

Twelve Things You Should Know About Orlando Fals Borda

By: Unidad de Apropiación Social del Conocimiento

Our guest, whose 100th birthday we commemorate, is recognized in Latin American social sciences for his academic and social commitment and for his dedication to scientific research that drives transformation.

1 | Orlando Fals Borda was born on 11 July 1925, into a middle-class family from Barranquilla. His father, Enrique Fals Álvarez, was a teacher and journalist, the son of Catalan immigrants, and his mother, María Borda, was the founder of the national campaign against cancer, a pioneer in radio programming, and a playwright.

2 | From an early age, he had a very close relationship with his grandmothers: Cándida Álvarez, from Santa Cruz de Mompós, and Ana Angulo, from Calamar, both towns in the department of Bolívar. Sitting in their rocking chairs, Grandmother Ana would read to Grandmother Cándida, who was blind. One day, when they had nothing left to read, young Orlando told them, "I'll write you a novel so you won't get bored." He then wrote four small notebooks about the supposed son of Simón Bolívar, marking the beginning of his life as a writer.

3 | He completed his secondary studies at Colegio Americano de Barranquilla, where he was first exposed to ideas that would later shape his thinking. He also studied English Literature and History at the University of Dubuque in Iowa, United States, earned a Master's Degree in Sociology from the University of Minnesota, and completed a Ph.D. in the same field with a dissertation on Colombian peasants.

4 | In 1959, he founded the School of Sociology at the National University of Colombia, the first of its kind in the country. That same year, he became its Dean, a position he held until 1967.

5 | He studied music, piano, and singing, and was part of the university's tenor group. As he himself expressed, "Sociology became intertwined with art."

6 | During the 1960s, he developed a more critical perspective and a deeper commitment to Latin American reality. In 1967, he stepped away from the university and devoted himself to research with rural communities.

7 | His greatest contribution was *Investigación Acción-Participativa (IAP)*, a methodology that revolutionized the social sciences by combining research, education, and social action through the active participation of communities throughout the entire process. Between 1967 and 1980, he worked with peasants from Córdoba and Sucre, which allowed him to produce a series of studies on the history and culture of these regions.

8 | His most renowned research work is the *Historia doble de la Costa* series, composed of four volumes that combine academic rigor with popular stories, giving a voice to local communities.

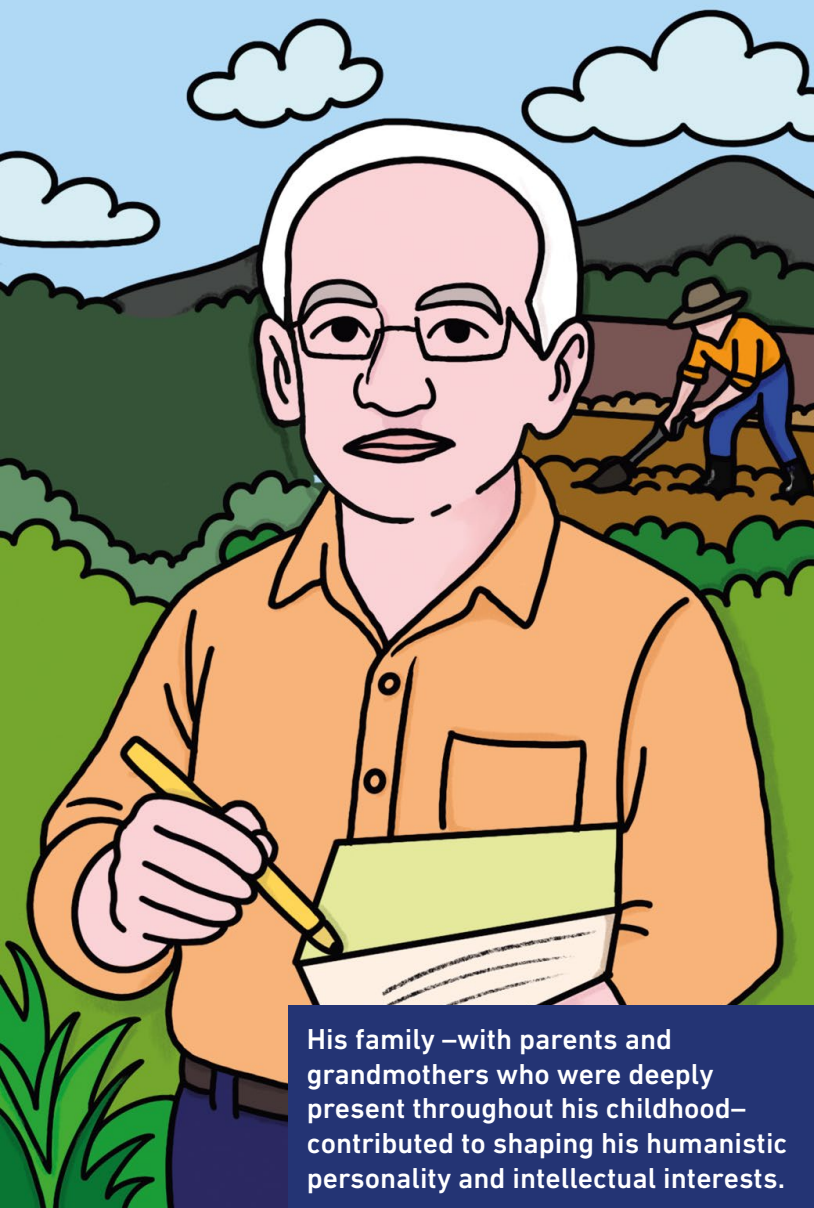


Illustration: Mariana Madrigal Escudero, Sofía Romero Corva and Eileen Rincón Cerquera

His family –with parents and grandmothers who were deeply present throughout his childhood– contributed to shaping his humanistic personality and intellectual interests.

9 | The methodology developed by Orlando Fals Borda has been adopted and adapted around the world, influencing fields such as community development, popular education, community psychology, and peace studies.

10 | “*Sentipensante*” (“feeling-thinking”) was a term he adopted from the popular culture of Colombia’s Caribbean region to describe a person who combines reason and love, body and heart, to speak the truth and free themselves from the (mis) formations that disrupt that harmony.

11 | On one occasion, after participating in a demonstration, he caught pneumonia from the rain. He was taken to the hospital, declared dead, and transferred to the morgue. However, a niece who was a doctor noticed he still had vital signs, and after emergency treatment, he came back to life. After this experience, he often said, “The medical doctors brought me back [...] so I could update my book *La subversión en Colombia*.”

12 | He passed away on 12 August 2008, at 83 years old, in a medical facility in Bogotá, where he had been hospitalized due to health complications.

These twelve insights about Orlando Fals Borda resulted from an extensive search across various public sources. Ingenio thanks Beatriz Elena Marín Ochoa, leader of the Unidad de Apropriación Social del Conocimiento at UPB, for her commitment to the development of this content.