

Despite knowledge democracy and community-based participatory action research: Voices from the global south and excluded north still missing

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Abstract

The primary purpose for this special issue of *Action Research Journal (ARJ)* focusing on knowledge democracy, community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) was to draw attention to and raise debate about knowledge exclusion of and alternative forms of knowing in the global South as well as to bring to the fore the perspective of authors from the global South. We understand the global South to include the excluded epistemologies from the global North such as Indigenous Researchers from the First Nations People from Canada. Reflecting on the 12 submissions that were made for this special issue reveals how even within supportive knowledge and research paradigms that are meant to promote marginalized scholarships, the global South and excluded North still remains excluded.

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Introduction

The primary purpose for this special issue of *Action Research Journal* (ARJ) focusing on knowledge democracy, community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) was to draw attention to and raise debate about knowledge exclusion of and alternative forms of knowing in the global South as well as to bring to the fore the perspective of authors from the global South. We understand the global South to include the excluded epistemologies from the global North such as Indigenous Researchers from the First Nations People from Canada.

Reflecting on the 12 submissions that were made for this special issue reveals how even within supportive knowledge and research paradigms that are meant to promote marginalized scholarships, the global South and excluded North still remains excluded. This is because all the submissions received came from northern authors of USA and mainstream of Canadian lead authors, with one or two co-authors from the South. This suggests that as long as the rules of the game and of academic discourse remain the same and are controlled from the North, excluded scholars and scholarship will always remain excluded. Without a radical shift in the knowledge and research presentation paradigm, the concept of knowledge democracy, community based action research (CBAR) will continue to be treated as an unpalatable concession from the North to the South and the marginalised North who will systematically continue to be excluded from this current knowledge discourse (ways of being, knowing and presentations). So the question of “whose knowledge counts” (Hall, 2012) is still unanswered and should be extended to “whose ways of saying, writing, and testifying counts.”

After this introduction, therefore, we discuss this theory of knowledge democracy, CBPAR with a view to illustrating how these inclusive epistemology and research paradigms still require much more attention for global discourses to actually become inclusive and mobilizing. We then look at the papers that ultimately were included in this special issue, We believe they confirm that knowledge democracy and action research are two academic paradigms that advocate for inclusion in knowledge co-creation, representation/dissemination and utilization.

The theory of knowledge democracy and CBPAR

Knowledge democracy recognizes all forms of knowledge or ways of knowing. Unfortunately the current dominant form of calling for submissions and publishing still continue to exclude the already excluded (Hall, 2011). This is a contradiction to the whole philosophy of Knowledge Democracy and community based and action research since they advocate for the acceptance of all forms of knowing and

knowledge creation. For example, while Boaventura de Sousa Santos and others argued that knowledge democracy involved the acceptance of a diversity of all forms of knowledge representation including making use of artistic or other forms of presentations which are accessible to the public (Hall, 2011; Santos, 2006), this is very difficult in practice. How these forms of representation can be made within the current academic knowledge publication system is still problematic.

While it is vital that knowledge democracy, CBAR can be about participatory harvesting of local knowledge for improving social lives and livelihoods, it is equally important for the discourses of knowledge democracy and action research to take into account how these knowledge can be accepted within the framework of the current mainstream academic and knowledge publication/sharing systems outside participatory research or community circles.

Secondly, the primary principles of knowledge democracy and CBAR are about the social and economic wellbeing of the marginalized, poor and excluded population of this world, exploited industrial workers, issues of mitigating climate change, food security, land loss as well as natural disasters such as floods and earthquake that are also affecting the lives of very many around the world. The ever-escalating economic disparity between the rich and the poor (Gaventa & Cornwell, 2008; Hall, 2011) is unaddressed. Local or indigenous knowledge's role in speaking to and addressing these world problems is now a widely accepted view. This theoretical and practical value of knowledge democracy and CBAR is well articulated by Tremblay and Jayme in her introductory section of their article in this issue (pp. 298–314).

Accordingly, CBPAR, which is defined as a “collaborative effort between academics researchers and non-academy based community members that aims to generate social action and positive social change through the use of multiple knowledge sources and research methods.” (Centre for Social Concerns, 2008, p. 1) has a very clear commitment to the involvement of community members or the researched. “Ideally, the research questions originate from off-campus communities and the process involves meaningful participation by all partners in every stage of the research” (Centre for Social Concerns, 2008, p. 6). Sometime this is referred to as CBPAR, or only participatory action research (PAR).

Even in this kind of research collaboration, there is still a limit to the participation of community members, as it has been revealed in all the submissions we received. That is, while the researchers are represented and their voices are visible in the paper and the process as reported in the writing, their presence in the final production of the papers is not evident. Not even their names or the names of their leaders are reflected as co-authors, which indicate that the role the community plays still remains that of being researched and not that of “researched researchers”. While the community members are excluded from the publication process, it is, of course, still acceptable that the community is able to use the findings of the research process immediately as a result of a CBPAR process.

Additionally, action research also emphasizes the role of research for solving problems as opposed to research that focuses only on satisfying curiosity about

some fundamental principles regarding how our world operates. Basically action research is defined as that research or inquiry process which is conducted for the purpose of the co-researchers taking action. The aim is to get an improved action designs or to solve a particular problem in practice. In this the person doing the research is the actor or practitioner who identifies the problem in their practice and designs a research project to address this problem. In CBPAR, an external person coming in to involve the person experiencing the problem is not a design feature (Sagor, 2000). The action element itself is emphasised because the local actors are the persons concerned with the research and undertaking it on their own behalf with capable peers in a “community of practice” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 6).

The papers in this special issue ably reflect the use of community based research and indigenous knowledge for addressing the social and economic problems of the affected and marginalised communities. This resonates well with Gaventa’s linking of knowledge with the organizing of a people’s movement and also similar to what the late Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere of Tanzania used to say and what we learned from Paulo Freire as well (Hall, 2012). According to Hall, Nyerere used to say, “Poor people do not use money for a weapon . . . they use ideas and leadership” (Hall, 2012, p. 1). He was speaking of a way of thinking about development and community betterment for building a national movement in Tanzania that did not depend on external financial investment. Nyerere said poor people needed to use ‘ideas and leadership’ to solve the problems affecting them.

Paulo Freire articulated a faith in the embedded knowledge of people who are living lives of poverty, exclusion, oppression, disadvantage and more. His central theme was that the ability to understand and articulate the experience of lives of struggle was not only possible, but was a necessary condition for organizing and transformation (Freire, 2000; Gaventa & Cornwell, 2008; Hall, 2012).

Furthermore, both knowledge democracy and community based research focus on the demystification of power in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination/sharing to bring about liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 2000). Again John Gaventa, a theoretician on power and citizenship and a pioneering participatory research leader, was the first person in our experience to speak of social movements using a ‘knowledge strategy’ as their core political organizing strategy. Similar to Gaventa’s proposition (Gaventa & Cornwell, 2008), the papers in this special issue demonstrate how CBPAR is used by marginalized people of this world to enhance their voice and influence policies in their favour in industries and municipalities.

Therefore guided by this concept of “knowledge democracy”, “knowledge strategy” and social movement for socio-economic transformation, we received papers grounded in a variety of dimensions of this broad subject:

- Papers on the concept of knowledge democracy and positioning of CBAR.
- Papers deepening and expanding the outreach of alternative knowledge generation and action research methodologies from the arena of practice to those of academia, such as PAR and community based research, collaborative research.

- Papers that highlight innovative practices in CBAR methodologies in different sectors and thematic areas to promote empowerment and social change – (i.e. addressing issues of poverty, sustainable development, social development, governance, conflict, empowerment of marginalized communities).
- Papers that relate the practice of CBAR methodologies by grassroots practitioners, and researchers in the global South and also lesser developed areas and excluded epistemologies of the North absent from academic journals and dedicated to enriching development discourse and practices.

CBAR and knowledge democracy practice

In this section, we briefly review the five included papers and thereby clarify the ideology driving this special issue of the *ARJ*. The paper by Buckles and Khedkar reflects on the use of PAR in addressing the problem of land loss and exclusion. The research project aimed at empowering a marginalised, discriminated and excluded community in India called the *adivasi*. The action research project sought to ameliorate the effect of property boom on the *Katkari* community. PAR tools such as the Problem Tree, Tree of Means and Social Analysis CLIP were used to elicit local knowledge about the problems that affected the community and how such problems are constructed and viewed by the community. The participation of the local people in the research process addressing land loss, marginalization, discrimination and exclusion was important. This demonstrates the usefulness of action research and knowledge democracy in addressing social and economic problems among the excluded communities. The Social Analysis CLIP was used for deep discussion with the affected community. On the other hand, new knowledge like land rights and understanding the legitimacy of their occupancy was external to the community and both knowledge of the local community perception of their problems in tandem with the new knowledge were essential in addressing the problem. This is well stated in the paper: “Understanding of the stakeholders structure and the interaction of factors and actors driving *Katkari* vulnerability to eviction were made visible and richly detailed by knowledge generated with and by the *Katkari* in the context of problem-solving and efforts to equalize the forces at play” (pp. 262–280).

A similar process is seen in the article by Cova, Monroy Arzola, and Jesus, dealing with the metal workers in Venezuelan metal industries who wanted to participate in the management decision making process. Participation is what enabled them to contribute their own knowledge gained from experience of working on the shop-floor to the management of the metal factory. They called this ‘participatory protagonist democracy’ at the workplace. This was meant to enable them negotiate for inclusion in factory management decision making process. The researchers called this industrial participatory action research (IPAR). This process can be understood as one bringing together two layers of knowledge production from the workers and the managers in the management of the factory and

enhancement of productivity and income in a manner that afforded mutual benefits for all. To make this possible workers' capabilities or knowledge needed to be enhanced through what we could call participatory organisational learning. They named it IVEDECOR or 'dialogue of knowledge' and 'recognising different ways of knowing' to enable them make sense of how to work within a participatory management work organisation that they were trying to lobby for. Gaventa and Cornwell (2008) called this "participatory knowledge strategies that challenge deep-rooted power inequalities".

We also see the value of knowledge democracy demonstrated in improving access to health services. The argument of Mullett is that CBAR states "Knowledge created is the synthesis of experiences, thoughts and ideals of the community collaborators." Here again we see action research moving in tandem with knowledge democracy. In this particular project, knowledge of the aboriginal people or the First Nations of Canada was used to improve access to health services and increase collaboration among non-profit agencies. This created a context that enhanced knowledge democracy in action research. This paper argues that, all parties the academics and community members are co-researchers and co-subjects simultaneously as each party reflects on their own practices or experiences in the world to collectively generate a new perspective. The element of bi-directional learning between the interacting parties in a relation of equal power was important and evident in this case and it is clearly a democratic knowledge process. This paper also concludes that democratic knowledge creation process is as rigorous as the positivist research paradigm claim.

This is further confirmed within the social movement learning context of Ada in Ghana in the paper by Langdon and Larweh, which concludes that:

In this sense, PAR (Participatory Action Research) resonates well with the desire to generate plural and democratic knowledge on issues of concerns and to mobilise people and movement. (Langdon and Larweh, this issue, p. 283)

To confirm this postulation Langdon and Larweh, cites Gaventa and Bizen (2014) (this issue, p. 283) who notes that, "Producing democratic knowledge require[s] a democratic process." Central to this paper is the warning about the hijacking of the concept of knowledge democracy and action research by Northern Scholars, research institutions, and development agencies who are quickly adopting these participatory and democratic knowledge processes for the purposes of population stabilisation rather than knowledge democracy or research participation. This kind of process is a common reality in which the southern origins of these processes are erased and substituted by hegemonic Northern concepts. In such a situation, knowledge democracy and community base action research are used for the purpose of inclusion without any substantive change in the power dynamics. This article, therefore, in addition to articulating action research or community based research raises this important warning about the subversion of the legitimate processes by Eurocentric knowledge domination and/or epistemologies.

An innovative strategy of knowledge co-creation using participatory video approach in the context of CBPAR is revealed in the article by Crystal and Jayme. In this case, knowledge is used by the poor people to solve a problem affecting them (Hall, 2012). The theme of this last article is echoed throughout all the papers but, in this particular case, the research team (academics and the community members) worked together to produce a video based on the life and contribution of the recyclers call *catadores/as* to addressing the problem of environmental degradation. The participatory videos (PV) were also used to advocate for recognition of the role the recyclers play and advocate for support from the municipal authorities in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The PV were also instrumental in changing the negative attitude about the work of the recyclers and promoting their social inclusion, thereby helping to overcome their problem of social exclusion. This was achieved through the eventual enactment of a policy of solid waste management that recognised the independent recyclers.

The central force of this special issue is therefore that community transformation can only be achieved through knowledge democracy brought about by CBPAR. This is the knowledge which can build community capacity to use knowledge for sustainable human development and environmental sustainability. It can help close the gap between knowledge production, social and economic practices in communities. This point is well summarized in the introductory statement of Tremblay's article that; "...there is a growing evidence in the literature suggesting that numerous resources, strengths, and skills exist within communities that can be engaged in addressing some of these complex challenges and in promoting people's well being" (pp. 298–314). These knowledge strength and resources exist as local knowledge that will need to be accepted as valid knowledge and democratically mobilised for appropriate use in those communities and beyond.

Can we overcome exclusionary outcomes in international publishing? A note from Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon

When Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon began their work on participatory research in the 1970s in rural India and Tanzania, they were drawing attention to the limitations of essentially colonial methods of research in the context of nations and communities that were trying to gain rapid improvements in their lives. They were highlighting the knowledge creating capacities of ordinary women and men who constantly make improvements in agriculture, shelter, the local economy, health and more. They gave the name participatory research to this new approach to knowledge creation. They were critical of the monopoly of knowledge production of academics in general but particularly Northern academics. Over the 1980s and 1990s they supported a network of activist researchers, the vast majority of whom were based in social movements, local NGOs. They supported journals, book publishing, conferences and seminars where activist scholars from the global South and the excluded North were hand-picked as participants and contributors based on the reputations that they had achieved with local results.

This gave Budd and Rajesh an impression that the participatory research 'movement' had built visibility and had gained some acceptance.

In 1992, a decision was made by the International Council for Adult Education, the global NGO that had been nourishing the PR network, that PR was strong enough and well enough known that it could 'go it alone' in the competition for ideas. Budd shifted from the ICAE to a university position (where he is still located) but continued to promote a knowledge democracy agenda but within the academic world. Slowly the social justice oriented approaches to research gained a foothold in the academic settings in the global North. Rajesh continued to make use of these research approaches within the context of campaigns opposing dam construction, in supporting women elected leaders, in participatory governance and more from his base at PRIA (where he is still located). So while considerable progress has been made in gaining acceptance in higher education institutions and as a key approach to local social action, one aspect of the original struggle remains to be done.

The international academic publishing industry is still dominated by dominant voices from the global North. The process of 'blind reviews' in the international journal trade disadvantages many researchers in spite of the intention to remove bias. The conditions of work for marginal excluded Northern researchers or academics from the global South are such that they are less likely to have time to respond to a blind 'call' for contributions. Add to this dramatically unequal research funding, uneven access to broadband internet, absence from the informal networks where academic contacts and friendships are shared and the result is an international academic publishing universe dominated by scholars from the global North. This is true whether one is speaking of the numbers of titles coming out of the major publishing companies of the world or from the major journals.

Our experiment with this special issue of this journal had been to see if we could give some focus to scholars who were from the excluded North and the global South who were working on issues related to knowledge democracy. We are proud of the excellent work that has been done by all of the authors in this special issue. We think it is fair to say that they advance our discourse on knowledge democracy. But we have largely failed in our imagined project as we have not been able, through the processes of the assembly of the journal itself and perhaps other reasons still to be unpacked, to offer a special issue on knowledge democracy where the authors are mostly from the communities that they are writing about. If we are feeling discouraged, we could say that, looking only at the results of this journal special issue, we have failed to get much beyond our 1970s dream. If we are more generous, we may feel that we have gained some in-depth understandings of the workings of highly respected journals from the global North such as this journal and will be better placed to strike a better blow for an inclusive publishing community next time around.

This has been a very long journey. It has produced pages of emails, anguished cries in the night and a feeling of wanting to give up many times. Two outstanding scholars from the global South, George Openjuru (Uganda) and Namrata Jaitli

(India) have kept this ship afloat. Davydd Greenwood, from the AR Editorial Board played the key role of wizard in taming the computerized journal editing beast. Budd and Rajesh managed to hang on to the end and remain somewhat humbled by the experience but still in the game and still ready to take the struggle of knowledge, democracy and social justice forward.

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Namrata Jaitli is Head of Programmes at Charities Aid Foundation, India (since April 2014). Prior to that she was Deputy Director in Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), an international Centre for Learning and Promotion of participation and democratic governance. She has multi-functional experience of 21 years in strengthening citizens' participation, empowering marginalized communities, strengthening capacity building and knowledge generation initiatives. She is academically proficient with a PhD in Social Work, MA in Social Work and BA in Psychology (Hons), coupled with numerous international and national workshops attained throughout the career span. Jaitli has executed projects on women's empowerment and decentralized water management, provided capacity building and educational support to development professionals and institutions on participatory methodologies, facilitated monitoring, evaluations and research on development and governance issues, and convened multi-stakeholder policy dialogues and networking initiatives with different stakeholders.

Rajesh Tandon is an internationally acclaimed leader and practitioner of participatory research and development. He founded Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a voluntary organization providing support to grassroots initiatives in South Asia and has been its Chief Functionary since 1982. He has recently been appointed Co-Chair of the prestigious UNESCO Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. He has championed the cause of building organizations and capacities of the marginalized through their knowledge, learning and empowerment. He has contributed to the emergence of several local, national and international groups and initiatives to promote authentic and participatory development of societies. He has authored more than 100 articles, a dozen books and numerous training manuals on democratic governance, civic engagement, civil society, governance and management of NGOs, participatory research and people-centred development. For his distinguished work on gender issues, the Government of India honoured him with the prestigious Award in Social Justice in March, 2007. The University of Victoria, Canada, awarded Dr Tandon the degree of Doctor of Laws (Honoris Causa) in June 2008. He is the first Indian to be inducted to the International Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) Hall of Fame (class of 2010).

Budd Hall is Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, Professor of Community-Development and founding Director of the University of Victoria Office of Community-based Research. He has done both theoretical and practical work for 40 years in various aspects of community-based participatory research and social movement learning. He is a member of the International Adult Education Hall of Fame, was selected

for the 2005 Canadian Bureau of International Education Innovation in International Education Award, was granted an honorary doctorate by St Francis Xavier University in 2011. His most recent books are *Learning and Education for a Better World: The Role of Social Movements* by Sense Publishing, *Knowledge, Democracy and Action: Community-University Research Partnerships in Global Perspectives* by MUP and *World Report on Higher Education 5: Knowledge, Engagement for Social Change Through Higher Education*, GUNi and Palgrave Macmillan.