

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR) AND THE COLOMBIAN PEASANT RESERVE ZONES: THE LEGACY OF ORLANDO FALS BORDA

José Gutiérrez

Abstract: Fals Borda was a Colombian intellectual who became well known for helping give shape to the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in social sciences, a process which emphasises a dialogical, self-reflective and participatory approach to knowledge which rejects the neat hierarchical distinction between the researcher and researched with the explicit purpose of empowering the oppressed and helping them to overcome their oppression. While most of South America has moved away from the ‘Washington Consensus’ over the last twenty years, Colombia has remained a conservative country and a staunch defender of the neoliberal creed. However, the peasantry has become the main actor of an important process of transformation, a central element of which are the Peasant Reserve Zones (ZRC). In the process of researching to implement these, researchers working with the agrarian unions and communities in the Cauca Valley have come to use participatory methodologies which demonstrate the contemporary relevance of PAR.

Key words: Colombia; Cauca Valley; Participatory Action Research; rural development; community activism; participative learning; Peasant Reserve Zones.

When the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda passed away in 2008, an editorial from one of Colombia’s leading newspapers, *El Espectador* (13 August 2008), drew attention to the fact that he was one of the few intellectuals who remained committed to that country’s oppressed groups throughout his career and that this commitment only grew deeper as time passed. As the newspaper aptly suggested, the older Fals Borda got, the more radicalised he became.

Orlando Fals Borda was born in the Caribbean city of Barranquilla in 1925 and was to leave a deep mark in social sciences both in Colombia and around the world. In Colombia, he was one of the founders of the first Latin American School of Sociology in the National University (Universidad Nacional) in 1959. Another founder, the priest Camilo Torres, would later die in the ranks of the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) guerrillas shortly after joining them in 1966. Fals Borda was one of the first social scientists to systematically study the phenomenon of violence in Colombia (together with Germán Guzmán Campos and Eduardo Umaña Luna they published *La Violencia en Colombia* in 1962). He was a researcher of the peasantry and the oppressed groups who managed to produce a rare happy marriage between his academic approach together with his social awareness and political commitments. His commitment to the plight of the most oppressed sectors of society is evident in all of his work. For example, his work on the peasants of Saucio (*Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes*, 1955) and his magnificent social history and sociological commentary on the rural areas of the Colombian Caribbean coast (*Historia Doble de la Costa*, four volumes, 1979-1984). Moreover, as a participant in the Constituent Assembly of 1991, he proposed a more participatory and decentralised model for Colombia, informed by his sociological knowledge of the country. They are all testimony of a rare example of what we may call a committed intellectual. Globally, he was among the early wave of researchers working with participatory methodologies, helping to define the approach we know as Participatory Action Research (PAR), writing extensively on it, participating in international fora and being one of the organisers of the Cartagena conference on PAR in 1977.

While PAR developed mostly in the context of global agitation of the 1960s and 1970s, it seemed to have survived well the shockwaves of the 'lost decade'. Still, after some decades, it is valid to ask what has been the contribution of PAR to the practice of social sciences today, and how relevant it is both to committed researchers working with oppressed, marginalised and vulnerable sectors of society, and to the social movements

trying to bring about social change, sometimes in extraordinarily adverse circumstances, such as exist in the Colombian countryside.

PAR: knowledge through action and action through knowledge

When PAR first appeared in the 1970s, it marked a veritable revolution in the theory and practice of social sciences, yet its roots can be traced back some decades to the work of people like Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, disciplines like Psycho-sociology in the 1960s and institutions like the Tavistock Institute (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013: 9-33). It was in Latin America, however, where this participatory approach to knowledge production received some of its most important contributions. It was infused with a critical spirit and a radical commitment by the interaction between intellectuals and oppressed, subordinate and marginalised sectors of society. One of the groundbreaking developments and a paramount contribution in this respect was Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), which put forward the case for an emancipatory education in unequivocal terms. In the face of blatant injustice, the education system can only serve to reinforce the structures of oppression or to promote emancipation of those who suffer from oppression. Emancipation is not a top-down process, where the 'ignorant' will receive enlightenment from elites in the know. Rather, emancipation is a process which can only be achieved from within, by the active participation of the oppressed in the very process of developing the intellectual resources to inform their practice in order to overcome domination. Education, in this view, is an intrinsically dialogical process and Freire tellingly dedicated his book 'to the oppressed and to those who suffer with them' where the knowledge and the experience of the oppressed are valued as the main basis for any meaningful education process. Education – and we may argue research as well – are not neutral instruments for liberation; they are liberating processes in themselves [1].

Inspired by this approach, Fals Borda began to apply this participatory approach to sociological research (2010). He helped thus to turn PAR into a coherent school of practice in social sciences, which he defined quite succinctly as an:

“experiential methodology [which] implies the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power, or countervailing power, for the poor, oppressed and exploited groups and social classes – the grassroots – and for their authentic organizations and movement” (1991: 3).

The objectives are at once academic and political, putting at the very centre of this approach the experience (*vivencias* – a term that implies something more than what is merely experienced, but actually what is lived) and commitment of both internal and external participants. Each one of these participants ‘contribute their own knowledge, techniques and experiences to the transformation process’, which stem from ‘different class conformations and rationalities’ (one Cartesian and academic, the other experiential and practical). Thus a dialectical tension is created between them which can be resolved only through practical commitment, that is, through a form of ‘praxis’ (ibid: 4). Sociology, as with any other science, is not a ‘fetish with a life of its own ... but it is simply a valid and useful form of knowledge for specific purposes and based on relative truths’ (ibid: 7).

Knowledge is not neutral, for it carries the ‘class biases and values which scientists hold as a group’, therefore, it tends to favour ‘those who produce and control it’ (ibid). Knowledge is power, and PAR in the view of Fals Borda, can help us to apply it to the dismantling of the ‘previous unjust class monopoly’ (ibid: 4). In order to be liberating, PAR needs first to shed the hierarchical distinction between object and subject. Being a participant in this research, means to ‘break up voluntarily and through experience the asymmetrical relationship of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/object binomial’ (ibid: 5). Consequently, this praxis can also be democratising, leading to the:

“Conformation of a new type of State which is less demanding, controlling and powerful, inspired by the positive core values of the people and nurtured by autochthonous cultural values based on a truly democratic ideal. Such a State ... would strive for a more even

distribution of power-knowledge among its constituents, a healthier balance between State and civil society with less Leviathanic central control and more grassroots creativity and initiative, less Locke and more Kropotkin. In effect, it would seek a return to the human scale which has been lost in the recent past” (ibid: 6) [2].

Methodologically speaking, PAR is distinguished from other forms of participatory research, because from the very beginning of the research, that is, from the moment of design and deciding what to research, why and how, there is participation from the grassroots. Whether it is collective research, critical recovery of history, recovery of indigenous knowledge, etc., they participate in every single step of the research process (the research methodologies being user-friendly), in the publication of results and in the ‘mainstreaming’ of those results (ibid: 8-9).

Fals Borda left behind a school of thought which certainly outlived him and which expanded throughout Latin America and beyond (Fals Borda, 1987). Yet, Colombia is far from the society he aspired to help build through his tireless intellectual activity. While most of Latin America has been associated for the last two decades with hope and with a certain political renewal which broke the Washington Consensus established in the early 1990s, Colombia has stood out as a stronghold of conservatism. Political assassinations, repression and a dissolving armed conflict still rage in the country decades after the School of Sociology in the Universidad Nacional was formed as a modest contribution to help solve these issues (CNMH, 2013). The panorama is even grimmer if we look at the situation of the peasantry, which occupied such a central place in Fals Borda’s thought. According to the latest Agrarian Census in Colombia, out of a total of 113m of hectares which were subject to this research, 41 percent are in the hands of 0.4 percent of the property owners, while 70 percent of the properties are divided into a mere 5 percent of the land (DANE, 2015).

Even if Colombia looks removed from the Latin American political context, some changes are starting to take place, particularly thanks to the

ongoing transformative struggle pushed by the rural workers, peasants and small-farmers; a fact brought dramatically to the fore by massive and brutally repressed agrarian mobilisation over the last ten years. Some of these aspirations and proposals are expected to be consolidated as the peace process between the national government and the insurgents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Army of the People (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, FARC-EP) progresses, which has made the agrarian question the central subject of the negotiations.

Peasant Reserve Zones (Zonas De Reserva Campesinas (ZRC))

Among the most interesting processes taking place in Colombia at present is the constitution of a myriad of Peasant Reserve Zones (ZRC, according to their acronym in Spanish), which are areas of the country defined as having a predominance of public lands (*baldíos*), where land concentration is not authorised. The idea behind ZRCs originally was to avoid the disappearance of the peasantry and to facilitate the conversion of the peasant-farmer into an *entrepreneur* (ILSA, 2012). Currently, there are six legally constituted ZRCs in a surface area of nearly one million hectares, and there are around fifty other ZRCs in the process of becoming legalised, totalling an estimated ten million hectares (Jerez, n.d.).

The ZRC were originally created under the auspices of the World Bank, while Colombia was going through its own process of economic neoliberalisation during the early 1990s, in tune with developments elsewhere in Latin America. The government at the time was trying to push for a more open economy in its secular attempt to ‘modernise’ the countryside without affecting the class structure and the patterns of land property. This is how Law 160 of 1994 came into being, which replaced the idea of an agrarian reform for subsidies on the land markets to make them more attractive to private investors. Law 160 reduced the role of the state in providing support to specific cases of victims of displacement and offering credit and subsidies to the peasantry to buy land (Gómez, 2011: 65-66; Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural, 1994). Only 13,000 families

benefited from this programme, and while they remain poor, the long term impact they felt was chronic indebtedness (ANZORC, 2015: 9). During those years, the peasantry in the south of the country were mobilising against the fumigation of illicit crops, in particular, cocoa. Those mass mobilisations were the space where the ZRC were first proposed as an addition to Chapter XIII of Law 160. Eventually this would lead to Decree 1777 of 1996 which regulates the creation and purposes of the ZRC and Accord 024 of 1996 which defines the criteria to create each ZRC (ibid: 10).

While the idea behind the ZRC was to bring dynamism to the agrarian sector and stimulate the land market, there seems to be a link between this new attempt of modernisation of the countryside, and the ideas of restricted agrarian reform of the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s. As Michael Taussig argued, the idea of aiding the peasantry to survive as a subordinate economic factor, had more to do with the need of agribusiness to access significant pools of cheap labour rather than with democratising the class and property structure in the countryside (Taussig, 1978). But as the peasantry appropriated this legal entity, it moved from being a mere reservoir of cheap peasant-farmer labour and a pocket of peasant economy [3]. Meanwhile, the idea of genuine agrarian reform was postponed *per saecula saeculorum*, into being a tool to demand peasant rights, agitate for food sovereignty and for a sustainable and agroecological food production system. What is important is not what the ZRC were created for, but what the Colombian peasantry is using them for, which is their reproduction as a class. The Colombian peasantry has a long tradition of using legal mechanisms in order to advance their plight for land and for a dignified life, thus challenging the *status quo*, stretching at least to the liberal decrees of 1874 that granted rights to those working on the land (Le Grand, 1988).

In south-west Colombia, in the Cauca Valley, the local peasant farmers' associations ASTRACAVA (*Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos del Valle del Cauca*/Association of Peasant Workers of the Cauca Valley) and CCVC (*Coordinadora Campesina del Valle del Cauca* / Peasant Coordination of the Cauca Valley) developed, in consultation with its

own members, a project for a ZRC for this department [4]. The following Cauca Valley municipalities have been proposed as part of the ZRC: Florida, Pradera, Guacarí, Ginebra, and Tuluá which collectively occupy a land surface of 63,000 hectares, with an estimated 12,000 people living in them (ANZORC, 2010: 17). The situation varied greatly from municipality to municipality: while in Pradera there has been support of the local government to the idea of the ZRC, in other municipalities, like Tuluá, the authorities' response has been far from enthusiastic (Posada, n.d.). Nonetheless, the idea of ZRCs is growing. But in order for the project to go ahead, it is necessary to get the consent of everyone in the *corregimientos* (the localities attached to Colombian municipalities) included in the project, which gave urgency to the need to present it and socialise it with the rest of the rural population in those regions.

Researching for transformation

Although the use of the ZRC as a mechanism for the improvement of the situation of the small-farmer and the peasant-farmer has important support among organised sectors, not everyone in those communities is aware of its implications and the potential benefits they can bring about. Therefore, a socialisation plan for the initiative is necessary in communities which are in the regions where the ZRCs will be implemented. This exercise of socialisation is also an exercise in participatory research and thinking together of collective decisions and actions. It is at this point that PAR becomes a key tool for, at once, researching, educating and mobilising. It is important to mention that those participating in the research team of the CCVC to promote and discuss the ZRC in Cauca Valley, without exception, have not read much about Fals Borda or about the methodological and epistemological developments within the field of PAR. Nonetheless, they all know of his approach and have become familiarised through practice with it, seeing him as an important referent to their work with the communities. In the words of one member of this team of researchers:

“We need to be self-critical. We have not studied about PAR, but in practice we've always used its methods and approach, and we

always talk about what we do as PAR ... PAR has been appropriated by the social movements, we always work with the communities using that methodology ... We haven't studied it, but we know of *compas* [comrades] who have ... and it is about a dialogue of the academics with the communities ... where the emphasis is placed in what the community proposes" (Posada, n.d.).

Another of the researchers insists that PAR has been absorbed as a basic repertoire of practices which is consciously used and has become the predominant way to work with communities:

"We work in a subject-to-subject relationship, I mean, despite the fact that we were guiding the process, we made an effort to always keep an open space of horizontal communication, among equals, not a vertical model in which we would have been the spokespeople and the community mere recipients. This way, the main players in this process were both the communities and us" (Torres, n.d.).

In theory, this is all fairly straightforward. In practice, however, implementing a PAR project is usually riddled with difficulties and tensions. In order to assess the actual practice of PAR in the context of agrarian movements in Colombia today, we will focus on the work carried out in two municipalities, Pradera and Tuluá, which are part of the ZRC project.

Reflections on the methodology used

Typically, in order to carry out the research, the local branch of the agrarian union would call all of the neighbours in a *corregimiento* for a meeting on a particular day. Meetings tend to last for a full day, for various reasons: many people have to walk long distances, sometimes hours, to make it to the hall or the venue where the meeting is taking place. Also, because of the very nature of the work in the countryside, in which particular tasks can go on for hours, when one takes a morning off, or a couple of hours even, then it means the whole day is lost and one has to re-arrange the daily chores for the next day. Usually, the meetings are organised with one introduction by the members of the union and the local activist, who explain the importance of the work to be

done and then proceed to introduce the members of the research team, who then explain the methodology to be used on the day. Then the group is divided into smaller groups to allow discussion and thus they work until the day finishes. In the middle, there is a break for chicken or beef soup (*sancocho*) and to drink a murky-coloured drink based on boiled unrefined sugar (*agua de panela*). This is really necessary as people will be working for the whole day and they can't go back home for lunch. Also, these opportunities are not only spaces for political empowerment and joint reflection, they are also important socialising activities in the life of the community.

The methodology of this particular research was based around the use of *social cartography* coupled with open and semi-structured questions to the groups of participants. The social cartography involved asking the community to describe the territorial space of the *corregimiento* taking into consideration three dimensions which needed to be graphically represented: socio-economical, environmental and productive. For this task, the different sub-groups were given a large blank paper which only had basic points of reference: the boundaries of the *corregimiento*, a hamlet (*caserío*), a main river and a main road. In a few cases, the blank paper with some points of reference was seen as difficult to work with by the participants, who turned the paper in order to start their social cartography from scratch.

From this basic exercise of social cartography of their *corregimiento as it is*, the exercise was to do exactly the same but in terms of how they would like their *corregimiento to be*. Through this exercise, the research team wanted to have a clearer picture of the current situation of territory as perceived, experienced and known by the peasant, but also, to know the aspirations and desires of the peasantry. In the process, the participants gained a clearer social-environmental picture of their territory, while at the same time started to discuss *collectively* a desirable future they could all help to bring about. Thus, gaining a clear understanding of the gap between their present reality and their aspirations, they can set up strategic tasks for the organisation and give a purpose to the ZRC, which in turns stops being a

mere constitutional article and becomes a living endeavour over which the community has ownership.

In Pradera, the work was carried in eleven out of fifteen *corregimientos*, whereas in Tuluá, the work was carried in all 11 *corregimientos*. Researchers had already worked in some of these communities for years, including a series of workshops to socialise the idea of the ZRC back in 2013 which helped to buffer the tension between the external observer and internal participant. The ambiguous position of the participant-researcher in collaborative research has been noted before (Rappaport, 2008), both in terms of the difficulties and the potential of this methodology.

Discussion

According to the research team and participants, this work supported reflection in relation to the territory. The community identified what they lacked but also what they had in terms of strengths and resources, a radiography of the territory which is highly relevant given the fact that all of the statistics available on these regions are, as revealed by this participatory research, dated, imprecise, incomplete and flawed. ‘Apart from having more precise and accurate information’, according to one researcher-participant, ‘this process helped the community to recognise themselves within the territory and to propose ways to solve the needs and problems affecting them’ (Giraldo, n.d.). They also identified conflicts in all three areas: social, environmental and productive. One thing that struck one of the members of the research team is that at no point did the aspirations of the communities seem extravagant, individualistic or narcissistic. The aspirational social cartography, according to her, was embedded in the ‘peasant culture; they talked above everything else on how to have their basic needs satisfied in order to keep working on the land’ (ibid). According to another participant-researcher, the bulk of the aspirations were based on the idea of their own family production, the recognition of their work, access to alternative and fair markets, stability of prices for their products, and the ability to live with dignity out of their work.

Among the most significant challenges faced in Pradera was the rejection that some communities felt against the idea of a ZRC. In the five *corregimientos* where this research was not carried, it was because the communities have suspicion with a project that the media in Colombia, agitated by some right-wing figures, denounce as a strategy of ‘subversives’ and ‘terrorists’. Given the prevalent environment of persecution, terror and ongoing violence in Colombia, these denunciations are not taken lightly by the community and in some cases, they manage to cause fear or rejection among some communities because they associate it with risk. This is particularly the case in those communities which are not so well organised, and are, therefore, less politicised. According to a member of the research team:

“Some people are not well informed of what the ZRC are, this is a big problem ... There is a bigger problem, which is linked to the lack of pedagogy around the peace process by the government, which became evident in the process of doing this research ... some people still see all of these projects as something removed from their communities, they do not feel it as something belonging to them” (ibid).

This is explained in a context of ongoing right-wing paramilitary violence which has plagued this department for decades (Machado, 2014). As explained by another participant-researcher ‘there is fear in many communities, that’s real ... but people react positively to the proposal when we have the chance to explain it’ (Posada, n.d.). Participatory methodologies are important, but they are insufficient if the less organised communities have been absent from the process of designing the participatory research and they are suddenly confronted with a legal entity that has been demonised for the last decade by the media and some politicians.

Another problem which was highlighted by members of the research team in Pradera, is the insufficient numbers of young people participating in the research. This is associated by the participants to a weak peasant identity

among the younger generation in a context of constant migration from the countryside to the urban centres. This is the biggest challenge in any process of empowerment through action-research, because then the decisions and responsibilities will not be assumed by the collective which is particularly worrying when there is a generational problem. Yet, the exercise itself was a good mechanism to develop this peasant identity and peasant knowledge. As one participant-researcher suggested:

“The very peasant culture is being lost, peasant knowledge is being lost, one finds that the peasants themselves underestimate the depth of their knowledge, the value of their practices, and there are many things they know, but that they don’t regard as important to the development of the region. The recognition of the peasant as a subject is something that this exercise helps to happen from the bottom up, in the process of them finding their own solutions to their own problems in their own territory” (Giraldo, n.d.).

This exercise has been useful to remind participants of aspects of ecosystem management – like combination of crops and trees together to guarantee pollination and fertilisation through organic means – which have drifted out of use as the culture of the chemical fertiliser advanced after decades of ‘green revolution’.

An open conclusion: more than a trademark

The use of PAR approaches as part of the engagement of the agrarian organisation with the broader community has been useful. Relying on the knowledge and experience of the communities as a primary source of information, a more complete picture of the terrain in which the ZRC will be applied has emerged. This process has also empowered communities in the process by bringing them together, making them participants in the elaboration of a collective project based on their own aspirations as valuable ideas to foster rural development (along very different lines to what successive technocratic administrations understand as ‘development’). Through its self-reflective approach, and through the dialectical tension

between the insider-outsider which PAR makes evident through a subject to subject relationship, it is also a source of constant questioning for the transformative projects that sometimes resort to hierarchical and top-down methods, often by default. These tensions are the main sources of dynamism in this process of mutual transformation between the researcher-practitioner and the members of a community.

You know the world in the process of its conscious transformation; this basic ethos of PAR, regardless if the acronym is used or not, is alive and well in Colombia and in the process of bottom-up transformation in the countryside. It has therefore managed to contribute significantly to the empowerment of one of the most oppressed and marginalised sectors of society. Although the written works of Fals Borda are not that well known among these practitioners, some of the core ideas of his approach are highly relevant and used in similar environments to those in which he worked some decades ago. Indeed, it is worth noting that Fals Borda's wife, herself a remarkable researcher, wrote a seminal book, through the use of PAR methodologies, on the history of the peasant organisation in the Cauca Valley during the 1980s (Escobar, 1987). A measure of PAR's health is the very fact that, in spite of all the problems and limitations of practical implementation, participatory methodologies have become the norm among researchers working together with rural communities.

Notes

[1] In spite of some positivist overtones, earlier in the twentieth century, the anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer Guardia had advanced emancipatory ideas which broke the neat distinction between the bearer of knowledge and the passive recipient of that knowledge and were an important point of reference to radical pedagogy later. See Ferrer Guardia (1976).

[2] The power of this sentence can only be fully grasped if we contextualised it. Written in the late 1980s, as Latin America was starting to emerge, through mass struggle, from the military autocracies that plagued much of the region for most of the latter half of the 20th century. It is this aspect of his

view as a committed intellectual which inspired him to actively participate in the 1991 Colombian Constituent Assembly. This link between science and politics had been present before in Latin America, particularly through the link between positivist thought and the Liberal State at the turn of the 20th century. Science and development have been far more valued in public discourse in Latin America as compared to Europe, for instance, with almost every Latin American country dedicating a statue to Louis Pasteur (Centeno, 2002: 185).

[3] Peasant Economy is defined by the Rural Development Institute of Colombia (INCODER) as an economy based on agricultural units that rely mostly on family work, where production is determined mostly by the reproduction of the units.

[4] Colombia is divided into thirty-two departments (*departamentos*); each department has a number of municipalities (*municipios*); each municipality has a number of localities known as *corregimientos*; and each *corregimiento* has a number of *veredas*, or hamlets, each one of them having its own *Junta de Acción Comunal* or local action committee, a State-sanctioned communal body of basic self-government.

References

ANZORC (2015) *Zonas de Reserva Campesina en el Valle del Cauca. Una Alternativa de Ordenamiento Social, Productivo y Ambiental del Territorio*, Cali: ANZORC

Centeno, M (2002) *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*, University Park (Pennsylvania): Pennsylvania State University Press.

Chevalier, J M and Buckles, D J (2013) *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry*, New York: Routledge.

CNMH (2013) *Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad*, Bogotá: CNMH.

DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística) (2015) 'Estadísticas Por Tema Sector Agroecuario', available:

<http://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/agropecuario> (accessed 3 March 2016).

El Espectador (2008), 'Orlando Fals Borda', 13 August, available: <http://www.elespectador.com/opinion/editorial/articulo-orlando-fals-borda> (accessed 9 March 2016)

Escobar, C (1987) *Experiencia de Organización Campesina en el Valle del Cauca*, Bogotá: PRODESAL.

Fals Borda, O (1955) *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes*, Gainesville (Florida): University of Florida.

Fals Borda, O (1979-1984) *Historia Doble de la Costa* (4 volumes), Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores.

Fals Borda, O (1987) 'The Application of Participatory Action Research in Latin America', *International Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 329-347.

Fals Borda, O (1991) 'Some Basic Ingredients', in Or Fals Borda and M Anisur Rahman (eds.) *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research*, New York: The Apex Press.

Fals Borda, O (2010) *Antología*, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Ferrer Guardia, F (1976) *La Escuela Moderna*, Madrid: Júcar.

Freire, P (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Giraldo, V (n.d.) Participant-Researcher in the ZRC Project in Cauca Valley. Personal communication with the author.

Gómez, B (2011) 'La Tenencia de la Tierra y la Reforma Agraria en Colombia', *Verba Iuris*, Vol. 25, pp.63-83.

Guzmán, G, Fals Borda O and Umaña Luna, E (1962) *La Violencia en Colombia* (2 volumes), Bogotá: Iqueima

ILSA (2002) *Zonas de Reserva Campesinas*, Bogotá: ILSA.

Jérez, C (n.d.) Coordinator of the National Association of ZRCs, ANZORC. Personal communication with the author.

Le Grand, C (1988) *Colonización y Protesta Campesina en Colombia*, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional.

Machado, A (2014) “*Patrones*” y *Campesinos: Tierra, Poder y Violencia en el Valle del Cauca (1960-2012)*, Bogotá: CNMH.

Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural (1994) ‘Normas Que La Reglamentan Y Desarrollan’, available: http://www.incoder.gov.co/documentos/Ley160_2004.pdf, (accessed 3 March 2016).

Posada, V (n.d.) Participant-Researcher in the ZRC Project in Cauca Valley. Personal communication with the author.

Rappaport, J (2008) ‘Beyond Participant Observation: Collaborative Ethnography as Theoretical Innovation’, *Collaborative Anthropologies*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-31.

Taussig, M (1978) ‘Peasant Economics and the Development of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cauca Valley, Colombia’, *Latin American Perspectives*, 5(3): 62-91.

Torres, Sonia (n.d.) Participant-Researcher in the ZRC Project in Cauca Valley. Personal communication with the author.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the following social activists and popular education practitioners Victoria Giraldo, Visnu Posada and Sonia Carolina Torres whose experience, insights and willingness to cooperate with me have been paramount. Also, their ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between professional practice and the commitment to social transformation is nothing short of inspirational.

This research has been carried in the frame of an ongoing Irish Research Council sponsored project titled ‘Insurgent Institutions: Communities and the constitution of social fabric in the Colombian conflict’ (GOIPG/2015/2479).

The research has been kindly co-funded by the Conflict Resolution Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Ireland, through the Andrew Grene Postgraduate Scholarship in Conflict Resolution. Without their support, my research would not be possible.

José Gutiérrez is Adjunct Assistant Professor, MPhil Race, Ethnicity and Conflict (Trinity College Dublin) and Researcher, Department of Sociology, University College Dublin (UCD).
Email: Jose.antonio-danton@ucdconnect.ie.