

**TORRES CARRILLO, Alfonso. Pensamiento epistémico, educación popular e investigación participativa. Mexico City: Editora Nómada, IPECAL, 2019.**

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Educator and researcher Alfonso Torres Carrillo, professor emeritus at the Pedagogical University of Bogotá, Colombia, acts as a popular educator committed to emancipatory social meanings and practices. His close relationship with the Council for Popular Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CEAAL) led him to undertake an evaluation commissioned by this institution of La Piragua's productions on popular education between 2004 and 2008. The result of this research was published by the journal itself (Torres C., 2009) and also in a book (Torres, C. 2008 and 2021).

The book reviewed here is the result of a series of lectures given by the author at the doctoral schools of the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas (Colombia) and the Instituto de Pensamiento y Cultura de América Latina (IPECAL); its aim was to synthesize the ontological, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical assumptions of Latin American critical thought in the context of popular education. The author's choice was to establish a dialogue between Hugo Zemelman and other referents of popular education and participatory research, especially Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda.

The author, as a popular educator, has been a reader of Freire's work, interacted at various times with Fals Borda and worked with Professor Zemelman from 2000 to 2013, with whom he learned about the density of his thought in the political, epistemic, methodological and pedagogical dimensions. And the present book of 121 pages, with four chapters, corresponding to topics addressed in conferences between 2017 and 2019 in Colombia and Mexico, provides a contribution with unpublished aspects to the field of Education and Research.

A first point of reference refers to Hugo Zemelman's epistemology of the "potential present", a fundamental and inseparable element in dialectics, but often forgotten by pragmatic or (neo-) positivist currents of thought that are sometimes called materialist. As Torres presupposes, more than a theory, epistemology implies an ontology of sociohistorical reality and the place of subjectivity and subjects in its configuration, giving rise to dialectical readings, open to the movement of social life. Social reality, intrinsically contradictory and indeterminate, is the result of the actions of individual and collective subjects, an important key that allows us to overcome deterministic analysis. For this author, social practices are always impregnated with utopias, projects and potentialities, "as a synthesis of processes and possibilities of the present future; that is, as the given that contains the future" (Zemelman, 1992, p. 12).

A second aspect marks the importance of thinking from the Latin American context, considering the centuries of domination in which colonialism was forged, not only eco-

nomically and politically, but also intellectually. However, Torres emphasizes that the 1960 s were characterized by a break with colonial and imperialist social theories and methodologies, through the work of critical intellectuals who proposed what Fals Borda synthesized as “proper social science”. This group of authors was influenced by European currents of thought, with a preponderance of Marxism, but which “constructed perspectives and concepts, in the face of the singularity of the problems they dealt with and the options for the future they promoted” (Torres, 2019, p. 13). And he highlights how this has been amplified by the influences of the exiles to which these intellectuals were subjected by the military dictatorships in our region of Latin America.

Both Freire and Fals Borda make an extraordinary contribution to overcoming deterministic analysis. But Zemelman’s contribution is innovative, especially in the field of research, as a step towards dialectical readings, open to the movement of social life. He values subjectivities by understanding subjects as particular manifestations of social expression (Zemelman, 1992). The category of subjectivity – as a set of values, beliefs, languages and ways of apprehending the world (apud Calvillo and Favela, 1995) – is characterized by the tension between constituted and constituent subjectivities.

In this process they “shape social subjectivity and its possibilities of empowering social practices and processes, generating new meanings and constructing reality” (Torres C., 2019, p. 19). As a result, participatory research, epistemic thinking and popular education, in the critical perspective, imply openness to the complexity of the social in the face of which “everything must be put under suspicion” (Torres C. 2019, p. 83).

Sensational is the pedagogical organization of the set of criteria of participatory methodologies (p. 28–32), among which the following stand out: 1) Critical distance from conventional institutionalized modes of research which, in practice, can mean a critical approach with the subjects of research so that their reality is the starting point for the production of new knowledge. 2) Production of knowledge with a liberating option, which is assumed to be critical and emancipatory. 3) “Localized” research practice in which local actors guide the research path. 4) Knowledge production linked to organizational processes and emancipatory collective action dynamics. 5) Insurgent task of producing knowledge in the face of institutional or disciplinary logic. 6) Collective production of knowledge with participatory processes in all stages of research. 7) Research practice that promotes the formation of knowledge groups. 8) Research that relates critically to theory. 9) Practice that promotes the ‘dialogue of knowledge’, valuing other experiences, languages, ancestral and popular knowledge. 10) Knowledge production that assumes the methodological as a flexible practice, in a critical and creative way. 11) Practice of reflective knowledge production, always taking reality as a starting point and reference.

Regarding point nine, on the dialogue of knowledge, it is important to point out that it is not a matter of relativism. It is a dialogue with ethical commitment that requires, as Dussel states, the sharing of vital criteria or principles such as the situation of the “other”, the oppressed, the “victim”, from which we situate ourselves, reflect and act. In addition, a twelfth criterion could be related: the research practice incorporates the contributions of communication, art, culture, an aspect that the author brings up in a nearby section. “Culture becomes a key element to understand these social dynamics, if we understand it as that set of imaginaries, representations, beliefs, meanings [...]” (Torres C., 2019, p. 110).

In the sequence, Alfonso indicates some epistemological implications and methodological challenges of critical thinking: a) Epistemic thinking requires theoretical flexibility in a

historical reality in constant transformation; b) Cultural dialogue from the recognition of the existence of multiple rationalities, worldviews and perspectives of understanding social realities. c) “The need for the subject”, both in the construction of the social and in research, guaranteeing its protagonism, and thus giving way to the potentiality of the present. d) The principle of reflexivity which is very clear in the line of Freire, Fals Borda and Zemelman. And these implications and challenges culminate in the question: “What does researching from this critical tradition of the potential present imply today?” (Torres C., 2019, p. 38).

In this perspective, popular education, as a pedagogical conception and critical thinking, can be understood in the context of the convergence between liberation sociology (Fals Borda), liberation theology (Gustavo Gutiérrez), ethics and philosophy of liberation (Enrique Dussel) and liberating/conscientizing education (Paulo Freire). The articulation between popular education and the epistemology of the present potential is important as a commitment to and “identification with utopian thinking from the transformation of reality. [...] not only to recognize oneself in a historical context, but to recognise oneself as a historical subject; either as an individual or as a collective [...]” (Torres C., 2019, p. 79).

The last part of the book brings out aspects of the vital convergences between Freire, Fals Borda and Zemelman. The formation of all three took place in a traditional conception based on Eurocentric thinking. They made ruptures and initiated new ways of thinking, establishing new visions of the liberating possibilities of social transformation. A second characteristic of this convergence is the relationship with each social context from which the authors come, since knowing their origins provides a basic key to understanding their works. In the context of all three, the stance of non-conformity, restlessness, discomfort was present, that is to say, a critical and hopeful stance towards the world. This was followed by another common aspect, which was the persistent questioning of “a common practice of the political and academic elites of our countries, which is the desire to imitate, “copy” or transfer ideas, institutions and practices from the Western North (Europe and the United States) [...]” (p. 105). They proposed (re)thinking from our place, considering our historical conditions, the characteristics of our peoples and sovereign perspectives for the future.

The open, flexible, heterodox and anti-dogmatic use of theories and concepts to approach reality constitutes the fifth characteristic indicated. “Zemelman argued that reality must be read as something that is happening, as a process, as a movement, which does not obey prefixed laws; it is a movement where, as Marx would say, social conditioning factors are combined with the multiple possibilities, the different possible futures. And this movement of reality generates a permanent gap with theories, which tend to become fixed, to stagnate” (Torres C., 2019, p. 107). This is a very important emphasis because it is consistent with the recovery of the place of subjects and social subjectivities; and it points to the need for the constant (re)creation of theories. Freire, in similar terms, contributes to the principle of hope: the present reality is changing, it is not determined, and it is traversed by many possibilities for the future.

After these highlights on relevant aspects of the book, here are some considerations on its importance for the field of popular education and participatory research. In a more general perspective, the author draws attention, with great emphasis, to the care needed to understand the thinking of a thinker. It requires knowing their life history: the authors who underpinned their thinking, as well as the social, cultural, economic, political and intellectual contexts and events of their time; in short, all the aspects that influenced their way of thinking and acting.

As for convergences, our three authors mentioned here went through political exile. That is to say, they had to make existential ruptures that certainly had an impact on their way of positioning themselves before the world, their way of thinking and their way of projecting the future. Knowing an author's thought requires identifying the socio-historical space in which he or she was born. "To follow an author or a conceptual current is not to quote and repeat it, but to recreate it and overflow it from its own presuppositions and criteria [...]" (Torres C., 2019, p. 84).

Epistemological openness as a permanent attitude of epistemic thinking requires, therefore, to be clear that the methodological problem in research goes beyond questions such as: What is the technique? What is the strategy? Popular education and participatory research have, above all, a commitment to the collective production of a reading of the world that contributes to its transformation. The elements provided by Alfonso in this book effectively contribute to constructing readings of dialectical and changing reality, to account for historicity in order to understand the potentialities of the present and thus transform "limit situations" into "unpublished viable ones".

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