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Psychosocial Repairing – Intervention with Victims and their Families Affected by Internal Armed Conflict in Colombia. Learned Lessons. Reflections and Provocations

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Psychosocial Repairing – Intervention with Victims and their Families Affected by Internal Armed Conflict in Colombia. Learned Lessons. Reflections and Provocations

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Abstract - This article presents the final reflections of the Investigative-Intervention Team in Socially-Critical Psychology after almost three years of participative investigation-intervention with governmental and non-governmental organizations, victims and their families, and other members of communities affected by Colombia's internal armed conflict. The central aim was to value and construct on-going and future processes of accompaniment and reparations. Given the intervening nature of the process, we simultaneously designed and evaluated various ways of jointly defining, framing, and building conversational processes and strategies as well as the encounters between participants. The process was important for the psychosocial teams, whose presence in the country in terms of providing attention to victims is rather recent, as well as for victims and actors from the legal community, who found ways of collaboratively presenting, participating, and defining the available psychosocial-legal needs, opportunities, and resources in order to encourage the processes of accompaniment and reparation. This learning The process was enriched with the organization of a national meeting of governmental and non-governmental organizations, victims, and academics that widened perspectives on and enriched our understanding of the context in which victims are attended. The process generated a series of reflections that we gather in this article under the heading guidelines and in which we privilege the experience and understanding developed by team itself.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The present document has the purpose of presenting the reflections and conceptualizations that the Social Critical Psychology Group in Colombia, build among with other authors during a three-year work period. In which it was valued, designed and developed psychosocial intervention and reparative processes with victims and their families. This process involved various complex contexts, including a polarized political scenario, the presence of the armed conflict and the diversity of technical language, professional standings, human necessities and institutional availability.

In these circumstances, psychologist and social sciences professionals, participate attending victims in complex political-judicial contexts. This would be the scenario to ask the question about how we would define, understand and organize the, now a day's famous labor: "psychosocial intervention". It was also a scenario to ask us about the institutional framework, the organizations working in peace building processes and specially the role and position of the victims, their families and the affected communities.

The intervention-research project was developed in two big phases. The first one, recognized and participative valued the models and attention routes designed by the Colombian State and the ones designed by the non-governmental organizations. This phase concentrated on identifying the regions with high conflict incidence as – North, Central West and East-, using interviews and focus group with politics operators, young victims, their families and community members. This helped with the complex context lecture of the psychosocial intervention, showing a very high quality kind of professionals avid of evaluating their processes and impact and also in need of defining a clearer action framework. It could be seen that the constructed models get nourish form different disciplines and institutions but the local experience is in lack of evaluation. Victims and affected communities expressed the need for the acknowledgment of professionals, since they value their work towards the reconstruction of their lives. They

would also claim for more listening spaces. During the process it was clear that the inter-institutional relationships as well as the team convergence was a big difficulty considering the constant changes on governmental politics, budgets and disciplinary frameworks.

The second phase was a proposal to participate during the process of reparation. A journey that started approaching different institutions as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Human Rights Division. Few cases were studied through meetings and deliberations, deciding to work with one of them joining two objectives: 1) evaluation with repairing purposes and 2) the construction of working protocols for the ad hoc teams, evaluative attention, and routes to work on a collaborative networking context (the different actors involved).

To socialize the experience and the diverse learning's, the Critical Psychological Group facilitated a National Seminar including different actors on psychosocial intervention and reparation. The assistants included the State, the non-governmental organizations (national and international), the victims and the academic field. These joint reflections nourished the considerations on psychosocial intervention and victim reparation. During the research process our principal methodological and technical resource was the active listening for reflexive conversations. This article will point out some of this deliberations waving from the reflections – conclusions to the provocations for new and different considerations: 1) epistemologically, understanding the referents presented on conversations to support political, juridical, communitarian and psychological actions. 2) Procedures, understanding different roles as the institution, ad hoc teams, communities, families and individuals. 3) Time, transversal to the other two, of the historic, political, juridical and psychological processes and the way in which the pass of time would affect suffering and fear for the victims and their families, through corrupting human rights processes. The long time the State takes to enhance justice and equity processes. As a result of these reflections during the research project, the ethical guidelines are a resource for teams and can be understood as:

- Principles to guide trans-disciplinary and inner-sectorial work, integrating learned lessons towards damage reparation and relieve suffering from the victims as well as the long lasting armed conflict context in the country.
- A technical, operative and methodical delimitation to draw the “how’s” of integrated processes that different actors can undertake as interventions with repairing purposes.
- A reflective framework towards the ways of integrating the different domains (judicial and

psychological) harmonizing the seen or unseen hierarchies of knowledge and operators.

- The first chart shows the actors involved in the research intervention process.

II. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PROCEDURAL REFERENTS

Ideas or concepts that inspire the different way to proceed of the involved actors, we categorize them on three:

a) *Disciplinary*

From one side the “Psi” (individualistic) demands to psychology /psyquiatry and other social scientist studying suffering and fear, and on the contrary the resilient and survival narratives. Therefore the phenomenon is qualified as psychosocial trauma, understanding that modern paradigms and tendencies treat trauma as a corporal/mental established entity in subjects that tends to stay. But, for some other paradigms including our team (Cyruinic, 2001 & 2008), the understanding of trauma varies from the impact of the adverse experience it’s way of changing quotidian life, its permanence and the dynamics of diverse cultural, political and historical processes among the event. Therefore, damage it’s not circumscribe to individual qualities but in a complex way to multiple levels. This is something quite acknowledged in the attention models with reparation purposes. Reflection. We were surprised with the trauma conception migration from medical objectivity to psychosocial orders, the reflection make us wonder how to relieve pain with out having to situate the victims on a individualistic way of understanding. The resource of inviting the whole family, it’s social network and the institutions in charge, had an impact on their everyday life and their institutions. *Provocation*. Changing the way understanding the self from an individual point of view to a relational being in process of, for example reparation. This demands a critical positioning point of view opened up to disciplines, theories, integration, trans-disciplinarily and diverse domains of experience.

b) *Inter-disciplinary*

The second referent category has to do with knowledge about psychosocial affection in communities, families and people confronted with humanitarian disasters.

Reflection. New paradigm learning's, have thought us that as human beings we all have a set of resources from which we could rescue strategies to affront danger, threats, suffering... We are still learning on how those resources can help us out in diverse conflict circumstances according to social, cultural and political orders. As we’ve learned during this research-intervention process, the context and matters such as gender and development cycles require a mayor

acknowledgement to improve strategies for damage/trauma resolution in relations with in affected people, their families and communities. *Provocation*. Trying not to solve the context/gender/age matters with intervening different kinds of population, but risking to work transversally with the whole family and some network wishing for different results away from individualistic comprehensions, can be a provocative option for designs.

c) *Juridical-political*

The bonds between institutions, organizations, juridical-political instruments, actors and the extended relational network that requires a long lasting process to advance on the reparation issues. These long terms, frequently than desirable, generate relegation among the victims making the pass of time dissolution of the participation and communication. *Reflection*. These long

processes disconnect the actual necessities of the victims and are not contextualized on time and space. An example of this is, trying to repair the affection of the victims when they where minors and not being aware of their new home chief condition. Or, for example, spending the money building up a monument for the victims in a town that doesn't have a hospital. *Provocation*. It's true that the psychosocial component and the psycho-juridical component are integrated to the politics. But the challenge is to integrate them in a fair relationship where both the political/judicial component and the social/psychological one, can be positioned in collaboration. This will facilitates the complex lecture and prospective of the victim's needs and the mediation between languages and instruments from both domains.

First Phase	Second Phase Workshop-seminar “What we have learned” convened:	Intervention with reparation purposes worked together with:
- 15 non government al local organizations	- 20 non government al organizations	- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Human Rights Division.
- 3 Local Hospitals	- 11 universities from all over the country	- Socio Critical Psychology Group.
- 2 non government al international organizations	- 1 religious organization	- Los Andes University
- 2 Universities	- 2 non government al international organizations	- RL. Litigant Lawyer
- 5 government al institutions	- 8 government al institutions	- Feminist organization on defense of human rights
	- 1 Local Hospital	- Victim, her husband, origin family (parents, brothers and sisters)

Figure 1 : Institutions and organizations convened during the time-line of the project.

III. OPERATIVE REFERENTS: PROTOCOLS, ROUTES, ACTORS AND INTERVENTION SCENARIOS

As a methodological reflection, the protocols and work routes where understood as learning devices, understanding learning as a social action that gives sense. As Schön (1996) would say, recognizing a professional knowledge crisis is an opening way to include a new epistemology of the practice and experience, and also the recognition of an indetermination zone opened to participative construction. Statement, that guided us to the method construction and its instruments.

a) *Protocols*

Are used as sailing charts, their purpose is to identify the epistemological and procedural referents for the collective to value the damage and analyze the reparation possibilities. *Reflection*. Considering in the protocols the different dimension is pretty useful (psychosocial, cultural, political, historical, economical and educational). Protocols are also methodical and technical ways of proceeding, and understanding it as a construction in context can lead it to bond the episteme and the action. *Provocation*. Therefore, the instrument can be seen as a relationship and a work pact, very necessary when there are different actors making decisions and without previous trajectories.

b) *Routes*

The route defines the orders and chronology of the actions, and it's understood as necessary and appropriate. It is important to identify the institutional and sectorial actors as well as the family and community, their disciplinary, institutional and relational and other knowledge's. The sense of the route is to build convergence processes, collaboration in drawing distinctions to construct ideas, visions and actor's aspirations.

Reflection. It was useful to group the actions chronology in moments as spaces of time, with common purposes accomplished with diverse scenes that operated as conversational, enterprising and reflective meetings that resorted to remembering stories, visions and actors aspirations.

The first moment helps recognize the comprehension on the impact, as an integral, complex, relational and historical description. It's the case interdisciplinary study getting the first approaching to people's affection. Therefore it's important to consider the first effects on: the victim's reactions, their families, the responsible, the care measures, the holes and how the very first moments of the harassment positioned the experience (politically, communitarian, family, individually). It also studies and builds the emergence of victimization as a processual and contextual one.

The second moment is about the context, declaring how it is understood, if it is taken as a "psychosocial accompaniment" (not therapeutically, but with the risk of darkening the role or the relationship with the accompanied and the evaluation of the process) or taken as a "psycho-judicial component" (judicial achievements and emotional coping with judicial processes). *Provocation.* Taking the option of value attention provides to reparation, for example, facilitating face-to-face meetings between the State and the victims, making the conversation opened to recognizing and identifying resources.

Reflection. Reparation and proposals for value attention get together the diverse disciplinary knowledge during conversational meetings. Particularly, understanding reparation as a way to boost the identity configuration with the construction of better form stories (Sluzki 2006). Stories that enhance the citizen positioning, as members of community, as family and their historical moment, this opens up the possibility to recognize the resources to cope suffering, the ways to resist and build sense in the experience (political, cultural, material and spiritual).

Provocation. Recognizing the context is important but it is critical to identify the political joints of the present that is the moment of the intervention. Realizing the present of the victims as well as their life moment, the institutional learning's, taking care of the psychologization of the problems in the two poles of individualistic vs. social points of view. It is also

recommended to be careful with the "politization" of the victims, where the way of suffering tends to be preserved by the political agencies.

IV. THE ACTORS

Understanding the problem as well as the context opens up the path to understand the actors that have to be involved and consider their qualities for the design on the work route and it's scenarios. We understood that the actors are representing institutions, communities, families and victims. Some of them are conveners from non-governmental organization, and some of them operators from the State institutions. For them is useful to identify their positions in the process and the way the work would be realized. All the participants collectively build the way they want to be recognized. Our team was conceived as a linking facility (intervene – coming in between), recuperating in a protective way the experience and its effects, making it intelligible to the lawyers and understandable to the victims. Searching for resignification of the experience and the reauthoring of the memories redefining the past and the future. It is a casuistic work, building the solution from the case characteristics managing the resources between the entities and the institutions constructing routes for institutional- intersectorial- interventions, responding to the chase exigencies.

Reflection. Once the research team gets to know the actors, it is important to get to know the convergence where the starting point would be. This could be the "psychosocial" or the "psychojudicial", which demands a strategic study of the relational system, the agenda, the resources and the set of groups. At the beginning it would be necessary to convene different subgroups, this is a very important moment and all the participants need to feel included. Generously listening but not extensively the just amount to generate including relationships that would build a collective work team, a community of practice, a collective subject. This is an important factor that should be taking care very carefully during the whole process; this is the way to modulate the changing dynamics of the actors and their reference contexts.

Provocation. The conveners should have documents and experiences to present under the form of projects, proposals, portfolios, or protocols and it's routes. This is the first step of the conversational process to build the relational system trespassing the traditional boundaries drawn from the academy and the politics. Convene the soonest the actors, this will ease the process.

V. SCENES AND SCENARIOS

The process can be seen in scenes categories, where the possible actions develop as meetings, visits or any collective spaces for conversation. Therefore, the

conversation is the central tool; it was developed general scripts that served as domains for affection/reparation, from a wide group of orienting questions. Our learning shows that appreciative and prospective conversations facilitate the course of practical actions. Ways of talking, that privilege the simple listening and the acknowledgment of the other, build trust and open possibilities and with it: knowledge construction. For us, during conversations, it was very useful to resort to the positioning lecture (gender, development, social condition, culture and historical referents) as well as the resistance lecture (survival and achievement recourses). This was a starting point to understand the cognitive and affective forms to relate, as well as the actor practices and resources to build up the experience and the transformative process.

Along the scenes and scenarios, the processes convene the concepts of valuation and resilience. Changing the perspective from the evaluation-diagnosis-intervention model to ways of conversation that value, understand; question the discursive forms and practices towards affection and pain.

Scenes could move, from the attention focus, towards the comprehension of affection/reparation in the human diverse domain. Designing scenes and its guidelines of conversation for the family, individual or couple meetings, allowed us to value the different relationships and their change resources. When there is a chance for a community meeting it should be designed taking in account a collective purpose and a participative dynamic, where all the voices can be heard and with a reparation and recognition sense.

Reflection. Scenes that involve a mixture of actors are critical (victims, family, institutions) these are the ones that concrete reparation and this event can promote welfare. Therefore, prolonging the action until the formal reparation “act” wasn’t a good idea. We decided to understand the act and the reparation as two different but bond business. Understanding the prolonged suffering of the victims and their families its not an engine to accelerate the juridical process, so the psychosocial process can be understand as reparatory and therefor doesn’t have to be delayed. Provocation. A nice learning was to talk with the different actors (direct victim, her/his family, couple), value their affection and also taking in account their available resources to build up a new story and history with appreciative sense of the present deconstructing-reconstructing the past and the future, integrating the different voices (actors).

We highly recommend paying attention to the new scenes and scenarios where the conversation with Human Rights, State, Victims and Family representatives can interact. The psychosocial team took the building bridges of communication role. Helping restoring the relations among actors, using the ritual tool was also very helpful:

From the victim position to the survival, from the victim to the diverse social subject, from the forgotten to the recognized, wetting the conversation with appreciative and prospective perspectives. Which is the inauguration to the relational being (self) and its diverse versions related to the appalling experience.

VI. THE REPARATION

This acting scenario demands recognition of the political, disciplinary and ethical positioning. It claims for inter and trans disciplinary perspectives to enhance the reparation. Therefore, it is not sufficient the classic psychological individualized centered form; it is necessary to transform the local and family realities as well as the individual subjectivities. The language mediation is a key to connect the psychosocial affection with the reparation agreements. Reflection. Technical languages are sensible in this process; the challenge is to integrate the ad hoc teams and privilege the action of listening particularly to the suffering and fear voices. Provocation. Humanizing the experiences with out the administrative times of process, recognizing the victims and positioning them in to the attention routes to receive psychosocial accompaniment. This will allow the reparation to be also a juridical-political achievement as well as a human- psychosocial one. Reparation should be received as a process that can be integrated to day-to-day life in a healing path, rather than a salvation option given by “someone” to the victim.

VII. THE GUIDELINES

Referents to the politics where always present, governmental disposition, laws as the Justice and Peace law, negotiation processes with illegal armed groups and so forth where important themes for discussion, towards the scenery of action from the State representatives, the Human Rights organisms and the other institutions involved in reparation. This would conduct to a political value of the victims. The decisions had to be negotiated from the political processes of the different actors, their diverse languages and perspectives on the political ground. The scenario had to take on account the diversity of comprehensions on the victims and their families needs. We decided to understand this as “positioning” which can be different some times, and also challenges the relationships towards better listening and conflict management skills (for the different actors, including the construction of attention teams, specially the ones constructed in situ for the requirements).

Reflection. We understood that the ways of acting and getting sense of what happened configure historic memory for the actors specially the affected ones, that are immersed in a complex network of people and meanings. Our reflections (above list) show the options that we as a team undertook and called “the guidelines”:



a) *Epistemological referents*

- Conceptual resources for a first comprehension of psychosocial affection of the victims of war and armed conflict. As a starting point, and then recognize the insufficiency of them when it is to work with diverse disciplines towards intervention with reparation purposes.
- Resources should tend to wide up. It can be done by the participative research process and by the trans disciplinary comprehensions. It is also necessary to critically recognize the political positioning's.
- Research can be understood as a, generative – construction of knowledge, –meta- dynamic. This could be critical to the psychosocial and psych juridical components, since it is necessary to deconstruct the theoretical background and question or bond the ideologies to know and act.
- Participatory perspective is a key, towards comprehension of experience and its resolution. And this claims a change in the forms we relate to each other, the participants and the actors. New ways of communication have to be tried: simplicity and clarity on the messages, horizontal power, inclusion and recognition of the virtues and resources of all the actors involved.
- Trans disciplinary constructions are needed to the institutional processes; the summary of work and tasks is an achievement for the reparation process (State, court, ministries, health, education, local governments and others).
- Times and processes of juridical/political reparation needed to be distinguished from the victims and their family's psychological times. This is important: those are different processes, correlated but different, to understand them as one can be a huge mistake towards the attention and what had happened the delay of psychosocial attention while the judicial process advances. Our experience showed that one facilitates the other one. Victims and families gain comprehension and projection from the psychosocial attention and with it they can convene the juridical domain towards meaningful reparations.
- Recognizing languages and their rhetorical forms (disciplines and politics) and its effects is a nice way of facilitating participation and listening skills. Conversations had to be guided to be generatively productive and careful with the other's pain. The "Psycho" component needs to be treated with competences: humanity, vital and contextual knowledge, searching for resources with the whole system (victim, family and community). This is constructed during conversations therefore competences are a key and have to be sensible to

negotiate language and narratives with the focus of constructing a full of sense experience.

b) *Provocation.*

i. *Procedural Referents*

- Recognizing paradigms (relationships between factors, process, events and effects). From our experience we can recommend to privilege the comprehension of process and context rather than a cause-effect vision.
- Collaboratively build the problem lecture and it's possible solutions. This will need the active listening skills, to reconstruct the whole scenario actor's expectative on reparation, to integrate the local conditions of the institutions and to protect the process of reductionism, psychologization or polarization of the pain.
- Inter-sectorial and inter-institutional teams as ad hoc teams can be useful to build understanding fields of action. It will be needed to design a clear and concrete path towards participatory action (collective and individual, long and short term designs).
- Recognizing the techniques and strategies for knowledge construction among the teams and ease the participation and listening skills, this will need the design of conversational convergence scenarios. Now a days attention teams, design protocols and routes, what we propose is to do it in a trans-disciplinary way integrating actors – institutions – State and off course the victims experience of affection.
- Generation of memory. To write and disclose, which is to configure knowledge as public, with the intention to have an impact on diverse communities and local sectors (people, academy, political scenery and private domains), a memory that honors the survivors and their capacity to continue.
- Teamwork and generation of memory claim for solidarity. A careful position for the other, one self and boundaries is necessary.

The way all this process was constructed is a way of building memory. We understood the recuperated past as moments on the "social time, integrated to experiential and psychological time in diverse ways" (Harré & Van Langenhove 1991); it will be a decision of our participants to define which sense they will want to grant.

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