzman argues that before seeing any significant quality in the mirror, the new Prospero (USA) would see the ills of Iberian America as "a thick cloud of frustrated national states, astrayed ethnicities and societies, grotesque and tragic *caudilhos* [local authoritarian leaders], bloody and despairing insurrections, aborted projects of modernization and industrialization" (Schwartzman 1993). The author reinforces emphatically the predominant image of a subcontinent to the South, doubled under the weight of its ills, confronted with a successful model of civilisation to the North.

In the Latin-American literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century the authors use the Spanish word *pueblo* as well as the Portuguese word *povo* here translated as *people*. It is important to note that *pueblo* as well as *povo* refer to a *collective* of humans similarly to nation, and not to a sum of individuals like the word suggests in English. When Americans from the South refer to *a people*, they are not referring to a nation, for *a people* has there no real or imaginary common origin; nor mean the authors something like folk, because the designation as *a people* does not refer to the cultural and folkloric heritage of a group, but to the group itself. People is a political concept under construction and in dispute in Latin America. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it designated primarily the result that emerged from the mixture of native humans from the continent with foreign colonisers, forming a new collective: perhaps the embryo of a new nation or a new race, but at the time *a people*, seen in a holistic perspective.

Even if it is not possible to define a precise period nor a single causality for it, discussions within the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean form the 1940e to the 1960s allow to perceive a change in this approach. Raúl Prebisch developed the concept of center-periphery to describe the structurally unequal relation between the countries of the North and the countries of the South, transferring wealth from the South to the North. Andre Gunder Frank and some colleagues went a step further and defended the thesis that development and underdevelopment are two faces of the same coin. That means, for these authors rich countries had developed themselves by exploiting, and so underdeveloping the countries in the South. A third step in the change of the holistic to an internal differentiated approach was the publication of the book *Dependence and development in Latin America* by Fernando Herique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1970). Cardoso and Faletto took the concept of center-periphery and applied it to the relation between the elites and the oppressed and exploited population within the different countries. Some authors widened this interpretation with Marx's conception of class struggle, describing the unequal relation as exploitation and domination of the underclasses by the elites (Sunkel 1995; Werz 1991).

The new interpretation of the relation between different social groups within the countries allowed a new usage of the concept *people*. In the last decades, it does not refer to the whole population of a country or of the continent, as it normally did before. Instead, *people* now refers to social groups in search of emancipation of poverty, of marginality, and of oppression. Some authors, such as Enrique Dussel, define people in a more restrictive way, including only those poor people who are organized in a liberation movement (Dussel 2016; Hernández Solís 2015). In general, however, the concept is kept open, to welcome all who engage in an inclusive, participatory and democratic society. This is the common meaning in the context of participatory research.

Participatory research and the discovery of its social place

In the troubled 1960s, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Latin America and an important part of the youth groups linked to it became more acutely aware of the poverty and misery of the subcontinent. In addition to internal factors such as the Second Vatican Council, there were also impulses coming from Protestant churches through the World Council of Churches and from Latin American intellectual movements. In 1962, for example, protestant Christians hold a conference entitled "Christ and the Brazilian Revolutionary Process" (Bittencourt Filho 2016). With this conference, Protestantism has contributed to setting the foundation for the Latin American church's engagement in the ensuing decades in social issues. Protestants and Catholics began a review of their theology, including in it the knowledge about the concrete reality lived by the people. For the great majority this reality was one of hunger and poverty, due to centuries of domination and exploitation. As the Roman church at that time comprised approximately 90% of the Brazilian population, and a similar proportion in several other countries, the impact of its politicisation was very high.

The fear of communism and the radicality of some manifestations, however, made this engagement also provoke resistance and retreats. Influential sectors in the Roman Catholic hierarchy and in some Protestant churches gave explicit support to traditional authoritarian regimes and military coups. Nevertheless, the engagement in favor of the poorest groups in society survived, including the support and shelter of political activists who did not find legal secular channels for their activities by local church communities. Consequently many pastoral activities had among their leaders agnostic people and a plurality of people linked to socialist and communist movements.

The working methodology used in grassroots communities was often described as the combination of *seeing*, *judging*, and *acting*. The dimension of *seeing* involved for example hearing personal reports of experiences, whereas the moment of *judging* was a combination of biblical-theological reflections with theoretical instruments of social analysis derived from Marxism (Mueller 1996). The *action* that followed was increasingly becoming the form of social movements. They subsisted even beyond the period of authoritarianism and helped in the process of re-democratization (Sobottka 2006).

It was in the Roman church that Carlos Rodrigues Brandão developed his activities of research and participation, predominantly through the dialogue between anthropology and

militancy in youth groups. Reflecting later on his so emerged practice, at the beginning still without a name, Brandão says: Participatory research is a "collective knowledge, emerging from a work that recreates, from the inside out, concrete forms that give to these people, groups and classes the right and power to participate in thinking, producing and directing the uses of their knowledge about themselves" (1981, p. 9-10). The link between the generation of knowledge and the strengthening of the respective social group was among the central objectives of this kind of action: "A knowledge that comes out of the political practice that makes the commitment of popular groups with groups of social scientists possible and beneficial is an instrument for strengthening the power of the people" (Brandão 1981, p. 10). To a certain extent Brandão's trajectory reveals that *participatory research* was the name given to an engagement against authoritarianism and in favor of social transformation, as soon as it began to be systematized by academic reflection.

In a similar way Paulo Freire (Freire 1981; cf. Sobottka & Faustini 2007; Wener 1991) developed his methodology through engagement. After a degree in law, he was engaged in a social assistance activity maintained by an entity of industry entrepreneurs. In this activity he could experience a clash, typical of peripheral societies as the Brazilian one is: the social assistance oscillates between giving effectiveness to the citizenship rights and replacing them, and so establishing a relationship of dependence and subordination. The development of the literacy methodology started there was continued as an extension service of the public university. For the regime installed after the 1964 military coup in Brazil, however, the right to literacy, which Marshall (1992) had described a few years earlier as the most basic social right of citizenship in British society, was now seen as a subversion of public order. As a result of this "subversivity", Freire had to sour long years of exile. Apparently the power of the domain of literacy was an unbearable threat to the armed forces that had taken the arms to save the country from what they considered the communist danger.

Freire saw education as research and research as education. Research and education are then a partnership between researchers and professional educators and the community or social group in which they share experiences. With research and education it is possible to overcome the non-knowledge of the letters that make up words and texts. But above all, with them it is possible to overcome the non-knowledge of the texture of social relations, especially the relations of domination. To free oneself from this domination is the focus of Freire's research: "In the liberating perspective in which I situate myself [...] research, as an act of knowledge, has as cognitive subjects, on the one hand, professional researchers; on the other hand, it has the popular subjects. As an object to be unveiled, it has the concrete reality" (1981, p. 35). Research in education is conceived as a two-way formation: "not only for community leaders and other interested people, but also for researchers, teachers and external activists" (Fals-Borda 2007; Fals Borda 2008).

Orlando Fals Borda focuses on this same aspiration of liberation by unveiling the concrete living situation of the poor. He developed his perspective of engagement in the Colombian context through what he called "participatory action research". Through an approximation to the poor peasants, that he started as a curious and dilettante employee of a multinational company (Fals Borda 2006) and was later deepened through a formal university research, both a work methodology and a life commitment were born. The

methodology and the life commitment subsisted even when he later held important posi-positions in agrarian policy and in the university of his country.

Political research and engagement for liberation

In an interview in which he recounts this trajectory, Fals Borda explains that he understands participatory research as a research "that responds especially to the needs of populations like workers, peasants, farmers and *índios:* the most needy classes in contemporary social structures, taking into account their aspirations and potentialities of knowing and acting. It is the methodology that seeks to encourage autonomous (self-reliant) development from the grassroots and with a relative independence from the outside" (2006, p. 43). He expressed himself similarly in another text by saying that by bridging the gap between "scholarly erudition" and "popular wisdom" and by developing more engaging and personal relationships in research "we recover the popular version of history and strengthen culture and the self-esteem of grassroots people" (Fals-Borda 2007).

With this statement Fals Borda touches on three central themes present since the origins of the entire participatory research movement in Latin America. First, a reinterpretation of development towards a more equitable participation in the wealth and cultural advances of the respective society. This is closely related to the question of autonomy as the liberation of the bonds of subjugation and exploitation, and the extension of the possibility of creating individually and collectively one's own life projects. Finally, to stimulate self-confidence as a feeling of being, and of being able to do things, has always been central to the participation of intellectuals in communities. Even though they are different from the mainstream, this being and doing are no less worthy than those of the most economically, politically and culturally dominant social strata. To have confidence or even pride in being what one is is a feeling that often had to be developed or recovered by communities and social groups as a form of resistance to domination.

In the various quotations made above, the authors express another central characteristic of this tradition of participatory research: the emphasis on the place that the intellectual who approaches a social group to research and engage wants to have in relation to the group. He shares with his interlocutors the condition of co-subject of the generation of knowledge. Brandão (1981, p. 11) expresses it even more radically by saying: "To have in the research *agent* a kind of *people* who serves". According to this understanding, the intellectual's duty is not only to let the others be subjects of their own life projects, but he should put himself at their service. There is an ethical expectation regarding researchers that permeates the whole activity: that they engage solidarily and even selflessly with the group. Or as Fals Borda puts it: "[...] in popular struggles there is always room for intellectuals, technicians and scientists as such [...]. They simply have to honestly demonstrate their commitment to the popular cause pursued through the specific contribution of their own discipline, without completely denying these disciplines". According to the same author, this expectation "motivated a change in the orientation of the personal conduct of the activists and the addition of new social values such as simplicity,

democratic and direct participation in the daily routine of community work" (1981, p. 49-50).

This politicised practice of generating knowledge through a solidary and even empathetic encounter with those to whom the research refers turns explicitly against the claims of neutrality of traditional science. More than this: the participating researchers have developed a deep distrust of a hidden agenda in many traditional researches. "The seemingly neutral expression that exists in the idea of a research object often includes the idea and intention that those whose life and reality are finally known become recognized in order to be *objects* of History as well" (Brandão 1981, p. 10).

Instead of sticking to the questions of the inner logic of science, the pretension of participatory research has been to ask "questions of real people [...] who seem to discover with their own practice that they have to gain the power to be, after all, *the subject*, both from the *act of knowing* what they have been the *object* of, and from the *work of transforming* the knowledge and the world that have transformed them into an object" (Brandão 1981, p. 11). Fals Borda distances himself even from authors like Kurt Lewin, considering his methodology still too little engaged with his respondents. Paulo Freire is even more explicit in advocating a movement in which objectivity and subjectivity are not mutually excluding. On the contrary, for him reality can only be grasped in the tension between these two poles. "For me, concrete reality is something more than facts or data taken more or less in themselves. It is all these facts and all these data and additionally the perception that the population living in them has of them. Thus the concrete reality is given to me in the dialectical relation between objectivity and subjectivity" (1981, p. 35).

The here mentioned authors-researchers (Brandão, Freire and Fals Borda) refer to traditional science as knowledge linked to the dominant groups of society in a given period. This binding, according to them, prevents the generated knowledge of having an absolute, universal character; on the contrary, this knowledge fulfills certain functions: those of maintaining and strengthening domination, of docilisation of subordinate workers, of increasing productivity. Moreover, the "individuals called scientists" themselves have "motives, interests, beliefs and superstitions, emotions and interpretations of their social development" that directly interfere with their activity. Therefore, according to Fals Borda, instead of focusing on the analysis of the results of that way of doing science, for a critique it is necessary and more promising to examine the "process of production of scientific knowledge" (Fals Borda 1981, p. 41, 44). That is why they developed practices that are now known as participatory research or participatory action research.

When affirming the vocation of participatory research to help drive processes of social transformation, it is necessary to better specify how this vocation is understood. While it is true that in its birth this research occurred in contexts where projects of "social action", "rural development" or "community development" were being implemented by governments or international organisations, participatory research mostly was implemented as a resistance within them, in an attempt to overcome the developmentalist orientation that prevailed in international co-operation at that time.

Since its origin, participation was not intended to conquer the co-operation of the "recipients" of any policy, so that its effectiveness could be increased. On the contrary, since its beginning it was conceived as a political formation of all those involved in the

resistance to the dominant power. Brandão (2006) differs emphatically from the participa-participatory discourse of official agencies. For this pioneer of participatory research, it is the research and the researcher who participate in the life and struggle of the groups with which they are involved, not the other way round. Participatory research reveals its value through its contribution to the collective search for knowledge that helps make social relations more just, free and solidary. This would be its emancipatory sense: "Thus, research is 'participatory' not just because a growing proportion of popular subjects participate in its process. Research is 'participatory' because, as a solidary alternative of creating social knowledge, it is inserted and participates in relevant processes of a transforming social action with a popular and emancipatory vocation" (Brandão 2006, p. 32).

But from this brief exposition made here it cannot be inferred that participatory research in Latin America has a single orientation. On the contrary, it has historically constituted itself as a range of contextualized experiences, marked by the histories of each place in which it was practiced. It was also not always successful, but "on several occasions, practical experiences ended up reducing at once, affecting only partial aspects of social life" (Brandão 2006, p. 33). It was born and continues today as an open and plural collective project of social transformation in a context perceived as unjust, exclusionary and oppressive.

There is even something fundamental that differentiates the way of making science of the classic critical theorists, like the Frankfurtian critical theorists, from that of the Latin American participatory researchers referred to here. While for the former the subaltern social groups are source of political orientation and normative criteria, in the participatory research the generation of knowledge is made in the coexistence that shares the pains and the concrete struggles. It is in this sense that Fals Borda speaks about both the breakup of asymmetry between researchers and the researched and the incorporation of "social base people as individuals and thinkers in research efforts" as well as about "enabling them to break with their dependence on the intellectuals, and to conduct their own research" (1981). The traditional subject-object relationship is broken in order to establish a research whose methodology is based on subject-subject relations. This sense of the quest for autonomy, even in doing science, transcends a lot the conception of a social division of labor, in which the specialisations, and the social distance between them, remain unsurpassed.

In Latin America, since the re-democratization that followed the authoritarian phase of the military regimes, the anxieties and expectations of social groups historically placed at the margin have been mostly expressed in the idea of citizenship: especially as citizenship rights. Social movements, the constituent processes that took place in most countries in the 1980s and 1990s, and even the dominant groups, have assumed as legitimate the existence of a very broad set of rights. In some countries, constitutional texts have included significant lists of rights. Not infrequently, however, they received vague formulations or remained without indication about who would have the duty to ensure these rights. They are therefore more declaratory intentions than rights due by legal means or through social ethical pressure. But it is precisely around these rights of citizenship, already formally recognized but inaccessible in daily life, that the broadest and most fruitful field for the

interweaving of research with participation in daily political struggles is inviting for partic-participatory action research.

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