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# In Whose Interest Do We Work? Critical Comments of a Practitioner at the Fringes of the Liberation Paradigm

*'De-ideologizing reality' is an urgent task within the psychology of liberation. Ignacio Martín-Baró characterized it as a process of conscientization that unmasks power inter-ests underlying knowledge production, retrieves the 'original experience of the people', and returns that experience in the form of 'objective data'. In contemporary humanitarian trauma work in crisis areas, however, psychology often masks global power structures and further stigmatizes and alienates 'victims' from their communities and their original experience. I draw upon my work as a psychologist, theologian and freelance consult-ant in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa to analyse two case studies. I use these examples to analyse and critique the underlying power discourses implied in definitions of 'victimhood' in humanitarian interventions and identify contradictions that challenge liberation thinking as well as demystify feminist agendas. I conclude by calling for a change of perspective and of professional attitudes that can be realized through engaging a de-ideologizing approach towards global psychosocial trauma interventions.*

Key Words: *Democratic Republic of Congo, ideology, liberation psychology, masculinity, trauma, Uganda, victimhood*

> [N]or should it [psychology] be looking at how something is done, so much as for whose benefit. Thus, what is at stake is not so much the kind of activity that is practiced … as what are the concrete historical consequences this activity is producing? … If it is not the calling of the psychologist to intervene in the socio-economic mechanisms that cement the structures of injustice, it is within the psychologist's purview to intervene in the subjective processes that sustain those structures of injustice and make them viable. (Martín-Baró, 1996b: 45f.)

What unites the different liberation paradigms of various disciplines that developed particularly in the 1970s is that they aimed to articulate the perspectives of the oppressed and to redesign their methodological and practical agendas *'desde'*/ 'from' their respective viewpoints. The essence of the underlying hermeneutic

Copernican turn can be formulated as follows: those from the 'underside of history' have the privileged right to describe their own situation; therefore, their voices need to be heard (e.g. Gutiérrez, 1983)

Against the background of an ahistorical, decontextualized 'scientific mimicry' that characterized the US psychology practised in El Salvador, the Spanish Jesuit Ignacio Martín-Baró developed a psychology of liberation that was inspired by the principles of Latin American liberation theology. At the centre of his vision of psychology was the desire to make a significant contribution to the history of the Salvadoran people (Martín-Baró, 1996c). One of the 'urgent tasks' ascribed to this liberation psychology is that of de-ideologizing (or 'un-masking') reality.

According to the Frankfurt School's critique of ideology and the postmodernist debate, which intellectually inspired Martín-Baró, *ideology* offers a certain interpretation of reality that justifies the existing social order and legitimizes it as something 'natural' and not historical. Therefore, *de-ideologizing* refers to a process of unmasking the power interests in certain productions of knowledge and then retrieving the original experience of the people and returning it to them in the form of objective data. This process counters the social lies that deny or disguise essential aspects of reality (Martín-Baró, 1998).

The ultimate objective behind this de-ideologizing work is to enable a process of critical consciousness amongst the oppressed ('desideologización concientizadora'; Martín-Baró, 1996a: 189). This consciousness-raising process, and, therefore, Martín-Baró's methodology as a social scientist, was participatory and action oriented. Martín-Baró dedicated a great many articles to this task, particularly on the topics of religion and Latin American fatalism and on the social discourses of femininity in family and society. Although he did not develop a distinct gender theory nor even explicitly write about gender, Martín-Baró carried out 'the first academic and rigorous reflections that questioned the roles that the Salvadoran society had assigned to men and women' (Molpeceres, 1996: 4). He thereby critically analysed the power interests of the established system inherent in the images of *machismo* and the corresponding essentialized traits attributed to women.

In the following, I critically analyse two case studies of contemporary trauma work in East and Central Africa, drawing on the de-ideologizing objective and method of liberation psychology. I am primarily interested in pointing to the ideological substance of discourses of 'victimization' in 'trauma interventions'. These discourses reveal a striking essentialism and in this way correspond to discourses of (African) masculinity and femininity. As importantly, this essentialism mirrors the ways in which 'victimhood' is defined by the 'western aid industry', a definition of 'victimhood' that more or less intentionally camouflages a political analysis of the global structures of violence underlying contemporary wars.

I will critically analyse selected assumptions of psychosocial trauma work in Northern Uganda and in the Eastern Democratic Republic of (DR) Congo (Kivu) as an entry into this critical debate about global trauma work. I will then suggest how a de-ideologizing approach to these interventions could bring about different

perspectives and professional tasks for the work of liberation psychologists.

I am writing from the perspective of a female western European consultant belonging to the very same 'aid community' that I am challenging in this article; thus I am part of the dilemmas that I am describing. As a theologian, psychologist and systemic family therapist, I have been working in Eastern Africa for the last 10 years, both on a permanent basis and as a short-term consultant. During my work, I have found the writings of liberation psychology to present some of the most helpful yet 'unsettling' approaches to psychology. I argue that the liberation psychological approach described herein could be used to critically revise psychosocial trauma work in Africa and elsewhere.


A CRITIQUE OF TRAUMA DISCOURSE

Since the war in the former Yugoslavia and the genocide in Rwanda, trauma work has become a major focus in humanitarian interventions across the globe. In recent years, in response to early experiences of the dangers of the 'trauma business', a number of remarkable articles were published (e.g. Becker, 1995; Giller, 1998; Lykes and Mersky, 2006; Summerfield, 1999) that critically analysed conceptual deficiencies of the work's central feature – the diagnosis Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD) – and the instruments used to measure its prevalence in non-western settings. These critiques suggest that PTSD reflects a de-politicization of violence whereby suffering is individualized, de-contextualized and reconceptualized in politically sterile terms of medical and psychological pathology that invite neo-colonialist knowledge transfer.

In my experience, however, many local people trained in international 'trauma projects' in various African countries are not obsessed with questions about the validity of the western-defined symptoms, but take what they see as relevant into their context, modify it and abandon the rest, particularly at the point when externally funded projects leave and salaries for locals expire. Unfortunately, Africans have been exposed to a lot of alienated technology in the history of development cooperation; western psychosocial trauma work is not the first of such encounters (e.g. Hancock, 1989). I make this argument not to trivialize the destructive effects of (neo-)colonialism. Rather, it is a self-critical effort to demystify a possible stance of innocence for trauma work consultancies and to acknowledge that we operate in fundamentally absurd global structures. Specifically, western governments spend money on humanitarian work and 'western experts' implement programmes that are meant to alleviate a suffering that we conceptualize as 'psychosocial', whereas these very same governments have political interests and global agendas that directly or indirectly reinforce some of the most chronic war scenarios in Africa (e.g. Johnson, 2008).

Trauma work has perhaps become so popular because it functions as a politically safe surrogate intervention against the massive collateral damages of an unjust global world system; it is thus a sort of modern 'anti-depressant for the

people', similar to Derek Summerfield's analysis of trauma work as a 'bread and counselling' approach (Summerfield, 1999: 1459). It is important to ask whether our interventions comply with the 'best practices' of contextualized and culturally sensitive psychosocial trauma work and its well-designed guidelines (e.g. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007). However, I argue here that it is more important to ask if we have a chance to make a difference even when operating within these 'best practices' when our professional base is conceptually part of the problem.

WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO BE CALLED A 'VICTIM'? LESSONS LEARNED IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Northern Uganda has undergone brutal and protracted civil strife for over 20 years. The history of this war is complex, both historically and regionally, and has gone through various phases (International Crisis Group, 2004). The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony is known for brutally preying on civilians, pillaging villages, and for the rape, murder and kidnapping of more than 10,000 children and many more adults. Tens of thousands of people have been killed. At one stage in the war, 90 percent of the population in Northern Uganda was internally displaced for several years in so-called 'protected villages'. The massive displacements aggravated the economic breakdown of the region and contributed to the complete disruption of social life (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative & Justice and Peace Commission of Gulu Archdiocese, 2001). Since September 2006, peace negotiations have been under way and life is gradually returning to normal with people returning from camp settings to their original homesteads.

I concentrate here on a perspective that might seem rather surprising for a western consultant with feminist ideals in the midst of a war full of sexual violence and domestic abuse – the perspective of men. I am doing it not *in spite of* my feminist ideals, but rather *because* of them, as the critical analysis of patriarchy concerns not only women's but men's oppression.

According to Chris Dolan, the war in Northern Uganda impacts heavily upon the dominant image of masculinity (Dolan, 2001). The normative model of a 'real man' in the Acholi traditional culture, the main tribe in Northern Uganda, is to a large extent based on the following premises: men are expected to become educated, heterosexual husbands and fathers who exercise control over their families. Men are furthermore expected to provide materially for their families in order to also earn the protection of the state. These socioeconomic expectations of the normative male model are unachievable because of the long-term insecurity of war and pervasive poverty, especially in the camp settings. There are no accessible income strategies, and male protection has been dramatically compromised by physical insecurity. The economic disparity is especially severe in relation to the soldiers who are part of the complex political situation that has kept the

war going for so many years. Because soldiers are the only men with regular income in the region they bring economic resources into the informal systems of prostitution and contribute to sustaining them and other forms of economic exploitation.

According to Dolan (2001), 'collapsing masculinities' in Northern Uganda are both a consequence and a cause of the male violence that is widespread at all levels of society and perpetrated by all male actors. Rebels *and* members of the armed forces have raped other men's wives and daughters because, in the logic of the 'hegemonic' model of masculinity, this undermines other men's sense of self, de-emasculates them socially and psychologically, and, as a consequence, breaks their resistance. As a result of the widespread feelings of fear, intimidation, humiliation and frustration, civilian men become violent as well, either against themselves, their families, or both. This usually not only takes the forms of alcohol abuse and suicide attempts, but also, and to a large extent, domestic violence. These forms of violence, thus, compensate for the perceived loss of masculinity. A suicide study commissioned by Caritas Gulu in 2005 showed that 72 percent of all suicides and suicide attempts in the camps are committed by men who find themselves helpless and are no longer able to live up to the expected standards of power and control (Ojwang and Ogora, 2006).

These cultural stereotypes about 'real men', that are not only maintained by men but also strongly by women who blame their 'weak husbands' for being 'like a woman', further reinforce feelings of shame. Men are thus psychosocially vulnerable, as analysed in various participatory assessments that the Church-related programme (with which I have been working) conducted in Northern Ugandan communities. Even if women and girls are particularly vulnerable to a specifically traumatizing form of violence, namely sexual violence, of which the destructive effects cannot be underestimated, the war in Northern Uganda was a war waged against the male population. Most people killed and most people abducted were male. This suffering is not politically acknowledged by a government known for its longstanding resentment against the Northerners and whose policies deliberately aimed at keeping the Acholi community hostages in camps, the so-called 'protected villages' (Dolan, 2001). These camps were characterized by cultural, economic and social destruction, with one result being an unnecessarily heavy impact on men's sense of self-esteem and productivity.

Men's suffering is equally not acknowledged in humanitarian interventions focused exclusively on women and formerly abducted children. Agencies provide services to men's families, particularly to women and children, but men are left out. Ugandan colleagues narrated various examples of women telling their husbands that now that they had the NGOs they did not need them any more.

In my experiences with organizations in Northern Uganda, humanitarian interventions and, as part of them, psychosocial work, focus – and are stuck – on 'good victims', that is, victims who are not overtly violent, or victims who cannot be held responsible for the violence. Usually children are placed in the latter category because they supposedly lack any sense of agency. With western stereo-

types of childhood and 'African victimized femininity', it is quite clear which groups are 'targeted' for assistance. Men – in general – are framed as trouble makers, violent, destructive, alcoholics, polygamous and useless in fulfilling any productive role. They are part of the problem, not of the solution. They do not *deserve* 'victim status' accorded by humanitarian agencies or protection provided by the state.

In my analysis, the problem with destructive masculinity in post-war settings is certainly not caused, but unfortunately often reinforced, by humanitarian interventions that bluntly ignore men's self-concepts. However, destructive masculinity is not only typical of conflict scenarios; it is connected with massive changes in the global economy. Duffield (1995) argues that war is generally not an extraordinary event and should not be considered extrinsic to the 'normal' way of life of a society. The effects of war can thus not be separated from those of other forces such as poverty and injustice. Conflict reinforces and aggravates what is already evident under 'normal' circumstances of 'mere' under-development (Duffield, 1995). This is evidenced in the World Bank's participatory poverty assessment project, Voices of the Poor, which describes worldwide gender anxiety as the consequence of households that are strained and in flux because of vast economic, political and social changes of the globalized economy. The study posits that these households undergo 'silent trauma'. Innovative approaches are called upon 'to enable both men and women to make the necessary transitions with fewer traumas' (Narayan, 2000: 280).

These innovative approaches still seem far away, at least in regard to Northern Uganda's psychosocial trauma and NGO interventions more generally. However, from the point of view of liberation psychology, I consider it a core task of psychologists and mental health professionals to challenge donors' agendas with their preconceived definitions of victims, thus helping to make the voices of these marginalized men 'heard' instead of reiterating ideologically – rather than scientifically – informed agendas. We therefore need to critically revise the tools and design of our 'participatory' psychosocial needs assessments, to see how men's voices can be 'heard' and how space can be created for those voices that might actually reflect different patterns of masculinity. Specifically, patterns of masculinity that are *not* violent and that could potentially create new avenues for men's self-concept that, until now, have not been considered.

THE 'BUSINESS' WITH THE 'VVS': FEMINIST CONCERNS ABOUT EASTERN CONGO

In the Kivu region in Eastern DR Congo, tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped in what is known as 'Africa's first world war'. These women and girls have been raped by armed forces on all sides but also, and in growing numbers, by civilians who perceive the ongoing impunity as an invitation for sexual violence and exploitation of all forms. Many of the women and girls experienced

gang rape and rape with objects that cause unimaginable physical destruction. Many – perhaps even most – of the raped women and girls are utterly rejected by their families and especially by their husbands for reasons of humiliation and shame (e.g. Pole Institute, 2004). Rape in the context of war is not only intended to destroy a person on whom this violence is inflicted, but also the group and clan to which she belongs. Rape is conceptualized as a special way of communicating 'total defeat' (McWilliams, 1998:114). Poor women and girls are especially targeted because they have no chance of defending themselves when going to the fields to produce food for their large families; they do not have the money to bribe policemen (who usually do not arrest perpetrators whose families pay 'their way out' anyway); and they will not be able to pay for a court process (Pole Institute, 2004).

A recent participatory study conducted by Médecins du Monde (MdM) (Médecins du Monde/Chistian Laval, 2007) looked at the changing role and function of the 'counsellor' in the recovery of the 'victimes des violences sexuelles' (VVS; victims of sexual violence) in the DR Congo. The author's analysis contributes to the understanding of the ambivalent role of international humanitarian interventions and their conceptualization of victimhood. He portrays two phases in the development of 'counsellors' in response to sexual violence: local and professionalized.

The struggle against sexual violence, according to MdM's (2007) study, first started around 2002 at a local level. Local activist women were mainly motivated by social and religious activism for the rights of women, or by the fact that they had been victims themselves. They assumed the role of a 'counsellor' and in local language were often called 'Mamas'. They saw themselves as responsible for assisting survivors of rape. It was a 'feeling of deep revolt' (MdM/Christian Laval, 2007: 18) against the horrible crimes that drove these women into activism. At this early stage, the counsellors were not concerned with formalized 'psycho-social concepts' – and they would probably not have even understood them. These 'Mamas' helped with practical matters such as advising on medical treatment, sharing their views and experiences, and often offering space in their own houses. A 'counsellor' at this stage in the war had a social function and emerged at a time when rape had been taboo. The concept of 'counsellors' did not only define the women who acted as such, but also had to do with the idea of social proximity. 'Counsellors' lived in the neighbourhood, were part of the very community to which 'victims' belonged – and many had been victims themselves. Of course, they worked voluntarily. It was *their* community and *their* fellow women and girls, and even *they themselves* (MdM/Christian Laval, 2007). So what they did was not a 'job', it was a human reaction to inhuman experiences.

After 2004, the situation changed (MdM/Christian Laval, 2007). Active initiatives and groups in the field started looking for funds, working with local authorities and international NGOs that integrated them into their programmes. Trainings in 'counselling skills' or 'de-traumatization' were organized with the objective of what can be termed 'professionalization'. With professionalization,

the 'victim counsellors' became fewer numerically, especially in larger organiza-
tions, and others performed a job that was now more 'psychological' and profes-
sionally distinct from the work of other 'approaches' that were created with the
United Nations Fund for Population Activities' (UNFPA's) technical and financial
assistance (see UNFPA, 2006).

Commissions were set up on provincial and territorial levels that regrouped
associations and initiatives according to their respective intervention sectors.
International NGOs – especially from the UN family – shaped the landscape of
these initiatives, defined 'quality', set standards of performances and determined
'focal points'. Of course, as money came in for the VVS, associations or local
NGOs, many were attracted to them and 'wanted to do something about "it"'. As
a war-torn country is poor and formal employment difficult to obtain, this type of
NGO work becomes a possibility to gain at least some money for following up
'cases' in the 'field', doing 'counselling', and writing reports (Lindorfer, 2008).
It is a matter of fact that war economies are not only shaped by rebels and cor-
rupt governments, but also by humanitarian interventions (see e.g. Ballentine and
Nitzschke, 2005; Lock, 2005). Intense competition between organizations and a
lack of coordination is an expected part of the picture (Lindorfer, 2008).

According to my assessment, this 'professionalization' occurred as VVS
became a 'top priority' for donor agencies, triggered by and reinforced through
extensive media coverage of the most horrible stories of rape and sexual torture.
The 'unknown suffering' gets special attention in frontline news; the 'untold
stories' are told with shocking photos from overcrowded hospitals where doctors
endlessly operate on fistulas and gynaecological traumas. The international media
has discovered the 'heart of darkness' that confirms images of the archaic (male)
brutality of the continent and the VVS fit perfectly into the picture of the 'good
victims' who need to be 'helped'. The complicated involvement of international
economic structures of western countries playing a role in the long history of the
protracted conflict in the DR Congo since colonialism is rarely covered by jour-
nalists. It is the personalized suffering, not the structural one that can be 'sold'.

When the international 'helping industry' arrives and discovers the VVS, a
re-evaluation takes place (Lindorfer, 2008). However, the effects are quite simi-
lar: rape that cannot be openly talked about in families and communities is now
debated in every NGO meeting and at every international conference. Rape is
discussed by short-term overseas volunteers coming in to 'help' the 'victims' and
by international trauma consultants who bring 'new methods' and 'brief thera-
pies' with 'good results in other conflict ridden places' and often with trainers
of a 'model figure' approach. Losi and Papadopoulos (2004: 245) describe this
approach as follows:

> [these types of trainers] deprive their interlocutors of their own experiences, their
> difficulties, their anguish and their trial-and-error progress; instead, the approach
> of such workers aims, unwittingly, to substitute the others' experiences with a
> 'good form' that is fixed, that is repetitive and it is, ultimately, sterile.

My main concern from a feminist liberation psychologist's point of view is this: in both discourses – the stigmatizing one of the community and the helping one of the 'international response' – the VVS become objectified and their status as 'victims' cemented. It does not matter whether they are called 'survivors', because being politically correct is not the same as being power-sensitive to definitions. Both discourses place the VVS outside their families and communities. Both discourses reduce them to their experience of rape. Having been 'raped' is what counts, whether they are also poor or widows or school drop-outs or define themselves along any other category is not of much importance in this discourse.

I do not want in any way to insinuate that ostracizing a raped woman is the same as treating her in a hospital and giving her comfort and assistance. However, my point here is the profoundly unsettling similarity in the power dynamics exerted *over* the VVS by both ostracizing them *and,* ironically, also having someone from outside the community engaged in 'helping' them. Both reduce or constrain women's identity. My concerns are as follows: What happens to women's basic relationships when the 'aid industry' takes over? What message does this 'taking over' communicate to local people? And finally, how do women and girls themselves perceive this redefinition of their identity?

During a study that I recently undertook with German and Congolese colleagues (Lindorfer, 2008), a key informant working for a local NGO explained to us that nowadays every association and organization goes 'to the field' and wants to 'identify victims'. Being able to 'present victims' is necessary in order to receive funding. The women and girls in their communities who have actually survived sexual violence, on their part, always expect some*thing* material to be 'given' whenever NGOs come in for 'identification' exercises. And some would even 'pretend' to have been raped in order to get a sack of additional rice, a blanket or whatever the particular organization distributes. These women might 'just' be poor and thus potentially be a victim of sexual violence, but poverty as such does not count. To imagine, as an international consultant, but moreover as a woman with certain professional ideals, that women and girls would voluntarily reduce themselves to helpless survivors of rape makes me feel truly ashamed. The very same key informant who shared with us the side effects of material assistance and its dynamics explained how difficult any idea of 'self-determined empowerment' becomes in an environment where powerlessness pays more.

I too painfully realized that applying participatory approaches with a resource-oriented methodology becomes a huge challenge in an environment where the rules of survival are determined by the availability of aid. In this environment, it is dangerous for the women to appear to be competent or capable or show some signs of coping. It is better they portray themselves in front of white consultants as completely helpless victims and their family and community environment as cruel, careless people in order to receive aid.

What about the original initiative of the 'counsellors' at a local level? The psychosocial terminology has now invaded helping behaviour: to be present is

considered 'active listening'; and, to console and encourage is 'trauma counsel-
ling' or – even more – '*detraumatization*'. 'Helping' is something that needs
professionalization and '*motivation*' – as financial 'incentives' are now usually
called in French in the Eastern DR Congo (Lindorfer, 2008). I am not against
professionalizing mental health services. It is needed given the collapsed govern-
ment health structures. But the lack of solidarity and the rejection that the women
and girls are confronted with is not a problem of mental health but of social
life. However, what is the message communicated by 'international responses'
to local communities who reject rape survivors? That international NGOs take
over responsibility for *their* women and girls? How can we espouse the value of
'promoting solidarity' if community associations, in order to get funding, must
create structures and prerequisites of modern NGO frameworks, that result in
divided communities?

   Psychological research on motivation and attribution can help in understanding
how this kind of monetary system makes it almost impossible for communities
to attribute positive 'change' to their own efforts: The performance of something
that was seen to be intrinsically motivated (as in the case of the early stage of
'Mamas'), declines as soon as the performer receives an incentive for it (Deci,
1975; Lepper and Greene, 1978; Lepper, et al., 1973). So 'caring', 'consoling'
or 'showing compassion' are perceived as types of 'work' that not only require
'professionalization', but even 'payment' of some sort. Do we really assume that
these 'newly trained counsellors' will go on doing their work, when funding is
discontinued because the next humanitarian crisis on the globe requires another
wave of 'help' somewhere else? And do we think that the community will have
'gotten' the message in the meantime that rape is an unacceptable crime?

## IN WHOSE INTEREST DO WE WANT TO WORK? CHALLENGING OUR COMPLICITY IN VICTIMIZATION DISCOURSES

> if psychology's work is limited to curing, it can become simply a palliative that
> contributes to prolonging a situation which generates and multiplies the very
> ills it strives to remedy. Hence … we cannot limit ourselves to addressing post-
> traumatic stress. Our analysis has to extend itself to the roots of those traumas,
> and therefore to the war itself as a social psychopathogenic situation. (Martín-
> Baró, 1996d: 122)

The two case examples are evidently more complex than I can describe in
this article, yet they share several important characteristics. In both, a certain
preconceived discourse of 'who the victims are' is organized and underlies the
helping response. Furthermore, in both cases we see the same political motives
behind neglecting the victims' discourse in intervention work. I would like to
conclude my observations not by giving practical ideas or ready-made 'recipes'
for 'how to cook good trauma projects'. I rather want to suggest a different
*perspective* through which we could redesign our approaches, but still more

importantly, through which we could critically revise our attitudes in international trauma work.

De-ideologizing as an urgent task of liberation (Martín-Baró, 1996c) presents a helpful approach to revising uncontested underlying assumptions of the (psychosocial) aid response. It is not only single 'tools' or 'programme approaches' that are western-oriented. Rather, the entire intervention is situated in a context that we must not only acknowledge but challenge and deconstruct. Psychosocial programmes, however well meaning or well designed, support and deepen the contradictions discussed herein. The cases presented here reflect the realities of western aid, the sense of competition it fosters among those receiving it, and the painful dilemmas aid workers encounter and incite related to this competition. These aspects of the western aid context are potentially destructive not only to the conflict scenarios themselves – as Mary Anderson (1999) and colleagues have successfully shown – but also to those social networks that are the most important ones for recovery and stabilization: the family and community. There is no need to romanticize both structures. They are highly ambivalent, not only to westerners, but also to Africans. However, international NGOs' psychosocial projects cannot replace these structures.

De-ideologizing – especially for psychologists and mental health professionals inspired by liberation psychology – would mean that one becomes aware of and acknowledges the potentially harmful and ambivalent role that our interventions have, and that one makes it an issue within our organizations *and* in the field. This requires systemic thinking and power-sensitivity – but still more: the courage and honesty to say 'NO'. NO to 'attractive target groups' when aid agencies are already over-involved in providing aid to certain sub-groups of a population in need and thus create more imbalance in an already shaken society. Turning down 'attractive target groups' would necessitate the courage and creativity to recommend interventions with segments of a population who are less interesting and perhaps more difficult 'to be sold' and whose suffering has more of an 'everyday horror' quality.

Additionally, and with reference to the implicit political implications of our work as psychologists, I consider it to be a professional obligation to make our organizations aware of the ambivalence inherent in such 'aid business' and to challenge our governments' roles in those conflicts in which we intervene. If our psychosocial slogans of 'breaking the silence about sexual/domestic/war-related violence' are to have any meaning to the people we hope to 'help' we must also break the conspiratorial silence that surrounds the global political interventions and economic interests of western governments underlying and/or supporting many contemporary conflict scenarios (e.g. Johnson, 2008). Otherwise we might risk what Giorgio Agamben (1998) rightly describes as the alienating separation between the humanitarian and the political in humanitarian organizations, through which they then support, against their original intention, a secret solidarity with those powers that they should combat.

De-ideologizing, as a professional individual *and* organizational attitude,

means acknowledging that there is no innocent standpoint in helping. It calls for a constant re-viewing of ourselves, our tools and methods, our implicit ideologies and our legitimizing role of international power structures. I believe that 'global' psychosocial trauma work that is inspired by a feminist liberation psychology is a place of humility and constant revision of our implicit alliances. It is also a place of self-critical creativity in 'assuming sisterhood' by refusing to define 'women as archetypal victims', which freezes them into 'objects-who-defend-themselves', and men into 'subjects-who-perpetrate-violence', and '(every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people' (Mohanty, 1991: 58). De-ideologizing as a core methodological attitude can thus help current psychosocial trauma work to stop being 'a type of oil, a slow lubricant' (Martín-Baró, 1996d: 122) in the international humanitarian response, but rather its brake fluid.

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