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2 Participatory Action Research as Practice

Marja Liisa Swantz

This chapter describes participatory action research practice in Africa, particularly Tanzania, drawing on the author's experience over several decades. It explores the relationship between participatory research and national politics, the place of theory, the role of the participant researcher, and the significance of symbols in social transformation, and it provides vignettes of the development of participatory practice in a development context.

Participatory Action Research — PAR or P(A)R — is multidisciplinary and multiform; no one perspective can claim authority or authenticity. PAR adherents agree that it breaks from the positivist and empiricist science. When Orlando Fals Borda reviewed the history of P(A)R at the World Congress on Participatory Convergence in Knowledge in Cartagena in 1997, he found at least 32 schools associated with the idea of participation in social, economic and political research. P(A)R had no one disciplinary or political orientation, but its beginnings were closely connected with critique of mainline social sciences and it frequently lined up with revolutionary movements (Fals Borda, 1998: xii).

Alfredo Molano in his opening speech at the same Congress referred to the multiple beginnings of PAR. In his words, 'As with all great things, it had no single inventor. Nobody discovered it, it was the result of an atmosphere rarefied by the clash between clear-cut scientific explanations and a rough reality.' Referring to the changes that had taken place, he pointed out that tempering of the radical orientation in the use of PAR and the need for critical interpretation had brought about an ethical dimension of science. The time of Marxism and its rigid application were over and the concern was for the reconstruction of the actual lives which ordinary people live. Two points had shifted the emphasis. After 20 years of action research, researchers were interested in walking shoulder to shoulder with ordinary people rather than one step ahead. Second,

the researchers had stopped fighting against [p. 32 ↓] the state, instead, they were participating, in spite of the weaknesses of the state (Molano, 1998: 5).

These two points were guiding thoughts when PAR started in Tanzania in the mid-1960s and apply particularly to the initial steps of a participatory approach to research and researchers' participation in people's actual lives. These beginnings were different from the start of action research in Latin America. This chapter describes beginning stages of PAR in the African, mainly Tanzanian, context and thus complements other chapters on the development of PAR in Latin America, Asia, and India in this volume and in the first edition of this *Handbook* (Fals Borda, 2001/2006; Hall, 2001; Rahman, Chapter 3). Much of the beginnings refer to the work of the writer, and for this reason first-person language is used.

When describing the roots of their own work, pioneers of P(A)R like Fals Borda trace the epistemology and theoretical groundings and the theoretical paths they followed, rather than the political or practical context. Latin American scholars had their training in the universities of the USA and became aware of the political implications of the modernization theories and the myth of objective science. The dependency theories first developed in Latin America, which condemned the trickle-down and diffusion-of-innovation theories, spread quickly to centres of social science in other parts of the world in the 1970s. The social scientists in Tanzania gained inspiration from books by Andre Gunder Frank and Walter Rodney (1972) and the University of Dar es Salaam soon became the hot spot of radical political theory. However, in Tanzania PAR did not start from such a political theory or action as in Latin America. It started from the practical need to connect research to national development and to avoid separating the university from practical reality and the nation's stated political goals, which demanded mutual communication between researchers and people, in political jargon, 'peasants and workers'. Participant research in action was an outcome of a sense that 'the license to practice the irrelevant has expired' (Nash, 1981: 236).

After the publication of Thomas Kühn's *Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962), new possibilities for paradigmatic change emerged in the social sciences and PAR was an obvious way to break the false objectivism of positivist social science. Personally, I leaned on Gunnar Myrdal's (1970) critique of objectivism. I also discovered that John Galtung, professor for peace research from Oslo, had after his visit to Cuba come on

an alternative model, which he called non-violent social science in which the general rule would be not to do research *on* people but *with* people (Galtung, 1975: 273–6). However, masculine concepts still prevailed also in new radical science, and there was a further need for a change of paradigm in women's studies. In the Tanzanian context these broke through to challenge the dominating social concepts and the 'scientific knowledge' that had suppressed people's knowledge in general and that of women in particular.

STARTING PAR IN TANZANIA

I learned participant research while immersed in village life some 50 km north of Dar es Salaam in 1965–70. I became part of a traditional community in which ritual and symbolic communication formed the base of social life and women were illiterate. A prominent medicine man adopted me as his daughter and thus integrated me into a family system with its responsibilities and privileges. My own family shared a Swahili house with a local family. In the words of a village woman to my daughter 20 years after:

She did not come as a European. She came as one of us. She was Mswahili.¹ Can you say that there is a difference between her and me because she is a European? No, there is no difference. We see her as one of us; exactly the same. (Tripp, 1991: 52)

Even if taken for what such statements are worth, they do indicate a basic condition for PAR. Participation means identification (Swantz, 1970, 1986b).

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Participatory approach to research had its start with university students when I was locally employed as a Senior Research Fellow in the University of Dar es Salaam in 1972–5. The university supported students as research assistants during their long vacation. It enabled me to recruit students and give them training in the new approach. The departure point was educational. Tanzania needed academic people who were not

divorced from their background and who would bring the wisdom and knowledge of the grassroots to the academy.

From the start PAR aimed at making research an agent of transformation in the rural community. It had to be of immediate interest to the people in the studied community, involving them in formulating the study problems and in finding solutions. In order to realize the educational and motivational potential of such a study it needed to be a common effort with villagers, elders, administrators, educators and researchers. It took some time to have such an unconventional approach approved by research authorities.

Research in action, later called PAR, was first developed with students over a three year period. The first group of 12 male students studied income-earning potentials of the school leavers in five coastal villages in 1973. Together with the youth they decided to start gardening, carpentry and fishing projects. Sharing work with the village youth was an instructive experience both for the students and the school leavers while they learned to plan and implement projects, consult village authorities, and make the projects viable. A Tanzanian colleague and I visited the students and analysed the situations with them. Funds became available from a trust fund for purchasing equipment. The students' attitudes towards the villagers changed radically, as they recorded in their reports. I quote from one:

Colleague, Ruth Besha and I have come to realise that this was a unique programme. While the traditional research methods take the people as objects of research, ours took them as actors, in fact as the stars of the whole process. This was a revolution in itself. Despite the problems, the method whereby researchers stay and work together with the local people is the best one, as besides bringing youth of different educational levels together, it also gives the local people opportunities for learning from the researchers. ... At the same time we learned a lot from the local people. People talk freely with people with whom they are acquainted. (Swantz, 1976b: 119–26; 1982: 117–38)

In the following year women students were engaged in a participatory study with families having malnutrition problems. Each shared life with five families, in which the mother had been with a child for rehabilitation in a nutrition centre. The students

made notes on daily life, keeping sets of questions in mind but forms out of sight. When mutual confidence was gained the problems could be discussed openly. Comparison with the living conditions of the healthy neighbours helped to focus on the economic and social differentials.

Other female students organized literacy classes for women cleaners of the university and the Ministry of Education in which they engaged women in lively talks and writing about their lives. The exercises encouraged the women to be active in advancing their social and educational level. One female student worked in a cashew nut factory, which employed over a thousand women workers. She experienced their work-related hazards of corrosive acid on bare hands and helped mobilize the women to take the poor working conditions to the workers union. Some women students gained deeper understanding in their home region of the reasons why women left their homes to become prostitutes in cities and on return established themselves as respectable farmers (Swantz, 1985c).

Participation and action made research contextual. The roles of the researchers and the researched interchanged in the course of communication through which there was a mutual development of knowledge and learning to understand people's problems. The students learned to question the role of the researcher and analyse how her/his presence influenced the research situation. PAR [p. 34 ↓] was in line with the political theory in which peasants and workers were to be the builders of the nation. The students' changed attitudes impressed the chief education officer of the university who recommended the approach for use in all the university departments when students were engaged as research assistants (Swantz, 1976a, 1976b).

With a Swedish colleague, Jan Rudengren, we developed a participatory approach in an ILO-supported pilot survey.² With some organizational assistance the villagers in 46 villages of Bagamoyo and two other districts assessed their educational level and the extent of utilization of skills and natural resources. The self-conducted survey raised active discussions in village meetings before and after the survey. The results made villagers aware of big gaps in skills and unused resources. In spite of statistical weaknesses in the survey, villagers' involvement in it and their self-assessment made them aware of their development potentials. The weakness was in the follow-up: the

research settings seldom allowed the researchers' contact with local participants to continue. The written documents benefit the academy rather than the participants, who learn from the guided action, analysis and reflection, which is the educational component in participation (Swantz, 1979).

These first participatory projects prepared the way for four years of full participatory action research on development and culture built on the contacts gained in Bagamoyo District. The project was launched in 1975 in co-operation between Tanzanian and Finnish researchers under the Ministry of Culture and Youth and the Academy of Finland. Issues needing research and action arose in many areas: there were imminent problems resulting from the government intention of moving people to planned villages; government officers had problems getting Maasai boys to schools; cattle keepers were experiencing poor relations with the authorities. The start of PAR coincided with the government programme intended to foster self-reliant development. People soon nicknamed the project

Jipemoyo, 'take heart', as Bagamoyo referred to the beating hearts of slaves who during the slave trade were brought to the coastal town, Bagamoyo, for sale (Swantz, 1981).

The aim of research was to gain a deeper view of people's own concepts of development, what assets their own cultural ways could contribute and what conflicts they caused. Seven Tanzanian and Finnish researchers of five disciplines along with some assistants became involved with intent to write doctoral theses after the four years of participatory research. Two worked with the Parakuyo Maasai, one with Kwere artisans, and an ethnomusicologist with his artist wife lived many years in Miono village with their three children, one born there, learning the Zigua music and dance. A geographer recorded people's moves to new villages, drawing maps for the ward office, and an ethnologist befriended women of Msoga. The project secretary engaged also in research on people's conceptions of ethnicity (Donner, 1977; Hurskainen, 1984; Jerman, 1997; Kiyenze, 1985; Mustafa et al., 1980; Sitari, 1983; Vuorela, 1987). The researchers lived with the people, renting village houses. Seminars were arranged to give a forum for village historians to relate past histories, people of same occupations discussed their work in groups, young people entertained in song and dance, and artists illustrated leaflets for distribution.

The government policy of concentrating population in bigger villages was aimed at improving people's access to health and educational services and at facilitating communal cultivation, but it also raised many difficulties. When people from scattered areas refused to move, force was often used. On the other hand, the intended aim of communal cultivation was never fully carried through; instead, people were told to join individually cultivated plots into unified fields for easy ploughing. People found ways to get around the orders instead of openly resisting. Today, 30 years later, the difficulties arising from mismanaged implementation of villagization belongs to the past: while some have returned [p. 35 ↓] to their home plots, the benefits from village dwelling can be seen in the village-based local government system. It has facilitated the application of PRA (i.e. Participatory Rural Appraisal) in village planning.

However, at that time the researchers could mediate between people and authorities. They learned people's reasoning and helped their voices be heard when local officers did not dare to bend the orders and the elected leaders would not risk their positions by expressing people's views. For example, Msoga village in Bagamoyo District was well situated along a river with good soil for vegetable gardens and a large maize field was ploughed with a hired tractor. The arbitrary plan made on an office drawing board had located the new village a few kilometres away along the main road. The school and dispensary had been moved there, but half of the people refused to move. Visiting the village we carried a tape-recorder, which the villagers at work on their gardens spotted. It prompted them to record their village story in songs and in a brief written history. They took for granted that we would take it to the president. The tape reached President Nyerere, with the result that they could stay in old Msoga and start a fresh.³

Also the Parakuyo Maasai of Bagamoyo District seized the opportunity through PAR to express their dissatisfaction at the dealings of the government, which in the early 1970s had taken their grazing and watering grounds along Ruvu river to start a state cattle farm run by the Chinese. The government had also failed to provide veterinary services, medicines and training. The Maasai had been ostracized from colonial times because of their different lifestyle and dress (or lack of it). They decided to organize a two-day seminar with the backing of the Jipemoyo researchers and were ready to butcher two cows to feed the participants. They wanted to speak to the regional veterinary officer residing in the capital and invited him to participate. When he didn't initially turn up, they

delayed the start of the seminar until he finally arrived, after having been reminded by phone 15 km away.

The women researchers met with Maasai women separately since the Maasai men could not consume meat with women present, nor could they yet think of sending girls to school. PAR would play a role in bringing about changes too, these are described below.

One issue arose from the government assumption that the Maasai herds were growing in size and the consequent order to arrange annual sales. The Maasai initially resisted the proposed counting of the cattle, but after they analysed the situation with the researchers they co-operated in the count, which evidenced that the numbers were diminishing, not growing. The discovery put a halt to the forced marketing. Many individual herds were in fact too small for supporting a household. The researchers recorded the differentiation, which was taking place among the Maasai, dividing them into three income groups. Only the richest had enough cattle for reproducing themselves (Mustafa, 1989; Mustafa et al., 1980: vol 3, 64–87).

Through PAR the contacts with the veterinarians were encouraged and after Jipemoyo the regional veterinary officer organized a training seminar for the same group of Maasai. They could have also taught much to the officer about cattle, the locations of good grasses for grazing, and the best spots for digging wells or water pools. The contrast between the Latin names of cattle diseases that the veterinarian wrote on the blackboard and the experience of men sitting at desks became evident. The men, many illiterate, listened for a while but soon took the initiative to make the training officer listen to their questions, such as whether their practice of castration was harmful. The Maasai were quick to learn but their opportunities for an encounter with the livestock officers had been few — previously one visit to a government cattle farm had given them new ideas.

The conflict between the development policies and cultural traditions in relation to women placed the researchers in a sensitive situation. A woman elder approached me in a Maasai *craal* with the problem of clitoridectomy, which they practised but which she [p. 36 ↓] had doubts about. I pointed out its dangers and she shared our discussion with fellow women sitting in the moonlight. The change of harmful customs takes place

gradually after some families break off the custom. In this, as in the schooling of girls, the Maasai who had become Christians saw first the need for change and others followed. Today many girls go to school and during my recent visit I ate meat with men.

Issues brought up in seminars and personal contacts during the four years of PAR (1975–9) began also to change discriminatory attitudes toward the Maasai. Shared research opened new perspectives and raised wide interest. When the Maasai Prime Minister learned of the progress made in settling the conflicts between the cattle herders and farmers, he initiated a seminar in Dar es Salaam between his local government officers and representatives of Lugoba Maasai and farmers. A Maasai woman in her blue apparel and red beads drew attention and the bureaucrats were impressed by the well-formulated arguments of the Maasai headman.

The leadership of the Academy of Finland followed closely the implementation of its first development research in Africa. The evaluation seminar in Helsinki drew participants from 14 different countries. The evaluator of the research methodology was a Swiss expert of PAR theory, Heinz Moser. In time five doctoral theses presented in universities of Dar es Salaam and Helsinki and some other degrees were the academic result of the Jipemoyo researchers who have become professors and development researchers. The immediate results of Jipemoyo were in the communication, analysis, action and reflection at the research scene. PAR also had political connotations. It made oppressed people visible and facilitated hearing them and solving their problems. It increased awareness and made power holders conscious of people's right to speak for their own defence.

Budd Hall edited an issue of the journal *Convergence on Participatory Research* in 1975 (Hall, 1975) in which he elaborated the basic principles of PAR, referring to my initial paper. He became the General Secretary of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) and was the main organizer of the First World Assembly of Adult Education in Dar es Salaam in 1976, during which some Latin American researchers visited a Jipemoyo research site. As the centre for PAR networks ICAE co-ordinated the Participatory Research Project (PRP) in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. Under its auspices regional and international conferences were held in which methodologies, theory and practice of PAR were debated. The Mzumbe conference in

Tanzania gathered representatives from six African countries, in which educational and popular theatre projects had been started (Kassam, 1982).

POLITICAL GROUNDS FOR PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Critiques of the colonial scholarship, imperialistic history, and continuing neo-colonialist presence prepared the ground for new research approaches. Disinterested social science was declared false. Nationalistic spirit guided people being freed from colonial fetters. The experiences in the former colonial states converged when students met in universities and research-conferences. Social scientists were caught with the political inspiration of the new nations while they also were critical of the national politics. In Africa people supported parties and national governments which lined up against the colonial and neo-colonial forces, even if they differed in the degree to which they trusted their governments. The role of the state was different in Africa from that in Latin America. Building a nation was seen as building a strong state, which would take care of social needs and build a strong national economy.

In Latin America the struggle was against the North American economic and political power over their governments and bourgeoisie which lined up with these forces. Action research, later PAR, related to the struggle against the oppressive governmental [p. 37 ↓] force. The state became the enemy, with the exception of countries with socialist governments. Activists such as Mexican Gustavo Esteva resisted also the foreign developmental emphasis in people's struggle (Esteva, 1996). PAR was developed with and for the oppressed groups. Similarly in Asia PAR embraced a liberationist perspective (see Rahman, Chapter 3; Brown and Tandon, Chapter 15): people organized themselves to resist the power of landowners or moneylenders. In such situations the resistant groups embraced revolutionary ideology in differing ways.

In Tanzania, the relation of people to the state was different. Hardly any resistance groups emerged. People rallied around the President Julius Nyerere and his TANU party, Tanzania National Union.⁴ In 1967 TANU had adopted the policy of *ujamaa*, communalism, formulated by the National Executive in Arusha and thus called the

Arusha Declaration. The self-reliant socialist politics, which claimed traditional roots in *ujamaa*, assumed that people would cultivate communally and join in the fight against capitalism. People's political aspirations were to be given space within the one party state. The government structure provided fairly democratically elected village governments, committees and ten house cell groups, though the National Executive Committee could influence local choices of candidates. PAR accorded with President Nyerere's self-reliant development policies in which peasants and workers would be the main actors. The Marxist economic theory guided the fight against capitalism, but Nyerere declined to accept Marxism as the philosophy of life. As a Catholic, Marx could not overrule religion; further, while Nyerere built on tradition he disclaimed its oppression of women.

However, as with Latin America countries claiming to be socialist, so in Tanzania the ruling elite did not always live up to the stated policies. Bureaucracy and the self-interest of officials brought about a separation between the Party elite and the people which often led to oppressive treatment of ordinary people, especially in implementing villagization, where it met people's passive resistance. In contrast, PAR built on the people's interests.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE USE OF PAR

PAR researchers found themselves in similar situations to which the anthropological method of participant observation had earlier led researchers. The initial PAR projects had similarities with Action Anthropology, which Sol Tax initiated in 1948 with students doing research practice in the Meskwaki Indian settlement in Iowa, challenging the ideal of disinterested science: 'people are not rats and not to be treated like them. ... Community research is thus justifiable only to the degree that the results are imminently useful to the community and easily outweigh the disturbance to it.' The early action anthropologists asked, 'Are the researchers in the position to know what is useful to the researched community? Can the doctoral theses as the academic outcome be considered commonly researched results?' (Mertens, 2004: 34–4). PAR researchers have had to deal with such problematics and place themselves as actors within the total

research context. This means withdrawing from the action into periods of reading and reflection and placing oneself in the larger picture. The problems are widely dealt with in reflections on AR and PAR (Ragland, 2006).

In early 1960s when the university was established in Tanzania, foreign natural and social scientists went there with the background of disinterested science. This was inappropriate in situations in which the need for practical solutions was urgent. One of the initial solutions led to the application of the participant approach to research. In contrast with Sol Tax's work with the Meskwaki, the intention was not to assist people; rather, the 'informants' were to become co-researchers. The research problems were [p. 38 ↓] identified together and research was conducted with members of the community. The practice could be criticized, but the principles were clearly stated. It meant a common search for interpreting the situations, with the knowledge of researchers complementing the practical knowledge of the people. The researchers' formulation of the scientific problems was part of the evolving ideas and the attempts to analyse them.

Action researchers today might face the same criticism as Sol Tax for 'not producing a high-quality ethnographic portrait' (Mertens, 2004: 34–4). The rich literature of the social applicability of anthropology is relevant for further analysis of action research and its role in development. By and large, the anthropological methodology has not openly recognized research as a common endeavour for common goals with its informants in spite of the fact that anthropological research is a shared activity. The researcher only thanks the informants (Swantz, 1985b, 1986a).

In PAR the researcher needs to be open to learn from others and to adopt a genuine learner's attitude even in situations in which apparent ignorance tempts her to become a teacher. For example, the participatory malnutrition study was different from traditional nutrition studies, which analyse measured portions of food consumed by malnourished children basing the analysis on exacting knowledge of the nutritional values. The use of PAR drew the attention of nutritionists in Finland and Norway to the significance of human relations in research and it resulted later in further participatory nutritional studies and seminars (Swantz, 1985c: 96–121).

PAR rejects science as the dominating knowledge and bases the problems on everyday knowledge; the researcher and the researched share their knowledge as equals. The researcher genuinely recognizes that she does not know the life world, wisdom or meaning of central symbols of life of the co-researchers. The term 'informant', which anthropologists use of the local holders of knowledge, and also the term 'field study' distance the scholar from the local partners and context. Reference to 'peasants' places a community into another class and emphasizes the difference, as does 'indigenous knowledge'. Such terms separate the academics into another category, class or nationality.

Harvard economist Stephen Marglin, in the book titled *Dominating Knowledge*, suggests the use of the concepts *episteme* and *techne* to differentiate knowledge systems of theoretical origin from technical or practical knowledge (Marglin, 1990). His and his wife's research team at UNU-WIDER,⁵ in Helsinki, of which I was privileged to be part, struggled to give *techne* knowledge the credit it deserves. In another book with the telling title *Decolonizing Knowledge*, Aili Mari Tripp and I wrote an article based on PAR in fishing communities of Tanzania (Swantz and Tripp, 1996). Through PAR conducted prior to the evaluation of the foreign-sponsored training project we discovered that artisan fishermen's knowledge, an integral part of their daily work gained over many lifetimes, was ignored in fishing officers' technical training on the same shore. In the words of a graduating student of the Mbegani Fisheries Development Centre: 'We learn higher and higher knowledge, it has nothing to do with fishermen.' Yet 98 per cent of fish caught in the country were caught by artisan fishermen and women.⁶

Keeping the two categories of knowledge separate reduces the meaning of people's work. The cultural variables in the organization of work determine the satisfaction and the success of work, not only the type of knowledge applied in work performance. Knowledge, which is not integrated into the cultural context, is not holistic, not related to the community and its capabilities. (Marglin, 1990). The technical individualistic training models presage failure. The lack of contact with fishermen in training fishing officers discovered through PAR was emphasized in the evaluation of the training in its relation to the fisheries' sector. It uplifted the status of fishermen and also the fisherwomen, who had been identified only as buyers of the left-over fish (Swantz and Tripp, 1996).

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PAR was developed into participatory evaluation in monitoring ongoing health work as an effort to integrate participation of the clients into evaluation. In Tanzania the total health sector had been evaluated in 1978–9 and a closer look at the grassroots was required. The Ministry of Health needed information about how the health services met women's needs. In place of one-time assessment, a proposal was accepted to work out continuous participatory monitoring and build it into the health workers' training system. Health workers during their training could learn to work with people, look at their future work from the viewpoint of the patients and assess the quality of the service given together with clients. The Tanzanian Ministry of Health and Finnida, the Finnish Development Co-operation, supported the plan and Finnish medical doctors through their NGO for Social Responsibility took part in it over a period of ten years. The project introduced participatory learning into the health workers' training in the medical training institutes and integrated participatory action into the periods of practical learning.

In one-or two-week training seminars all the levels of health workers were learning through participation a shared human approach to village health. Participants visited village homes, and some villagers were invited to the training venues. In group meetings participants analysed what they had experienced and how the health personnel could better meet people's real needs. All the 90 training institutes were involved and a participatory component was introduced into the syllabus for medical doctors' training. Materials for participatory learning and training were prepared and distributed by the Ministry of Health, so that the project influenced a large number of medical workers during the years. The researcher's role was to analyse the process (Swantz, 1992a, 1994). A follow-up was possible within participatory development in southern Tanzania. The chief medical officer had taken part in participatory training and he put it into practice. Materials available in the Ministry of Health were upgraded and meetings were held between health workers and traditional healers. Participatory learning was an important tool when cholera hit the area and people had to deal with it. Research went side by side with participatory practice and was published in articles and chapters in books. However, the institutional continuity of participatory practice is difficult to maintain with the change of personnel.

Participatory evaluation, PE, was also done in 1982 when Finnida supported a group of six women to assess the effects of its projects on women in Tanzania, three studying the documents, three staying in project areas (Kivelä, 1985; Stude, 1985). PE assumes that the beneficiaries are the best judges of the effects of the projects, consequently they become part of the evaluation process. PE carried out alongside development projects makes development people-centred and reaches actual beneficiaries and, if applied, reduces the number of evaluation missions which consider people as 'targets' of development. Instead of people working from their own premises, external criteria formulated by the funding agents' interests are imposed on them (Swantz, 1985a, 1992b). Monitoring, in which the clients could participate, was attempted in Regional Integrated Project Support (RIPS) in southern Tanzania, to which a separate monitoring department was attached. Even then the people involved in the implementation did not always participate in the evaluation process.

For 12 years RIPS incorporated Participatory Rural Appraisal, PRA, and also research based on PAR into its programme. (Freling, 1998; Swantz in Seppälä, 1998: 157–94). Robert Chambers (see Chapter 20) participated in a training seminar and other PRA experts came from India, but the main work was carried out by Tanzanians, among them such experts in PRA as Mwajuma Masaiganah and M.G. Kajimbwa. Training in PRA methods was carried out in all 11 districts and village people learned to assess their resources and needs. As an important outcome the approach became [p. 40 ↓] part of national policy to be promoted throughout the country. Before the external support ended in 2005 it was declared to be a national model. Teams were to be trained in all the villages for assessing their potentials and for making village plans as the basic documents for rural development. To simplify the approach the Ministry for Local and Regional Government recommended later an approach in which opportunities and obstacles were analysed.

THE PLACE OF THEORY

In all of the PAR projects I have described the starting point was a practical situation. PAR was related to the development impetus of the country. The experiments of PRA became part of the theoretical debate in social sciences. Orlando Fals Borda was the initiator and President of the Research Committee on Innovative Processes in Social

Change of the International Sociological Association, ISA. It had its beginning in a controversy within the research committee on Modernisation and Diffusion of Innovation in Varna in 1970. Fals Borda gathered an international conference in Cartagena in 1977, in which the innovative P(A)R scholars from five continents debated against the minority holding on to diffusion-of-innovation theories. The committee met again in the Tenth World Congress of Sociology in Mexico in 1982, in which Ulf Himmelstrand from Uppsala, then President of the ISA, also took part as a member. He had contributed a paper in Cartagena in 1977 of which Fals Borda remarked that he provided a bridge towards sceptical academicians. Their chapters in a book of the Committee spelled out the diametrically opposed perspectives (Himmelstrand, 1982).

Action Research in the context of urban social problems in the USA stimulated ideas for starting the experimental PAR in Tanzania, but those studies did not incorporate community members as active partners in the research. The poor reputation of instrumental science shadowed pragmatism, but the trend was moving in that direction. The critique of John Dewey's pragmatism by Novack (1975) was in line with early PAR researchers when historical materialism ousted pragmatism.

Developments in social science eventually created space for the actor and everyday life. In Alain Touraine's *Le retour de l'acteur* (1984), the actor again had a role in the analysis, but Touraine had warned against the P(A)R proposed by Fals Borda in which the researcher becomes committed with the actors.⁷ According to Anthony Giddens the majority of the newer or newly discovered schools of social science veered to the subjectivist side and research subjects were seen as beings capable of understanding the conditions of their actions, acting intentionally and having reasons for what they did. The 'sociological' direction of modern philosophy involved a recovery of the everyday (Giddens, 1987: 52–72).

The culture as a broad concept was an essential part of everyday life and people's identity in Africa. Symbolic conceptualization of life formed the basis for communally celebrated rituals and people's decisions were often based on visions and dreams. Some Jipemoyo PAR researchers and associates, in analysing the changing kin and age-grade-based societies, interpreted the cultural phenomena in line with the prevailing Marxist theories, according to which culture was the superstructure and

cultural phenomena depended on the economy as the base. Anthropology was considered a colonial discipline and not a subject in the university. A South African anthropologist, Archie Mafeje, was a vocal critic. In his words, traditional African forms of society and religious practices were ‘forms of oppression and mental enslavement, which should be judged as such for the benefit of the present day society’ (Ranger, 1972).

Other Marxist anthropologists argued that kin relations were not determined by the economic infrastructure nor by relations of production (Godelier, 1973), so that it was possible to build development on interrelated [p. 41 ↓] concepts of culture and economy, using a broad concept of culture to comprise all human activity which did not reduce culture solely to dependence on economy. Material means were always mediated by meaning making — ‘Rational production of gain is in one and the same motion the production of symbols’ (Sahlins, 1976: 212, 215). For Paul Ricoeur (1967) symbols preceded all interpretation, and for Susan Langer (1951) the basic human need is symbolization preceding all action. Transformation of symbols indicated human capacity of symbolic conceptualization, which could evolve to self-shaped development (Swantz, 1986b: 378–82).

The political theory based on historical materialism eclipsed all other theoretical approaches in the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s. In the struggle to study development in relation to culture, phenomenology was criticized as being bourgeois, concentrating on appearances. In contrast the materialist phenomenology transformed appearances and thus was a way to transform the meanings of action, production and reproduction of symbolic universes from subjective to objective knowledge (Mustafa, 1977, 1989: 19–20; Rigby, 1977). This theorizing maintained to the end the distance between the researchers’ rationalism and the life world of the research partners. This materialist perspective meant that no effort was made to fit aspects of this life world into any of the theoretical construction. Significant aspects of village culture — such as the witch-finding experts who controlled the minds of villagers; or the lame woman *mganga*’s (healer’s) claim that she was taken up to a tree by a wind to find solutions to a patient’s problem — were simply ignored.

It was hard to accept ‘class conditioned consciousness’ as the motor of social development in societies in which ‘classes’ and ‘proletariat’ seemed misguided,

inappropriate concepts. Even if one tuned in with the idea that the domination of social and economic forces could not be changed with gradual transformation of symbols, culture as a larger concept had a role to play. Rejection of culture as a social force is a major deterrent still in the development of countries like Tanzania, although there are some signs that it is now gaining momentum. In formulating the *ujamaa* socialism, President Nyerere had seen the significance of culture as a trajectory of development. The scholars rejected Nyerere's socialism for its lack of theoretical grounding as they commonly reject efforts to learn directly from different conceptualizations of life. Perhaps here the way forward would be Peter Reason's contemplation on future participation finding Bateson's ability to 'peer over the edges of different frameworks' a way to reflect on and choose the premises of understanding and action (Reason, 1994: 37).

The women researchers in Jipemoyo analysed the women's role in peasant commodity production and the patriarchal relations of production. Whether in agricultural or pastoral societies, women were subjected to men's power; the structure of the kinbased societies made them dependent and the system worked against them. Their socially bound position, which they traditionally could utilize in favourable situations for their own benefit, deteriorated with the petty commodity and capitalist economies (Bryceson, 1980). The Marxist researchers saw the solution in a historical materialist framework, which to me erased women's rich ritual contribution with its symbolic values and potential for meaningful participation in knowledge creation. Participation was the best way to learn to understand women's views of their life situation, even if the researchers' final analysis of the factors affecting women differed from the women's own understanding.

The Jipemoyo scholars found support from Habermas, who in his *Theory and Practice* claimed to develop *the* theory of society. Historical materialism for him at that time (1971)⁸ was 'an explanation of social evolution which is so comprehensive that it embraces the interrelationships of the theory's own origins and application' (Habermas, [p. 42 ↓] 1974: 1). In 1977 (English version, 1984) his *Theory of Communicative Action* opened up new ways of looking at social theory. The proletariat disappeared as the motor of revolutionary force and resistance broke into protest movements. Eventually Tanzania's weak economy eroded the adherence to state socialism, and after President

Nyerere's resignation in 1985 the country adopted the multiparty system. Gradual opening to outside markets became a necessity but the structural adjustment policy forced by the World Bank on the developing countries brought new pressures on the economy.

Stephen Kemmis (2001/2006; also this volume), leaning on Habermas's theory of knowledge constitutive interests, divides AR into three groups: *empirical-analytic* (or positivist), *hermeneutic* (or interpretative) and *critical* approaches in research theory and practice. The context of the described cases of PAR does not fit solely into any one of these categories. Different approaches were combined with AR and PAR, and the political undercurrent and participatory reflection gave research critical overtones. I identify my own approach as being hermeneutic and phenomenological, critical of my person in relation to partners and seeing that I have a role in bringing into people's consciousness connecting factors for their own analysis.

THE ROLE OF THE PARTICIPANT RESEARCHER AND THE CRITERIA FOR VALIDITY

When I first introduced participatory research I rejected the conventional participant observation as alienating and formulated my own position as the researcher:

Any scientific inquiry, which is made on the level of human encounter, involves the inquirer in an interpersonal exchange. The inquirer has to gain the confidence of the community with which she works. The centres of human existence can be reached only if there is common trust that the encounter takes place for the benefit of people involved. This means that there is in last resort no mere observer position in such an encounter; there is common search for common good.... I feel justified in writing the result of my encounter with the Mwambao Zaramo only because of the knowledge that in it there was ... this mutual spirit of search for health as well as truth. (Swantz, 1970: 359–60)

Orlando Fals Borda called such an approach 'sympathetic participation'. In Latin America, changing the class *in* itself into class *for* itself was the principle of the researcher who saw the revolutionary challenge. The researcher could with social analysis raise people's consciousness to see their alienation in a corrupted society and to become conscious of their role in history.⁹ For Fals Borda traditional 'sympathetic participation', in which the researcher puts him/herself in the place of the researched, was not enough. The researcher had to enter into the process which he/she studies as a full partner, getting an insider's view yet being aware that he/she represented a different class or social group. This made the researcher face the question of political involvement. In Moser's interpretation Fals Borda's action research bound science and action together, and thus in Latin America it meant that traditional ahistoric sociology changed from political equilibrium to a conflict and social crisis model. Fals Borda was developing a new kind of science but remained within social science (Moser, 1978: 176–9). The militant researchers would join the revolutionary movement and their theoretical frame would be a theory of revolution.

In clarifying the role of the researcher Heinz Moser wanted to give the researcher a definite role in PAR. In this he differed from those who represented more politically motivated participation — 'A researcher who acts like a superior practical worker is of no use to the people.' He has to trust people's expertise in their practical work. The researcher's role is to organize systematic reflection as a co-worker while identifying with the aims of a project. True knowledge could be validated [p. 43 ↓] through communication. In Moser's view the researcher should maintain his role and not become one of the researched group or community, otherwise he has no business being there as an outsider (Moser, 1978: 176–9).

The subjectivist approach was gaining ground when the positivist grip on social research was giving way. PAR broke off from the rule of keeping distance as a participant in a community, but it was neither desirable nor possible for foreign researchers to engage politically or become one with the community: identification did not mean 'going native', to use the anthropologists' critical term. In Jipemoyo the researchers identified with the interests of the local people, which gave people confidence in the researchers and they soon forgot that the project was supported by the government. Yet people comprised, not only one group with unified ideas. The

researchers' contact with the Maasai caused some apprehension among other ethnic groups, as did also differing positions the women researchers took on women's issues, which were analysed in separate sessions with women. Researchers recognized that to treat 'the people' as one category was a gross simplification (see Gaventa and Cornwall, Chapter 11).

PAR could not be validated with the conventional scientific criteria. Practice verifies the success of action research and for the practitioner successful action suffices as criteria. The role of the researched community in proving the validity of results has not been considered sufficiently. For a scientist, practical success verifies the usefulness, but it does not fulfil the conventional scientific criteria. To serve as a proof the same research cannot be repeated as such. The researchers deal with such complicity of life that creating similar research situations hardly would serve as criteria.

Heinz Moser was invited in 1980 to give the main critique of the four years of the Jipemoyo research, theory and practice based on 800 pages of writing. Considering the traditional criteria of validity irrelevant to the new paradigm, he had earlier formulated theoretical foundations and criteria for validity of PAR. He had suggested three criteria (Moser, 1975: 122–4). The first one was transparency, which meant that all the participants were able to trace the whole process of the PAR, its functions, aims and methods. The second criteria was compatibility of the aims with the methods and means with which they are reached. The researcher who participates in research with the community cannot claim the traditional researcher's distance and thus have a view as an independent observer. Thirdly, the participant researcher should be able to claim that she knows the situation better than does any outside observer and that she has honestly set forth all the aspects she had become aware of.

ROLE OF SYMBOLS IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND PAR

The domination of a symbolic conceptualization of life was reflected in PAR cases in Tanzania. Ulla Vuorela, with researchers from the University of Dar es Salaam, was involved in a participatory theatre in Msoga village. She also found that storytelling was

still a living tradition and recorded a hundred stories, relating them within their social context. Stories were open-ended, inviting the listeners to comment on them and debate about their meaning. Many stories, such as Monster as a Husband and Rebellious Girl, related to women and thus to the inner dynamics of the Kwere matrilineal culture, but a story could carry a multiplicity of meanings. Vuorela related the image of the Lost Woman to the importance of women in human reproduction; the concern of the community for continuity and the threat to it reflected the external elements in a story (Vuorela, 1991).

Before Msoga village was broken up I had been introduced to *changa cha mulungu*, literally translated 'a hut of god', used for a communal offering at the time of sowing and [p. 44 ↓] harvesting. Before harvesting the crop individually the home fires were extinguished and new fire fetched from the spirit hut where men and women together celebrated the offering of the first cobs of maize. The symbolic rite bound the community together. The villagers' eagerness to talk about their threatened culture was the initial incentive for participatory action research on culture and development starting from Msoga.

Jipemoyo researcher Bernhard Kiyenze discovered in his communication with the Kwere women potters the influence of bodily symbols on their occupation. Pregnant women or women with suckling babies were not allowed to dig clay nor take any part in pot-making lest the pots break and the child be harmed in contact with the high potency of the woman in her state of reproduction (Kiyenze, 1985: 50). Woman was closely related to nature and the pot was a central symbol of woman's womb. It was used in teaching the young girls about the bodily functions. The myths of the Zaramo, close relatives of the Kwere, credited the discovery of the domestic use of plants to the original woman who taught her husband the use of them. Woman's breast had mythical powers and she could exert final power over a disrespectful son by striking her breast (Swantz, 1986b: 148, 259).

I have interpreted the dominating symbolic conceptualization to have great potentiality for creative development, which if recognized would embolden people's initiative. Stage by stage evolving ritual planning could also serve as a model for development planning. Nothing is as well planned in Tanzania as feasts, since planning of them has a long tradition. Development planners should study the essentials of ritual planning.

The significance of cultural tradition was recognized by Terrence Ranger, Professor of History in the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1960s. He conducted research on the traditional religious movements as social movements of Africa, significant for moving African countries toward self-understanding.

He appreciated also my reconstruction of cultural transformation, which meant change from one symbolic system to another, instead of solely replacing people's capacity for self-reliant development with a materialist view of life. Ranger saw in it a counter argument to the view that African religious beliefs constitute a force opposing development, writing that 'there is a counter argument — namely that in the past change had been mediated through ritual and sanctioned by religious authority and that if we wish modernising change on a communal basis we need to understand these rhythms of innovation' (Ranger, 1972: 42; see also Swantz, 1986b: 359–68).

This can be verified by participation which is sympathetic to the symbolic view of life. The Bagamoyo Maasai have been turning to Christianity because of the vision their *laiboni*, ritual leader, has had. It has led to changes in lifestyle and acceptance of education for girls. The evidence is plentiful that symbols, dreams and visions are part of life in Africa, but the rational North ignores it and pretends it disappears if you do not pay attention to it (cf. Sundkler, 1960: 25–31).

For a Finnish researcher Finnish national development has served as an inspiration and as a historical precedent for the use of PAR. The revival of Finnish culture, including the collection of over a million verses of folk poetry and inspiration drawn from it for music, art and literature, laid the foundation for an independent Finland and Finnish as the official and academic language. It was crucial for the national self-understanding and economic development of the country since independence from Sweden and Russia was achieved.

In Tanzania the Ministry of Culture and Youth placed high hopes on Jipemoyo research. It was expected to identify a significant role for culture in national development, but the time was not ripe for it. The interest in culture is now revived when there is sufficient distance from the colonial past and the potential for new interpretations can be spelled out.

[p. 45 ↓]

CONCLUSION

The introduction of PAR in relation to development has made possible its long time application in Tanzania. PRA (Participatory Action Research) shifted to PAR (participatory rural appraisal), which Anisur Rahman calls 'techniques' and Ponna Wignaraja a 'toolkit' (see also Chambers' discussion of PRA in Chapter 20). In the Tanzanian case it is important to note that the PRA in its different forms, including the Jipemoyo story, and most significantly PAR, have influenced the politics of the state in a major way. The capabilities of the villages to make their own plans and enabling the bureaucrats to work with the villagers are central aspects in the present local government reform.

We have witnessed the potential of the research approach based on participation and communication. Together with breaking the monopoly of privileged knowledge, also the monopoly of bureaucratic and technocratic power is broken. It is crucial that research is not separated from life. Knowledge gained through research needs to become part of people's lives. PAR cannot be only participatory practice, it has to be integrated into the way knowledge is created. PAR can become an accepted part of professional training, as it already is in parts of the world. The big question is how PAR-related training combined with academic research can break the domination of the bureaucratic and technocratic Western society, which keeps ordinary citizens at a distance.

I return to the speech of Alfredo Molano in Cartagena in 1997. When in the first participatory conference in Cartagena 20 years earlier many of the participants knew where they were going, in 1997 Molano claimed that by 'good fortune. we have no idea where we are going'. False certainty can lead researchers astray. Participatory action research can be used as a compass in realizing history, which has no presaged destination.

NOTES

- 1 A Swahili speaking person like her from the coastal region.
- 2 The project was run by the Ministry of Development Planning and had participation from ministries of Education, Agriculture and Labour, the Statistical Bureau and the Research Unit of the Institute of Adult Education (Swantz, 1979).
- 3 The newly elected President Jakaya Kikwete comes from Msoga. Ulla Vuorela, now professor in women's studies in Helsinki University, stayed there and later wrote her doctoral thesis on the women's question based on Msoga (Vuorela, 1987).
- 4 Tanzania became independent in 1961, and in 1964 it united with Zanzibar, forming the United Republic of Tanzania. In 1977 TANU and the Zanzibar Afro-Shirazi Party joined together and the name *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM, Revolutionary Party) was adopted.
- 5 United Nations University — World Institute of Development Economics Research, WIDER.
- 6 Mwajuma Masaiganah was employed by the Centre and started her PRA career in that research project.
- 7 Quote in Himmelstrand (1982) based on Touraine (1979) *La Voix et la Regard. Essai de sociologie*. Paris: Fayard.
- 8 *Theorie und Praxis* was published in German in 1971, in English in 1974.
- 9 This was part of the discussion first in the African workshop in Mzumbe and then in Cartagena in 1977, in which Fals Borda's earlier Columbia experience was criticized and he responded to it (Bryceson and Mustafa, 1982; Fals Borda, 1977).

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