

**Comprehensive Reparation:
Facing the Damage of State Political Repression
Psychosocial Support: A Collective Construction**

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*“Social psychology either works for the integral liberation of humanity, or it is not social psychology. That is how I understand it.”*¹ **Bishop Emeritus Samuel Ruíz, 2008**

To Begin

I have developed this lecture considering three intersecting themes: the relationship between psychology and human rights, the lessons I have learned from victims, and the comparative elements that I have found in the sociopolitical strategy of Colombia and present-day Mexico.

It is fundamental for all social disciplines and, in particular, for those of us who are psychologists working in contexts of sociopolitical violence to understand the situation and, in particular, the configuration of States in which collective damage is developed, which is why I want to outline some of the characteristics of terrorist States.

I. About the Context

1. Human rights violations are a systematic practice that is sustained by impunity, by denying justice, and/or by creating a legal framework that allows for crimes to be committed at no cost. That which is illegal is legalized, and spaces for dialogue or negotiation are closed or restricted.
2. In these States, a paramilitary project is developed, which not only entails State-coordinated military action, but also the creation of an economic, political, and social structure whose primary objective is to control the territory and, by extension, the population.
3. It involves civilians in the support of military jobs, either as informants or through co-optation strategies, among others.
4. The media plays a fundamental role, as it legitimizes the rhetoric of institutional power; the State is built on lies, manipulation, and confusion.
5. The State seeks to impose its ideology through terror, which entails developing an ideological strategy of psychological war.

¹ Ruiz García, S. (2008, 18 noviembre). *Saludo al San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas*. Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz. Available at: www.justiciaypazcolombia.com/saludo-al-san-cristobal-de-las-casas-chiapas/

In order to deal with the damage that repressive policies create and the implications of reparation processes, it is necessary to understand what the damage is that we are referring to and the motives behind it. First, there is intentionality for acts of repression and human rights violation that responds to the economic, political, and ideological interests of specific actors with specific powers. This will not be the focus of the analysis; however, it is fundamental to understand that acts of political repression are intentional acts committed by the State or other related groups (such as drug-traffickers and/or paramilitary members), and that the State is responsible for these violations—whether by action, omission, or acquiescence—as it is legally and politically responsible for safeguarding the welfare of its citizens.

It is a fact that authoritarian States use different mechanisms of repression, which are carefully designed and selected to fulfill its objectives; massacres, forced displacements, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, and torture are some of them. All of these mechanisms are characterized as representing a threat to human dignity and to the individual and group projects that fight for fair living conditions.

William Schütz, a sociology researcher, points out that ordinary repression and State terrorism represent a financial means—which may or may not be direct—through which a dominant minority can appropriate wealth, and that “the reasons why an elite who is in power decides to give preference to certain forms of terror over others has to do with the political psychology of State terrorism.”

Acts of political violence, repression, and dirty war are used for controlling or defeating whomever the State declares to be an enemy, and they have various objectives, such as having control and normalizing the abuse of State power. This explains why the strategies are adapted and modified according to actors’ interests. Accordingly, we can see that some, while apparently vague, are directed against people or organizations that defend and fight for their human rights and decent living conditions, but they can also be aimed at implementing social control over the general population to cause fear and paralysis and even to neutralize acts of solidarity.

As Ignacio Martín-Baró states: “Under the shadow of impunity, States develop an entire strategy, which is both military and psychological, through which they seek to dominate the population through *terrorizing repression*, that is, through the visible execution of cruel acts that unleash a massive and uncontrollable fear among the population in which it is no longer about fully paralyzing civilians, but about inhibiting their potential rebellion or, at least, impeding their effective support of the enemy”.² To this effect, Elizabeth Lira

² Martín-Baró, I., I. (2019, 11 julio). *Political Violence and War as Causes of Psychosocial Trauma in El Salvador*. Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial: Mexico. Available at: www.alunapsicosocial.org/single-post/2019/05/28/political-violence-and-war-as-causes-of-psychosocial-trauma-in-el-salvador

states that, ultimately, repressive violence indicates not only the annihilation of the most active opposition but also the progressive subjugation of the population as a whole through the internalization of vital threats in such a way that self-regulation is produced, which is learned from desirable social conduct.

The military objective entails not only armed action but also all dimensions of the meaning of cultural, ethical, psychological, and social life. These acts of repression and terror are systematic incidents that are caused by a comprehensive strategy and aim to create psychosocial impacts on the population—by being systematic, lasting, and collective, they leave behind physical, psychological, and social marks.

II. The Witness Victim and Historical Subject

Whom are we referring to when speaking about victims? Today, the very concept of victim tends to be questioned, fearing that using it minimizes, stigmatizes, or even victimizes the individual. However, to erase it is to take away its association with legal and political spheres, and therefore, this can carry a risk of losing its association with the power that is exercised over an individual or group. I believe it is necessary to speak about the victim, to name it: the person or group that was offended by a specific actor, a person whose essential rights have been undermined. This leads to the recognition that there is an offender, that a relationship that uses unequal force exists—as much economically as legally and politically and in the military—, providing evidence of some groups' asymmetry, which has an enormous weight when compared to others.

We can assert that all victims form coping mechanisms, that is, they face situations of pain and suffering in different ways according to their conditions and possibilities; however, not all victims become empowered on their own, as often they cannot or decide not to. Conversely, speaking of victims does not mean speaking of victimization—this refers to when there is a tendency to see the person as being passive and even to sectors of society that look down on victims and put them in a place of vulnerability, of being “poor things.” We cannot, however, deny that victims can *be in conditions of vulnerability* (which is necessary for recognizing and accepting to be able to cope), but this does not mean that they *are vulnerable people* and incapable of facing the situations that have affected them. What we can state is that being a subject of rights is a decision: some people opt to demand, to transform, which requires an active stance and a form of empowerment to demand justice, truth, and better living conditions.

III. What Collective Damage?

Before going further in depth about collective damage, it is necessary to state that human rights violations should be considered a psychosocial trauma because they are carried out in a context in which victims are completely defenseless—they experience pain, fear, and helplessness as a result of the aggression against them and because their lives are

at stake. Thus, these are experiences of extreme stress that involve a threat to physical, psychological, and ideological integrity.

It is important to point out that the impacts of repression tend to create a ripple effect that spreads and is established from a dialectical relationship between that which is personal, that which is related to family, that which is collective, and—while more vaguely—that which is societal. Therefore, differentiating between personal damage and collective damage would not be possible; however, methodologically, I will illustrate aspects that are more related to collective dynamics.

Effects brought about by human rights violations vary depending on age, gender, social class, and even the capacity to face such a situation. Moreover, we find generational effects—which pass down patterns and history, often of silence—that give us an explanation about our place in these struggles. People, groups, and communities react according to the magnitude of the event, the degree of exposure to it, their history, and the available support systems. This does not mean to say that the effects can be worse; they are neither less painful nor more painful, but rather they are different.

I want to revisit an aspect that, in my opinion, deals structurally with both the effects and the ways of confronting them, and it is related to social class. It is about understanding that socioeconomic conditions demonstrate fundamental differences in at least three ways. First, repression, terror, and the imposed model are aimed at the lower and lower-middle economic classes in the majority of cases; that is, the majority of the victims of Colombia and Mexico are indigenous people, rural people (or *campesinos*), Afro-descendants, and marginalized sectors that already have difficult living conditions and whose vulnerability increases when their rights are undermined. The second element deals with it not being the same to face a traumatic event of a human rights violation when one has the resources to do so as compared to when one does not have these resources. The third is to provide evidence that sociopolitical violence also influences the ways the impact is confronted. For example, there is a social tendency to reject those who are family members of disappeared people, which, consequently, creates isolation and stigmatization as well as a sense of solidarity among the families of those who have been abducted. This influences the mechanisms of family and collective support, which are different in the two cases, not only as a result of fears and personal perceptions but also because of the dominating power's politics, as noted by Martín-Baró.

From the framework mentioned above, I will address some of the most significant **collective impacts** that I have detected during my experience in Colombia as well as in recent years in Mexico.

Social Relations

One of the cross-effects is the change in human relationships and the impact on them, from the most personal to the most collective. This entails the formation of distrust; there is a rupture in bonds and in the social fabric and a deconfiguration of the references that have been personally, collectively, and socially created. In the words of Martín-Baró, in the undermining of social relations—which is the framework with which we historically construct ourselves as individuals and as a human community—the deterioration of social coexistence, whether or not it surfaces in individual disorders, is already, in itself, a severe social disorder, a deterioration of our collective capacity to work and love, to state our particular identity, to express our personal and communitarian word in the history of peoples.

Social polarization is part of this damage to social relations, and it entails groups, collectives, and communities that had gone through a process of cohesion and project-building ending up internally divided into camps and even considering each other as enemies as a result of repressive acts. Martín-Baró points out that polarization is a process of extremization and of resignifying the existing attitudes that distance some groups from others. One of the most evident impacts is “mutual distrust—social relations become extremely difficult: exchanges tend to be limited to the circles of people one knows or remain in superficial and stereotyped forms when dealing with strangers, thus impoverishing the reach and depth of social life.

On Fear

Fear is one of the most complex feelings experienced in contexts of political violence; while it is a positive emotion, given that it prevents and alerts, it can also be quite negative because it tends to paralyze and isolate people. In cases of repression, fear initially tends to be produced by the very act of violation—for example, at the time of torture, in a paramilitary raid of a community, or with the disappearance of a family member—but it generally spreads and gradually deepens into all spheres of life. This is due to the impunity and persecution that victims suffer during the process of their pursuit of justice, which become additional acts of torture for victims, their family members, and the organization, given that they are acts that, once again, put their lives at risk.

Fear creates confusion in society, brings about questioning of the constructed references, and generates a sensation of vulnerability, a lack of protection, and individual and collective helplessness; it can even create the perception that is impossible to find a way out. Additionally, it produces emotional blockage and political confusion, which explains how one might be led to think that no matter what we do, everything is going to remain the same, which creates a deep sense of frustration.

For Luis Ibacache, fear is a precondition and a result of political repression and, at the same time, can be both a mean and an end. A perpetual life-threatening situation, the absence of stable personal, group, institutional, and social parameters, growing dissolution of the limits between safety and danger, between that which is prohibited and that which is allowed, and between that which is real and that which is possible, and the difficulty of putting sensations of threat or prosecution to the test of reality cause a widespread experience of terror and uncertainty.

Fear is found in all dimensions of daily life and is related to the impossibility of managing uncertainty, an act that causes people to experience a feeling of vulnerability and helplessness that makes them less self-confident and makes them feel they have fewer prospects for their future. They experience a fear of making demands, a fear of being, a fear of being part of the family, of being part of the organization; they feel a constant fear of what could happen to loved ones. Thus, a type of fragmented identity or fragmented social construction is created; the collective being is fragmented.

The spreading of fear can lead to individual manifestations being relived in the collective. For example, in an indigenous community where members of the army raped a woman, she was not the only one who suffered from sleeping disturbances and nightmares of persecution; the majority of men and women also had the same experience. These impacts of fear also create tiredness, exhaustion, and irritability, which, over time, can bring about psychosomatic disorders and even cause a severe collective crisis.

Fear and polarization lead to ruptures and damage in the social fabric. They bring about the deterioration of bonds and loss of trust. They affect both individual and collective identity, as it is difficult to believe in what has been and in what is wanted after being exposed to fear and polarization; there can be doubts about what has been believed, about the collective references that gave life meaning.

Stigmatization and Social Guilt

The stigmatization of victims, carried out both by the classes of power and by society in general, occasionally causes victims and their family members to bear a hefty moral weight in addition to the pain and fear they live with, which creates insecurity in their lives. To stigmatize victims is to put a label on them that engenders discrimination against them, that discredits their means and isolates them from their context. An example is the case of the disappeared whom are given a stigma of either guerrillas or criminals and delinquents, depending on the context.

This stigmatization is transferred to their family members, who are labeled as the wife of the guerrilla or the father of the criminal, which makes them feel singled out and isolated

in addition to creating a constant feeling of vulnerability. This stigma can also be an element of risk to their lives, as they are people that the State identifies as undesirable for their system.

Conversely, discourses constructed from a place of power permeate the social imaginary, blaming society for the acts of violence with the idea that “we are all responsible,” which is particularly irresponsible; citizens’ participation in the conflict is fundamentally different (they did not create the strategies of terror). For example, asking how one can participate in finding a solution for the violence is one thing, but assuming that we are all responsible for the violent acts is another, as it not only creates social guilt that does not correspond to the acts but also, with this discourse, the State’s evasion of responsibility is accepted.

As we know, the feeling of guilt tends to be revived in borderline situations and very violent situations. This can be the case of family members of disappeared people who can feel guilty because they did not do enough or have not done enough to find their family member. In the case of women who have been raped, family members can feel guilty for not having done enough to avoid the rape, despite not having had the possibility to do more than what they did.

Thus, the feeling of guilt leads one to carry a tremendous moral debt: what we still have not paid, what we could not do, what we would have done and did not do. It is living with a debt—with fear of death and also of life. Concerning this, Elizabeth Lira points out that one of the core aspects of torture is the feeling of guilt, which comes from the repercussions experienced by the person who is being tortured that go beyond his or her alleged participation in this reality being forced and involuntary. Torturers aim to cause the victim to have feelings of guilt with the objective of splitting the person in two: “the person who resists and the person who collaborates in his or her own destruction and in that of his or her loved ones”.

While there is guilt that is experienced personally, it also tends to be reproduced within the collective, as it does not only surface in direct victims but is also projected onto their different relationships. Once guilt and fear have been planted, they continue to work, and—given the existence of conservative cultures and ideologies—instead of helping to soften or repair the damage, they spread it (considering the religious ideas of Catholic conservatism that say that all conflict goes against the commandments of love, Christian acceptance, and purity). This situation can even start to create doubts, not only about the legitimacy of the acts but also about the legitimacy of the communities’ struggle itself.

Stigmatization and polarization are related to social guilt, which comes from individuals

in the community or society who attribute their fear of something happening to them to the victims and organizations that demand justice because of the denouncement they have made. The fear, anger, and risk that they can go through are not attributed to the offender, but instead, they are often placed on the victims themselves, whom they blame and single out, which is why they even ask them to remain silent so that their scandal does not reach others.

Lies, Confusion, and Silence

To be able to legitimize acts of repression and avoid reactions of defense and demands, those in power also resort to lies and create social confusion. Lies, as Martín-Baró says, “try to create an official version of the events, an ‘official story’ that ignores crucial aspects of reality, distorts others, and even falsifies or invents others. [...] The public expression of reality, the denouncement of human rights violations, and, above all, the debunking of the official story, of the institutionalized lie, are considered ‘subversive’ activities—and actually, they are, as they subvert the order of the established lie.”³

The institutionally created lie creates a great deal of uncertainty and unease among victims. First, because hiding the truth compromises their psychological processes of reference, as they are facing the social power of reality and a small but profound truth. Victims may ask, “if they have all the power and I do not, and there are people who believe that this did not happen to me, how do I make people believe that those who abused me were part of the military?” Conversely, there is the social weight that rebukes and questions a story that is told that some want to make implausible, as if it did not exist. Ultimately, the social lie is like living in the confusion of an unreal order. In the face of the State’s denial of the disappearances of their children, some parents might say, “Do you think we can invent that we gave birth to our children? They even have the nerve to put our existence into doubt.”

Several truths are at play in these processes: the official truth (that is sustained by the reasoning of the State and advanced by the interests of the establishment), a truth of the media (that generally sustains and supports the dominating power’s ideology, as Martín-Baró said), a procedural truth (that falls short of considering or doing justice to the barbarities committed against the victims), and, finally, the truth of the victims (the historical truth, which has asymmetric power when facing the other truths).

This entire process of fear, lies, and stigmatization leads to victims’ lives being permeated by many silences. Families spend time together on a daily basis often without touching the topic of the pain or fear, although they all know the deep wound that each

³ Martín-Baró, I., I. (2019, 11 julio). *Political Violence and War as Causes of Psychosocial Trauma in El Salvador*. Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial: Mexico. Available at: www.alunapsicosocial.org/single-post/2019/05/28/political-violence-and-war-as-causes-of-psychosocial-trauma-in-el-salvador

of them carries. In an Afro-descendent community, for example, people can spend nights in the dark thinking that paramilitary members will enter again at any moment; mothers of disappeared children can even spend years wondering, "Is it better to file a report so that my son shows up or can they kill him if I speak up?"

For doctors Diana R. Kordon and Lucila Edelman, a phenomenon of social silencing is established in the repressive processes in which the common denominator is panic, and silence reinforces panic; this is why horrific things happen while everything appears to continue to be the same. This is expressed in some cases in which there is an assumption that silence is one of the conditions for personal survival, and in others, in which silence is the condition for the survival of the disappeared person.

The ongoing process of stigmatization, depressive states, fear, and lies have made significant changes in the lives of communities and collectives: by focusing on their activities and life projects, they see a need to put their prospects on the pursuit of justice, which is why they neglect their emotional, political, and ideological motivations. From filing the report to pursuing justice, the majority of the time, they devote their activities to investigation procedures for their case, which is why, often, they are either capable of strengthening their processes, their fights, and their search for better living conditions or they restrict themselves to only pursuing justice.

All of the above involves a change in the life project, which is associated with a variety of significant losses: financial losses, the loss of freedom (being confined to their house), the alteration of all their relationships, and the loss of trust in themselves, in their neighbors, in the organization, and even in their family. Likewise, the loss of the relationship that they had built with their community and the loss of their jobs leads to a derangement of their identities and makes them incapable of clearly visualizing their futures, provided that it causes a great deal of anxiety and confusion between what is wanted and what can be done.

Effects of Impunity

Revisiting the words of Father Javier Giraldo, we could say that the most important consequence in the political order of impunity is the society's conditioning to face the future, as this future is fundamentally modeled according to the principles, the ideology, and the model of social order that offenders desire. This phenomenon leaves psychological effects on individuals and society that can be more traumatizing than the violent acts that victims have suffered in themselves.

By denying that the guilty be punished as demanded by victims and their family members, there is an aim to create a process of frustration, which is why, occasionally,

victims have the sensation that there is nothing more to do—that the reality imposed by the offender must be accepted. With this, a process of helplessness and hopelessness is created, as offenders are left unpunished; if those in power laugh at their injustices, if persecutors delight in the lies, then resisting and continuing to fight for ideals is a utopia, while getting used to how things are is a type of survival.

To this effect, Andréu-Guzmán states that impunity reminds the people that their very destinies are governed by those in power. It also reminds them that their destinies are imposed upon them by persecutors, who simultaneously threaten them with the return of the horrors from the past if this boundary is exceeded. In this same way, impunity aims for the crimes committed by offenders to be forgotten. “If we forget what we have gone through we will have the tendency to repeat it. And what better for the offender than to repeat before reparation, given that reparation would imply a legal and moral restitution. Restoring would imply leaving an effective social sanction in the historical memory.”⁴

IV. Facing the Damage: Reconstruction and Hope

As we said at the beginning, victims have coping mechanisms, in spite of their pain and fear, and, in many cases, they grow and are empowered by their experience, and by having an active stance toward their trauma, they can participate in pursuing truth and justice.

On an emotional level, being able to share one’s experiences with other women, other displaced people, or other family members and having backing from members of their organization and other organizations is very important for feeling safe and supported; it allows them to discover other spaces and settings, which expands their worldview in order to strengthen the fight for their rights.

The meaning that victims give to their traumatic experience while pursuing justice, especially that of preventing the same thing from happening to other people, has allowed them to give meaning to their life. The resignification of pain occurs within solidarity—when they are no longer only fighting for their case but also for those of other people who have had the same experience, when they help other women, other displaced people, or other family members of disappeared people, they can give meaning to their lives. What’s more, they build hope that, with their contribution, the acts that they experienced will not be repeated.

Finally, to be a witness or a victim of the horror of crimes against humanity is to have the

⁴ Correa, C. y Rueda, D. (2002). *La barbarie irracional de la guerra: el desplazamiento*. En M. N. Bello, E. Martín Cardinal y F. J. Arias. *Efectos psicosociales y culturales del desplazamiento* (pp. 63-82). Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia- Fundación Dos Mundos y Corporación Avre.

possibility to claim a new, dignified, and just life; because it is the people who hold the memory of the horror, of the physical experience, of the emotion, and of the ideology who travel paths of transformation from the pain, the experience, and the collective reconstruction. The victims are those who bear witness, who demonstrate and remind us of what is happening in the country; they are who carry the truth about a terrorized country along with the possibility of hope in their memory and their history.

On the Psychosocial Approach

In the face of this panorama, which is sometimes overwhelming, many of us, as individuals and collectives, have been working in a variety of ways and with different focuses to create methodologies and practices that contribute to working through and overcoming the impacts that these types of economic and political systems have been leaving behind. Today, I am sharing some keys that I have observed from where and how I have been working, having learned from both good decisions and mistakes. Working from the psychosocial perspective has allowed me to approach cases of human rights violations, which has given me the chance to recognize the effects they have on victims as well as the different ways there are to face these types of situations. At the same time, it has allowed me to understand offenders' direct responsibility and the routes for demanding and resisting that exist in a particular cultural, political, economic, religious, and social context.

For me, the central objectives of psychosocial support are not only to mitigate damage and face the consequences (which are necessary issues) but to also contribute to:

- Building processes that strengthen both individual and collective coping mechanisms of the individuals, groups, and organizations that have been victims of authoritarian States and/or political and social violence.
- Resignifying victims' experiences so that they reshape their daily lives and transform their pain into strength for their struggles, so they can continue with their pursuits and life projects and strengthen their resistance processes in the face of the dominating power.
- Reconstructing the historical memory as to not accept horror as a way of life, as to not feed into the imposition of the dominating ideology and to not be blind to the ignominy of the capital's power.

However, adding to this, psychosocial support should, fundamentally, be part of consolidating the collective ideology to transcend the causes that gave rise to political violence and to continue to seek alternatives for transforming the society that change conditions of oppression, inequality, and discrimination.

If political violence and repression seek to have an impact on individuals, families, collectives, and societies, from a psychosocial perspective, we have the task of contributing to all of these areas from a comprehensive vision that not only includes different disciplines, but also incorporates fundamentally different lessons and knowledge from professionals and, as a priority, from the experiences of the victims who are committed to the people. As Martín-Baró said, this is why this perspective, which comes from liberation psychology, considers a vital political and ethical dimension and cannot be neutral.

A. With whom?

Providing support for people and processes in violent political contexts involves making decisions that transcend labor-oriented logic, break schemes, make us confront our history, and allow us—if we choose—to construct using other paths and outlets from an unwavering ethical, ideological, and political stance. While there are different victims in political violence and conflicts, I have chosen to work with those who have left political repression, as they are who, by being stigmatized and isolated, have fewer possibilities for solidarity; they are who bear witness, demonstrate, and remind us of what is happening in the country; they are who carry the truth of a terrorized country in their memory and history and who also carry the possibility of hope.

It is also necessary to say that those who have been victims of rape represent, in the context of violence, the possibility of being subjects of rights. We should always remember that all victims produce coping mechanisms; that is, they face situations of pain and suffering in different ways (according to their conditions and possibilities). However, not all victims are empowered on their own because, often, they cannot or they decide not to do so. Victims can *be in conditions of vulnerability* (which is necessary to recognize and accept in order to confront it), but this does not mean that *they are* vulnerable people who are incapable of facing the situations that have affected them.

What we can indeed state is that being a subject of rights is a decision. In many cases, victims grow and are empowered from their experience, and by taking on an active stance toward the trauma, they opt to demand and transform, which brings about an active stance and a form of empowerment for demanding justice, truth, reparation, and better living conditions. The meaning that victims give to their traumatic experiences while pursuing justice, especially that of preventing the same from happening to other people, has allowed them to give meaning to their lives. The resignification of pain occurs when they transcend into solidarity—when they no longer only fight for their case, but also for those of other people who have experienced the same. When they help other women, other displaced people, or other family members of disappeared people, they

can give meaning to their lives. What's more, they create hope that, with their contribution, acts like the ones they experienced will not be repeated.

B. How is it done?

It involves, to a minimal extent, recovering experiences—the ability to place oneself in the situation and construct a dialogue of knowledge to, from there, go about constructing endeavors such as:

1. Strengthening people and organizations: Our work should contribute to visualizing the internal dynamics created in collectives and resulting from repressive acts in order to minimize tensions, create spaces for dialogue and/or analysis of the reality that break the silence, fear, and frustration so that victims can strengthen their ideology, clarify their objectives, and adjust methodologies and conditions in a way that is realistic and agrees with the context of violence. This will allow them to continue their work and projects in the midst of the violence that surrounds them. We must remember that political and spiritual ideas provide people and collectives, especially social activists, with a sense of purpose. This is why strengthening one's ideology leads to strengthening one's conscience; having clarity about the interests that one defends and the reasons for doing so is fundamental because it allows us to believe in what we are and in what we do.

2. Comprehension, the meaning of political repression: We should contribute to the vision and interpretation that exist about acts of violence and repression; this allows for—as Carlos Beristain expresses—giving meaning to the experience and—in my opinion—locating the place that is taken up in this scenario of violence, which allows for evaluating and establishing how to continue and how to decide to continue. This involves, as a minimum, understanding the acts of repression (*what happened*), who did it (mapping out actors), and *why* it happened (intentions and interests supported by analytical tools for the circumstances that allow for finding a way out of the confusion).

3. Accepting the personal, family, and collective impact: It is equally important to contribute to the identification, acceptance, and comprehension of the personal and collective impacts that are experienced due to the aggression that has been suffered. On many occasions, we can find that individuals and/or groups have mechanisms of denial, avoidance, and escape, as the pain and fear felt about the experience they have been through can minimize their coping or cause them to use some forms of coping that are negative due to the way they affect their lives. Thus, we can contribute to strengthening the positive coping mechanisms that victims already have and visualize others that allow victims to make the best decisions according to the situation and to continue developing their life projects.

4. Facing fear: It is necessary to contribute to the identification of fears in order to adjust the subjectivity of the experience to the external conditions, which can create risks that threaten physical and psychological integrity. Sometimes there is a tendency to minimize the risk or measures are toughened due to an exaggerated fear, which can cause self-isolation. Other times, the risk can be denied out of a fear of assuming responsibility and the decision that this involves. Developing a knowledge of the fear and taking an active stance, as Carlos Beristain expresses, must be part of working to face the fear. These actions are related to the ability to regain control and to the possibilities for making decisions. Working on risk assessment, strategy building, and protective measures that provide tools for strengthening organizations' security measures process is also part of facing fear; this should be established by assessing the particular implications and conditions of collectives and specific contexts.

5. Strengthening bonds and developing grieving processes: If there is something that repression breaks, it is the bonds with others, the relationship with the land, and relationships with projects. This is why contributing to the identification of losses will allow for seeing what has been broken in order to reconstruct it and to start to resignify the pain in the search for alternatives, projects, and/or damage reparation. Creating spaces for sharing experiences—from the most personal and family-related experiences to collective experiences—is what will provide opportunities for strengthening and/or creating new bonds. This is why visualizing collective projects and new connections with those who have had the same experience or with those who stand in solidarity with victims allows for building the bases of the subjective and objective certainties that are necessary for resistance. Being able to identify with people and collectives lets us understand what has happened to us, learn how other people have dealt with it, and create protection from the feelings of defenselessness and meaningfulness. Because of all this, ties of affection and solidarity are indispensable, as they allow for a better way of anticipating, facing, and integrating the psychosocial impacts produced by political violence.

6. Demanding human rights: truth, justice, memory, and reparation: Offering knowledge and mechanisms to demand human rights, as tools and not as an end in themselves, contributes to victims being able to demand their human rights and seek respect for their dignity. In the fight against impunity, it is essential to heal the wounds of individuals, but it is also necessary to heal the wounds of the entire society. This involves exposing the events that had been buried by official lies to the light and this is only possible in the pursuit of justice, recovery, truth, historical memory, and comprehensive reparation as part of a social, political, and legal strategy that helps create a political culture based on justice, dignity, and non-repetition conditions. For this, it is necessary to use several institutional legal mechanisms in addition to continuing to

create other alternative mechanisms, as justice, truth, and our memory are not included in the solutions of those who have perpetrated the crimes—this is why the collective construction of symbolic acts, like the *escraches* or peoples' tribunals, is what gives meaning to a people's self-determination and reminds us, time and again, that there is hope for our struggles and ideals and that we are right to pursue them.

From the psychosocial perspective, there is a great challenge in this logic, which is to strengthen the documentation processes of acts of human rights violations, including offenders' strategies and interests, in order to be able to refute and delegitimize everything that the dominating power asserts, generally through the State. At the same time, this not only contributes to delegitimizing the stigmatization process that is socially and politically sought, but also to counteracting lies that have been constructed, thus contributing to the creation of a media strategy to break some of the channels of ideological imposition.

V. Some Considerations for Reparation

As we said before, in the fight against impunity, it is essential to heal the wounds of individuals, but it is also necessary to heal the wounds of the entire society. This involves elaborating on violent acts that have been buried by lies. The fight against impunity is only possible in the pursuit of justice, in the recovery of truth, memory, and reparation as part of a social, political, and legal strategy that helps create a political culture based on justice and non-repetition conditions in the interest of building a new society in which we can live together with dignity as human beings.

Why Is Seeking Reparation Necessary?

Because we cannot just accept that they violate our rights, that they repress us, that they kill us, and that they torture us. Because offenders' actions should at least create a political and moral cost. Because to remain silent and forgotten is to accept the offender's strategy. Because to not demand justice, truth, reparation, and non-repetition conditions is to deny our rights, which have been historically gained by the struggles of the people.

Who Should Receive Reparation?

The victims of the oppressor power, of a criminal terrorist State—the people, families, organizations, communities, and society at large—that have suffered damage due to the imposition of the capital's interest.

Who Should Provide Reparation?

The State, as it has the legal and political obligation to guarantee, protect, and fulfill human rights, and when they are violated, it is obligated to investigate, sanction, and provide reparation for the damage. The reparation processes can be demanded internationally or through domestic legal procedures.

What Should the Reparation Be For?

While we can all agree that reparations should be for the damage, it is not so easy to understand this in and of itself, as, first of all, we must position them in a specific sociopolitical context. Conversely, within the framework of human rights, locating those who are responsible will also be fundamental for being able to determine what is being demanded and whom it is being demanded from. Also, understanding the intent will allow for clarity about what measures to demand in the reparation, as it is clear to us that the damage caused by one motivation will not be the same as that caused by another just as the damage caused by an agent of the State will not be the same as that caused by a private party, and this is how we have been approaching it.

To this effect, it is important to revisit Alejandro Guajardo's proposal at the point when he expresses that the damage, both in the individual subject and in the collective, can be approached in an all-embracing way as long as a restorative sociopolitical context is created, which requires the absence of impunity, social policies that entail a real and effective intersectionality, a health system that is conscious of the task of rehabilitation and sensitive to it, and solid technical teams that are stable and have resources for their efforts. This inevitably questions a substantive transformation of the country and the definitive democratization of the society.

This is why the reparation of the damage caused entails contemplating the ethical, moral, physical, legal, and political dimension, as the violations that victims are objects to affect all spheres of human life. Reparation aims to keep the pain and the damage from turning into a lie and for the face of those who carried out the violations to be recognized in order to give credibility to the efforts and, therefore, legitimize the fight for justice.

If impunity causes the absence of justice to be experienced as another human rights violation, then, as a result, it creates another traumatic event. To heal this painful and open wound, comprehensive reparation should contribute to reconstructing lives and victims' dignity and integrity. Carlos Beristain explains that "Nothing can replace dead family members or repair victims' pain. In essence, reparation is a matter of a problem without a solution, but at the same time, it is a need for a commitment to restoring the rights of victims and family members, to helping them face the consequences of the violations, and to promoting their social reintegration."⁵

Today, thanks to the fight of victims and human rights organizations, reparation is no longer only a matter of indemnity, but also of an entirety of factors that aim, at the least, to minimize damage and create better living conditions with consideration for the damage

⁵ Beristain, C. M. *Diálogos sobre la reparación: experiencias en el sistema interamericano de derechos humanos*, tomo 2. San José, IIDH, 2008.

that has been suffered. *Restitution* measures, whenever possible, should aim at returning the victim to the situation before the violation of international human rights norms or the serious violation of an international humanitarian right. Rehabilitation measures should include medical and psychological attention as well as legal and social services; measures for *non-repetition guarantees*, *symbolic measures*, and *measures for restoring victims' dignity*.

Each reparation will depend on victims' needs, on the damage caused, and especially on sociopolitical and cultural contexts. For this reason, there should be reparation for the effects of impunity, fear, stigmatization, depression, and the pain of ruptures to the social fabric, and the measures will be those that give meaning to the experience of the damage and to the victims' struggle.

If offenders are judged, victims will have the chance to experience that the offenders do not have total power over their lives. If those who are responsible are punished, this will be restorative for victims, as it will mean that the creation of a justice system is possible.

The measures regarding truth will be restorative if the offenders' intents and interests are known; they will be restorative by carrying out public acts in which offenders are exposed as such, and they will be restorative if apologies are made and the responsibility of the corresponding agencies is recognized. All of this should be done in agreement with the victims, and not as yet another imposition of power.

And What Is Society's Role in the Reparation Processes?

And the role of society at large

Firstly, it must be recognized that the society has also been damaged, as a violation of human rights does not only imply damage to a select few. Secondly, it must be understood that damage to others affects individuals when they can see the pain and suffering, when they are not blinded, and when they are not in denial. Thirdly, reconstructing their humanity is a need. If this is not possible, reconstructing the bonds will not be easy, and solidarity with victims to legitimize their struggle will not be genuine because mutual support will not be seen as a form of fellowship.

The role of society is to also contribute to the reconstruction of historical memory, as to avoid accepting horror as a way of life, to avoid feeding the imposition of the dominating ideology, and to avoid being blinded by the ignominy of the capital's power. In parallel to the processes of States' justice systems—either domestically or within the international human rights system—we should continue to create other alternative reparation

mechanisms, as we will not find justice, truth, or our memory in the answers of those who have perpetrated the crimes. This is why it will always be necessary to continue to carry out opinion tribunals and truth commissions as part of the construction of symbolic acts that resignify and give us meaning, which remind us, time and again, that we have hope for our struggles and ideals and that we are right to pursue them.

To Finalize...For Now

We cannot just accept that they violate our rights, that they repress us, that they kill us, and that they torture us. Because offenders' actions should at least create a political and moral cost. Because to remain silent and forgotten is to accept the offender's strategy. Because to not demand justice, truth, reparation, and non-repetition conditions is to deny our rights, which have been historically gained by the struggles of the people.

If political repression aims to have an impact on the individual, the family, the organization, and the society, from the psychosocial perspective, we have the task of contributing to all of these settings; this allows us to not only face the consequences, but also to build a fairer society and strengthen the processes for resisting the dominating power from an unwavering ethical, ideological, and political stance.

I want to end by recalling one of the phrases from Martín-Baró that influenced my career choice: "Liberation psychology requires a previous liberation from psychology, and this liberation only comes about with a praxis that is committed to the suffering and hopes of the Latin American people."⁶

⁶ Martín-Baró, I. *Hacia una psicología de la liberación*. Revista Electrónica de Intervención Psicosocial y Psicología Comunitaria. Vol. 1, n. 2. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/2652421.pdf>