

Another social research is possible

From the collaboration between researchers and social movements

Alfonso Torres Carrillo¹

Abstract

The article presents an overview of the relationships between higher education institutions, researchers, and social movements in Colombia. Based on a periodisation of the different modes of alignments or gaps between these 3 social actors, the study focuses on two significant experiences of collaborative research between researchers and social movements. First, an experience with peasant movements from the Atlantic Coast led by Orlando Fals Borda from *La Rosca* Foundation in the 1970s, and which originated Participatory Action Research. Then, a project conducted by the *Subjects and New Narratives in Research and Teaching of the Social Sciences* research group at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* focused on the systematisation of practices with popular organisations and their inputs to the field of critical research. Finally, a balance of the current situation of joint research between social movements and collectives of researchers linked to higher education institutions is presented.

Keywords: Knowledge production, university, social movements, participatory research, systematization.

Otra investigación social es posible. Desde la colaboración entre investigadores y movimientos sociales

Resumen: El artículo presenta una mirada de conjunto sobre las relaciones entre universidades, investigadores y movimientos sociales en Colombia. A partir de una periodización de los diferentes modos de articulación o distanciamiento entre estos 3 actores sociales, el estudio se detiene en dos experiencias significativas de investigación colaborativa entre investigadores y movimientos sociales: la liderada por Orlando Fals Borda desde la Fundación La Rosca en la década de 1970 con movimientos campesinos de la Costa Atlántica y que dio origen a la Investigación Acción Participativa, y la llevada a cabo por el grupo de investigación *Sujetos y nuevas narrativas en investigación y enseñanza de las ciencias sociales* de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional en torno a la sistematización de prácticas con organizaciones populares. Finalmente, se plantean algunos

1 Translation made by Camilo Torres Barragán

desafíos acerca de la investigación conjunta entre movimientos sociales y colectivos de investigadores vinculados a universidades.

Palabras clave: Producción de conocimiento, universidad, movimientos sociales, investigación participativa, sistematización.

Introduction

The production of knowledge on social movements has been associated with what has been done by specialists in higher education institutions and research centres; inquiries carried out with or by its own protagonists has been less frequent. In Colombia, there has been a tradition of participatory research, initiated half a century ago, which gave rise to what is referred to as Participatory Research and other collaborative methodologies such as Collective recovery of history and Systematisation of experiences.

In this historical research trajectory with social organisations, the role of the Higher Education Institution has varied. Colombian higher education: heir to colonial higher education, has barely had a relationship with civil society movements. The accelerated capitalist modernisation that took place during the second half of the 20th century, triggered social conflicts in the rural areas and the city; it also brought about the establishment of the social sciences in the country. However, institutional obstacles and the radicalisation of the political environment limited the possibility for researchers to interact with these processes; this led some of them to leave the higher education institution to conduct their research and also to build the first participatory methodologies.

Since the 1980s, the most significant research on social movements was conducted by Non-Governmental Organisations; only in the next decade, were these topics gradually incorporated into higher education institutions. This “late” interest coincided with changes in the country’s social movements; together with the struggles led by peasants and wage workers, others became visible, led by urban inhabitants, women, youth, indigenous peoples, and the LGBTI population. At the beginning of the new century, the Colombian social overview evidenced the consolidation of these movements, as well as their interest in conducting their own research, proposing another type of relationship with researchers and higher education institutions: establishing agreements to jointly develop research projects.

This article presents a joint overview of the links between higher education institutions, researchers, and social movements, focusing on two significant moments in these relationships. The first one refers to the work of Orlando Fals Borda and *La Rosca* Foundation in the 1970s, and the second one, to some collaborative research experiences conducted by the *Subjects and New Narratives in Research and Teaching of the Social Sciences* research group of the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* during the first decade of the 21st century. Building on those research experiences, a set of methodological criteria for the collaborative production of knowledge between professional researchers and social movements is presented.

1. A higher education institution turning its back on society

A characteristic feature of Latin American higher education institutions at the beginning of the 20th century was their fixation on the colonial higher education model, centred on academic and professional education in classical fields such as philosophy, theology, medicine, law, natural sciences, and the emerging engineering careers, with little or no dialogue with national and local realities. In the case of Colombia, the higher education condition was more precarious because of the legacy of the so-called regeneration: scarce autonomy and confessional and with no relationship whatsoever with nascent social movements.

The higher education student movement that began in Córdoba (Argentina) in 1918 had among its main criticisms the higher education institution, its cloister, and its lack of knowledge of national realities, particularly those of popular sectors. In its *Liminar Manifesto*, the higher education students questioned the cloistered higher education institution, and proposed a higher education institution open to social issues and committed to the less fortunate. To this end, they proposed extensionism, understood as projecting academic knowledge toward the understanding of and overcoming social issues.

In Colombia, this reformist wave has been adopted by higher education students, forming a movement questioning the absence of research and scientific education. Between 1920 and 1924, the student-led higher education reform movement was strengthened, but its fruits would only be seen a decade later with the reforms promoted by President López. The only experience in Colombia based on an extensionist perspective was the one developed by the young student Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who, inspired by the movement in Córdoba, created together with other students from *Universidad Nacional*, a *Higher Education Center for Cultural Propaganda*, from which they developed educational activities with workers in poor neighborhoods in Bogotá and other cities, as well as with peasants in areas near the capital (Torres, 1992, p 18).

The so-called “Revolution on the March”, led by President Alfonso López Pumarejo, introduced some changes favourable to higher education: established the Organic Law of the Higher Education Institution (1935); created *Escuela Normal Superior* (1936); strengthened *Universidad Nacional*; acknowledged a higher education institution’s autonomy and academic freedom (Soto, 2005, p. 123). However, this liberalisation of Colombian higher education policy did not mean progress in linking its schools and education programs to the social dynamics of the time.

This process was interrupted by a transcendental event in the country’s history: the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9 1948, and the popular uprising that ensued. As a result of this event, the persecution of his followers and the political violence scourging Colombian rural areas until 1964 intensified. Although the arrival of the Conservative Party to government in 1945 had already begun to reverse some of the progressive measures in higher education policy and promoted the expansion of private higher education institutions, as of that moment, the Catholic Church and the government strengthened the conservative nature of higher education, which was perpetuated during the military dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957).

As expected, during this period higher education institutions did not make progress in addressing social reality. However, their students did, who, since 1954, protested against

the military regime, contributing to its fall, and the establishment of the so-called National Front in 1958². This agreement between the political elites represented a monopoly on public power and state institutions, which meant the exclusion of left-wing parties. This led to the progressive radicalisation of the political opposition, giving rise to, or supporting, the emergence of anti-system guerrillas.

On the other hand, the institutional closure of the National Front also ignored the expansion and pluralisation of social movements in rural areas and the city. Indeed, this period coincided with the accelerated forced migration of peasants to the cities, urban growth, industrialization, and modernisation processes; old conflicts in rural areas and the city were worsening, and other new ones associated with capitalist expansion were emerging. Thus, between the mid-1970s and throughout the following decade, peasant struggles grew, indigenous peoples generated their own organisations and demands, the student movement radicalised, city inhabitants mobilized around their right to the city, and even some sectors from the Catholic Church joined in these struggles and social movements.

On the other hand, in Colombia, as in Latin America, there were also some significant changes within the political left, associated with dynamics at the international level: tensions between the USSR and communist China, which gave rise to political parties and movements and Maoist guerrillas, as well as the Cuban revolutionary experience, which inspired the birth of Guevarista guerrillas, such as the National Liberation Army. In addition, as a response to the State's frustrated attempt at elimination, a peasant movement gave rise to a guerrilla group with a communist affiliation: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC.

2. Initial approaches between Higher Education Institution and Social Conflicts

Also, in 1961, the country's first sociology department was created at *Universidad Nacional de Colombia*. Its first director was Orlando Fals Borda, who had just arrived from the United States from completing his postgraduate studies in sociology,³ and who was also part of the teams that drafted the Agrarian Reform and Community Action laws, reformist policies aimed at containing the conflict within the rural areas and the urban periphery. The first team of faculty professors also included the priest Camilo Torres and Dr. María Cristina Salazar: the only individuals with degrees in the discipline, as well as other researchers such as anthropologists Virginia Gutiérrez, Roberto Pineda, and lawyer Eduardo Umaña Luna.

This team of social scientists conducted the first collective research on an issue relevant to the country: the study on violence in Colombia, which took advantage of a file compiled by the priest Germán Guzmán Campos (Campos, Fals y Umaña, 1962). The study, in addition to providing a detailed description of violence, incorporated a sociological, anthropological, and legal analysis of the phenomenon, revealing the responsibility of the political and economic

2 Covenant between the liberal and conservative parties to alternate in government between 1958 and 1974, as well as to distribute among themselves all of the public offices. Said agreement was justified to avert the violence that had worsened since April 9, 1948, leaving more than 300,000 casualties.

3 He did his undergraduate studies in literature and music at the University of Dubuque in Iowa, his master's degree in sociology at the University of Minnesota and his doctorate in sociology at the University of Florida.

elites in the conflict, who benefited from the illegal appropriation of land. Its publication in 1962 generated controversy and rejection among the institutionalism, which disqualified its authors as “communists” amid the Cold War.

This fact was key for these social researchers to progressively distance themselves from the reformist project with which they had so far identified. The case of the priest Camilo Torres Restrepo is the most renowned: faced with institutional pressures and his identification with the armed revolution, he joined the ELN guerrillas in 1965, dying in combat at the beginning of the following year. For their part, Orlando Fals Borda and Cristina Salazar decided to continue their intellectual commitment and research work outside of the Higher Education Institution: “The administrative and curricular rigidity of higher education institutions, as well as the gap between research and renovation, did not allow for initiatives of this type” (Cataño, 1986, p. 19). With the retirement of these outstanding researchers, the School of Sociology was left in the hands of conventional academics who oriented education toward the study of the classics and disregarded current pressing issues.

3. Militant Research with Social Movements

It is in this critical context, at the social and political level, that the first methodological proposal for participatory social research aligned to social movements arises, managed by a collective of Colombian social scientists, led by Orlando Fals Borda. In a broader context of dialogue with other Latin American researchers who dissented with reformist developmentalism, Fals Borda (1970) questioned the colonialist nature of how the social sciences were imposed on Latin America; he also proposed the need for a liberation sociology that would respond authentically to the region’s historical specificity and to his own needs.

This new social science, committed to social struggles, demanded a decolonising and militant methodology that acknowledged popular knowledge and involved communities and their social organisations as subjects of knowledge, promoting the dialogue of knowledge and raising awareness among individuals. Thus, at the end of 1970, together with other researchers, they created *La Rosca* Foundation⁴ for research and social action; this entity was committed to assisting popular organisations and movements, particularly peasant and indigenous ones, in several locations in the country.

Thus, for example, Salazar and Fals Borda moved to the Atlantic Coast of Colombia to establish partnerships with the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC), a peasant organisation that led the struggle for land. With that organisation, they agreed on educational and research support regarding the history of their struggles, particularly in the department of Córdoba. As a result, they began to reconstruct the struggles experienced in the region, training teams to interview old and new leaders, contextualise the experiences within the framework of the country’s history, produce informational materials, and “systematically return” the research results to the social bases. To this end, they resorted to creative ways such as the production of comic books, pamphlets and films, songwriting and plays (Fals Borda, 1994, p. 38 y 39).

4 “Rosca” is a Colombian colloquial expression denoting the closed and exclusive groups of the political and economic elites. Here it was used in an ironic sense.

This novel way of doing research and politics, initially referred to as “study-action” was severely criticised. On the one hand, from the higher education realm, where professors and researchers did not consider this participative and militant methodology “scientific”; on the other hand, from the left-wing parties that saw these participative processes as an “ideological deviation” without the tutelage of a vanguard party. There were so many tensions and threats that Fals Borda had to leave the region in 1975. Similar processes also occurred in other areas of the country such as Cauca, where *La Rosca* had supported the nascent Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca.

Faced with the need to assess the political and research experience and submit it to discussion by other social scientists, who, at the same time, had generated methodologies of a militant and participative nature, Fals Borda began to organise, from 1976, a World Symposium of alternative social scientists, which finally took place in Cartagena in 1977. This event was very significant in building a current of critical research, as well as for the public presentation of what later would be the Participatory Action Research. Indeed, in said event, Fals presented the paper “For praxis: the issue of how to research to transform it”, where he bases the nascent methodology, resorting to heterodox Marxist theorists such as Gramsci and Lukács, and he describes and reflects on the strategies and techniques created during the experience carried out with the ANUC.

In the 1980s, Fals extended that paper into a book, and began to refer to the new methodology as Participatory Action Research. During these years, he also produced other texts, developing the epistemic references and methodological criteria which underpinned and guided it. As a comparative analysis, the main features of this experience of alignment between social research and social movements “outside of the higher education institution” are summarised below (Fals, 1997; Torres, 2010; Herrera, 2018):

1. Its “own science” in the service of popular classes. Based on the criticism of intellectual colonialism, they insisted on the “authenticity” of the social sciences in the Latin American context, as well as on the commitment of researchers, assumed in Gramscian terms as “organic intellectuals”, to popular causes and popular class organisations.
2. Non-dogmatic adoption of Marxism: This group of researchers adopted Marxism as a working method, in its theoretical and practical aspects, distancing themselves from the parties and groups that assumed it dogmatically as an ideology. This allowed them to resort to different authors of said critical tradition, particularly heterodox ones such as Gramsci and Lukács; this allowed them to adjust and recreate some relevant categories to regional and national realities.
3. Alignment between theory and practice: closely related to the foregoing, the concern about the combination between study, knowledge, and reality transforming action was solved by adopting the category of *praxis* proposed by a young Marx, and revisited by Gramsci as the singularity of Marxism when he referred to it as the *philosophy of praxis*; in a similar sense, Fals will speak of a *sociology of praxis*, in tune with the *pedagogy of praxis*, proposed by Freire⁵.

5 In his subsequent reflections, Fals Borda also incorporated the Aristotelian category of *phronesis*, to argue that the transforming action must be prudent.

4. Participation in knowledge production. Perhaps the most original contribution of this research proposal was to seek to overcome the dichotomy between the research subject and research object, intrinsic to classical science. By acknowledging organisations and social bases as political and knowledge subjects, a transition is made to a subject-subject relationship enabling co-operative research.
5. Dialogue between popular knowledge and scientific knowledge. From Freire he will also incorporate the idea of *dialogue* but understood as a *dialogue of knowledge* to refer to the needed confluence between specialised knowledge coming from the social sciences with popular knowledge (which he referred to as *popular science*) and the knowledge generated from the social struggles themselves.
6. Rescue history and local and regional cultures. The contextual and mobilizing nature of research led this team of researchers to promptly acknowledge the importance of social history and local cultures, not only as a necessary object of inquiry, but also as perspectives based on which to address and understand peasants' resistance and struggles. Thus, Fals proposed that participatory research cannot be done without "historical recovery".
7. Use of simple and friendly techniques. Within their concern to democratise social research methodologies, Fals Borda and his team carried out the simple use of research techniques, such as mini-surveys and interviews; however, no epistemological or political criticism was made on these techniques, which were generated based on assumptions and parameters of hegemonic social science.
8. Communication between social researchers, leaders, and social bases. Faced with the differences between academic and popular language, which prevented communication between researchers and social collectives, this research proposal insisted on the production of educational materials: textbooks and pamphlets, as well as audiovisual pieces such as comics, films, musical and theatre compositions. In his book, *Historia Doble de la Costa* [Double History of the Coast], Fals Borda innovated academic writing by incorporating two communication channels: one analytical and the other narrative.

Following the socialisation of these epistemological and methodological approaches at the Cartagena Congress in 1977, Participatory Action Research began its path of dissemination, appropriation, and adjustment throughout the world (Herrera, 2018, p. 90). On the one hand, among social movements and organisations, who saw in it a strategy for knowledge production consistent with their political meanings; on the other hand, among social researchers and non-governmental organisations, who saw in this emerging methodology a research potential to assist social, educational, and cultural processes with which they interacted; but it was also assumed and "co-opted" by international development agencies that used it as an efficient tool to produce information on popular issues and populations, "object" of their policies.

4. Researching Social Movements based on Civil Associations

On September 14, the same year that the Congress of Cartagena was held, the First national civic strike took place in Colombia, symbolising the rise of the period's social struggles and

became a milestone for the beginning of the stage that would follow. Indeed, following a call by the trade union to a day of action, inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods of the cities took to the streets to protest for several days. The governments were not indifferent to this popular upsurge and overflow; in the context of the military dictatorships in most of the continent's countries, a repressive policy was unleashed in Colombia that involved mass arrests, torture, forced disappearances, and the persecution of social movements.

This scenario evidenced that beyond the classic trade unions and peasant organisations, other dissident social actors had been progressively developing in the cities, which until now had been invisible to social activists and analysts. It also showed that, regarding growing human rights violations, social organisations and practices were emerging to protect them and report the abuses that were being committed.

Just as these initiatives emerged from civil society, interest in researching them arose in the nations. Non-governmental organisations supported multiple local experiences around urban issues, work with and among women and youth, often inspired by education and communication, liberation theology, art and culture, and alternative law (Torres, 2007).

Throughout the 1980s, while the academic social sciences were consolidating their disciplining and cloister, it was these centres that undertook the task of producing knowledge and critical thinking about and based on social struggles, movements, and organisations. Institutions such as the Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP), the Forum for Colombia Foundation, the Educational Dimension Association, the Institute for Popular Promotion (CPC), the Region Corporation, and the Latin American Institute for an Alternative Society and Laws (ILSA)⁶. These organisations are the ones that undertook relevant issues such as violence and social struggles; as an example, in 1985, some of them published a joint book on the Colombian labour movement, the result of a Seminar held in Medellín that same year.

Although some researchers maintained their links with their higher education institutions, the knowledge production closest to social demands and dynamics was conducted with these civil organisations. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention the work on workers' struggles (Archila, 1986, 1987 y 1989), civic movements and urban struggles (Santana, 1982, 1983 y 1989; Giraldo 1985 y 1987; González, 1984), as well as the work of the professor M. Medina (1984) on urban protest in Colombia. On the other hand, from *Dimensión Educativa* (1985, 1988, and 1990), contributions were made regarding the use of participatory methodologies in social research, such as IAP and the collective recovery of history. On the other hand, it is important to mention the testimonial research work carried out by Arturo Álape and Alfredo Molano on the Bogotazo, violence, peasant and urban struggles, which, without being participatory, made visible the view and voice of its actors.

In any case, from civil organisations based on popular education, participatory research methodologies were generated as the collective recovery of history. Some grassroots organisations and teacher collectives began to request support in creating neighbourhood and local stories with the purpose of getting to know the populations they worked with better, as an entry strategy to them, or to develop curricular proposals around shared stories of social struggles. Entities such as *Dimensión Educativa*, CLEBA, and the IPC developed designs

6 It was also the journals of these organisations that addressed contemporary problems and communicated relevant research.

to make these stories, resorting to the contributions of participatory research, oral history, and “history from below” created within the historiographic field. Thus, stories of popular neighbourhoods and organizations, as well as methodological texts, were produced in Bogotá, Medellín, and other cities (Cendales, Peresson, & Torres, 1990).

During the second half of the 1980s there were some timid and marginal approaches by the higher education sphere to social issues and alternative research methodologies. This did not happen in the Schools and departments of the social sciences, but rather in spaces considered as “marginal” or “plebeian” within institutional hierarchies, such as Extension programs, community internships, as well as in “practical” professional programs such as social work, education, and nursing. The more disciplined schools generally remained immune to reality and these modes of engaged research; rather, they sought to discredit them for their lack of science and neutrality⁷.

During the 1990s and the following decade, this trend continued, with some variations, associated with significant changes in the context. Indeed, the negotiation processes between some guerrilla organisations (FARC, M-19, EPL) and the government, the subsequent signing of peace agreements with the latter two; the constitutional process that gave rise to a New Political Constitution (1991), and; the multiplication of social struggles and movements positioned issues such as violence, peace, democracy and citizenship, as well as urban, environmental, ethnic, women’s, and peace struggles on the public agenda.

These significant historical changes challenged higher education institutions and state research centres to undertake their responsibility of accountability: together with the already mentioned Non-Governmental Organizations, for some of the contemporary social issues but maintaining their social research methodologies from their disciplinary fields, generally resorting to quantitative and qualitative techniques. Regarding social movements, there was a proliferation of studies, some of them conducted by students’ dissertations, which contrasts with previous periods. The most discussed topics were: civic and urban (García, 1996; Torres, 1993; Novoa, 2009), peasant (Salgado y Prada, 2000; Ramírez, 2001), women (Lamus, 2010; Luna y Villarreal, 2011), indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian struggles (González, 2006, Pardo, 2001), and struggles for peace (García, 2006). Some global comparative analysis of the social struggles in Colombia were also conducted (Múnera, 1998; Archila y Pardo, 2001; Archila, 2003; Archila y otros, 2002).

5. Research between social organisations and the University

At the beginning of the XXI century, new research approaches emerged replicating the tradition created by Participatory Action Research (PAR) in a new phase of social movement consolidation that included indigenous people, women, environmentalists, rural workers, Afro-Colombians and LGBTI+ people, as well as urban working class young and cultural organizations. These participatory research approaches are consolidated by the co-operation between academic research groups and social organisations across the country; however, due to

7 With some exceptions, in terms of studies on peasant and student struggles (Fajardo, 1984; Bejarano, 1983; Jaramillo, 1988; García, 1990).

its richness in sources, this work focuses on the research group *Subjects and new narratives in social science research*, based at the National Pedagogic University in Bogotá.

From the last decade of the XX century, researchers that had made their careers within NGOs, started joining public universities, and were joined by activists that start their bachelors and postgrads in social Sciences. Their previous and new experiences conveyed into the universities via the creation of new seminars, courses and programs focused in community and other collective organisational processes. For instance, the leader and founder of the research group we are analysing, had a trajectory within Popular Education and had a background as researcher of the history of social urban struggle in Bogotá and the collective construction of memory with the Educative Dimension Association (Torres, 1993; Torres, 2014). In Colombia, Popular Education has been introduced as a pedagogic perspective inspired by Paulo Freire's ideas, which advocates the leadership of people in the understanding and transformations of unfair realities, through pedagogic experiences based on dialogue, participation and collective production of knowledge.

Correspondingly, in the Pedagogic University, a program in Community Education has been formed since 1985, connecting the academic work to community organisations in order to do joint projects on adult learning and cultural activities in Bogotá's working-class districts. Students produce small but significant process of participatory research, neighbourhood and community projects history, and contextualised curriculum design.

After forming the research group in the year 2000, researchers and community leaders decided to start the two-year project "Popular organisations, local identities and citizenship in Bogotá", which represented a thematic, methodological and conceptual milestone for the process. Thematically, one of the first questions guiding the project was about the longevity of the popular organisations that conformed it, as many of them could be traced back to the 1970's and were still active and relevant within the popular social movement. In terms of methodology, the project allowed to test an innovative and participative methodology: the systematisation of experiences. This meant that every step in the research process was the result of a collective agreement between researchers and members of the popular organisations. This dialogue showed that participatory research promotes self-learning and critical thought in popular organisations and enhances their ability to have agency in wider social transformations.

During that research a new research question emerged: what is pedagogic about social organisations? Two organisations that had participated in the original project (CPC and La Coordinadora) and a new one (Fundación Kerigma), teamed with the research group to analyse the educational and pedagogic dimensions of social organisations. As a result of this research, three dimensions of the pedagogic knowledge were recognized within social organisations: educational discourses and pedagogical work criteria, formation as pedagogic knowledge in organisations, and daily life as a formative scenario (Torres, Mendoza and Barragán, 2006).

From this research experience, a new interest in exploring educative processes that promoted critical thinking within the wider social movement in Colombia emerged. Consequently, some members of the research group conducted a project between 2005 and 2006 focusing on that matter: social movements, education and critical thinking formation. In this project, they teamed up with the *Red de Organizaciones de Educadoras Comunitarias*,

an association that gathers different organisations of community educators, which in Colombia are traditionally women. As a result of the research, it was concluded that these women collective had been creating a critic-interpretative community, which produced their own set of values, criteria and strategies to promote critical thinking among their members.

Later on, in the years 2011 and 2012, the group worked on the project “Education in Latin American social movements”, which aimed to analyse the educative dimension of some of the social movements in Latin America, understanding that these are spaces where pedagogic and emancipatory knowledges can thrive and have a high constituency potential. In order to achieve this, the group cooperated with the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University in Colombia, the Amauta Indigenous University in Ecuador, the Popular Secondary School Association in Argentina, and the Rural Workers Confederation’s leadership school in Brazil (CONTAG) (Torres, 2005).

This project widened the geographical scope of the research group, and at the same time validated participatory research methodologies and forged an alliance with other universities and research groups like the Popular Educators and Researchers Cooperative at the University of Buenos Aires and the aforementioned CONTAG. Building on that experience, between 2013 and 2014 the group’s attention turned back to the local level with the project “Formation of subjectivities, communal senses and politic alternatives in organizational processes”, aimed at understanding the concepts of alternative and political subjectivities and ideas of community in 3 community organisations (Aguilera, González and Torres, 2015).

As part of this process, and in alliance with other academic and social organisations, the research group has published books and articles aiming to synthesise the principles, criteria and methodologic strategies used so far (Aguilera, González and Torres, 2012; Torres, 2010; Torres, 2014; Barragán y Torres, 2017). A balance on the methodologic conclusions of that process is done in the following lines, and is divided in two parts: first, a definition of the principles and criteria behind this particular way of understanding and doing research; and second, a description of particular times and collective decision-making during the research process.

Based on the experience of these past years and on the work of Falkembach and Torres (2015) and Torres (1996), these are some of the main criteria for our way of understanding and doing research with social organisations, keeping in mind that this is a process of constant change and learning:

1. Maintaining a critical distance from institutionalised research modes in the scientific world, acknowledging their subordination to hegemonic powers (imperial, capitalist, modern colonial, etc.) and disdain for other forms of knowledge. Likewise, the limits of positivism are questioned to give an account of the intersubjective and cultural character of popular educational practices.
2. Assuming it to be both critical and emancipatory. It reveals situations, contexts, and structures of oppression and injustice while promoting the transformation of individuals and collectives into autonomous subjects capable of confronting adverse circumstances and ending the relationships that perpetuate oppressive schema. This liberating option is identified with values, willpower, and projects that involve new meanings of the organisation of collective life that form alternatives to capitalism; in other words, the concept that “other worlds are possible.”

3. Understanding Popular Education as qualitative research into a set of approaches, methodologies, strategies, and techniques that recognise the place of the cultural and the intersubjective, both in social phenomena and in social research processes. In fact, there is no social practice, educational or investigative, outside culture nor external to the symbolic interaction of the meanings and effects of individuals.
4. Linking it to emancipatory organisational processes and collective actions. Political and cultural emancipation is recognised as social action programmed by forces that resist the system of oppression, and research practices are the result of agreements with collectives, organizations, and social movements that decide to implement them as a means to try and strengthen their options and actions.
5. Not subordinating it to the institutional logic of disciplinary research. Instead of academic caprice or fashion, it is the nature of their feelings that motivates subjects and the problems that concern them which determine knowledge production. It is their interest in emancipation and their drive to understand, with the purpose of transforming unique social processes and practices, that dictates the approaches which cross institutional, epistemological, and methodological boundaries. Popular Education research is almost always situated between the academic and social worlds, blending knowledge production and political action.
6. Promoting group and organisation participation in research process decisions. This allows them to define and agree to the “why” and “what” behind the research; what will be researched and how; what the results will be; and what to do with them. In almost all cases, a research team that is responsible for data collection, analysis and interpretation, and results’ write-up is formed. Participative research promotes democratic relationships between the different categories of researcher subjects.
7. Ensuring that it drives formation of knowledge collectives. This research is identified with participatory focuses, so the knowledge subjects it involves are “common” people who are members of organisational processes and with whom agreements can be reached to carry out research and participate in teams. To activate participation, conditions and processes are generated to form collectives, using each project’s methodological approach, strategies, and techniques.
8. Critically relating it to theory. Since the historicity and uniqueness of social processes is emphasised, initial work with the protagonists focuses on understanding the elements, factors, and meanings that structure the study problems and how the subjects categorize and interpret these realities. Once reasons and meanings are identified, the relevant conceptual references are uncovered, to more deeply understand the initial findings. In this way, critical use of theoretical structures is made, provoking dialectic between comprehension of the specific and interpretation within wider frameworks.
9. Recognising the plurality of subjects and promoting a “dialogue of knowledge.” In recognising that the multiplicity of dimensions and senses within social processes cannot be encompassed inside a single rationality and cultural system, this research attempts to attain a consensus in ways of thinking, interpreting, and narrating reality; this is almost always a confrontational process.
10. Incorporating different forms and cultural practices that the communities have in order to produce and communicate their knowledge. From its origins, the research inspired

by Popular Education incorporated the arts and the popular music, humour, and celebration and decision-making events (assemblies, committees); this enabled meanings and popular worldviews to be not only objects but research perspectives.

11. Favouring construction of life-ways from the uniqueness of the examined practices. Our researches propose capturing in words the meanings and feelings manifested in lived experience, transformed into an object of knowledge and action. Analysing social practices and identifying the socio-historic conditions they create is a means of linking the ways subjects talk about “what happens” to their practices and seeing how these mark and transform them.
12. Assuming methodology to be a flexible practice. As a way of counteracting the instrumental rationality of institutionalised research, this perspective treats methodologies as constructions to be adopted critically and creatively. The research adapts to and creates strategies and procedures according to the unique meanings, subjects, and questions of each project.
13. Assuming research within Popular Education is a reflexive practice. As long as the subjects’ researchers are recognised as carriers of culture and subjectivity, it becomes necessary to subject a permanent critical judgment to each of the moments and decisions of any research process.

Now, in terms of the particular times and collective decision-making during our research process, the following is a methodologic route which, with possible variations depending on the case, is followed by researchers working with social organisations:

1. Collective project definition. We reached agreements on the research questions, justification and methodology, and a work plan created to delineate activities, responsibilities, resources and times.
2. Investigation of main research problems. This was done by defining, reconstructing and analysing some of the main significant events of each sub-topic. This was not a linear reconstruction of movement’s historic events and processes, but production of agreed upon stories regarding key events. Analysis of these stories produced inputs for further interpretation.
3. Moments of analysis. We first analysed achievements, challenges and lessons learned, and then socialised and discussed these issues in subsequent meetings.
4. Results synthesis. We produced a written text from the set of topics, events and reconstructed processes, including analyses by event and topic, conclusions and recommendations. Within the reconstruction process, these texts were discussed and amended, then assembled into a whole. This in turn was read various times by group members and a supportive researcher who helped to edit for style.
5. Socialisation of the research findings and conclusions did not end with the book. A video was produced in active collaboration with students from the Universidad, and community activities were carried out to socialize and discuss the study results with members of the organisations.

6. Current trends: social movements that do research

After this short history of the recent relationship between research and social movements in Colombia, we present a description of the state of that relationship now and in the past decade. First, social mobilisation keeps growing and also keeps widening its motivations: aside with traditional civil rights, working-class and rural claims, new topics like the defence of traditional territories and ecosystems against transnational extractivism, the claim for a dialogued end of the civil war in Colombia and the requirement of protection for social leaders being systematically killed. Additionally, there's been a revival of both the student and teachers organised movement against austerity and neoliberal policies against public education (Cruz, 2017).

Related to these different forms of collective action, research produced from academia and NGOs keeps growing, with a great increase in MA and PhD dissertations addressing education and social movements. In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been used, although there has been a greater emphasis on highlighting the social movement participants' voice through interviews and focus groups (Archila and González, 2010).

There has been some innovation in this past decade. One has been the formalisation of the relationship between researchers and social organisations with the creation of observatories and networks in which activists are often producing research themselves (Dussan, 2017; Red Popular de Mujeres de La Sabana, 2019). In those cases, research strategies have tended to be of a dialectic and co-operative nature, with the inclusion of innovative communication and outreach strategies like walking tours, photographic exhibitions and other visual and narrative expressions.

These innovations announce a growing trend, where social movements are at the centre of research process, having greater agency and leading the alliance with academic and non-academic research groups and networks. Additionally, the most established organisations have permanent suborganizations committed to the production and dissemination of knowledge, which, in their own terms, contact established researchers and institutions. This research produced "from below" and with more horizontal relationships between academia, NGOs and social movements, has also promoted the renewal of the epistemological and methodological principles in participatory research. Along with the traditional sources of Marxism and Participatory Action Research, post and de-colonial as well as community-centred feminist perspectives have enriched the range of theoretical scopes available. Similarly, new methodologies like social cartography, word *mingas*, tours through the territory and visual narratives have complemented the already diverse set of strategies used so far.

Above all, we consider that the growing collaboration between universities, NGOs, researchers and social movement brings benefit for all the participants, as, on the one hand, it renews universities main functions (formation, education, outreach); and on the other, it helps widening researchers' methodological, theoretical and epistemological references. Consequently, it promotes the empowerment of the social movement through the production and socialisation of knowledge by and for itself.

Conclusions

After this panoramic view of the relationship between universities, researchers and social movements in Colombia we can see how, in a mostly conservative institutional context, a set of avant-garde takes on the production of knowledge have been developed beyond the epistemological and methodologic principles of conventional research. Additionally, these novel ways of researching have permeated academia, not “through the front door”, but through the cracks generated by specific projects of university extension, community practices and non-disciplinary education programs.

In contrast, we have also seen how this emancipatory and politically engaged research, which actively involves regular people and organisations in the production of knowledge, can sometimes be appropriated by international organisations and governments and be put at the service of their political agenda. Therefore, research involving social movements is currently a field in constant construction, where new research methods, techniques and strategies emerge; many of them inspired by the accumulated principles, criteria and standards of participatory methodologies.

Bibliografía

- A.V. (1985). *La investigación sobre movimiento obrero en Colombia*. Medellín, IPC – CEIS – Dimensión Educativa, CINEP y ENS.
- Aguilera A., González M. I. y Torres A. (2012), “Investigar subjetividades y formación de sujetos con organizaciones y movimientos sociales”, en: Claudia Piedrahita y otros, *Acercamientos metodológicos a la subjetivación política: debates latinoamericanos*, Buenos Aires, CLACSO –UD – (2014). *Reinventando la comunidad y la política*, Bogotá, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
- Archila, M. (1986). “Aquí nadie es forastero. Testimonios sobre la formación de una cultura radical”. *Controversia* 133 – 134, Bogotá, CINEP
- (1987). “Barranquilla y río: una historia social de sus trabajadores”. *Controversia* 142, Bogotá, CINEP
- (1989). “Ni amos ni siervos. Memoria obrera de Bogotá y Medellín”. *Controversia* 156 – 157, Bogotá, CINEP
- (2003). *Idas y venidas, vueltas y revueltas. Protestas sociales en Colombia 1958 – 1990*, Bogotá, CINEP – ICANH
- Archila M. y González N. (2010). *Movimiento indígena caucano: historia y política*, Bogotá, USTA
- Archila M. y Pardo M. (2001). *Movimientos sociales y democracia en Colombia*. Bogotá, ICANH
- Archila y otros (2002). *25 años de luchas sociales en Colombia 1975 – 2000*, Bogotá, CINEP
- (2018). *Cuando la copa se rebasa. Luchas sociales en Colombia 1975 – 2105*, Bogotá, CINEP
- Avendaño M., Barragán D., González M. I., Mendoza N., Torres A., Vargas A., y Vallejo M. (2003). *Organizaciones populares, identidades locales y ciudadanía en Bogotá*. Bogotá, UPN – COLCIENCIAS
- AVESOL (2013). *Avesol: 36 años de resistencia popular en el suroriente bogotano*. Bogotá, ARFO
- Barragán, D. (2017). *Procesos formativos de la Consejería Mujer, Familia y Generación de la Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia, producción de subjetividades femeninas emancipadoras y reelaboración de proyectos alternativos*. Tesis para optar por el título de Doctora en Educación. Bogotá, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
- Barragán, D., Mendoza, N. y Torres, A. (2006). “Aquí todo es educativo”, *Folios* # 23, Bogotá, Facultad de Humanidades, UPN.

- Barragán, D, y Torres, A. (2017). *La sistematización como investigación interpretativa crítica*, Bogotá, El Búho - Síntesis
- Cataño, G. y otros (1987). *Ciencia y compromiso. En torno a la obra de Orlando Fals Borda*, Bogotá, Asociación colombiana de sociología
- Cruz, Edwin (2017). *Caminando la palabra. Movilizaciones sociales en Colombia (2010 -2016)*, Bogotá, Ediciones Desde Abajo
- Dussán, Miller (2017). *El Quimbo. Extractivismo, despojo, ecocidio y resistencia*, Bogotá, Planeta Paz - ASOQUIMBO
- Fals Borda, O. (1970). *Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual*, Bogotá, Punta de Lanza
- (1994). *Por la praxis. El problema de cómo investigar la realidad para transformarla*, Bogotá, Tercer Mundo editores
- Fals Borda O., Guzmán Campos, G. y Umaña Luna, E. (1962). *La violencia en Colombia*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
- Falkembach E. y Torres A. (2015). “Systematization of Experiences: A Practice of Participatory Research from Latin America”, Barbury H., *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research*, London, Sage
- García, M. (1997). “Descentralización y movilización popular en Bogotá”, en: García, M. y Zamudio J. V. *Descentralización en Bogotá bajo La lupa (1992 – 1996)*, Bogotá, CINEP
- García-Durán, M. (2006). *Movimiento por la paz en Colombia*. Bogotá, CINEP
- González, C. (2006). *Resistencia indígena. Alternativa en medio del conflicto colombiano*. Bogotá, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
- Gramsci, A. (1985). *Antología*, México, Siglo XXI editores
- Herrera, N. (2018). *Saber colectivo y educación popular. Tentativas sobre Orlando Fals Borda*. Buenos Aires, El Colectivo – Ediciones desde abajo
- Lemus, D. (2010). *De la subversión a la inclusión: movimientos de mujeres de la segunda ola en Colombia (1975 – 2005)*, Bogotá, ICANH
- Lukács, G. (1975). *Historia y conciencia de clase*, Barcelona, Ediciones Grijalbo
- Luna L. y Villarreal N. (2011). *Movimientos de mujeres y participación política en Colombia del siglo XX al siglo XX*, Bogotá, Editorial Gente Nueva
- Medina, M. (1984). *La protesta urbana en Colombia*, Bogotá, Editorial Aurora
- Múnera, L. (1998). *Rupturas y continuidades. Poder y movimiento popular en Colombia 1968 -1988*, Bogotá, IEPRI –Universidad Nacional de Colombia
- Novoa E. (2009). *Trayectorias geopolíticas en Colombia*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
- Pardo M. (2001). *Acción colectiva y etnicidad*, Bogotá, ICANH
- Parra, E. (1983). *La investigación acción en la Costa Atlántica. Evaluación de la Rosca 1972 – 1974*, Cali, FUNCOP
- Ramírez, M. C. (2001). *Entre el estado y la guerrilla: identidad y ciudadanía en el movimiento de campesinos cocaleros del Putumayo*, Bogotá, ICANH
- Red popular de mujeres de la sabana (2019). *La economía del cuidado como práctica y discurso político de mujeres populares* (2 volúmenes), Bogotá, Fundación Rosa Luxemburgo
- Salgado C. y Prada E. (2000). *Campesinado y protesta social en Colombia*, Bogotá, CINEP
- Santana, P. y otros (1982). “El paro cívico 1981”, *Controversia* 101, Bogotá, CINEP
- (1983). “Desarrollo regional y paros cívicos en Colombia”. *Controversia* 107-108, Bogotá, CINEP
- (1989). *Los movimientos sociales en Colombia*, Bogotá, Ediciones Foro
- Soto, D. (2005). “Aproximación histórica a la historia del movimiento estudiantil en Colombia”, *Revista Historia de la educación latinoamericana*, Vol. 7, Tunja, UPTC
- Torres, A. (1993). *La ciudad en la sombra. Barrios y luchas populares en Bogotá (1958 -1977)*, Bogotá, CINEP

- (1994). Jorge Eliécer Gaitán y la educación popular, Quito, CEDECO
- (2007). *Identidad y política de la acción colectiva*. Bogotá, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
- (2008). “Investigar en los márgenes de las Ciencias Sociales”, en: *Folios # 27*, Bogotá, Revista de la Facultad de Humanidades. UPN. doi: 10.17227/01234870.27folios51.62
- (2010). “Generating knowledge in popular education: from participatory research to systematization of experiences”, in *International journal of Action Research*, Vol. 6, # 2 – 3, Mering, Germany doi: 10.1688/1861-9916_IJAR_2010_02-03_Torres
- (2014). “Producción de conocimiento desde la investigación crítica”, *Nómadas # 40*. Instituto de Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos – Universidad Central
- (2015). *Educación popular y movimientos sociales en América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Biblos

About the autor

Social educator and researcher, Ph.D. in Latin American Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Professor at la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (Colombia).

Author' address

Alfonso Torres Carrillo
Carrera 57 # 53 - 50 Ap 5 - 536
Balcones de Pablo VI, Bogotá, DC
alfonsitorres@gmail.com
Phone: 57 3107740608