

The Life of Ignacio Martín-Baró: A Narrative Account of a Personal Biographical Journey

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Ignacio Martín-Baró is celebrated in Latin America and beyond for his penetrating writings about psychology and social change and for his inspiring commitment to the oppressed of the world. The roots of both his great ingenuity and sensitivity are explored in this article from the perspective of a personal journey taken by the author in preparation for a full-fledged biography about him. Although still a work in progress, the current essay provides a detailed sketch of Martín-Baró's life as informed by interviews with relatives, colleagues, and close friends as well as extensive reviews of archival material, including Martín-Baró's personal and family records. It sheds light on the intricate connections between vital experiences of Martín-Baró's life and his thought and choices as a social scientist. The impact of Martín-Baró's life and his legacy on the author is also described. A photo collage that covers his life, since his childhood, accompanies this essay.

Keywords: El Salvador, Martín-Baró, Liberation Psychology, Jesuits

Ignacio Martín-Baró was one of the most brilliant and provocative thinkers in psychology from Latin America during the last quarter of the 20th century. Some consider him psychology's own version of Che Guevara in light of his great love for an adoptive land and his immense devotion to the people's hunger for justice and liberation from oppression. Beyond this parallel, Martín-Baró's life and work reveal a man with clear ideas and committed ideals who conceived of psychology as a tool that could help to construct a new person in

a new society. This modest article presents a biographical sketch of this notable social psychologist and his work based on several interviews with relatives, colleagues, and close friends as well as extensive reviews of archival material, including his personal and family records. This biographical sketch is partially based on early works of Luis de la Corte Ibáñez (2001), Roberto Martialay (1999), and *Estudios Centroamericanos* (ECA) as well.

Ignacio Martín-Baró: A Man With A Mission

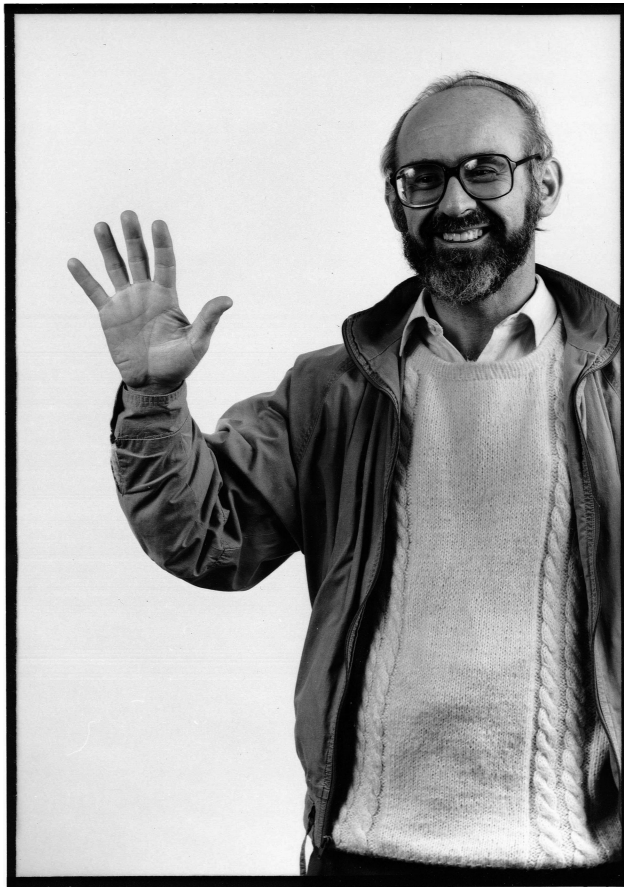
José Ignacio Martín-Baró was born on November 7, 1942, the fourth child of renowned writer and local chronicler Francisco J. Martín Abril and Alicia Baró, in Valladolid, the capital of Castile and Leon in northwestern Spain. Nacho (a typical nickname for Ignacio) was marked early on by the Society of Jesus (“Jesuits”) not only because he shared the name of the order's founder, Ignatius of Loyola, but also because he was educated by them during part of his childhood.

Nacho was raised during the Spanish postcivil war years by a rightwing-leaning and devoted Catholic family. His father, also known as Paco, was sympathetic to the Nationalist movement of Francisco Franco, Spain's fascist, Catholic, and conservative dictator who ruled the country with an iron fist for 37 years. During the war, Paco showed his support by writing a *romancero*, a book of ballads (Martín Abril, 1937) for Franco's

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José Ignacio Martín-Baró (1942–1989). Photo by Marvin Collins.

soldiers in which he exalted their heroism and the Franquist ideology. This political alignment was troubling for Nacho and brought serious clashes between him and his family later on.

Nacho was not immune to the excessive conservative influence of the Catholic Church during the Franco era. When Nacho was eight years old, he and a few of his classmates were dressed up in full costumes as powerful members of society in a seemingly innocuous school performance. He played the role of a Catholic archbishop surrounded by other high-ranking members of the Church, Franquist officers, and the petite bourgeoisie (a picture of this event is included at the end of this work). Although Nacho did not become an archbishop, he did go beyond role-playing as a priest and followed in the footsteps of his older and younger brothers Luis Alberto and

Carlos by entering the Jesuit order on September 28, 1959, at the Novitiate of Orduña in Vizcaya. At the time, he was not yet 17 years old. His decision took everyone by surprise, including the girlfriend he left. Along with his sister Alicia, a Carmelite nun, Ignacio was the only one who stuck to his early chosen religious career. His brothers later abandoned the path to priesthood.

From Orduña, Nacho was transferred to Villagarcía de Campos, back in Valladolid, but very soon had to pack again and was sent by his superiors with other Jesuit brothers to El Salvador, where he completed his second year of early religious training or novitiate in the city of Santa Tecla. El Salvador, the land of the Savior, the greatest discovery of his life as he once told one of his two sisters, became his return port after every journey abroad.

The young Nacho exhibited great intellectual capacity and academic discipline early on in the novitiate, but he was seen as an overachieving and somewhat rigid student by some of his former classmates there. Both his advanced knowledge of Greek and Latin, and his high grades served him well and distinguished him from the rest. His intellectual tenacity would become a character trademark that often led him to dismiss those considered less brilliant and to fight head on with those of equal or greater capacity.

Upon finishing his novitiate studies in El Salvador in September 1961, Nacho made his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In the poem "Letter to America's Son" (Martín Abril, 1964) in his book of poems, *Nostalgia at the plateau of Castile*, Paco advises his son to be strong and offers to be the godfather of his son's vows. Through this literary work, Paco offers a rare and intimate view of the Martín-Baró family and Nacho across time. In poem after poem, the reader witnesses the deep affection family members have for each other and details of their everyday lives. The admiration and love of Paco toward Nacho are also found in copies of his books that he inscribed for his son.

From El Salvador, Nacho was soon transferred to Quito's Catholic University in Ecuador where he studied classical humanities for two years. He later moved to Colombia to begin his undergraduate degree in philosophy at Javeriana University. It was there that Nacho found his true intellectual calling—psychology—and combined it masterfully with his studies in philosophy. His philosophy degree thesis, *To Be and To Suffer* (Martín-Baró, 1964a), was the product of a seminar on existentialist psychology in 1964.

His Colombian period also marked the beginning of his career as a dedicated and prolific writer at the early age of 22. A little known fact about Nacho is that his first academic work dealt with clinical psychology in which he reviewed Carl Rogers's nondirective approach to psychological treatment (Martín-Baró, 1964b; Martín-Baró, 1964c). Besides humanistic psychology, his early interests in psychology were focused mainly on existentialist and psychoanalytic therapeutic approaches and theories. He developed a special fondness for logotherapy (a form of existential analysis) and an admiration for Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who was one of his main referents for his philosophy degree thesis. Perhaps Nacho felt very comfortable with Frankl's ap-

proach since, as Gordon W. Allport (1973) maintained, Frankl was neither pessimistic nor antireligious like many other European existentialist thinkers of the time.

Moved by a fascination with Frankl's work and by his academic self-confidence, Nacho wrote directly to the famous Austrian psychiatrist to describe his experiences with Colombian indigenous people. During that time, Nacho had begun working as a clergyman in the dense jungles of El Chocó (near the Atlantic coast) with Afro-Colombian communities. This experience left a deep mark on Nacho as he tried to understand the social roots of fatalism among disenfranchised people from the perspectives of logotherapy and existentialism.

Nacho had also expressed to Frankl his interest in studying under him in Vienna. Frankl, impressed by Nacho's letters, welcomed him to come to Vienna. However, he advised Nacho to study experimental psychology in the United States first, in a phenomenological-existentialist program. Frankl was very specific and recommended that Nacho attend Duquesne University in Pittsburgh where psychologist and Dutch priest Adrian Van Kaam and Frankl's former assistant at Harvard University, Rolf von Eckartsberg, taught logotherapy. Many of the frequent changes in the path of Nacho's life were due in part to the orders given by his Jesuit superiors and this may be one of the reasons why he never went onto studying in Vienna or Pittsburgh. After all, he had already taken his vow of obedience. It is important to keep in mind that his exchange with Frankl marked an early milestone on his career and shaped his worldview and some of the tenets that would become his own approach to psychology.

In 1966, Nacho returned to El Salvador and started working at the Jesuit school, Colegio Externado San José (see Beirne, 1985), where he took on the challenge of mastering chemistry so that he could teach it. He also taught literature and became the school's discipline prefect and library director. The following year, he was asked to teach religion and ethics, direct the chorus, and work as a collaborator of the school magazine, *Juventud*. During both years, he traveled to the United States as a supervisor for exchange students and took full advantage of this opportunity to learn English.

About the same time, Nacho started teaching philosophy at the place that would eventually be-

come his academic home and, ultimately, his resting place —the University of Central America (UCA) founded by the Jesuits and supported by the wealthy and powerful. This posting was short lived and he once again left the country, this time for Frankfurt to initiate the studies in theology that his Jesuit training required. His time in Frankfurt coincided with that of fellow brothers from UCA, including Jon Sobrino who later became one of the main figures of Liberation Theology. Nacho was disenchanted with the atmosphere in Frankfurt and decided to transfer to Belgium's Catholic University of Louvain. With his ability to learn new languages, Nacho took on French and rapidly became proficient. He combined his studies with pastoral duties during the weekends when he often worked with Spanish immigrants in Brussels.

Nacho had remained in Europe until 1969, when he returned to El Salvador to complete his theology degree at the request of Ignacio Ellacuría, a leading Basque Jesuit in Central America. However, he left for Europe again and finished his studies in Eegenhoven, Belgium, in 1970. Later that year, he was ordained and took his final vows as a Jesuit priest in his native Valladolid and closed a 10-year chapter that took him from Europe to Latin America and back several times.

Nacho was an avid music lover and in Europe he began an affair that lasted for the rest of his life: he acquired a guitar. This event was so important that his father, Paco, described it in one of the several books that he authored. The quest ended with the purchase of a guitar worth 2,500 pesetas that he was able to afford by translating books into Spanish as a side job. Translating books was a professional career in his family and two of his brothers did this for a living. Nacho's most important translation work was Pierre Flottes's, *L'histoire et L'inconscient Humain*, which was published in Spain in 1971 as *The Unconscious in History*.

But before Nacho entertained friends and relatives with his guitar, he had already entertained with a magic wand. By the time Nacho was about 10 years old, he was a bona fide magician in high demand for family gatherings and birthdays. Nacho was a member of the national association of magicians. The eminent Spanish writer Miguel Delibes, a close friend of Nacho's family, immortalized Nacho's first serious trade in a poem called, *Nacho, The Magician*, which is included at the end of this work.

While studying theology, he formally began his studies in psychology at UCA, which he completed in 1975 and continued to perfect until the last day of life. At UCA, Nacho was mentored by Jesús Arroyo Lasa, a Basque Jesuit who had studied applied psychology and psychoanalysis in Innsbruck and was an enthusiast of Marxist social psychology. Authors like Paulo Freire and Herbert Marcuse and the like became referents for Nacho thanks to Father Arroyo. Under Arroyo's guidance, and while still an undergraduate, Ignacio published *Psychodiagnostic of Latin America* in 1972, a text that contained ideas he would later develop along with some he would abandon, especially those associated with his early psychoanalytic views. At that point, Nacho had already written 26 articles and become head of the editorial committee of the prestigious Jesuit journal *Central American Studies* (known as ECA for its acronym in Spanish), which he later directed between 1975 and 1976.

Immediately after finishing his undergraduate degree in psychology at UCA, Nacho was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to further his studies in the United States at a graduate level. Before being accepted at the prestigious University of Chicago, from which he obtained his master's degree in 1977 and his doctorate in 1979, he spent a short period of time in Buffalo, New York, polishing his English skills. For his master's thesis, he studied social attitudes and group conflicts in El Salvador and for his dissertation he focused on crowding among low income Salvadorans. Nacho's mentors included well known psychologists with diverse interests such as Milton J. Rosenberg, Salvador Maddi, Suzanne Ouellette, Norman Bradburn, and Mihály Csikszentmihályi. Rosenberg recalled long and erudite conversations with him at a Jesuit residence in Hyde Park, the neighborhood where the University of Chicago's main campus is located. Ouellette remembers him as an exceptional student, anxious to return to El Salvador as soon as possible. As was usual in every place where he lived, Nacho combined his studies with pastoral work during the weekends.

In Chicago, he did not particularly enjoy the weather but took full advantage of cultural events such as the opera and the symphony orchestra with his mentor and friend Suzanne. Nacho chose Chicago, in part, because of its large Jesuit community from Latin America, especially at the University of Chicago. The social and organizational psychology program

was rather small and not even among the top in the area, but it gave him the time and the milieu to systematize his own ideas.

In many ways, Nacho was not viewed by his professors and mentors as a typical graduate student. At 35 years old, he was older than most of his classmates. In addition, his intellectual stature set him apart. Among students, however, the story was very different: He was like everybody else. He lived and enjoyed the frugal life of the average graduate student with other Jesuits who shared the same quarters and who had relinquished the comforts of a well-equipped, staffed Jesuit residence in the area. Nacho was a very lively member of his student community and his loud laugh could be heard in crowded parties at which he always sang and played his guitar.

As a man who did not believe that destiny was ever written, he set the last part of life cycle in motion on November 16, 1979, the day on which his doctoral dissertation was approved. From that day, he would have exactly 10 years to produce as much as possible, in a race against death that not many intellectuals ever face in the United States or Europe. A few years after his return to El Salvador, in response to a letter from Suzanne in which she expressed great fears for his life, Nacho wrote that he had anticipated he would only live for two years after his return. So, from his point of view, he was enjoying extra time with the work he thought essential to do. In 1979, Nacho finally returned to El Salvador and to UCA, to stay for good this time as a consecrated scholar and as a Salvadoran citizen, two titles that were granted to make official what he had always been. During his Chicago period, many things that influenced Nacho had occurred in El Salvador and Latin America, including the meeting in Puebla, the rise of Liberation Theology, the persecution of the church and, most important, the increasing sociopolitical radicalization of the country.

The breath of Nacho's robust academic preparation was not sufficient defense when war broke out and UCA suffered its first wave of attacks. In his unpublished work, *Psychosocial Roots of War in El Salvador* (1981), Nacho describes how he was violently awakened during the night after a bomb went off outside the Jesuit residence where he lived. He experienced the effects of the bomb's chemicals, intense fear, and heightened feelings of helplessness. Attacks such as this, however, made him experience the war from inside and identify

himself with the struggle and the suffering of the Salvadoran people.

The Jesuits had received several death threats and were ordered to leave the country for their own safety. Paramilitary groups whose motto was "Be A Patriot, Kill A Priest" had already claimed the life of Archbishop Oscar Romero and several priests and nuns. Nacho learned quickly how to survive under these circumstances and never felt more determined to put his knowledge to work for the sake of the social change that he saw coming to El Salvador.

At UCA, Nacho juggled several administrative posts (vice-rector, member of the board of trustees, chair of the psychology department, and director of research programs) as well as academic duties (faculty, author of studies, director of the University Institute of Public Opinion, and student advisor). Despite his rich intellectual and academic life, Nacho was happiest among the modest people of Jayaque and its vicinities, a village where he worked as a priest. He comforted, gave strength, and helped the poor to improve their material and spiritual conditions. The children waited every weekend for his visits and the sweet treats he brought with him.

Nacho's prestige and visibility skyrocketed in the mid-1980's and he became a keynote speaker in high demand at national and international events. In El Salvador, he was accused of being a communist or a subversive by his conservative peers. In some circles, he was known as "Nacho, the Red One." In Latin America, it was in the context of the 20th Interamerican Congress of Psychology in Caracas that Nacho gained major notoriety for his poignant ideas about the role of psychology as an instrument of change. He had been invited by his colleague and friend, Maritza Montero, with whom he shared his vision for a more committed and critical psychology. Two years later he became the vice-president for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean of the Interamerican Psychological Association (IPS), in a meeting held in Havana, Cuba.

For Nacho, traveling was not a perk of the academic intelligentsia; it was a strategy to survive by being in the public eye and a way to serve witness who could denounce the atrocities of war and the human rights violations inflicted by the Salvadoran government with the help of the United States. Nacho traveled much more frequently to the United States than anywhere

else in order to let people know what their government was doing “in their back yard.” He started close relationships with activist psychologists Adrienne Aron in the West coast and with M. Brinton Lykes in the East coast. Both friends helped him to organize talks and visits to key places.

Nacho had a love-hate relationship with the United States even before the Salvadoran civil war started. He was well-versed in the topic of North American foreign affairs and he distrusted almost everything that came from there, including the psychology made in the United States. Studying in the US was a form of getting to know the enemy from inside. In his two main works, the handbooks *Action and Ideology* (1983) and *System, Group, and Power* (1989), he opened a North-South dialogue rarely seen in the academic books on psychology available in Latin America then or now. Nacho not only articulated sharp critiques of American psychology, but also proposed provocative ways to break away from it. A telling aspect of his deep-seated sentiment was his determination to write in Spanish only, despite the fact that Nacho was fluent in English. Ultimately and unfortunately, this decision put his writings at risk of going unnoticed by English-speaking scholars in the US and beyond.

Friends and colleagues stood in solidarity with Nacho and often advised him to be careful and leave the country if possible. He turned down several job offers in prestigious institutions and instead he asked for help in the form of books, travel funds, and moral support. He opened other channels of communications within the academia in such specialized journals such as the *El Salvador Journal of Psychology*, group-edited books, and editorial committees. He accepted short visiting posts in the Central University of Venezuela, Zulia University, University of Puerto Rico, Javeriana University, Autonomous and Complutense Universities in Madrid, and the University of Costa Rica. By the end of his career, Nacho had edited, compiled, or penned more than a dozen books and over 100 articles. Nacho is best known for pioneering what he named liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1986), his own proposal of what a political and critical social psychology should aspire to be. With very few exceptions, Nacho wrote most of his work as the sole author.

Beginning in 1987, the situation in El Salvador had become so difficult that he went into hiding for short periods of times. That same year, in his visit to Cuba, he told English psychologist Alison Harris (1990) that he had declined to appear on Cuban national TV because it would most certainly bring some kind of retaliation in El Salvador. He told her that he knew the rules that he could break without exposing himself to serious danger.

Toward the end of his life, his health deteriorated. In his last visit to Spain in 1989, his brother Carlos saw a nervous and overtired Nacho with several medications on top of the nightstand. The end came about two weeks after his 47th birthday during the early hours of November 16, 1989. Still dressed and awake, Nacho was working on a manuscript when an elite military squad of the Atlacatl Battalion forced its way into the university campus and the Jesuit residence, using as a pretext a major operation launched by the guerrillas of the FMLN, five days before. The militia had come with orders to eliminate Ignacio Ellacuría, UCA's rector, and leave no witnesses. In total, six Jesuit priests were massacred along with their cook and her daughter. According to the version given by one of witnesses of the crime, it was Nacho who told his executioners before dying: “This is an injustice. You are carrion.”

Meeting Ignacio Martín-Baró: A Narrative Account of a Personal Journey

I first met Nacho Martín-Baró the day that he was killed, although I was not fully aware of that until later. As a teenager, I remember watching live news about the killings that took place at UCA and thinking that the people lying on the grass, shown on TV, were important people. It was in 1993, when I was an undergraduate student of psychology at the University of Central America (UCA) that I recalled vividly Nacho's death more than three years before. As a freshman student, instead of touring the beautiful campus of UCA as usually happens in U.S. colleges and universities, I was with my peers watching a heart-wrenching documentary that narrated the UCA Massacre, as it was known, that took place in November 1989. It was the university's attempt to situate our experience for a new breed of postwar students.

This second encounter with him was brief and I did not realize its importance until I was in my third year of studies when I took two social psychology classes. His presence in introductory psychology courses during the first two years was dim and we never really took advantage of the vast wealth of studies and texts that he had produced. Most faculty members were Nacho's colleagues and former students, but that fact did not become crucial until we started taking more advanced courses. The social psychology course, however, was different because we used his handbooks as textbooks. During this time, a new world opened up to me as I read him and initiated a pilgrimage that has taken me across the globe, learning and following the academic and personal tracks that Nacho had left.

In my fourth year, a friend encouraged me to seek a position as a survey researcher at the University Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP, its Spanish acronym) that Nacho had founded in 1986. This fourth act set in motion a chain reaction that allowed me to get and feel closer to him. I quickly became an IUDOP research analyst and worked in the place where he had worked. My office was across the street from the Jesuit residence where he had been killed. I had access to his personal files. He had left everything well organized; books, manuscripts, surveys, SPSS outputs, research reports. I felt as he had left everything ready for curious people like me.

Through colleagues who worked with him, I started learning more about Nacho and felt moved and inspired by the example of his life and work. It was clear to me that I wanted to leave the country and study social psychology. Two years after starting to work at IUDOP, I was awarded a Fulbright scholarship and had the chance to gain a graduate degree in the US and, particularly, in the city of Chicago. I felt that I was getting closer to Nacho. Due to the type of scholarship I received, I could only apply to Master's Level programs and decided to study at Loyola University, a Jesuit university in Chicago. There, I met a priest who knew Nacho and was a frequent guest at the Jesuit residences on campus. In 1999, I attended a memorial event prepared specially for Nacho at the University of Chicago and was moved by a documentary presented PBS' *Enemies of War* and the testimonies it included by former colleagues, friends, and professors.

One of the speakers was Milton Rosenberg, who had been chair of Social and Organizational Psychology when Nacho was a student. I approached him at the end of the event. I told him that I had come from El Salvador and that I was interested in the work of Nacho. He asked me why I was not at the University of Chicago and that I should consider transferring from Loyola. Tempting as it was, it was impossible to move for several reasons. This encounter, however, gave me the opportunity to speak to Milton Rosenberg later to talk about Nacho. He then suggested I find Suzanne Kobasa to learn more about Nacho's time in Chicago.

Dr. Rosenberg was not aware that Dr. Kobasa was Dr. Kobasa no more; she had changed the last name she used to Ouellette and I was not able to find her. By sheer luck, I learned of the name change, and proceeded to find her and establish contact with her. Again, I felt that I had met another important person in the life of Nacho and I was getting to know more about him through her. Unknowingly, I had also started a relationship with Dr. Ouellette that has lasted since then.

In 2006, I was invited to give a talk about Nacho's work at the University of Seville and took advantage of the trip to Spain to establish contact with his family. I knew that Nacho had five siblings and started searching on the Internet for contact information. I luckily found telephone numbers and addresses for two of them and called while in Spain. Carlos Martín-Baró, Nacho's younger and closer brother, met me in a café in Madrid where we spent several hours conversing about his brother and family. Carlos gave me the opportunity to meet Nacho at a deeper level and provided me with key information about him. We met once more before I left for Chicago at Madrid's Parque El Retiro. We exchanged meaningful gifts such as videos with footage of Nacho that I had found and he gave me a book (C. Martín-Baró, 2002) that he had authored that dealt with the death of his father, Paco Martín Abril, and to some extent with the life of Nacho and the Martín-Baró family. Later, he sent me family pictures of Nacho, including the first picture available of him at the age of two.

Other close friends of Nacho have given me information as well as a deeper understanding and perspective about the juxtaposition of Nacho's work and life. One of them, Maritza Montero, who I met in 2002, has become one of my per-

sonal mentors since. In 2009, I had the privilege to contribute as a coauthor (Luque-Ribelles, García-Ramírez, & Portillo, 2009) in a book edited by her and Christopher Sonn (Montero & Sonn, 2009), the first published in English, that revisits Nacho's proposed psychology of liberation. Before that, the only systematic source of Nacho's work in English was the compilation, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, published in 1994 by Harvard University Press and crafted by a group of Nacho's friends that included Adrienne Aron.

In 2010, I returned to El Salvador after 11 years in the United States and such was my luck that I was offered a job at UCA. My office is barely 100 feet from where I worked previously as an undergraduate student and it is across from the Chapel where the remains of Nacho and the Martyrs of UCA rest. In 2011, I was elected as the vice-president for Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean of the Inter-american Psychological Association, the same position once held by Nacho. When I take all these experiences as a whole, it is clear to me that I have gotten to know much more than the life and the work of a man that I deeply admire; I have learned to weave his life story and mine to construct my own.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix

Nacho, The Magician

By Miguel Delibes (1990)

Translated by Nelson Portillo

About 25 or 30 years ago, every time a birthday of one of our children approached—very numerous and very young then—my wife phoned the home of Paco Martín Abril. She spoke with him or with Alicia, his wife and asked if his son

Ignacio had any commitments for that day. Ignacio, Nacho, never had one or, if he did, he would make arrangements to please us. Nacho was just like that, selfless, gentle, understanding. By then he could have not been older than



Nacho, the magician

(Appendix continues)



From left to right: Nacho at age 5 (1947); The Martín-Baró Family (ca. 1951); As archbishop in a school play (ca. 1950); Spending his summer in Segovia (ca. 1952); Playing the guitar (ca. 1972); With friend and colleague Maritza Montero and Central University of Venezuela's Rector (1987); Posing as a doctoral graduate from the University of Chicago (1979); Preaching and denouncing social injustice during mass (ca. 1988).

fourteen and was thrilled with illusionism. He wanted to be a magician, a juggler, do tricks with his hand. . . He believed, as a good magician does, in the transformation of men.

On the evening of his debut, the children enthusiastically welcomed Nacho Martín-Baró. His image of a magician was very moving. He

was a burly teenager and the tuxedo of his father was too tight and the legs of his pants were too long. An enemy of etiquette, Nacho's bow was crooked and the muddy pair of boots he had just worn to a soccer match was poking out from the bottom of his pants. But nothing mattered, nothing. The mysterious suitcase he had left on the

(Appendix continues)

far side of the table he was using, kept the children's eyes wide open. As a good psychologist, he talked to them during the preparations in order to keep their enthusiasm. Despite his young age, Nacho was already a master of card games. But after a very promising opening, when the more complicated tricks started, he was nothing more than an apprentice. Out of the mysterious suitcase, he pulled a folded top hat, unfolded it, tightened the knot of his tie and began stuffing it with colorful handkerchiefs. But before conducting the first hocus-pocus movement, white doves came flying out from his pockets, his tuxedo cuffs and the bottom of his pants and Nacho, the magician, laughed, trying to catch them. While the children celebrated, realizing that the untimely eruption of the birds had not spoiled the evening, a fountain of colored ribbons, confetti, inexhaustible streamers came out from his hands. It was such a memorable evening and its success so great that the birthday boy told me when Nacho closed the door:

He is better than a circus magician.

To which the boy's sister, a sharp observer, replied a bit disappointed:

But he doesn't wear magician's shoes.

Sensitive, deep, fraternal, noble, Nacho never abandoned the career of magician nor did he dispose of his walking boots. From self-

sacrifice to self-sacrifice (he left his house, was a novice in Villagarcía, went to El Salvador, became a naturalized citizen of this country, and embraced the cause of the underprivileged), he walked towards a chosen death. He came and went:

The country of one hundred families. Its people are starving.

But he never gave up, never lost faith or hope. He believed, as a good magician does, in the transformation of men. He trusted. On his last visit, his parents found him alone, pensive, with his mind far away:

What are you thinking, Nacho? Is everything ok?

Nacho dismissed them and smiled. Nothing happened to him. He was just dreaming, preparing the great revolution, his best illusionist's trick: to turn one hundred hawks in pigeons and by this ruse, redeem the people of an entire country. He ignored that, upon his return, the snare that would end his life and that of his brothers was waiting for him. I want to believe that, in that ill-fated moment, the sky of the city of San Salvador was filled with white doves in honor of his gesture and his memory.