Resilience in Families and Communities: Latin American Contributions from the Psychology of Liberation

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Resilience in Families and Communities: Latin American Contributions From the Psychology of Liberation

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A systemic understanding of resilience is expanded by studying the meaning of hope and solidarity in a Latin American context facing war and political repression. Understanding the language used in Latin America to refer to coping with adversity has valuable theoretical and therapeutic potential. This article compares, integrates, and further develops Froma Walsh's systemic view of resilience by discussing Latin American literature that addresses the notions of hope and solidarity as pathways to cope with social trauma. The concept of collective resilience is introduced based on the stories of human rights activists who developed the capacity to cope with adversity. Collective resilience refers to the coping processes that occur in reference to and dependent on a given social context. These processes aim to rebuild and sustain social relationships to heal the wounds of trauma, the losses of war, and the reconstruction of a sense of belonging and personal identity.

Large numbers of people all over the world face severe and sometimes ongoing trauma from such circumstances as war, terrorism, physical and emotional abuse, and natural disasters. How can they manage to maintain or recover some semblance of mental health under such difficult conditions? That is the question faced by family therapists and other mental health workers. This article offers models to help such populations based on family therapy and psychology of liberation theories and the experiences of human rights workers in Colombia. These models can be applied to developing resilience in traumatized populations.

The term *resilience* does not have a direct translation into Spanish; however, there is an important body of Latin American literature that speaks to a set of ways of coping with trauma in the midst of political persecution and social turmoil. The psychology of liberation (Martín-Baró, 1982, 1984, 1989, 1990, 1994) and the notions of hope and resistance developed by Latin American psychologists (Lira, 1988; Lira & Eldeman, 1987; Lira, Weinstein, & Salmovich, 1986) address issues of trauma, resistance, hope, and solidarity from a contextual and political perspective. The psychology of liberation adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of resilience processes in countries facing political turmoil. This theoretical framework offers the possibility of integrating some of the key concepts developed by Walsh (1998) in her approach to resilience in families.

WALSH'S MODEL

In the United States, Walsh (1998) placed the foundations of resilience within an ecological, developmental, and rela-

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tional perspective. An ecological perspective frames family functioning within the many contexts that a family inhabits; attends to cultural, ethnic, gender, religion, and economic status; and attends to hierarchy, power, and oppression. A developmental perspective attends to change over time within the shifting balance of the stages in families' life cycles. A relational view understands the family as a functional unit in which mediating processes influence short- and long-term adaptation to hardships for all members. An important caveat, however, is that overcoming struggle is more challenging when families also face racism, poverty, or war. She criticized previous traditional research for not taking into account the family as a potential source of resilience and for narrowing its focus in terms of individual and biological hardiness.

Both the psychology of liberation and Walsh's model offer supporting frameworks to understand processes of community resilience. This understanding is accomplished by analyzing the concepts that each approach may lend to view the stories that Colombian human rights activists shared about their coping with political persecution in the current war that the country faces. This analysis is based on a qualitative study on trauma and resilience that entailed in-depth interviews with 8 human rights activists in 1997 (Hernández, 2000).

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LIBERATION: MAJOR CONCEPTS

In her work on the genesis of a psychology attuned to social justice, Hollander (1997) referred to this branch of psychology as the psychology of liberation. She explained that this term is "reminiscent of *liberation theology*"[1] because it captures the "efforts to address the emotional and social sources of human suffering" (p 16). Obviously, this is not a unified body of approaches. Some approaches lean more heavily on psychoanalytic thought (for example, Lira & Eldeman, 1987), others rely more on the theology of liberation (Martín-Baró, 1990, 1994), and others build more on Freiran pedagogy (Freire, 1972).

These theories, however, converge on similar major assumptions to guide their work: They (a) acknowledge the sociopolitical nature of traumatic experiences, (b) take a position against repression and state violence, (c) name the sources of oppression, (d) assist people in the reconstruction of their lives, (e) rely on community-based approaches for therapy and education, and (f) link the therapeutic work with human rights and activism.

The most significant aspect of these approaches is their integration of psychological expertise to treat people suffering the wounds of war and repression with an articulation of social justice and a political view. This article relies on Martín-Baró's writings about the role of psychology and mental health in helping communities in the midst of war.

Martín-Baró: Mental Health and Hope

The work of Martín-Baró (1982, 1989, 1990) is fundamental in locating explanations about trauma and hope at the social level in Latin America. His approach coevolved with the El Salvadoran war and seeks to provide a pragmatic understanding of trauma, recovery, and the role of mental health. His approach to psychology of liberation involves the concepts of trauma and hope in the dynamics of liberation. In his developing of a pragmatic understanding of trauma and recovery in the aftermath of war, Martín-Baró used Freire's concept of *concientización*[2] to shift the focus of therapy from individual alienation to group de-alienation through a critical understanding of the reality of war that shapes people's lives. Through dialogical teaching, reflection, and action, people can understand and articulate their experiences and then appropriate a personal remodeling in their lives and their communities. The locus of hope is twofold. First, by framing individual suffering in context, stories are opened up to be understood as forming part of the social ways in which suffering is maintained. Therefore, hope is reconstructed as oppressive societal ideologies are deconstructed. Second, by emphasizing the community aspects of healing, webs of relationships are reconstructed through affiliation and trust, and therefore hope becomes an avenue for change involving groups of people and not solely individuals.

In other words, two concepts are at the center of his approach: the dialectical nature of the sociopolitical realm and the process of concientización that integrates the personal and the sociopolitical in practice. For Martín-Baró (1989), individuals and societies are mutually dependent realities that define each other and the place of individuals in history. Thus, individual dynamics have to be understood within the frame of macro-sociological and structural aspects. For example, the El Salvadoran people's attitudes toward work have to be studied with an understanding of the labor market in that country, its effects on people, and the politics of that market. The process of concientización involves a kind of learning in which people transform themselves by changing their realities. That is, one learns as one gains awareness in the doing and in the reflecting on the doing with others. In this process, people decode current dynamics of their world and understand how oppression operates. This process brings changes in personal and social identities. Within the exploitative Salvadoran economic and social structure, and the subsequent war, Martín-Baró stated that the role of psychology was to *concientizar*, that is, to foster approaches to intervene at the level of developing awareness of the structural dynamics of traumatic reactions for persecuted populations.

Overcoming Dehumanization

Stemming from the El Salvadoran literature on trauma (Samayoa, 1990), the psychology of liberation reached an

understanding of how the civil wars and their social correlates produce a dehumanizing process. The ways in which groups and individuals live throughout a war, adapt their lives within it, and make meaning out of their situation are both a site of pain and a site of hope. Overall, the site of hope is grounded in two premises: the psychosocial nature of trauma and the development of consciousness about the dynamics of war. The former refers to the dialectical character of the wounds of war in which the root of pain is not considered individual but social. These wounds affect people in different ways depending on their personal conditions. The latter refers to processes of concientización and political education geared toward a critical analysis of structural inequality and subjugation and the development of transforming practices to build new relations, histories, and identities.

Hope and Human Rights Advocacy

Therefore, through an epistemology constructed from below with the popular majority, the task is to engage in practices to transform injustice alongside the people who are dominated. Hollander's (1997) account of South American psychologists and human rights leaders illustrates one way in which her protagonists led their paths and "actively engaged in human rights' struggles, whose aim would be to address the psychological legacy of the culture of fear and posit a politics aimed at individual and societal reparation" (p. 180). Comaz-Díaz, Lykes, and Alarcón (1998) applied this framework to understand ethnic identity and conflict in Guatemala, Perú, and Puerto Rico. They noted that the role of mental health is to accompany people, that is, to develop collaborative relationships with them to transform inequality. In a similar line, this stance has also been recognized in the United States by professionals working with minorities and economically disadvantaged populations (Inclan & Ferran, 1990). The ideas of advocacy and collaborative relationships are applied within a different social structure but seem to call for the same kind of stance.

COLOMBIA AS A SPECIAL CASE

When looking at the dialectics of the legacies of dictatorships and repression all over Latin America, as well as social movements, approaches grounded in the needs of particular populations are prisms through which mental health and healing make sense. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are differences in history and ethnic configurations in Latin American countries in spite of the similarity of legacies. The case of Colombia is notorious precisely because of its brief periods of dictatorship and the relatively lower level of immigration of people of European descent in this century. To this day, Colombia still has various native groups struggling for their survival in their own terms and an important percentage of Afro-Colombians (Grueso, Rosero, & Escobar, 1998).

A Freirian understanding implies learning about the existing knowledge and understandings that people have about their circumstances, and about their knowledge and the mental health people's knowledge. Therapeutic encounters are then framed by working with people to collectively understand and transform those life conditions that they experience as the most important ones. Accompany means working together. The purpose of this kind of relationship (togetherness) is to analyze and act on particular issues, so that people can critically appropriate ideas and transform their lives. I find that these ideas have much in common with the way in which White and Epston (1990, 1995) talked about positioning in therapy. The psychology of liberation seems to precede this understanding, later developed within narrative therapies.

An example of a therapeutic model that addresses healing from a critical and psychosocial perspective is that of Beristain and Riera (1992). It attends to the effects of political repression and war on individuals and groups, the therapist's role in linking his or her work to broader levels such as human rights, and the development of techniques that respond to the idiosyncrasy of the people affected. It analyzes notions of hope and resistance in several steps. First, their model is based on the recognition of two key elements. The first one acknowledges and builds on the ways in which people construct networks of solidarity to respond to their emotional and material needs. The second one defines traumatic experiences in the context of war, understanding that in low-intensity conflicts, traumatic experiences become "normal" and generalized. They called for situating and discriminating traumatic experiences in personal and group histories. In addition, they strongly stated that pointing out the effects of war and repression on people's lives should not imply a label as "victims." That is, there is a clear understanding that people suffer greatly, but their dignity is maintained when the locus of the responsibility is placed in the sociopolitical apparatus. For them, "the only way to overcome feeling broken is by facing these situations from a constructive perspective" (p. 39), that is, by developing meaning out of it. There lies the hope: in finding personal and political meaning out of it.

The development of resilience is a key process in overcoming the effects of trauma. In it, hope is sowed again in the reconstruction of the self. People appropriate certain knowledge, share their mutual tragedies (i.e., disappearances), mourn the losses, and build new purposes in life. Beristain and Riera (1992) mentioned the following steps in their approach: (a) developing firm convictions, (b) regaining control, (c) knowing the methods used by those in power to abuse others, (d) preserving autonomy, (e) affirming a reality that allows one's voice to exist, and (f) understanding the dynamics of fear and confronting them. Their emphasis on the supportive role of the community obviously attends to communities in which relationships and togetherness are more

important than a strong sense of individuality. They drew on the webs of solidarity to foster recovery. Their approach presents similarities with Walsh's (1998) conceptualization on belief systems, as her approach emphasizes relationship processes to heal and strengthen individuals in communities, and the importance of facilitating the appraisal of crisis in manageable ways.

Helping Models in Colombia

In Colombia, several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have developed approaches to working with victims of the sociopolitical violence in the country. Apoyo a Victimas de la Violencia Socio-Political Pro-Recuperación Emocional[3] (Castano, 1994; Castano, Jaramillo, & Summerfield, 1998) has developed a psychosocial model that combines educational and therapeutic components based on the same idea that traumas of war are not individual but collective. Following a Freirian approach to education, they have created a developmentally based curriculum for children, adolescents, and adults that teaches about possible reactions in times of war: anxiety and depression. They also address the processes of mourning the disappeared and the loved ones killed in massacres. Their organization is structured in teams of physicians or nurses, psychologists, and occupational therapists. These teams travel to the areas affected by the violence and work at two levels: (a) rebuilding the social networks within the communities and with other communities and organizations and (b) offering educational and therapeutic services for the communities. Again, the locus of hope is located in rebuilding the networks and promoting agency or *autogestión*.[4] This is a very challenging task in the kind of "dirty war" that Colombia is undergoing, but it is one that makes sense within the multiple social upheavals that the country faces. The approaches to mental health presented here are empirically grounded and follow a particular trend: that of making sense of the self and the selves in context.

Community Life Model

Research on community life has also shed light on the importance of relationships and solidarity as an integral part of how many people live in Colombia. Studies on social networks by Abello and Madariaga (1992) have addressed the function of social networks in communities living in poverty. They viewed it as a survival mechanism when people need emotional, moral, social, and economic support. They found that as people develop relations of *compadrazgo*[5] through sharing geographical spaces such as the neighborhood, socializing, and helping each other, these nets maintain themselves over time. These relationships are based on trust and reciprocity. Scheper-Hughes's (1992) work on the violence of everyday in Brazil also points to the nature of networks and solidarity that people enact to survive in the midst of poverty. From an anthropological perspective, she narrated the life stories of three stepsisters who grow up in extreme poverty under conditions where many children do not live beyond infancy. Within such context, their survival depends on relationships, alliances, and the sharing of resources. Their lives speak of their abilities to learn skills and develop relationships to beat the odds against them, as well as their belief in a destiny predetermined by God and the power of luck.

In sum, the notion of hope within networks of social relationships is a key feature of important Latin American mental health approaches responding to the traumas of war (Lesner, 1996). In these approaches, hope lies in the promotion of social change through community and therapeutic work and international advocacy. The concepts of trauma and hope and the processes of recovery are considered mutually dependent and embedded in the ethos of communities.

RESILIENCE FROM A FAMILY THERAPY PERSPECTIVE: INTEGRATING WALSH'S MODEL IN THE COLOMBIAN CASE

Advances in family therapy focus on interactional family processes within an ecological and developmental perspective. Walsh (1998), a pioneer in this systemic trend, talked about relational resilience as involving "organizational patterns, communication and problem-solving processes, community resources and affirming belief systems" (p. 262). She explained that families were not considered a source of strength because of the influence of deficit-oriented models and the focus on children with seriously disturbed parents. Thus, sources of strength were looked for outside the family. She proposed the following foundations for an approach on family resilience: (a) family belief systems grounded in how they make meaning out of adversity and views on positive outcomes and spirituality; (b) organizational patterns understood in terms of flexibility, connectedness, and social and economic resources; and (c) communication processes regarding clarity, emotional expression, and collaborative problem solving. Taking the term *family* as *community*, it is possible to broaden the application of these foundations to more complex systems of relationships. The Colombian human rights activists interviewed (Hernández, 2000) were part of larger systems and complex systems of relationships with their kin and coworkers.

The most relevant aspect of Walsh's model informing this analysis of human rights activists' stories (Hernández, 2000) is the role that belief systems play in resiliency processes. An essential dimension of the human rights activists' understanding of trauma is based on social and political beliefs. Walsh (1998) stated that "we cope with crisis and adversity by making meaning of our experience: linking it to our social world, to our cultural and religious beliefs, to out multigenerational past, and to our hopes and dreams for the future" (p. 45). How

people make these links in their lives is fundamentally related to their capacity for narration.

Walsh (1998) proposed three categories to organize the values, attitudes, biases, and assumptions that come together to trigger emotional responses and guide actions. These categories are (a) making meaning of adversity, (b) positive outlook, and (c) transcendence and spirituality. Walsh defined making meaning of adversity as a relationally based process explained by the affiliative value of resilience. It acknowledges that views about the self and the world are the product of relationships, that crisis is shared by family members, and that trust in others plays a fundamental role in overcoming challenges. Making meaning of adversity also entails the development of a sense of coherence and a way of appraising stress. In her work, sense of coherence is defined as a "global orientation to life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful" (p. 56); it involves abilities to understand problems and mobilize resources. Appraisal of stress addresses facilitative and constraining ways of thinking that people use to think about problems. It involves the relationship between how a person defines a problem and how she or he deals with it.

These categories are useful as organizing principles in the stories presented in this article. However, sense of coherence is a category with limited explanatory value in the Colombian context of war. Although the human rights activists' stories evolved in ways in which they found ways to make violence comprehensible, the atrocities of war are not always so intelligible. People learn to live with the incomprehensible dimension of war and its contradictions. In fact, as Janoff-Bulman (1992) said, in situations of politically based trauma, people know that evil exists, and the shattering of their assumptions involves a devastating understanding that evil does happen. Thus, there is both an effort toward coherence to organize meaning and mobilize oneself and others and an acknowledgement of evil.

Making meaning of adversity and maintaining a sense of coherence are useful descriptors for some ways in which the human rights activists interviewed coped with adversity (Hernández, 2000). Excerpts of the stories that will be presented in this article illustrate how their stories involve these two aspects. Making meaning of adversity occurs mainly through relationships, affection, and solidarity. They healed wounds through the trust and care that they had in relationships. In addition, a sense of coherence came from an ideology that allowed an understanding of violence from a political perspective. This ideological frame and their convictions to work for a peaceful resolution to the war and justice added clarity between their perceptions of risks and how they respond to them.

The second category at the core of belief systems is positive outlook. Under this category, Walsh (1998) spoke of the importance of perseverance, encouragement, hope, strength, and the development of a sense of what is possible and what is not. Human rights activists are extremely determined to persevere in their work. In fact, perseverance is rooted in their family histories, adult relationships, and values. Hope and strength are rooted in a lifetime dedicated to serving others and working for future generations. Their acceptance of their limitations is tied to the political changes that affected their lives, sometimes in harsh ways. Those experiences led them to reevaluate their views on the groups involved in the war and their ways to help strengthen the civilian population.

THE COMMUNITY DIMENSION OF RESILIENCY STORIES

The notion of resilience may be described as being socially constructed in the language and social context of Colombian human rights activists interviewed for a research project (Hernández, 2000). This section addresses its meaning within the web of relationships of communities. In the Colombian context, communities and relationships are at the heart of the social fabric. In fact, solidarity, an essential feature of the participants' stories, can only be understood in relationship to others. I conceptualize resilience as collective and ingrained within relationships in communities by illustrating the wholeness of communities and understanding how people care for each other. I conclude by analyzing how the human rights activists' ways of coping with adversity have a community dimension that can be best described by the term *solidarity*. When used in the Spanish language, this word encompasses patterns of activity related to making meaning out of surviving at the community level.

Despite the apparent breakdown of the system of protection in Colombia, what sustains a semblance of social order in these violent times is a network of social-valuing mechanisms by which citizens relate to each other. A key strategy for surviving through decades of violence has been negotiation. People have been able to negotiate daily life within their communities in the midst of political violence. In the rural areas and in communities that have been affected by decades of violence, people have learned to coexist with relatives or community members who belong to a guerrilla group. It is fundamental to understand that this population has experienced oppression from the state since times immemorial, some became *guerrilleros*, some sympathize with the left, some do not care about politics, some sympathize with the traditional parties, and so on. But in their daily living, all peasants and merchants have developed many family and community ties by virtue of marriage, trade, friendships, and support. Therefore, a superficial glance at these communities may lead to simple and dangerous assumptions. The themes in the human rights activists' stories speak about core belief systems. In this context, community and relationships are more important than individuals. Here, the idea of affiliative values from Walsh's (1998) model refers to shared geographical and ideological spaces, to networks of friendship and kinship.

The intertwined nature of communities is a fundamental aspect in making meaning out of adversity. The lives of the human rights activists were embedded in communities that had to be taken into account to understand the role that they played in their struggle for human rights in Colombia. Their proactive actions for human rights as well as their suffering had effects on other people's lives. Therefore, the processes of coping with adversity must address the relationships that sustain or constrain how people cope with social trauma. This community level of coping may be called collective resilience. Collective resilience encompasses the counteracting process that leads to social trauma. I define it as the coping processes that occur in reference to and dependent on a given social context. These processes aim to rebuild and sustain social relationships to heal the wounds of trauma, the losses of war, and the reconstruction of a sense of belonging and personal identity. Specifically, these coping processes involve the restoration of past traumatic memories toward building a future where accountability and social justice are prime elements. An example of collective resilience is the peace process in the Colombian town of Aguachica (Rincón, 1995). Until 1995, Aguachica was the only town in the world that held a popular consultation process to establish the residents' wishes for peace. This town had been under constant attack by guerrilla and paramilitary groups that claimed to represent the people. However, 99% of the people voted for peace. People wanted to rebuild their town and social nets.

Furthermore, I argue that the term *solidarity* is one that best describes the affiliative value (Walsh, 1998) of resilience in the Colombian human rights context. I understand the meaning of the affiliative value of resilience in terms of networks of trust, care, and ideologies. The human rights activists participating in this study "wove" relationships in geographical and ideological spaces within institutions holding politics that promoted fundamental rights and disempowered communities' interests. Coping with the adversities of war and persecution may be understood in practice as a collective effort ingrained within community relationships. Viewing their role as key players in community nets corroborates that informal community leaders provide the basis around which to build informal support systems, as well as the vehicle for bridging formal and informal systems (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993).

The social networks existing in countries such as Colombia entail interpersonal threads that compose the social fabric of communities facing oppression. This interconnectedness brings in both the challenges of strains in interpersonal relationships and the reassurances and strengths of being able to share and rely on people. The human rights activists' stories illustrate the nuances and contradictions that they face in the midst of interacting within communities. This aspect of the human rights activists' life stories enriches our understanding of their roles in their communities and how people care for each other. The meaning of solidarity is ingrained in the social fabric and ways of caring of these communities. The following excerpts from the life stories of Colombian human rights activists illustrate the community dimension of resilience processes.

The Intertwined Nature of Communities: Stories of Hope and Solidarity

The human rights activists' stories illustrate the family and the community dimensions of hope and solidarity.[6] In the context of discussing how to support social workers and organizers in human rights committees, Daniel pointed at the lack of personal spaces that they have to express their pain and receive emotional support. He shared how he cared for his own colleagues and friends and offered support regularly when he saw them falling apart. One of those experiences was as follows:

> After I listened to her I hugged her and I asked when she was going to keep some time for herself. . . . I told her to let go of that arrogance that made her feel that if she was not around, the world will end. If you have to be absent it means that you need to recover so that when you come back, your work will be more fertile. I invited her to do exercises, to meditate, to be in silence to see what came out . . . to listen to her feelings. I noticed her headaches, her anxiety, lack of appetite. . . . I told her that all these meant that something needed to be heard.

Another example of the importance of friendships and the nature of solidarity within communities is illustrated by Jaime's experience. When exploring how Jaime and his team were able to continue working under persecution and harsh conditions, he shared that the strength came from themselves as a group and the appreciation that was developed over the years by the community.

> We became very good friends, we were very close, and at the public level we became important in the city. But we all loved each other and protected each other. We used to meet and have coffee and talk. . . . It was a very humane environment. . . . Besides we all had our own support groups; we all had friends through our professions and jobs. Maybe that is why they were not able to destroy us so easily. In any case, our committee became an institution with a lot of support from different sources and people knew that although we were a small group they got their services. We were also a homogeneous group with a clear and strong sense of what human rights were about. We supported each other unconditionally and had that kind of support from other people.

Another aspect of care and affection is hope. Daniel emphasized the idea of hope in the context of his faith and religious convictions:

> I get hope from my experience of faith. In the manner in which I relate to God's life, in my history, supported in my meditations and in the written word, I mean the Bible. But

> another thing that helps me is friendships. Knowing that I can count on them . . . that we can talk and share our feelings . . . it is the presence of the others when I can be myself as I am. That is my fundamental nutrition, although it is not permanent. . . . These friendships are also relationships that demand, very deep and questioning.

The community dimension of solidarity is salient in Daniel's story. This dimension evolved along his understanding of the war's dynamics and the role of NGOs. In documenting the testimonies of how people used to live in times of peace with others who had made a choice for change, Osorio (1993), Molano (1994), and Salazar (1993) illustrated the ways in which they later became involved in the conflict and suffered persecution, displacement, or personal losses. While Daniel spent several months with a peasant community that had been attacked by the paramilitary five times, he understood the different ways in which people live with armed groups during peaceful times and the conditions that emerge to help them stay in their lands. Daniel's experiences in a peasant area where attacks from the paramilitary are common led him to explain the violence they suffer as follows:

> Interviewer: Do you remember an anecdote with regard to how the peasants explained the violence they were suffering? When they found themselves suddenly persecuted by any of the groups?
>
> Daniel: The community starts to find out that part of the violence is related to the natural frequency of the insurgents in their territory. . . . We are talking about a region that until recently was under total control of the insurgents. It was highly militarized but the insurgents had the control. They discover this when supportive paramilitary activities occur in their territory. These people grow up in an environment where it is natural to live with a force that is an actor in the political conflict. In addition, it is armed, has power and an ideology. . . . There is a natural growing of relationships in a world where the group passes through, settles in, asks for water, cooks and where there are exchanges of favors . . . a message, a medical service . . . because if you do not do it you have to go. Also, the relationships are peaceful. . . . There was no land in dispute as it is today. When the paramilitary incursions start, it is barbaric!

I believe that there are shared ideological and geographical spaces that form a web of relationships in which activism takes place. These relationships and solidarities that people build over time are at the heart of the building of supportive networks to survive. For example, there is closeness among certain displaced populations, certain peasant groups, certain NGOs, and certain politicians. These relationships are heterogeneous, and affections collide and merge at different times. The human rights activists' accounts point at a main role in their work: building bridges, connecting people, negotiating spaces, and developing threads for people to understand each other. The main survival feature to continue the work is the creation and development of webs of personal and political relationships.

Daniel and I discussed in depth his understanding of solidarity. He elaborated on another aspect: the relationships that NGOs develop with displaced populations and people in need. This discussion sheds light on important issues to consider in terms of reevaluating community work:

> Daniel: The ideal is that the way in which people relate to each other changes. That the way in which those who want to serve the ones who suffer the effects of the war changes. That we all help our friends, women and men, to propose a different way to locate ourselves in relation to those who are the objects of our actions. They are the subjects of our solidarity.
>
> Interviewer: What would be the effects of constructing solidarity relationships the way you define them?
>
> Daniel: We need to identify the excluded populations, the impoverished, to begin to build with them their place in history. See, the effect is that any effort in transforming this situation starts at the bottom, not at the top. That is, that the poor who mobilized these organizations be the authors of their lives, that they take the reins of their lives. They will discover that they can define how they want to live. In other words, the effect is that processes of organization and participation are set in motion.

Daniel's views emphasize personal components that seem to make change possible. In his view, the civilian victims of the violence have not had the opportunity to decide by themselves what they want and how they want it. His stress on authorship continues as follows:

> I insist in the concept of the "subject" in two ways: The one that we want to help has to be the author of the process, we cannot think for the other; I do not believe that one is the voice of the others, they have a voice of their own. What we need to do is to help to create conditions for people to speak out without fear, or with fear but not a paralyzing fear. And then, when we think about economics, politics, culture, we also have to include what people feel, what they imagine, the ways in which people create meaning . . . in their celebrations, in their sensibility. The world of intuition, compassion, tenderness, forgiveness, hospitality is constitutive of us.

When I asked about what he thought maintains relationships of authority or power in a one-down position, he said the following:

> Daniel: I suspect that it is the necessity to do things now. The needs are so urgent that you don't have to think much. They cannot afford to go through slow processes until the other, who we want to help, is able to decide on his own about what we might think. I suspect that this rush is a good that becomes a bad thing in the long run as it creates dependency.

Interviewer: How did you start to notice the difference between the people who are working for solidarity and the ones who are not?

Daniel: In a very practical manner, in meetings with people, observing how they relate to people, how they talk to them, and also observing the ways in which they refer to the community processes when the people are not there. Then they tell you what they think about the others. . . . They shared things that troubled me. . . . For example, people would make comments about people with little compassion towards them.

Daniel's account deals with the issues of representation and agency. People who have been direct victims of the war have had almost no way in which to take control of their lives and communities. In the process of rebuilding their lives, it is necessary to develop real participatory processes to develop agency and commitment. To think about solidarity as nets of relationships in which people develop their own voices and coordinate their efforts for visualizing a future together, it is necessary to establish certain kinds of relationships between them and the organizations providing services. People working for NGOs at the local level have the privilege of developing direct relationships with communities.

Daniel articulated his ideas on the ways in which the displaced populations should be seen as subjects and not as objects of humanitarian aid. His ideas point at the need to develop agency and horizontal relationships with people. Following the thread of his ideas of developing community, listening to people, and joining them in their daily lives, his views fit in with the following statements:

> I believe that what is clear in the complaints that I have heard, and in my observation of their behavior, is that people are looking for new ways, that they are tired of lectures and ideologies . . . that they do not want pressures and manipulations, that they do not want to be reduced to a wall. . . . This points at the need to attend to the subject. The subject who is capable of creating meaning, who defines structures, ideologies and the values that frame the social fabric. . . . The ideal is that we, the people who want to serve the ones who suffer the effects of war, change our way of relating to them. . . . They are the subjects of our solidarity.

In Daniel's view, these relationships should be enacted in a Freirian frame, that is, learning about the existing knowledge and understandings that people have about their circumstances and about their knowledge and the NGO people's knowledge. By working with people to collectively understand and transform the conditions of life that they experience, people develop relationships of solidarity that transform the authoritarian nature of institutional relationships. Discourses that frame notions of individual agency as an individual's responsibility based on hard work and personal sacrifice lose sight of the historical circumstances that have made displaced populations in Colombia lose hope, trust, and faith in reconstructing their family lives and towns. In this context, agency should be seen as a joint process of reconstructing life in everyday practices.

Daniel and Beatriz, who worked in the same region, shared that at critical times, people from other NGOs, as well as people who heard information about them, informed them of any possible danger. The people who warned them were other citizens who might have had links with people who had access to information from armed groups. The affiliative value of resilience (Walsh, 1998) is illustrated here within the context of caring for someone's life. In spite of disagreements, the valuing of the work and the relationships establishes the importance of caring for others.

The Sheltering Power of Community

Solidarity at the community level can also be seen in terms of the value and the position that community members may develop over time. The networks that evolve when people participate in community programs and town activities offer members possibilities for taking positions that may break norms. However, the fact that these members are known in the community and have relationships of kin and friendship within the community makes a difference. They may voice concerns and change the status quo. The following stories attest to this dimension of community networks.

For example, Beatriz's stories illustrate the various and complex levels of relationships. Beatriz shared that on one occasion, she was called by one of the guerrilla groups because one person in her health group was stealing money from poor people. She found out that this was true and that they were there to protect the community. But to her surprise, she found out that the "guerrilla" members were people she had met in other contexts. This account shows again how when the state has no presence, others take over and perform its functions. Beatriz's account shows how she learns about "violence in the neighborhood":

> Well when the military and the guerrillas came in and two parties were formed . . . I used to think that there were no guerrillas in this town; I never saw anyone unusual. But I met them. . . . It was a nice experience. One of our colleagues . . . not everybody works with the same ethic . . . [the health company] had come here and had ordered cheap prescription glasses for people. The person who was in charge of receiving the money was keeping it, and you know, and that gave a bad name to all of us, the volunteers. I got to know because as I was waiting in line in another health center . . . I overheard a conversation in which someone said that the volunteers were thieves. I inquired . . . and the person told me that he had paid for his glasses and then he had been told that he had not paid. I identified myself and told him that I was going to investigate. . . . A few days later we got a citation from the guerrilla. . . . We went . . . got there . . . and it was the people from the neighborhood! . . . It was people I knew and I realized that there were guerrillas in the town. We had a meeting and decided that we were going to take a loan to pay for these people's glasses. [The person who took the money] had no money

> to pay back . . . but people talked about things that she had done. She had two little children. They started to talk about not letting her go. . . . I got very nervous and aggressive and my fears disappeared. I stood up and said, "Wait a moment, this lady has two children, who is going to take care of them? You are not going to do it. That is not the solution!"

In this situation, she learned that people she had met before in the town were affiliated with a guerrilla group, that they were called to clarify and prosecute someone who was stealing from other people in the community, and that she had to defend the life of this person. She appealed to the fact that this woman was in need and had two children. In this context, safety means developing a trusting relationship with the agent of justice in the town (which is not the state) by attending a meeting, explaining the situation, and defending someone else's life. This is an example of a situation in which Beatriz feels responsible for the image of her team and has to face a moral order that does not agree with her values. Her way of telling and her argument convinced these people not to hurt the woman who stole the money.

The development of relationships is framed by people's solidarity with each other. Solidarity means support for people who live in economically deprived areas. An example of its meaning can be seen in the ways in which some people voice the community's concerns and make possible the development of public channels to request and respond to their needs. The community member who is aware of her or his rights and expresses it for herself or himself and others is of great help in a community. Beatriz was clearly such a person. The following story illustrates the importance of her role in the community:

> Sometimes a person does not have money to pay for the appointment, then one can talk to the doctor; one knows that they have to see the client and one can discuss it with them. For example a new physician came in to work there. I had already referred three patients to him when a 13-year-old came in with a great wound. I referred him to the health center although he did not have any money. He came back and told me that the physician got very upset, that he wanted to meet this woman who referred him because she thought that she owned the health center, since she was referring people to be seen for free. He refused to see the boy and left to complain to the director. Then the director told him that if she referred people in those conditions it was because she knew that they had no money. That if they did not take care of the patient she would come and remind us of the vows we made as physicians. The director took the boy in.

Beatriz herself went to the health center and asked the physician if he wanted to meet her. She told him that "although she did not own the center, she advocated for its being built and open to serve people so that he and others could also work there and earn a salary." In Walsh's (1998) terms, Beatriz's actions speak of the transcendence of larger values and commitment to justice. However, such a commitment must necessarily fly in the face of an institutionalized regime that blocks avenues of support to those sections of the population who are impoverished and lack connections to authority figures who may get services for them.

These two situations illustrate the intricate dynamics that communities lacking resources in Colombia undergo. They have to negotiate their survival with several powerful players that are struggling for control. In his work on social networks, Garbarino (1985) has already recognized the key role of people like Beatriz. According to him, central figures in networks that are mutually supportive attain their centrality by playing key helping roles and by matching resources to the need.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the language used in Latin America to refer to coping with adversity has valuable theoretical and therapeutic potential. An expanded and contextual understanding of resilience is possible when integrating the concepts of hope and solidarity from the psychology of liberation with the affiliative aspect of Walsh's model. This integration may be accomplished by introducing the concept of collective resilience. In the context of the four-decade, low-intensity Colombian war, it refers to the coping processes that occur in reference to and dependent on a given social context. These processes aim to rebuild and sustain social relationships to heal the wounds of trauma, the losses of war, and the reconstruction of a sense of belonging and personal identity. The integration of Walsh's model and the psychology of liberation concepts enable us to examine trauma in many circumstances and apply the principles outlined in this article to promote reconstruction and healing.

I suggest the following guidelines to the development of community-based therapeutic relationships: (a) explaining at the outset the collaborative nature of the therapeutic relationship to begin to establish trust and the expectation of developing agency in the therapeutic process, (b) becoming aware of the sociopolitical context in which traumatic events unfolded to assist clients in making connections between community and personal stories, (c) having a position of transparency regarding the therapist's stance with regard to the larger sociopolitical level of conflicts, (d) offering a setting for safe therapeutic groups in which participants can share and bare witness to traumatic and survival stories to expand both understanding and relationships, (e) coaching clients to seek information and links with people who have written and work on issues related to the legacy of trauma and war, and (f) inviting people who can speak about their personal processes of resilience to therapeutic groups. Finally, therapeutic conversations should have a focus on developing alternative stories that may embrace the choices leading to survival in the midst of conflict. This entails a joint venture in comprehending their life stories, rewriting them, and composing new stories after suffering the damaging effects of upheaval and disruption.

NOTES

1. This was the revolutionary movement within the Catholic Church that introduced a new vision to address the spiritual and material sources of oppression in Latin America.

2. This concept is derived from Paulo Freire's pedagogy and refers to the development of critical awareness of the personal dynamics in the context of the social and political situations of oppressed people (see Freire, 1971).

3. The translation in English is Support to Victims of Socio-Political Violence and for Emotional Recovery.

4. *Autogestión* is the name given in Spanish to processes in which communities develop agency and organize themselves to demand the fulfilling of their rights, restructure relationships of power within the community, or become political in society.

5. *Compadrazgo* is a word that people use in Colombia to refer to others who are close and are considered part of the kinship although biological ties do not exist. These relationships develop over time as people share their daily lives through socializing and helping each other.

6. Personal information that may lead to identifying these human rights activists, including their names, was changed.

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