

“ADULT LEARNING & COMMUNITIES IN A WORLD ON THE MOVE: BETWEEN NATIONAL TENSIONS AND TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES”

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**The power of testimonies and critical (auto)biographies in education:
consideration on the anti-racist perspective in education**

The central theme of this article is the question of whether the narrator of witness accounts or a critical (auto)biography can also be the (co)author of a scientific or literary written record. The question is relevant, as since the end of the 1970s the testimonies of groundbreaking libertarian memoirs and critical (auto)biographies have been opening up a new space of research and creating study materials which, in addition to affecting the social sciences and literature, are also making profound headways into the area of pedagogy. On the basis of reflections from my own biographical research with counter-hegemonic movements of the Global South, I have identified some characteristics of testimonies which I have placed in the context of Santos' 'sociology of absence' and 'sociology of emergence'. The research is reflected through examples of literary written records which have empowered social emancipation and show how the pedagogy of testimonies can be used innovatively for learning and research, and also how testimonies can also make a fruitful contribution to much-needed considerations on anti-racist perspectives in the classroom and in the society.

In Bertaux's context of the biographical approach, testimonies as life histories are always the result of a life story already accompanied by its analysis, reflection, re-thinking, and theoretical and political contextualisation (Bertaux, 1981). Witnesses are often not merely sources of information, but the bearers of 'specific' expertise, knowledge, and sometimes even epistemology – ways of coming to a scientific understanding. In the same way, autobiography and biography cannot be anything other than inter-textual, discourse-responsive, and inter-subjective (Stanley, 1992). Do not testimonies and critical (auto)biographies then open up a new space for research and the creation of study materials and analyses? The question is a utopian one, as it has not yet been formulated in quite this way within existing scientific literature.

In the first section I will present examples of how I had to face this question on multiple occasions, and why I feel it is a relevant subject for serious consideration. Following that I will demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of placing the genre of testimonies into the social sciences and literature. In the third section I will briefly explain the history of testimonies and critical (auto)biography as a new genre. In the fourth section I will highlight some notable examples of the testimonies of women who experienced global social reactions and present the obstacles they and their testimonies faced, both in the process of recording and following publication through selected concepts and thoughts of Santos' *Epistemology of the South* (Santos, 2014). In the conclusion I will consider the role of this newly defined testimony for science, especially pedagogy if we continue to consider the fundamental role of education to be one of social transformation (Freire, 2000/1972, 2005/1973), otherwise referred to as 'knowledge-as-emancipation', knowledge conceived of as solidarity (Santos, 2010).