



# the **JUST** word

## The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health & Human Rights

A Partner of Boston College Center for Human Rights & International Justice

### Liberation psychology in African contexts of war trauma

Simone Lindorfer, PhD

I have been working as a psychologist, theologian and trauma therapist in African contexts for more than 15 years, both on a permanent basis and as a free-lance consultant. I have specialized in community approaches to psychosocial trauma and developed a particular work focus on gender-based violence.

Martín-Baró's writings have been one of the greatest inspirations to my work, and although his liberation psychology was developed in a concrete historical and regional context that is different to the contexts of contemporary Africa, his ideas can be contextualised for African realities and inform our way of developing projects.<sup>1</sup>

I want to highlight in my article just one core idea that might inspire African colleagues dealing with the consequences of extreme trauma. Martín-Baró insisted on a strictly psychosocial understanding of "trauma". In his view, the "wound" (Greek: trauma) is socially produced, i.e. the root cause lies in society, not in individuals; and the nature of this wound is nourished and maintained in the relationship between individuals and society. This understanding radically calls for new "therapy" concepts: Because "...if psychology's work is limited to curing, it can become simply a palliative that contributes to prolonging a situation which generates and multiplies the very ills it

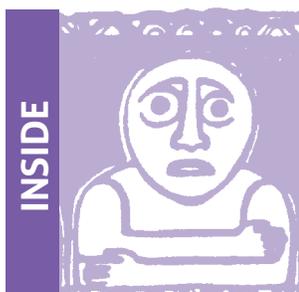
strives to remedy. Hence, (...) we cannot limit ourselves to addressing post-traumatic stress. Our analysis has to extend itself to the roots of those traumas, and therefore to the war itself as a social psychopathogenic situation."<sup>2</sup> Given this psychosocial understanding of trauma, it is only logical that trauma recovery must take place not only on an individual, but also on a social level: For Martín-Baró this meant treating the traumatizing structures that have wounded and keep wounding individuals; it entailed healing social relationships.

In my work in communities in Eastern and Central Africa, I have been privileged to be witness to some of these socially healing and emancipatory processes. I want to mention here particularly one experience in the Kivu region in the Eastern part of the DR Congo related to projects for survivors of the immense sexualized violence that tens of thousands of women and girls have been subjected to in one of the most protracted wars in Africa. In

*continued on page 2*

<sup>1</sup> See also Lindorfer, S. (2006). "Sharing the pain of the bitter hearts". *Liberation psychology and gender-related violence in Eastern Africa*. Münster: LIT

<sup>2</sup> Martín-Baró, I. (1996). War and the Psycho-social Trauma of Salvadoran children, In: A.Aron & S.Corne (Eds.) (1996). *Writings for a Liberation Psychology. Ignacio Martín-Baró*. Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press, p.122-135, here: p.122.



Disappeared Children in Argentina .....	page 3
Seven Projects Funded in 2014 .....	page 4-6
M. Brinton Lykes speaks on Ignacio Martín-Baró's Liberation Psychology .....	page 7
Bowl-a-thon 2014 .....	page 7
HEARTBEAT .....	page 8



## Our Mission & Values

Through grant-making and education, the Martín-Baró Fund fosters psychological well-being, social consciousness, active resistance, and progressive social change in communities affected by institutional violence, repression, and social injustice.

### OUR VALUES

- ◆ We believe that the scars of such experiences are deeply seated both in the individual and in society.
- ◆ We believe in the power of the community collectively to heal these wounds, to move forward, and to create change.
- ◆ We believe in the importance of developing education and critical awareness about the oppressive policies and practices of the United States and of multinational corporations.

### OUR GOALS

- ◆ To support innovative grassroots projects that explore the power of the community to foster healing within individuals and communities that are trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice.
- ◆ To promote education and critical awareness about the psychosocial consequences of structural violence, repression, and social injustice on individuals and communities, while educating ourselves and the wider community about the community-based responses of grantees in their pursuit of social reparation and a more just and equitable world.
- ◆ To build collaborative relationships among the Fund, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and social change.

### Special thanks to all contributors!

Sriya Bhattacharyya, Thomas Kane, Timothy Karcz, Ramsay Liem, Simone Lindorfer, M. Brinton Lykes, Sarah I. Padiá, Cristina B. Sadurní, Barbara Viechnicki.

**Editors:** Cristina B. Sadurní and M. Brinton Lykes. **PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK.** Inquiries can be sent to: **Martín-Baró Fund**, P.O. Box 302122, Jamaica Plain, MA, 02130. Contributions can be made on-line at: [www.martinbarofund.org](http://www.martinbarofund.org) or by check made out to Peace Development Fund, noting that it is for the Martín-Baró Fund on the memo line and sent to PO Box 40250, San Francisco, CA 94140. For questions or comments, please email us at [info@martinbarofund.org](mailto:info@martinbarofund.org).

## LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS OF WAR TRAUMA

*continued from page 1*

my conversations with local organizations since 2008, I have confirmed what Christian Laval from *Médecins du Monde* [*Doctors of the World*] described in a study regarding the changing role and function of what is termed “counselor” in the Kivu region<sup>3</sup>: The struggle against sexual violence in the Kivu region first started at a local level. Local women were mainly motivated by social and religious activism, and often times by the fact that they had been victims themselves. They assumed the role of a ‘counselor’ and in the local language were called ‘Mamas’. At this early stage, the counselors were not concerned with formalized ‘psychosocial concepts’, but rather helped with very practical matters such as taking survivors to the nearby health facilities, sharing food with them, and often offering space in their own houses, since many rape survivors were abandoned by their husbands. In one of my interviews that I conducted in the Kivu region in 2008, a leader of one local organisation expressed this process of social conscientization as follows: “When all these women came and told us that they had been raped, we said to each other in our local agricultural initiative, we can’t just go on doing things as we used to do them. We have to do something about it. Agriculture is not enough.”

After some years in this struggle against the rampant sexual violence, the situation changed, when local initiatives in the field started looking for funds, working with local authorities and international NGOs that integrated them into their programs. Trainings in ‘counseling skills’ or ‘de-traumatization’ were organized with the objective of what can be termed ‘professionalization’. Of course, as money came in for the survivors of sexual violence, associations or local NGOs got attracted and almost all changed their agenda to this new focus of donor agencies.

During a study I conducted in 2008, a key informant working for a local NGO explained to me that nowadays every association and organization goes ‘to the field’ and wants to ‘identify victims’. Being able to ‘present victims’ is necessary in order to receive funding. The women and girls in their communities who have actually survived sexual violence, on their part, always expect something material to be ‘given’ whenever NGOs come in for ‘identification’ exercises. And some would even ‘pretend’ to have been raped in order to get a sack of additional rice, a blanket or whatever the particular organization distributes. These women might ‘just’ be terribly poor and thus potentially be a victim of sexual violence, but poverty as such does not count in the current intervention logic of most donor organizations in the region. Local activists also shared how corrupted the idea of ‘self-determined empowerment’ becomes in an environment where powerlessness pays more.

*continued on page 3*

<sup>3</sup> MdM/Christian Laval (2007) ‘*Leçons d’humanité: Des conseillères de Goma. Etude sur les parcours des conseillères auprès des femmes ayant subies les violences sexuelles*’ [*Lessons in humanity: Goma counselors. A Study of counselors’ experiences with women who have suffered sexual abuse*], unpublished report.

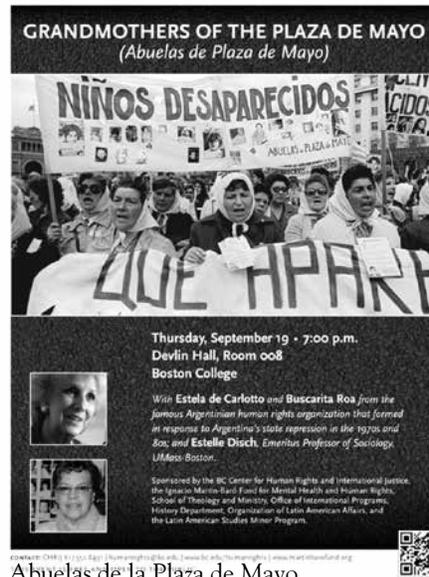
# Disappeared Children in Argentina: Two Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo visit Boston

Sarah I. Padial

In the fall of 2013, the Martín-Baró Fund co-hosted Estela de Carlotto and Buscarita Roa, founding members of Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo), a human rights group dedicated to reunite disappeared grandchildren with their respective families.

During what is often referred to as Argentina's "Dirty War" between 1976 and 1983, the government's National Reorganization Process kidnapped young protesters and relocated them to one of approximately 360 concentration camps, where most were tortured and many later killed. Some of these youth were either pregnant or had small children; these children were frequently illegally adopted by families and/or friends and colleagues of the NRP. The Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo were determined to fight for the return of their grandchildren.

Estela, confessed that at the beginning of the dictatorship she stood passively and submissively, knowing that all was not right, but doing nothing. When her daughter, Laura, was kidnapped, Estela, along with other mothers, protested openly, seeking justice for their disappeared children at the Plaza de Mayo. The military regime thought that they would give up and leave. In reporting



Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo

her story to us, she commented: "What kind of mothers did they have?" Once she learned that Laura was dead, Estela begged for the life of her grandchild, whom she learned had been born in a prison and probably appropriated by a general. Although Estela hasn't found her grandchild she has celebrated the reunion of 109 grandchildren with their biological families, ties that have been confirmed through DNA tests. While she still awaits another 400 reunions, she is very hopeful that justice will be served.

What baffles yet fascinates me about their protest is that had it not been for caring, passionate, justice-seeking women, all of those lives would not have been accounted for. No international organization would have stepped in with the same vigor and delivered these remarkable results. Another aspect, which I loved about the talk, is that Estela and Buscarita reported that these protests weren't designed or initiated to "demand revenge or vengeance against the military, but justice." The grandmothers' optimism and persistence inspired me and made me believe that little by little, truth and justice will be achieved.

*Sarah I. Padial is a sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College where she is majoring in sociology.*

## LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS OF WAR TRAUMA

*continued from page 2*

I don't want to say professionalization is a bad thing. I want to highlight the fact that there are undoubtedly destructive side effects on local initiatives once international concepts and projects enter. They often disempower local initiatives. When I work as a consultant in some of these local projects, it usually takes a while for the staff members of these initiatives to realize and believe that what they do and have done, often under immense financial and security constraints and with personal sacrifices, is wonderful and courageous. Many who initiate local programs seem to believe in the logic of the "aid industry" and that what they do is not enough and that they need to be better trained in, for example, the "right" Western trauma therapy methodology. Yet, what these local initiatives can offer can never be replaced by professionalization: ownership, commitment, solidarity and acceptance. This

– not professionalized methodologies and project concepts  
– can bring social healing to war-ridden communities and their survivors.

I am happy that the Martín-Baró Fund not only offers grants to projects, but reminds all these immensely courageous local projects that what is needed is actually their liberatory commitment to make a difference in the lives of survivors of extreme trauma.

*Simone Lindorfer is a Catholic theologian, psychologist, and psychotherapist who specializes in trauma and serves as an international trauma work consultant. She completed a PhD about Martín-Baró's liberation psychology and its applicability to gender-related violence in Eastern Africa. She is a friend and supporter of the Martín-Baró Fund.*

## Seven Projects Funded in 2014

### ACEFOMI, Guatemala

\$7,000

The Center for Mayan Ixil Education and Development has continued to facilitate psychosocial and human rights workshops with women in the town of Chajul and in surrounding villages, extending psychosocial education with and for 25 and 30 women living in each of four villages. Workshop topics included self-esteem and personal hygiene; mental health and nutrition; women's right; and recovery of memories of the armed conflict. Individual family visits by workshop facilitators afford an opportunity to observe women's applications of the training and work with them to sustain family gardens for growing nutritional foods.

A goal over the past two years has been to extend this work to local youth in Chajul. ACEFOMI has recognized the need to educate youth leadership who can then take more responsibility for initiating work among their peers. They have identified a small group of youth who, with school principals' approval, will work with ACEFOMI staff to survey all the middle and high schools in Chajul to discern which among a series of possible topics are of most interest to youth. Potential themes include: sexual education and preventative health care; self-esteem; work, social responsibility and solidarity; environmental and land challenges; and the legacies of the armed conflict in the context of globalization and migration. They have contracted with municipal leaders to collaborate in a series of town-wide presentations for youth and anticipate three such community-wide events during 2014. These will be followed by smaller workshops designed to strengthen youth leadership in Chajul towards establishing ongoing youth work in the community.

### MÉDICOS DESCALZOS, Guatemala

\$7,000

The Asociación Médicos Descalzos works to strengthen traditional health and mental health resources in twelve municipalities in the Guatemalan department of El Quiché. Previous grants from the Fund enabled the group to publish a groundbreaking book *Yab'il Xane K'oqil: Enfermedades o Consecuencias?*, a comparative exploration of traditional concepts of illness and health and some within Western psychiatry and psychology. Since then they have strengthened training and education of the *Ajq'ijab'*, or Mayan traditional healers, who serve as culturally and economically accessible resources for rural indigenous communities. In 2013, with support from the Martín-Baró Fund, they published the first of six popular education resources, graphic-conceptual booklets



Médicos Descalzos' organizational structure

designed to renew traditional cultural understandings and practices among local populations. The first publication, *Q'ij Alaxik*, focuses on an illness whose manifestations include states of dissatisfaction often accompanied by physical and emotional illness and/or a sense of personal failure. These states are traced to a failure to recognize and appreciate one's vocation and/or personal talents, gifts related to one's *Nawal*, that is one's Mayan spirit or totem. These educational resources are designed to reconnect Maya and introduce ladinos to these longstanding sources of traditional knowledge towards mobilizing preventative mental health care and psychosocial well-being.

### LIVE WITH HOPE, Uganda

\$7,000



Live with Hope stakeholders' meeting

With past support from the Martín-Baró Fund, Live with Hope has mounted successful programs of education, public advocacy, and economic support to address female genital mutilation (FGM) and domestic violence for two districts in northern Uganda. Last year, residents of a third community, Amudat, attended public forums organized in the target area of the Bukwo District and requested similar support for their region. According to a recent UN Population Fund survey, Amudat District ranks third in the country in the violation of and women's and girl's rights. Confident in Live with Hope's demonstrated

## Seven Projects Funded in 2014

ability to support girls who have been subjected to FGM and create economic alternatives for women cutters, the Martín-Baró Fund is pleased to provide a third year of support to this organization to extend its reach to the Amudat District. In addition to direct support to girls and cutters, Live with Hope will mobilize community members and public service providers to lobby the government of Uganda to extend social services to remote, mountainous areas like Amudat. And for the first time, Live with Hope will develop training and sensitization meetings for men about domestic violence and also address the high rates of male unemployment and alcoholism.

### COPERMA: Communauté des Planteurs et Eleveurs dans la Région Marachaire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) \$7,000

For the last two years the Martín-Baró Fund has supported COPERMA in a community-based project to help survivors of rape and other war-related violence in the North Kivu Province in the eastern region of the DRC. In response to the trauma suffered and disruption of livelihoods caused, the project has conducted a range of psychotherapy sessions as well as providing vocational training. Psychotherapy work included listening sessions and individual and group counseling sessions that benefited approximately 850 victims. In its vocational training program last year, 228 received training in bread-making, 327 were trained in tailoring and 540 were trained in soap-making.

The MBF Committee has approved COPERMA's request for a third year of funding. Violence in the DRC, particularly in the eastern region, presents mounting challenges for communities in the region. COPERMA remains poised to continue its efforts to address the needs of these traumatized communities. Recognizing the importance of mental health in the overall healing process, COPERMA will continue its psychosocial efforts through counseling sessions and family sensitization and education for rape victims, as well as for demobilized child-soldiers, orphans, and other displaced persons. Its work in vocational training will include distribution of kits to enable trainees in soap-making, tailoring and bread-making to reintegrate successfully into their own communities.

### AFN: Action des Femmes à la Non-Violence, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) \$7,000

Action des Femmes à la Non-Violence (AFN) is a grassroots organization in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, founded in 2008 by women and girls who came together as one to campaign for the abolition of the ongoing gender-based abuse, sexual harassment, torture, and sexual violence against women. With their grant from the Martín-Baró Fund last year, AFN conducted a training of trainers for 21 women to mentor and coach women and young girls to actively participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives in home, family, workplace, and community settings. About 280 women and girls have since been trained as an extension of these trainings. From this, women have identified two primary concerns for their community: the high rate of child mortality in Kazimia hospital due lack of pediatric beds; and absolute poverty and unemployment. To this end, the community has already begun a project to make 100,000 bricks to expand the hospital and started to clear a road to adjacent towns to help gain access to markets for their agricultural goods, expanding economic opportunity, though they cite a need for access to more raw materials to help finish the projects. With the new grant from the Martín-Baró Fund this year, AFN will expand the trainings into South and North Kivu provinces to further build women's leadership capacities and mount advocacy campaigns against gender-based abuses.



AFN women leaders and human rights' trainers.

## Seven Projects Funded in 2014

### THE AWAKENING, Pakistan

\$7,000



The Awakening pioneered the first Women Council in Pakistan. The women are now successfully taking part in counseling and mediation processes and fighting for their rights. The group successfully organized the *mohallah* peace committees and mothers, lady teachers, and councilors are being trained in skills including peacemaking, trauma counseling, conflict management, and conflict resolution. These groups provide counseling to survivors suffering from trauma while working in their professional contexts to further disseminate the knowledge that they have gained from this project.

For the first time in the history of District Swat, women from religious minorities were included in the *mohallah* peace committee and were members of the organization's general body. Further, the grant from the Martín-Baró Fund supports the transgendered community of District Swat, one of the most vulnerable communities which suffers great hardships during the armed conflict

With its renewed funding, The Awakening will establish a friendly space for the depressed, traumatized people of District Swat with the main objective to protect the victims of fear and trauma by providing psychosocial support, medical aid and recreational, educational and structured leisure activities that will provide the victims with life skills to protect themselves through their own and the Council's ongoing advocacy efforts.

### NOMADESC, Colombia

\$7,000

Nomadesc has worked since April 2000 to address poverty, trauma, and hopelessness brought on by the Triana massacre in El Valle de Cauca, Colombia. With a continued military presence and a deep feeling of injustice in the region, Nomadesc, through the "Las Mujeres de Triana" project, seeks not only to repair, but also to re-establish these lost rights. The Martín-Baró Fund will assist the community to develop and establish practices to repair the psychological, socio-cultural and financial damage.

The "Mujeres de Triana" encourages the community to reflect on how armed conflict, kidnappings, and reliving of the trauma in the territory impact the lives of victims. Nomadesc will provide training workshops to gain practical and theoretical tools to aid and strengthen the recovery of historic memory, so that this knowledge can be passed on and can, subsequently, unify the community. Through symbolic acts, social demonstrations and the creation of "la casa de la memoria", they aim to create a symbolic and physical space to commemorate their losses and pay tribute to the massacre's victims and their families.



With the help of the Martín-Baró Fund, this project will not only reduce the psychological and physical symptoms of institutional trauma, but also, strengthen the memory and the collective power of the community to demand justice for all and repair human rights.

# M. Brinton Lykes speaks on Ignacio Martín-Baró's Liberation Psychology —

Cristina B. Sadurní

On November 11 2013, M. Brinton Lykes, professor of Community-Cultural Psychology and member of the Martín-Baró Fund, introduced Boston College students and guests to the world of liberation psychology through the life and work of Jesuit social psychologist, Ignacio Martín-Baró. Professor Lykes presented her personal reflections on the work of her friend and colleague, Martín-Baró and how his praxis influenced her work and that of many other mental health workers within conflict and post-conflict settings of inequality and institutional oppression. After describing some key moments in Martín-Baró's life, Professor Lykes provided what she believes to be one of his most important legacies, that is, liberatory social and psychological theories and their applications as interventions in contexts of "gendered and racialized violence." Another of his most important legacies noted by Lykes was his encouraging psychologists to critically reflect on their place in the world through the lenses of privilege and power they have accumulated while critically analyzing the historical, political and socio-economic systems in which they live and work and their effects on majority

populations. Martín-Baró contributed importantly towards understanding trauma and other "syndromes" as "the manifestation of the dehumanized social relationships", rather than as the product of an individual's dysfunction.

With humility Professor Lykes presented how she has applied these lessons through her work in zones of armed conflict in Central America, South Africa, Northern Ireland and currently in the United States with the Migration and Human Rights Project of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice. More importantly, she shared her life long journey of personal reflection and deconstruction of power and privilege, clarifying how that has contributed to her positioning herself within these contexts and better understanding how her presence can facilitate local actors' self-recognition of their protagonism and the contributions they make to their own and their communities' well-being.

*Cristina Sadurní is a second-year graduate student in the Mental Health Counseling program in Boston College and coordinator of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund 2012-2014.*

## Bowl-a-thon 2014

Sriya Bhattacharyya



HGSE Team

Excited to rock our research team logo for the first time, our MBF bowling team stayed up the night before the event and painted the "RADICALeS" logo onto patches, t-shirts, and diapers for our Bowl-a-thon "uniforms". We call ourselves the "RADICALeS" – Research Action Designed to Impact Communities at Large en Solidaridad. We are an interdisciplinary team at Boston College focused on doing research with and for overlooked communities here in the Greater Boston area and beyond, in hopes to better their well-being and increase their access to power and resources.



RADICALeS Team

The 2014 Martín-Baró Fund Bowl-a-thon was a wonderful opportunity for our research team (and teammate's newborn baby!) to bond, meet with like-minded activists, and



Fuego del Corazón

compete for the LOWEST bowling score...that we successfully attained! We were honored to

join 12 other teams formed by students, faculty, and their friends. Boston College's Undergraduate Latin Dance group, Fuego del Corazón, and Harvard

Graduate School of Education (HGSE) were among those who joined in the Strike for Justice. It makes us happy that RADICALeS formed part of this event and even members who could not make the event helped the Martín-Baró Fund raise nearly \$19,000 in 2014. We hope to make this event an annual activity, where we can be reminded of the hard work and successes of radical activists and scholars who came before us.



# HEARTBEAT

Cristina B. Sadurní

The Center for Human Rights and International Justice and the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund joined Boston College's Students for Justice in Palestine, the Arts and Social Responsibility Project and the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning to host an amazing event. *Heartbeat*, an Israeli-Palestinian youth music community, launched their third US tour in February 2014, and BC had the opportunity of being a venue for this inspiring ensemble of Arab and Jewish youth artists who document and share their lived experiences through music and peaceful dialogue.

*Heartbeat*, based in Jerusalem, is an international non-profit organization that, since its foundation in 2007, has aimed at uniting not only artists and musicians, but also



students, educators and the public. Through the power of musical harmony, *Heartbeat* has provided young Israeli and Palestinian musicians the opportunity to “build trust and transform conflict through the power of music”. They vehemently challenge both the psychological and physical barriers that surround the Palestinians and Israeli and invite listeners to do so as well.

It was an honor to provide this wonderful group of young adults the opportunity to use Boston College as a space to educate us about their battle against separation, fear and violence. Thus, they encourage dialogue among students to inspire people to work together to be the change our world needs.

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