Who Stole my Methodology? Co-opting PAR [1]

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ABSTRACT   *As we enter the 21st century it seems likely that the collection of methodologies and methods that have constituted PAR will continue to permeate mainstream research. There is increasing evidence, for example, that the discourse of participatory action research is now being widely used by international development agencies, NGOs and related organisations to promote a wide array of educational, healthcare and social programmes. This paper argues that the increasing popularity and use of PAR over recent years poses both possibilities and problems for researchers. In particular, it will discuss the challenges that this process presents to the concept of participation within PAR, as well as the implications it has for constructing methodologies for inclusive forms of participatory research.*

Introduction

There can be no doubt that the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a profound transformation of the societies in which we live (whether first or third world). It also appears likely that the transformations that characterised this period, in politics, economics, culture and society have established the hegemonic order that will prevail in the new century. Whether this is called globalisation, the knowledge economy/society, or simply the new economy, it is clear that neo-liberalism has either systematically dismantled or shattered the old post-war consensus that was social democracy. Global capitalism, without question, has triumphed—at least for now.

   While the patterns and character of this transformation are now well established through privatisation, de-regulation, and the commodification of increasing areas of public life, its dimensions, as they affect the everyday world, are not. For example, information technology continues to effect changes across the social landscape of contemporary capitalism (Castells, 1999; UNDP, 1999). Another is that of the biotech or life sciences industry which now threatens to patent and commodify the human genome and vast areas of the eco-system through genetic engineering technologies. The opening up of these new frontiers to capitalist accumulation is having, and will likely have, major implications for the contexts in which social research is conducted.

This is particularly so for those of us engaged in participatory action research (PAR). Unlike mainstream social science research, PAR has traditionally been a methodology of the margins. It has been marginal in at least two senses. First, as a research methodology it has rejected the 'lore of objectivity' (Burawoy *et al.*, 1991) that has characterised mainstream social science research. Prefiguring post-positivist critiques, PAR acknowledged that research is an inherently political process that is embedded in the 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1990b). Consequently, the notion that social research can be value-free, objective, or scientific is viewed as an ideological position that expresses prevailing power relations within capitalism. Second, PAR has proven to be a powerful approach for working with subordinate or oppressed groups to better their circumstances within society. In this respect it has become a methodology of the marginal that has promoted the interests of the poor and disenfranchised. This has primarily been effected through the inclusion of these groups within the key decision-making procedures of the research process and their ownership of its outcomes (see Boston *et al.*, 1997). Its commitment to linking social justice with research is yet another reason why mainstream social science has relegated PAR to the fringes of legitimate social research.

In recent years, however, this situation appears to have turned around. Not only is PAR gaining some credence among social scientists, it is also increasingly being promoted or used by international organisations such as the World Bank, government agencies, non-governmental organisations and other groups that constitute civil society. In short PAR appears to be migrating from the margins to the mainstream. While its practitioners may welcome this development, it nevertheless poses some awkward questions. For example, how is the discourse of participation being appropriated and re-contextualised by these different organisations? How is participation (and action) being interpreted and implemented? What forms of social organisation are being used to construct the participatory research process? And what kind of knowledge is produced and who benefits from its production? In brief, a debate needs to be initiated on both the theory and politics of PAR under globalisation.

This paper attempts to outline some of the contours of this debate. It is organised into three sections. The first is a brief discussion of the history and defining themes and issues that have defined PAR since its inception in the 1960s. In particular, attention will be given to its non-positivist methodology and commitment to a politics of research that is centred on social justice. The second section explores how PAR, and more broadly participatory research, is being co-opted and re-defined within the context of globalisation. The argument advanced here is that under global capitalism the discourse of participation has been gradually appropriated and re-contextualised within a neo-liberal policy regime that works to preserve and further the interests of capital over workers, communities, and other groups within society. The last section of the paper explores some possibilities for re-claiming PAR as a counter-hegemonic methodology of and for those groups who have been marginalised by global capital and the rule of the market. It points to some research tools that might be used for re-constructing a methodology of the margins.

Before I proceed to my discussion, I should make clear that PAR and other forms of participatory research have been and remain a contested terrain. One effect of this is that PAR is used interchangeably, and often loosely, by researchers to denote any one of a range of research methodologies that have participation of subjects as their focus. This is reflected in the literature where, for example, there is a significant degree of conceptual slippage over terminology. The point to grasp, however, is that there is no definitive or pure model of PAR, but that there are versions of it across a broad spectrum of approaches to participatory research. Consequently, my approach is less concerned with definitions than staking out an approach for PAR that is both subversive and counter-hegemonic of the prevailing neo-liberal constructions of participation.

History, Themes and Issues

The origins and development of PAR are both complex and elusive and, therefore, difficult to map with any precision. This is not only because the term is used loosely and often interchangeably with concepts such as action research, it is also due to the fact that PAR is itself a blend of a broad range of research approaches that include forms of participatory research, action research, and popular education initiatives. Despite this, it is possible to mark out some of its general contours and key features that have marked PAR's history over the last 50 years.

First, it is clear that the impetus for exploring forms of participatory research— though they were not necessarily named as such—came from the third world in the early 1960s (Smith, 1997). As Hall (1992) has shown, inspired by political events such as anti-colonial struggles, scholars such as Friere (1972), Fals-Borda (1969) and others began to focus their attention on how social science research could be used to 'move people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the centre' (Hall, 1992, pp. 15–16). Through processes such as *conscientisation*, the poor were to become agents of social and political transformation aimed at creating just, peaceful and democratic societies. Second, independence from colonial powers invariably led to the emergence of forms of popular education through, for example, national literacy campaigns. Tandon (1981) has demonstrated the effect of these was not merely to inculcate functional literacy in the populations of less developed countries, but to foster forms of popular consciousness that were critical, emancipatory and democratic. The general thrust of these developments, it should be emphasised, were not only radical but revolutionary, i.e. they had as their focus societal transformation. A third strand in the development of PAR relates to its action component. While the history of action research parallels that of both participatory research and popular education, it nevertheless can be distinguished from them in three important ways. First, action research has primarily European and North American origins. Second, it has been principally developed by academic research-ers working from universities and particularly schools and faculties of education (Stenhouse, 1993). Third, its ideological orientation has tended to be liberal, focusing on the improvement of professional practices—this is why it has proven

to be so popular among researchers working with teachers. However, as Kemmis (1993) has shown, in recent years action researchers have also become concerned with issues of social justice. Although much action research continues to express its liberal/professional focus (e.g. Schon, 1983), there are a significant number of action researchers who have attempted to incorporate the radical lessons of both participatory research and popular education within its practice.

While PAR's history has been characterised by at least three inter-related developments that have defined its methodological orientation to social research, it nevertheless has not emerged as a unified field of social inquiry. As I will argue below, the development of PAR has been marked by an ongoing debate among its practitioners over what aims, principles, and practices should be used to conduct social research. This debate has not only turned on substantial theoretical and political differences between practitioners, but on questions of methodology and the social organisation of the research process itself. In this respect it is important to remember that PAR consists of an amalgam of methodological approaches that, together or in different combinations, have produced an orientation to social research rather than a distinct methodology per se.

Over its relatively short history PAR has drawn on a wide array of theoretical traditions within the social sciences including sociology, social psychology, neo-marxism, critical theory, feminist theory, and more recently postmodernism. While these theoretical traditions have been important, the emergence and development of PAR has also continued to be informed and shaped by practice in the field. As I indicated above, such practice has been generated by anti-colonial movements, popular and community struggles, transformative adult education initiatives, and more recently feminism and the the new social movements (e.g. environmentalism, gay and lesbian groups, anti-globalisation protesters). One of the defining character-istics of PAR from its beginnings, therefore, is the centrality of this dialogical relationship between theory and practice. Indeed the history of PAR is marked by a reliance on forms of knowledge, skill, and understanding generated within the everyday world that have all too often been dismissed as commonsense by the mainstream social sciences. From this nexus has emerged three key themes that have defined PAR methodology.

The first is that PAR has tended to align itself with a non-positivist approach to research. As Smith has noted (1997), this has its origins in a critique and rejection of conventional social science research as a form of cultural imperialism that continues to be shared by a wide range of groups within both developed and less developed countries. The essence of this critique is that traditional forms of social science research, particularly quantitative methodologies, systematically reproduce power relations that contribute to the domination of subordinate groups within capitalism. In particular, the hierarchical organisation of the social sciences, their procedures for data collection and analysis, and rigid adherence to the separation of researcher and subjects in the pursuit of objectivity, are seen to produce forms of knowledge that express the relations of ruling. The underlying positivist approach of quantitative research has historically objectified its subjects for the purposes of manipulation and control by the powerful (see Asad, 1994). The effect of this critique is the adoption

of methodologies that favour qualitative or naturalistic forms of inquiry. For example, McTaggart (1997) notes that:

> Information is collected in the usual naturalistic research ways, for example, participant observation, interview, the compilation of field notes, logs, document analysis, and the like. (p. 37)

In general, qualitative approaches are favoured on both technical and ideological grounds. As a collection of techniques or methods they provide a more rounded and holistic perspective that produces 'thick description' of complex social processes (Marcus, 1998). They are also better suited to small-scale, local studies, that are accessible to participation by the communities in which they are conducted. In this respect they are less susceptible to colonisation by outside experts. Non-positivist forms of interpretive inquiry are also preferred because they hold the potential for marginalised groups to have greater access to—and thereby 'have more of a say' over—the research process than do quantitative methodologies. Used within a participatory process qualitative methodologies also encourage engagement in nascent forms of reflexivity, and as well provide the tools to stimulate local discursive practices and group activities that constitute PAR.

A second theme that characterises PAR is that it is openly political. Its politics is evident in several ways. As I have already noted, it is political in the sense that its practices have emerged from a critique of western social science methodologies as cultural imperialism (Said, 1993; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). This theme is also expressed through its commitment to work *with* (as opposed to *on*) subordinate, marginalised, and oppressed groups to change their circumstances within society. This stems from the recognition that the social is constituted by asymmetrical power relations in the workplace, the family, education and, more broadly, within politics and civil society that systematically generate inequalities between individuals and groups. The recognition that these inequalities are endemic to capitalist societies has produced a strong ethical stance that research should focus on issues of social justice. Arising from this strong ethical stance, PAR has also been equally committed to democratic engagement, transparency and openness, a strong co-operative and communitarian ethos, inclusion, multiculturalism, and a clear conviction to issues concerned with development and sustainability (see Dale, 2001). These core values have made PAR a particularly flexible methodology, adaptable across a broad range of issues and contexts.

However, what distinguishes PAR from other research methodologies that share a similar ethics is that:

> . . . it has been demonstrated time and time again that the application of the researches of others (especially positivist research, which blithely claims or assumes universal applicability) in new social, cultural, and economic contexts is unlikely to work. *People must conduct substantive research themselves on the practices that affect their own lives.* (McTaggart, 1997, p. 26, italics added)

Thus, unlike conventional forms of research methodology where authority is vested in the researcher-academic, PAR aims to shift responsibility for the research process on to individuals and groups who are directly affected by these inequalities. Insofar as professional researchers have a role within PAR, it is to set their expertise alongside the lay knowledge, skills and experiences of those people who constitute the object of their investigations. In this way the research process is conceptualised as an encounter, where equal partners meet, enter into dialogue and share different kinds of knowledge and expertise on how to address issues of exploitation and oppression. In this respect PAR is unashamedly committed to a politics of equity and social transformation that many other research traditions would dismiss as ideological.

The politics of equity that PAR has historically engaged in has had direct implications for the kinds of theoretical traditions on which it has drawn to inform its practices. Consequently, a third theme that has defined PAR is its embracing of the broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks that now go under the label of critical theory. I have alluded to some of these above, but they include versions of marxism and neo-marxism, feminism, Frierian pedagogy, post-colonial critiques, post-modernism, cultural studies, and critical ethnography. Critical theory has not only brought political economy to participatory research, it has also yielded some of its key conceptual practices. For example, Friere's (1972) concept of conscientisation, Gramsci's (1974) notion of hegemony, or the feminist analysis of patriarchy have either influenced or directly shaped the forms of social organisation that PAR practitioners have used to conduct research. It should also be noted that this has not been a one-way street. While critical theory has made a significant contribution to the development of PAR, critical theory has drawn on empirical research conducted by PAR researchers that has informed its development.

These themes—the alignment with non-positivism and adoption of qualitative methodology; its openly political character; the engagement with critical theory; and the core values of PAR—cannot capture all the complexities of the development of PAR over the last 50 years. However, they do nevertheless serve to show that it has been driven by a dynamic that has centred on a democratic, critical, and emancipatory impulse quite distinct from conventional research methodologies in the social sciences. Despite this, my argument in the next section will be that under globalisation approaches to participatory research, including PAR, have increasingly been subject to forces that have either challenged or systematically compromised this legacy. It is to this process of co-option that I now turn.

Co-opting PAR

Despite its social origins and radical traditions, PAR and other forms of participatory research have increasingly been subject to a subtle process of institutionalisation and co-option by mainstream social science researchers, private consultants, government bodies, international development agencies, and NGOs. Depending on the context, this process has expressed itself in different ways. However, the general effect has been to assimilate and reconstitute these methodologies within conceptual practices and forms of social organisation which articulate with the relations of ruling. In

relation to the social sciences this process is most evident where PAR is viewed as a quasi-science, or form of applied social research. This tendency is most clearly expressed in industrial sociology where PAR, or variations of it, have been used to explore the effects of shop-floor workers participation in managerial decision-making through the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Whyte's (1991) rendering of PAR, or that of Schön and Agyris' Action Science (1991) reveal an overt concern with organisational change and learning on terms and conditions established by multi-national corporations (e.g. Xerox). In this context, PAR's unique contribution, as 'part of the tool kit of the social sciences,' is to co-opt workers' knowledge and understanding of the labour process in order to effect 'paradigm shifts' on how to boost productivity and competitiveness (Whyte *et al.*, 1991). Despite the human relations approach of these authors, the overall impact of the research process that they elaborate is to re-constitute PAR as a tool of capitalist accumulation.

The approach to PAR outlined above, it should be noted, has inspired an array of participatory workplace initiatives that have attempted to re-organise and mask the historical tensions implicit in the capital-labour relation in the contemporary period. In particular, I am thinking of Senge's (1990) development of the concept of the learning organisation and its widespread application to understanding and analysing capitalist restructuring of the workplace. However, as Fenwick has pointed out, not only is it largely uncritical of this process, 'the learning organisation concept emphasises productivity, efficiency and competitive advantage at the expense of the worker' (Fenwick, 1998, p. 151) Another, perhaps more insidious, example of what I am referring to is the rise of the 'team concept' and the assumed benefits that it provides workers through participatory management. Yet as studies such as Rinehart *et al.* (1997) have shown, the team concept invariably implies intensification of the labour process, greater stress through multi-tasking, and burn-out among workers. It is in these ways that the concepts of the learning organisation and team concept can be considered as constitutive of the conceptual practices of power (Smith, 1990a).

The contributions of academic researchers have been, over the last decade, complimented by increasing numbers of private consultants who also claim PAR as their own. Hagey's (1997) comments on the privatisation of social research in recent years is pertinent here:

> Since there is a growing stable of PAR facilitators in the growing private research market, principal investigators can hire a facilitator who may come through with adequate results in the conventional research spectrum. In such cases, the principal investigator can passively be an agent for powers interested in managing the community. (p. 3)

My argument in what follows is that Hagey's observation touches on only one dimension of the ways in which forms of PAR and participatory research have begun to be colonised and appropriated in the contemporary period. As the collection of essays edited by Cooke and Kothari suggests (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), while this process is not new, it does appear to be both accelerating and expanding under globalisation as we enter the new century. Although it is not altogether clear why this

has occurred in the contemporary period, I will attempt to provide some preliminary observations and analysis of the phenomenon.

The rise of neo-liberalism from the 1980s has had a profound impact on economics, politics, and culture within the advanced capitalist countries. Its proliferation throughout the 1990s to both the former communist bloc, as well as less developed countries, now underpins the processes that constitute globalisation (Kelsey, 1999). While neo-liberalism can be viewed as a primarily economic philosophy in which free markets are the centre-piece (Hayek, 1944; Friedman & Friedman, 1985), implicit within it is also a system of governmentality whose locus is the individual consumer; not the citizen of post-war social democracy. As theorists such as Yeatman (1997, 1998), Rose (1992) and Gamble (1986) have shown, the transition from the politics of citizen rights to one where everyday life is organised through consumers and market relations, has fundamentally recontextualised the discourse of participatory democracy. By extension, my argument is that the prevalent discourses of participation that define contemporary approaches to PAR and participatory research are being infiltrated and appropriated by neo-liberalism.

Foucault (1991) has shown that regimes of governmentality are both insidious and subtle in the myriad of ways in which they generate and mould individual subjectivity and consciousness. Neo-liberalism over the last two decades has utilised a complex of ideological tools for this purpose. The most prominent and pervasive is that of the market which, as the historian E.P. Thompson (1991) has noted, is projected as:

> . . . an energising spirit—of differentiation, social mobility, individualisation, innovation, growth, freedom—like a kind of postal sorting-station with magical magnifying powers, which transforms each letter into a package and each package into a parcel. (p. 305)

To participate in a market is, therefore, to become subject to its 'magical magnifying powers' through which individual consumers can realise their own subjectivities. In this way the market has proven to be a powerful ideology in mobilising consent for the implementation of a neo-liberal agenda across a broad spectrum of economic, social, and educational policies. As Offe (1984) has demonstrated, this has resulted in the commodification of increasing areas of everyday life that were formerly part of the public domain.

While the market metaphor has constituted the master narrative, neo-liberalism has also secreted other conceptual practices that have saturated the social fabric. Significantly, many of these have had their origins in the social sciences, underlining Smith's (1990b) analysis of their implication in what she refers to as the relations of ruling. Instead of remaining in the pages of academic journals where they originate, international organisations such as the World Bank, IMF, OECD, and other agencies such as NGOs (e.g. PRIA, 2003), appropriate and work them into their respective discourses on economic policy, development, education, training, and so on. Of relevance to the discussion here are the concepts of social cohesion and social capital. The latter concept in particular over recent years has become the darling of public policy debate across a wide range of contexts, particularly in relation to the idea of a

'learning society' (see Schuller & Field, 1998). Originally developed by Coleman (2000) in the 1960s, it was re-discovered by political scientists and sociologists in the 1990s (Portes, 2000). Since then, it has been embraced by a much broader spectrum of the academic community, governments, international organisations, and elements of civil society. While there are radical and conservative revisions of the concept, it nevertheless has been co-opted and assimilated within a neo-liberal policy regime. For example, the World Bank has a major section of its website devoted to the concept and its role in promoting social cohesion and economic development in less developed countries (World Bank, 2002b). A cursory glance at this shows how social capital has become a metaphor for a myriad of behaviours, values, practices and forms of social organisation that support and legitimate the social relations of accumulation under neo-liberalism. As Fukyama (1995) has put it:

> Property rights, contracts, and commercial law are all indispensable institutions for creating a modern market-orientated economic system, but it is possible to economize substantially on transaction costs if such institutions are supplemented by social capital and trust. (p. 17)

Re-contextualised in this way, the idea of social capital has become a conceptual practice for legitimising appropriate responses to the anti-social effects of the market and, therefore, re-energising forms of participation within civil society from the standpoint of capital.

As I suggested above, the identification of social capital has been part of a much wider repertoire of conceptual practices that have reconstituted the discourse of participation under neo-liberalism (other examples of what I am referring to here would include the concepts of social exclusion and civil society). This has been nowhere more explicit than in the publications and policies of development agencies. Again, the World Bank website gives us insight into how it has been appropriated and made to work in the interests of capital. Like the section on social capital, the World Bank also has another section of its website devoted to the issues of 'participation' and 'participatory development' (World Bank, 2002a). At first glance the impression given is that development cannot be either effective or successful unless local stakeholders are included within the programs and projects that the Bank funds. Significantly, the inclusion of stakeholders within this process is viewed by the Bank as a form of 'social learning'. As the Bank puts it:

> . . . over time, development experience has shown that when external experts *alone* acquire, analyse, and process information and then present this information in reports, social change usually does not take place; whereas the kind of "social learning" that stakeholders generate and internalize during the participatory planning and/or implementation of a development activity *does* enable social change.

The explicit commitment to social change through 'participatory planning' is something that many organisations, irrespective of their political orientation, would

find laudatory for its democratic impulse. However, we must ask how, exactly, participation is to be organised and what kinds of social learning are to be internalised by stakeholders. The Bank provides a clear and unequivocal answer to both of these questions in a section entitled 'Building Capacity to Act':

> As the capacity of poor people is strengthened and their voices begin to be heard, they become "clients" who are capable of demanding and paying for goods and services from government and private sector agencies. Under these changed circumstances, the mechanisms to satisfy their needs will change as well. In this context, it becomes necessary to move away from welfare-oriented approaches and focus rather on such things as building sustainable, market-based financial systems; decentralizing authority and resources; and strengthening local institutions.

Clearly then, participation in the process identified here means to participate in a 'sustainable, market-based' system. It is also clear that social learning in this context centres on transforming poor people into clients (consumers) within the market (see Mosse, 2001, for other examples of this process). Participation is, therefore, concerned with learning, but learning that articulates the poor's interests and identities with the social relations of the market. In this way the poor are said to be empowered. As Henkel and Stirrat have perceptively noted, 'the question that arises with regard to empowerment is not so much "how much" are people empowered but rather "for what" are they empowered' (2001, p. 182).

While it may be said that the above excerpts reflect only one aspect of the Bank's mainstream development narrative—although Francis' (2001) work on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) suggests it is not—it is nevertheless significant that its conception of participatory development is shared by similar international agencies. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank's (2003) website on participation espouses very similar views on the subject, as does the Asian Development Bank (2003). In brief, there is a remarkable degree of convergence on participatory development across these institutions over how and in what ways it should be conceptualised, implemented and evaluated.

Participatory development, as promoted by these international organisations, is not exclusively aimed at the poor, however, but more crucially those agencies within civil society that can mobilise marginalised and oppressed groups, and act as mediators on their behalf. Thus, while the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has noted 'Economic development must be participatory and inclusive,' it also emphasises that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have:

> . . . demonstrated the critical role they can play in facilitating grassroots feedback and advice, improving transparency, generating community awareness, and harnessing people's power effectively. NGOs and civil society groups have widely established their capability to mobilize communities, generate community participation and develop community movements, particularly for addressing poverty. It is therefore essential that

governments come to view NGOs and civil society groups as partners in development. (Asian Development Bank, 2000, p. 25)

Consequently, 'NGOs and civil society groups' are viewed for their ability for, significantly, 'harnessing people's power effectively'. Once more, we must ask searching and potentially awkward questions such as: How is this power to be harnessed? For what purposes? and Who stands to benefit from it? Answering these questions might help us better understand how many NGOs and civil society groups have themselves become subject to the market and thereby co-opted to the standpoint of capital as 'partners in development'.

The argument presented so far, therefore, is that the neo-liberal discourse of participation—organised through the conceptual practices of the market, social capital, and participatory development—continues to appropriate and reconstitute the methodology of PAR in ways that are antithetical to both its founding principles and traditions. How this process may be either reversed, or at least halted, is the topic of the next section.

Toward a Methodology of the Margins

In the Introduction to this paper I suggested that the transformations that have characterised capitalism over the last quarter century will likely have a major impact on the contexts in which social research is conducted. As Castells (1999) has observed, the effects of globalisation 'are pervasive and cut across all spheres of human activity' (p. 45). While social scientists have devoted much energy in attempting to account for these changes, he also notes that after 'twenty years of efforts to describe, analyse, and theorise the "new society," there is still a great deal of uncertainty about what this society is' (1999, p. 57). Nevertheless, one thing that is reasonably clear about this new society is that knowledge-producing practices across a wide array of sites are increasingly becoming commodified. As a recent UN report has noted, 'Knowledge is the new asset' (UNDP, 1999).

My argument in this paper is that PAR and other forms of participatory research are increasingly being subjected to this process of commodification for the purposes of supporting and reproducing the social relations of accumulation in their multivarious forms. In its neo-liberal guise, social capital is a good example of how this process has materialised as a conceptual practice in the contemporary period. The question that confronts us is, therefore, how can PAR and other forms of participatory research not only resist this process but be subversive of it? Put another way, how can PAR become a counter-hegemonic methodology of and for the margins? In my view, there are at least three ways that practitioners of PAR can do this.

First, practitioners of PAR should explore and draw on other critical methodologies for the purposes of forming alliances with their respective research communities. One path that might be followed here is that of critical ethnography. Not only has the relatively short history of critical ethnography paralleled that of PAR's development, but its methodology, as well as the themes and issues it has

focused on, are remarkably similar. For example, critical ethnography has systematically rejected positivism as a methodological approach to social research, as it has notions of value-neutrality or objectivity. It also shares with PAR a strong ethical commitment to social justice. Consequently, critical ethnographers have found themselves working with the poor, marginalised and otherwise subordinate groups within society. While it shares this common ground, critical ethnography has at least two important contributions that it can make to the development of PAR. The first is its integration of political economy within its theoretical and analytical framework. In an era of globalised capitalism, this is crucial to the analysis of social phenomena. Second, critical ethnographers have now developed an elaborate and sophisticated critique of the mainstream social sciences implication in the relations of ruling within capitalism (Smith, 1990a,b; 1994). This critique does not only legitimate the hitherto marginalised practices of PAR, it also offers it powerful insights on how to develop a critical methodology for the new century.

It also needs to be emphasised, however, that critical ethnography differs from PAR in several important ways, and that these differences may attenuate possibilities for such an alliance. As I have discussed the limitations of critical ethnography elsewhere (Jordan, 2002, 2003, 1995), I will outline these only briefly below. The first is that while critical ethnography shares a marginal status with PAR vis a vis the mainstream social sciences, its practitioners tend to be university trained academics concerned with the pursuit of 'rigorous' research practice. One effect of this has rendered forms of critical ethnography that are imbued with positivism, while another has been to maintain and reproduce the division between expert/professional researcher and his/her subjects. This poses a second limitation. Because of its social location within universities and colleges—a position that increasing numbers of PAR researchers share it should be noted—critical ethnography is often subject to and enmeshed within the hierarchical and highly individualised social relations of competitive research funding. This type of social organisation obviously contradicts the democratic and communitarian ethos of PAR. A third limitation concerns the contemporary trajectory and orientation of critical ethnography which has increasingly been defined by postmodernism. While this has not necessarily been a retrograde step, it nevertheless has accentuated highly individualised approaches to qualitative research (e.g. autoethnography) as well as a reification of theory over practice. This development raises difficult questions about the accessibility of critical ethnography to groups who do not possess the specialised training of university based researchers. Despite these limitations, however, practitioners of PAR may still derive highly relevant insights from the study of critical ethnography for their own practice.

A second field of social inquiry that practitioners of PAR might pursue is marked out by Gryff Foley (1999) in his concept of 'learning in social action'. For Foley, learning in social action has the following dimensions:

- learning is a dimension of human life and manifests itself in many forms;
- informal learning is frequently implicit, embedded as it is in the routine activities of people in their daily lives;

- much of this learning involves struggles, and these struggles are shaped by individual, interpersonal, institutional and broader social, political and cultural factors;
- emancipatory learning and education are possible, but also are complex, ambiguous and continually contested;
- it is both possible and necessary to develop an analysis of this complexity and to act strategically.

This typology derives from Foley's observations that informal learning, across a wide range of contexts, is subject to both dominant and insurgent discourses that either hinder or legitimate emancipatory forms of struggle focused around informal learning. It seems to me that Foley's analysis of struggles over informal learning are particularly relevant to PAR given what I have said above about the co-option of the discourse of participation by neo-liberalism. That is both the concept, and the practices that can be derived from it, offer methodological insights into the complexity, tensions and contradictions that surround the generation of counter-hegemonic discourses over participation.

Last, practitioners of PAR need to pay close attention to the language and conceptual frameworks that they employ to develop their methodology. I have already pointed, for example, to the ambivalent legacy of the concept of social capital and its effects on the conceptual practices of participatory research. It seems to me that an authentic methodology of and for the margins would be sensitive to, for instance, the ideological tensions in the use of the following concepts shown in Fig. 1.

Mainstream	**Critical**
Civil Society	Capitalism
Social Capital	Moral Economy/Hegemony
Social Cohesion/Exclusion	Class Struggle
Globalisation	Neo-Liberalism/Colonialism

FIG. 1.

My argument is that we must be cognisant of the insidious effects that the use of mainstream concepts has on the research questions we pose, the research process we construct, and our analysis of the contexts that we explore. Such concepts and conceptual frameworks have, as I have shown, a profound influence on the processes of participatory research and the social organisation of participation.

Conclusion

In this paper I have focused on three key themes in relation to PAR and participatory forms of research. In the first section of the paper I provided an historical overview of the key developments that generated PAR as a distinctive approach to research over the last half century. From a combination of popular anti-colonial struggles, popular education and action research, PAR emerged not only as a methodology of the margins, but of the marginalised. As I showed, it was this legacy that endowed it with a non-positivist, critical and overtly political character.

In the second section of the paper I showed how this critical tradition within PAR, and more generally participatory research, has increasingly become eclipsed by the emergence and pervasive influence of neo-liberalism. Specifically, my argument was that the discourse of participation within capitalist democracies has been appropriated and re-contextualised by neo-liberalism, which in turn has had profoundly negative effects on the possibilities for participatory research in both the developed and less developed countries.

The third and last section of the paper looked at ways for reclaiming the critical traditions that originally defined PAR. I suggested exploring three possible paths for this, namely critical ethnography, Gryff Foley's notion of learning in social action, and the development of conceptual practices that will challenge, resist, and subvert those generated by neo-liberalism. Combined, these three elements, I suggested, might contribute to the development of a counter-hegemonic discourse of and for the margins in participatory research as we enter the new century.

NOTE

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