# THE JUST WORD

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

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# MISSION STATEMENT

The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund fosters psychological well-being, social consciousness, and active resistance in communities affected by violence, repression, and social injustice. Through grants, networking and technical support, the Fund works in partnership with grassroots projects that promote progressive social change.

To achieve this mission the Fund has articulated the following goals:

- Develop a holistic perspective for understanding the individual in community, through support of innovative projects that explore the power of the community. The purpose of the Fund is not to support individual therapy, but rather to support communities to heal their wounds collectively, and to move forward as a community. Funding for such projects has generally been overlooked by foundations, despite the fact that rebuilding the emotional mental health of the community is integral to economic and structural development.
- Develop social consciousness about the psychological consequences of violence, repression and social injustice within the United States.
- Build collaborative partnerships between grantees and grantors that mutually educate and empower partners toward building community.

# History as an Instrument of Social Reparation: Reflections on an Experience in Guatemala

by Marcie Mersky. Paper presented at the XXI annual meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Guadalajara, Mexico, April 19, 1997



"All of history depends ultimately on its social purpose."

— Paul Thomson, The Voice of the Past

he Recovery of Historical Memory," (known as REMHI in its Spanish acronym) began in 1995 as a project of the Guatemalan Catholic church, seeking to recover and interpret the history of the past 36 years of political violence in Guatemala, through the testimonies of the survivors. It developed as a response to people's tangible need to be able to speak out, at last, after years of living in silence and official denial, about the social struggles, the experience of repression, and the armed conflict, as Guatemalan society was ripped apart and left to face the human tragedy of the statistics we all know: 200,000 dead or disappeared; 400 villages destroyed; 150,000 refugees; a million displaced.

The project began with three basic ideas: First, that it was necessary to enable victims to speak about their experiences – to restore the elemental right to remember, a right that was systematically denied through the imposition of terror. We understood the exercise of the rights to remember and to speak as a step toward restoring dignity to those who had suffered profoundly. Secondly, we wanted to recover this history, in hopes that its horrors would never happen again. Thirdly, we wanted to contribute to the Commission for Historical Clarification, an official "truth commission," to be established by the Peace Accords in Guatemala.

Perhaps with the Commission in mind, we developed a model to collect and systematize information; its categories included violations of human rights such as extrajudicial executions, homicide, forced disappearances, torture, rape, etc. That is, it was developed to analyze the details of human rights violations, to identify patterns of violations, and to quantify them.

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However, in the initial confrontation of our model with reality, in discussions with pastoral workers and catechists, with many victims themselves, and with those who would be involved in the work at a community level, we discovered some of its limitations. To achieve the true potential that history holds as an instrument for social reparation, we needed to create a model that would salvage the elements that are lost when we focus simply on the documentation of human rights violations - a model that would better respect the testimony as a whole, and thus the integrity of the experience.

I should clarify that I understand testimony as being a memory of the lived experience, told freely. It is not the product of an interrogation; rather, since it is told freely, it should respect the logic and the voice of whoever is doing the telling. At the same time, the testimony given is not necessarily all of what is remembered, nor all of what happened; rather it is what the person can or wants to tell us at that moment.

Firstly, when such testimony is used only to document "cases" - of an extrajudicial execution or forced disappearance, for example - it treats complex and shattering human experiences as though they could be reduced to mere "events." Especially in testimonies from rural areas, people might speak not only of the kidnapping of three brothers, or the murder of a husband, for example, but in their testimonies we may also hear phrases like "In those times, everything was sadness," or "In those times, life was not possible." For these survivors, this was not only because the army had burned their cornfields and there was literally nothing to eat but, in a more profound sense, that time itself, with its particular logic and movement, was shattered.

Thus, if we focus only on the kid-

napping or assassination, we isolate the violation from the fabric of people's lives; we ignore what came before and what comes after. This can limit or distort our understanding – as investigators or as a society – of the multiple dimensions of the damage done, of the depth of the wounds.

Moreover, those who have given us their testimony will not see themselves reflected in a history that so profoundly compartmentalizes their experiences. In dismembering their testimonies, the echo of their voices is lost. And that should give us pause, for it is their history, and should both confirm their existence and reflect their strength.

A second point: many testimonies reminded us that massacres are not the sum of multiple extrajudicial killings, rapes and torture. Rather they are understood and remembered as collective experiences, whose effects transcend the individual.

In urban areas, it is undeniably important to reconstruct the details of disappearances and assassinations, in order to identify the mechanisms used to commit them. But this is insufficient if we seek to understand all that is being told. We must also use people's words to explore in greater depth the cumulative, societal effects of thousands of individual violations - to reconstruct, for example, how fear and State surveillance of victims' funerals and former homes worked to shatter solidarity and isolate those who lost family members. And we need to understand the development of societal complicities, as with witnesses who claim, "I saw nothing, I know nothing."

Thirdly, for understanding the present, the way in which a person was assassinated can be as important as their death itself. In a certain community, we were told, the army arrived one day and took a man away. They brought him back half-dead, and then made all of the men in the town file past and, as they passed, stab him with

their machetes. Thus they participated symbolically in his death and mutilation. What feelings of collective shame, guilt, and complicity remain? How can cultural values be restored after being so severely compromised? Thus, it is not sufficient merely to extract the facts and dates of individual executions from a testimony; we must listen to and value what we are told about how they happened.

Similarly, how do people live with the thought that their dead could not be buried, that dogs devoured their loved ones and neighbors whose bodies were tossed out along the roadsides? When people have not been properly buried, how can the daily relationship with the dead, so vital to the Mayas, be restored? Can wounds heal when one does not know where the person is? Fifteen years after the disappearance of her husband, a woman says, "I don't feel very much at peace. Perhaps they have him stuck in a cave, in a hole. Perhaps he is in a clandestine cemetery. But where?"

Finally, if our analysis of testimony focuses primarily on the violations of human rights, we risk ignoring people's efforts to confront overwhelming circumstances – the superhuman efforts of a mother, her husband dead and the house burned, to feed her children; the courage of individuals or small groups who confronted the military in the search for someone who was disappeared. To recover these elements, as well, is to recognize the valor and dignity of the survivors.

In referring to history as an instrument of social reparation, I speak of history not only as seeking the truth of events and of those responsible – thereby leading to some form of justice – but also as a tool to help individuals, communities, and their society to reconstruct their identity and acknowledge their dignity, both profoundly affected by the counterinsurgency. It can aid in the reconstitution of social relations,

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# Committee Member Profile: Ann "Brian" Murphy



By Joan Liem

nn "Brian" Murphy has had an abiding interest in literature and politics since she graduated from Hollins College in Virginia in 1970 with a major in English and a background in anti-war activism. She joined the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund in November of 1996 after attending our commemorative event honoring Martin Diskin for his longstanding commitment to peace and justice in El Salvador. That event occurred soon after the mid-term election victory of the Newt Gingrich Republicans, and Ann was feeling overwhelmed by the mean-spiritedness of what was going on in the country. Inspired by Diskin's work and the Fund's recognition of it, she accepted the invitation to join the Fund as a means of expressing her commitment to progressive political action.

Ann attended Hollins College, in Virginia, and after graduation moved to Boston in search of a serious progressive community. Like many English majors, she hoped to support herself by doing meaningful work at a major publishing house, but in 1970 the Boston Globe was still running "Help Wanted: Male" and "Help Wanted: Female" ads separately and her credentials got her a secretarial job at Harvard Medical School. There she learned a great deal about power politics and what it meant to be a female worker in a male dominated world. At the same time, she was meeting civil rights and healthcare activists and became involved with some people who were organizing what 20 years later would lead to the successful organizing of clerical workers at

Harvard.

In the early seventies, Ann volunteered in the McGovern campaign. After his Massachusetts primary win, she helped to set up his organization in Rhode Island. By then she was hooked on Democratic party politics and went on to work for McGovern in the New Jersey and New York primaries and, during the election, in Minnesota. McGovern won Ann's district in Minnesota with the largest plurality of votes anywhere outside of Massachusetts. She began to realize both that she had real organizational abilities and that politics offered a means of working for social change.

After returning to Massachusetts, Ann worked for the Legislative Council for Older Americans, a lobbying and advocacy group which was developing a New England-wide network of senior citizens. Ann wrote the organization's newsletter and helped lobby for a guaranteed minimum income bill to supplement Federal SSI.

When Michael Dukakis became governor, Ann went to work for the state Energy Policy Office, where she eventually became the director of urban residential programs. When Dukakis lost the next election to Ed King, many staffers in the energy office were fired. Now 30, disheartened by politics and still in love with literature, Ann decided it was time to go back to school, and enrolled in the PhD program in English Literature at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

After finishing her coursework, Ann taught part time at UMass and at Tufts, then directed the Academic Support Center at Tufts for a year before joining the faculty of Assumption College, where she has been teaching courses on African American women writers, film, and media analysis for the past 10 years.

Ann and a friend have recently developed a new course at Assumption called Social Responsibility and Literature – part of a program in community service learning. Students in the program perform twenty to twenty-five hours of community service, and relate their work to literature on social problems such as Dorothy Allison's Bastard Out of Carolina and Alex Kotlowitz's, There Are No Children Here.

For the past five years, Ann has also taught in a Dorchester District Court-sponsored program called "Changing Lives through Literature," held at UMass-Boston, in which young men and women on probation are sentenced to take a class team-taught by a professor, a judge, and a probation officer. The course offers them a chance to read, reflect on, discuss, and write about the forces that have shaped their lives, especially domestic violence and substance abuse.

As a member of the IMB Fund for the last four years, Ann has been instrumental in developing and publishing our newsletter. She also lends her many talents to fundraising, and participates in grantmaking in support of mental health and human rights work in many parts of the world. She is also determined to see that one day the Fund and its activities receive the media attention they deserve. •

#### Reflections on an Experience in GUATEMALA continued from page 2

now tainted with distrust and fear: and help to conquer the sense of impotence that remains endemic in many sectors of society. To serve this purpose, history must be returned to the people in a form that they can understand and assimilate, which they feel truly reflects and explains their experience.

In a context such as Guatemala, a restorative history should consider at least four elements: First, it should provide elements that help explain the actual state of affairs. It should concern itself with locating the wounds and identifying the roots of distrust and

Second, it should provide a more global explanation that can break the isolation of individual or local experience. This history must respect the integrity of the testimonies as given, while going beyond personal or local explanations to place these in the context of national strategies and interests that may not have been immediately apparent, yet without minimizing the enormous destructive role that local

and interpersonal conflicts played. It must explore the complex question of levels and types of responsibility and complicity, without falling into the simplistic notion that we are all responsible.

Third, it should help to de-criminalize the victims. State sponsored terror sought to entrench the idea that those who suffered the assaults were guilty of some crime or sin – that if they hadn't "been involved in something," this would not have happened, that their "offense" justified their physical elimination. This self-serving message attempts to make criminals of the victims, while denying the criminality of the perpetrators. It steals the dignity of those who perished, and immobilizes those who survived.

Lastly, the history I speak of should recognize people's role as historical agents, whether through making conscious decisions to participate, or not, in the social struggles of the day or in the armed conflict itself, or through finding ways to overcome the lifethreatening situations they faced. In this context, it is important to go beyond the evolving conventions -

that we were manipulated or tricked, or that this simply befell us. To fail to explore further is to remain impotent, and to limit our potential to imagine and create a different future for the country. (Excerpted from a longer presentation; translation and editing by Silvina Moncho and Ben Achtenberg.)

Marcie Mersky has lived and worked among Guatemalans for more than two decades. Her recent work has focused on efforts to understand and make public the massive violations of human rights that characterized Guatemala's 36-year war. She worked as part of the initial team that coordinated the Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory, then later served as the general coordinator for the 12-volume final report, Memory of Silence, produced by the UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification. She currently works as a consultant for the United Nations Office for Project Services in Guatemala.

#### **CALENDAR**

#### COMING JUNE 23rd: MARTÍN-BARÓ FUND HOSTS READING by Activist/Poet Renny Golden

"Just as a theology of liberation exists, so too exists a poetry of liberation, inspired by that theology, which has recently emerged in the two Americas. And one of the best representatives of this poetry is Renny Golden."

— Ernesto Cardenal, poet and former Nicaraguan Minister of Culture

On Friday, June 23rd, the Fund will have the honor of presenting activist and poet Renny Golden, reading from her new collection of poetry, The Hour of the Furnaces. In his forward to this book, Dan Berrigan writes: "Her poetry is an act of compassion...The nuns, the cotton pickers, the Jesuits, the madres, the catechists – their memories, their stories must somehow, against all odds, reach us."

Golden has traveled and worked extensively in El Salvador and Guatemala. "I have learned," she says, "that insurgent hope, even in the midst of hideous repression, is a weapon that the powerful always underestimate." She is also a Professor of Criminology at Northeastern Illinois University, and has published widely on criminology, sociology, and social justice.

The reading is being co-sponsored by Oxfam America and Grassroots International. Sales of *The Hour of the Furnaces* at the reading will benefit the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights. For information about the time and location, please call Lisa Jackson at 617.971.0806 or e-mail her at <ldri@ix.netcom.com>. •

#### RECENT EVENTS

### Commemorative Event Honors Father Roy Bourgeois

by Ann Murphy



ach year the Fund honors a person whose work carries on the spirit of Ignacio Martín-Baró. This year's Commemorative Event was of particular importance, since it marked the tenth anniversary of Ignacio's assassination in El Salvador. We were therefore especially pleased to be able to honor Father Roy

Bourgeois, who has fought for years to shut down the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, which has trained nearly 60,000 Latin American officers, including members of the infamous Atlacatl Battalion, the very group which murdered Ignacio Martín-Baró.

Born in Louisiana in 1938, Father Roy served as a Naval officer in Vietnam, where he was wounded during an air raid and awarded the Purple Heart. In 1968 he entered the Maryknoll Missionary Order. After being ordained, he worked among the poor of Bolivia.

In 1983, dressed in military uniform, Father Roy entered Fort Benning, Georgia, in his first protest of the School of the Americas.

In 1990 he founded School of the Americas Watch, which documents the abuses of the SOA. But he is perhaps best known for organizing ever larger annual demonstrations at the School, drawing international attention to the demand that it be shut down. Since 1990, he has been sentenced to three prison terms in connection with these protests. Undaunted, he returned to the School shortly



after our event, to continue his vigil with more than 10,000 supporters. The Fund's Commemorative Event was held at Boston College this year, on October 17, 1999. In addition to Father Roy's inspiring talk, those who attended saw a film remembering Ignacio Martín-Baró, compiled by MBF Committeee members Ben Achtenberg and Laura Wald, and heard music provided by Dean Stevens. •

# School of the Americas Watch

archers wearing black shrouds and white death masks led the procession onto the grounds of Fort Benning, Georgia, home of the School of the Americas. The demonstrators also carried coffins, many of them child-sized, representing the hundreds of tortures, murders and "disappearances" linked to the School's graduates.

The first protest in 1990 drew only a handful of demonstrators. This year, there were thousands. School of the Americas Watch estimated the total at 12,000 and reported that about 4,400 risked arrest by actually going onto the military base. Sixty-five demonstrators who "crossed the line" onto the base were arrested, then released with a letter banning them from the post for three years. Twenty-three "repeat offenders" were cited for trespass.

In a letter to the Martín-Baró Fund, SOA Watch founder, Father Roy Bourgeois wrote: "This was a wonderful celebration of hope and solidarity. Ignacio was with us in a special way. We move ahead in the struggle and you give us hope."

**IGNACIO MARTÍN-BARÓ FUND WEBSITE:** Look for our new web page (www.fex.org/mb.html) which is part of the Funding Exchange website. We would welcome your suggestions about what kinds of information we should be providing via the site.

Editor: Ben Achtenberg. Contributors: Lisa Jackson, Joan Liem, Ramsay Liem, M. Brinton Lykes, Marcie Mersky, Silvina Moncho, Cathy Mooney, Ann Murphy. Letters, inquiries, contributions, etc., can be sent to: Martín-Baró Fund, Post Office Box 2122, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Checks for tax-deductible contributions must be made out to The Funding Exchange / Martín-Baró Fund. Thank you!

#### RECENT EVENTS

### Striking for Justice at Annual Bowlathon

by Ramsay Liem



he Ignacio Martin-Baro Fund's annual Bowlathon was held on February 13th at the now familiar bowler's haven, Lanes and Games, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Twelve determined and seasoned teams including several student foursomes from University of Massachusetts at Boston and Boston College rocked the pins to raise money for the Fund's grant-

making activities. As evident in the accompanying pictures, everyone had a fine time celebrating the occasional strike, grabbling handfuls of junk food, and competing for team prizes – actually, practicing "friendship first." To everyone's credit, the event raised over \$8,000 and the members of the Fund wish to express sincere appreciation to all who collected pledges and to those who pledged. The Bowlathon has become a time to enjoy ourselves and reaffirm our community of activism, but it has also been an important means to raise funds for the projects we support. Thanks again to all who participated. We invite your support throughout the year and look forward to rolling more gutter balls with you next year! •





# Spirit of "Padre Nacho" Lives on at Conference on the Social Psychology of Liberation

by Tod Sloan

he second International
Conference on the Social
Psychology of Liberation was
held in San Salvador in November,
1999, to coincide with events marking
the tenth anniversary of the murder of
the Jesuit scholars at the Universidad
Centroamericana – José Simeon
Cañas. The Martín-Baró Fund supported student attendance at this conference through a grant to the program
organizers.

Dozens of scholarly papers examining the social psychological work of Ignacio Martín-Baró were presented over several days, as well as a number of fascinating reports of action

research and solidarity work with oppressed groups. A strong consensus emerged that the work of Martín-Baró had not been forgotten. Clearly, it has been the main inspiration for literally hundreds of professors, students, and professionals who have dedicated themselves to socially-committed work in the social sciences.

Among the highlights of the conference were emotional first-hand analyses of the situation in Chiapas, and reports of struggles to bring massacres in Guatemala to light. The conference was followed by a candlelight march around the campus and an all-night vigil with speeches, music and video in honor of the martyrs

of the UCA. An estimated ten thousand students and peasants turned out for this peaceful demonstration of protest and mourning.

Tod Sloan is Associate Professor of psychology at the University of Tulsa, and a long-time supporter of the Martín-Baró Fund. His presentation at the conference affirmed the importance of psychologies of liberation, while arguing that such psychologies need to develop a critique of the unsustainable middle-class lifestyle toward which the liberation of the poor and oppressed implicitly strives.

## Project Updates: Grantee Reports

by Ben Achtenberg

Violence in Kyrgyztan – A sixmonth report recently received from one of the Martín-Baró Fund's grantees highlights the grim realities faced daily by such groups. Sezim, an NGO based in Bishkek, Kyrgyztan, focuses on the mental health needs of abused women and their children. Its programs include crisis centers offering counseling, art therapy, and support groups; 24-hour hotlines; a club for elderly women; and a discussion group on "protection of our rights."

The Fund selected Sezim for funding because their activities not only address domestic violence as a private matter, but also engage women in examining sources of violence in the wider society, including unemployment and pervasive poverty, demeaning cultural stereotypes of women, and a climate of fear and mistrust linked to police and military corruption. In pursuit of this goal, it has produced several booklets and two videos, has launched a petition campaign seeking protective legislation, and in a country where elections are a new phenomenon, has organized seminars to train both new voters and election monitors

Nancy Gregory, a Peace Corps Volunteer working with Sezim, writes that, in the short time since the Fund made its grant: "The economy in the country is suffering badly, and the exchange rate is steadily climbing. Unemployment is high and salaries, for the few being paid, are extremely low." Under threat from radical Muslims based in Uzbekistan, she reports, already excessive taxes have been increased to support a Kyrgyz military buildup. In the midst of this turmoil, the group's core funding has been cut, and it has become totally reliant on its MBF grant of less than \$7,000.

Rather than use these funds to support four personnel as originally intended, the group has made a collective decision to allocate a portion of the MBF funds for emergency food relief for their clients, and to share the remaining money equally among its eleven staff members – at the rate of only \$18 per month for each woman.

Gregory writes, "They cannot with a clear conscience give four people salaries when others are in need. This situation is carried out in all family structures – if one person has a salary, that salary is shared by all members of the extended family. That is the only way many Kyrgyz people are able to exist." The MBF Committee hopes that this accommodation to worsening economic conditions will enable to Sezim to survive its current crisis and continue to pursue its objectives.

nternational Conference Addresses "The Challenge of Promoting the Haitian Cause in the Dominican Republic." - In November, 1999, the Quebec Committee for the Recognition of the Rights of Haitian Workers in the Dominican Republic hosted participants from the United States, Canada, the Caribbean and elsewhere. Conference attendees took the opportunity to denounce the increasing repression which has included manhunts with dogs, arbitrary deportations, physical intimidation, and other forms of retaliation against Haitians who resist the conditions they are forced to work under. The Quebec Committee estimates that a half million Haitians currently living in the Dominican Republic lack legal status, and are subject to conditions of virtual forced labor, primarily in the "zaffra," or sugar cane harvest. The group has also launched a solidarity action to pressure the Dominican government to grant the

legal status which would give these stateless people access to healthcare, education, and other rights of citizens

The Martín-Baró Fund's 1998 grant was intended to enable this organization to investigate the working and living conditions of Haitian workers. Solicited by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, this investigation sought to document human rights violations, which profoundly impact the mental and physical health of this population. It also outlined proposals for ways to address the situation.

Last year we directly funded one of the groups with which the Committee works, the Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitiana. Created by Haitian women who labor on Dominican sugar plantations, this group has struggled not only to improve working conditions, but also to reclaim the identity and human dignity of the cane workers.. The Fund's grant supports continuation of the only health services available to these workers, along with workshops designed to affirm cultural identity, promote self esteem, and strengthen the voice of workers as a community.

The Quebec Committee's President, Joseph Perard, writes that "without any status as citizens, and with no government willing to take responsibility for this group, these people will continue to live in a situation of modern-day slavery, a condition that will leave emotional and psychic scars for many generations to come." •

# South African Commemoration Focuses on Martín-Baró's Psychology of Liberation

By Catherine M. Mooney

n November 4, 1999, Martín-Baró Fund Committee members Brinton Lykes and Cathy Mooney hosted a commemoration of the life of Ignacio Martín-Baró and discussed the mission of the Fund at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), in Johannesburg. The presentation began with the moving video on Ignacio's life made for the Fund's fall Commemorative Event in Boston.

South Africans attending the event included a variety of academics, researchers, undergraduate and graduate students from Wits and other universities, as well as community and human rights activists. The relevance of Martín-Baró's psychology of liberation in the South African context formed the nucleus of the discussion.

Although news reports about South Africa often refer to the "fall of apartheid" and the dramatic political transformation that finally lifted laws discriminating against the majority black population and other peoples of color, it is truer to speak of the "falling of apartheid." The vestiges of that oppressive and exclusionary regime are still present in virtually all sectors of South African society. Even today, a mere 17% of the population receives about 70% of the income. The formidable physical and psychological violence that people have suffered over the past decades in South Africa is still a palpable reality. Many people have vivid memories of physical torture, the disappearances of loved ones, and the psychological terror fomented by the white Nationalist Party police state.

While western-style individualisti-

cally-oriented psychotherapy has its place in helping some to heal the wounds consequent upon state-sponsored violence and oppression, it is inadequate to address the pain inflicted on many individuals - and entire communities – in this culturally diverse country. Many of the cultures of South Africa possess a stronger notion of community solidarity than is the case in western industrialized countries. And across these diverse cultures, there is a need for community healing as people try to forge a new South Africa. Martín-Baró's psychology of liberation is a welcome guide for the growing number of community-led grassroots projects aimed at healing the wounds of apartheid and creating a non-racial and inclusive society. •

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