

doi: <https://doi.org/10.15446/rcp.v32n1.98961>

Historical Development of Political-Critical Thinking in Colombian Psychology

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How to cite this article: Cudina, J. N., Ossa, J. C., Millán, J. D., López-López, W., & Tateo, L. (2023). Historical development of political-critical thinking in Colombian Psychology. *Revista Colombiana de Psicología*, 32(1), 29-47. <https://doi.org/10.15446/rcp.v32n1.98961>

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SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ARTICLE

RECEIVED: OCTOBER 11, 2021—ACCEPTED: JULY 14, 2022

Abstract

The study traces the historical elements that have influenced the development of political-critical thinking in Colombian Psychology. Four historical periods have been identified and discussed: The intellectual colonialism of Colombian Psychology (1947-1960); the social Psychiatry in the years of *La comisión* [The commission] (1961-1980); the community Psychology and the coexistence (1980-1991); and the psychosocial studies after recent peace processes between government and armed groups (1991-2018). Colombian political Psychology did not follow a homogeneous and linear development. The reality experienced by Colombians during more than five decades of armed conflict required Psychology to abandon the direct paths of politics and opt for psychosocial studies that promise to be the most radical heirs of a generation of Latin American critical thinking as represented by Ignacio Martín-Baró, Maritza Montero and Silvia Lane.

Keywords: Colombia, critical Psychology, history of Psychology, political Psychology, social Psychology.

Desarrollo Histórico del Pensamiento Político-Crítico en la Psicología Colombiana

Resumen

El estudio rastrea los elementos históricos que han influido en el desarrollo del pensamiento político-crítico en la psicología colombiana. Se identifican y discuten cuatro periodos históricos: el colonialismo intelectual de la psicología colombiana (1947-1960); la psiquiatría social en los años de La Comisión (1961-1980); la psicología comunitaria y la convivencia (1980-1991); y, finalmente, los estudios psicosociales tras los recientes procesos de paz entre el Gobierno y los grupos armados (1991-2018). La psicología política colombiana no siguió un desarrollo homogéneo y lineal. La realidad vivida por los colombianos durante más de cinco décadas de conflicto armado exigió que la psicología abandonara los caminos directos de la política y optara por los estudios psicosociales que prometen ser los herederos más radicales de una generación de pensamiento crítico latinoamericano representada por Ignacio Martín-Baró, Maritza Montero y Silvia Lane.

Palabras clave: psicología política, psicología social, psicología crítica, historia de la psicología, Colombia.

Introduction: The Historical Context

COLOMBIA IS going through a crucial historical moment in the aftermaths of the Peace Agreements Process (Gutiérrez, 2020; Segura & Mechoulam, 2017). The peace process in Colombia is an attempt to end the internal armed conflict that the country has lived through for more than five decades with one of the oldest guerrilla groups in the world: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army] (Acosta-Olaya, 2020). Since its creation in 1964 by farmer Pedro Antonio Marín (1964-2008) alias "Manuel Marulanda Vélez" or "Tirofijo", the history of Colombia has witnessed the most atrocious crimes that have been detrimental to the lives and human rights of thousands of Colombians¹.

The phenomenon of violence in Colombia is an extremely complex aspect. Diverse actors that have participated in the changes and transformations of the country's internal armed conflict, from its beginning in the period of *La Violencia* [The Violence] in 1948 until today. They converge in a central point: The emergence of an unusual violence against the civilian population, that along the systematic use of the media have entered into the country's internal armed conflict:

psychological warfare that hides the truth of the facts, maximizes the evil of the enemy and the goodness of those who represent the state, and in turn manipulates the population to accept the liquidation of those who oppose the *statu quo*². (Quesada-Vanegas, 2006, p. 26).

- 1 Although the peace process carried out by the government of Juan Manuel Santos was only with the FARC-EP, it should be mentioned that the history of the conflict is not only with the FARC but also with several armed groups such as the ELN, EPL, M19, as well as criminal and paramilitary groups.
- 2 Original Spanish "una guerra psicológica que oculta la verdad de los hechos maximiza la maldad del enemigo y la bondad de quienes representan el Estado, y su turno manipula a la población para aceptar la liquidación de quienes se oponen al statu quo" translated by the authors.

Since the peace dialogues between the Colombian government, led by Juan Manuel Santos, and the FARC-EP, that began in 2012, the Colombian people have been living a situation of intense political polarization (Villa-Gómez et al., 2007). The most acute moment was achieved after the peace plebiscite of October 2nd, 2016, that gave the Colombian people the possibility of ending a conflict of more than 50 years and with more than 220,000 victims (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2009). The 51 % of the Colombian population voted against the peace agreements. We think that the Colombian people which we claim have been victims of a media strategy (Dajer, 2021; Prager & Hameleers, 2021) that caused the negative result.

Colombia was caught in a political polarization between those who supported the peace process and those who opposed to it. This polarization has been exploited by right-wing political sectors, who have come back to power through a strategy based on fear. It is not the first time that Colombia faces a similar situation. Since the 19th Century, the war between liberals and conservatives significantly delayed the construction of the Nation State. The same is happening now: The political polarization and sabotage by the National Government and its Democratic Center³ has delayed the processes of reparation for the victims of the civil war, the psychosocial well-being, and the construction of a common historical memory.

This is just one example of the many cases in Colombian history that have led to another complex aspect of the structural escalation of violence in the country (Ríos & González, 2021). This is the role of a violence that is exercised with the aim of generating gaps within social and class relations among civil society. In many cases, violence has been an instrument used to foment social tensions,

- 3 The Democratic Center [El Centro Democrático] is a Colombian political party founded in 2013 by ex-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez. Its origin is based on five pillars: democratic security, investor confidence, social cohesion, decentralized austere state, and popular dialogue, and in turn, it has become the political party of the extreme right in the country (Vargas, 2018; Durán-Núñez, 2018).

to forge ideologized symbolic contents in which beliefs and customs for public and private life are constructed (Barrero-Cuéllar, 2006).

In this context, the Colombian psychologists started to take small steps towards the development of psychosocial welfare, by acquiring a strategic role in proposals as the PAPSIVI (Program of Psychosocial Care and Comprehensive Health for Victims) under Law 1448 (Rettberg, 2015; Campo-Arias et al., 2017). However, the history of Colombian Psychology shows that the discipline lagged behind the social and political issues of the country for long time (Aguilar, et al., 2021).

Latin American Political Psychology. Starting Point

In general terms, the history of Latin American political Psychology has been mainly represented by critical psychologists as Maritza Montero, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Miguel Salazar, Silvia Lane, among others. The political and critical project of Latin American social Psychology (Montero, 1991; 1993) had its most decisive expression after the First Latin American Seminar of Social Psychology, held in 1975 in Caracas (Montero, 1986; 1987) and the foundation of the *Associação Brasileira de Psicologia Social* (Brazilian Association of Social Psychology, ABRAPSO) in 1980 (Caycho, 2017; Jacó-Vilela & Sato, 2012).

The intellectual colonialism was one of the elements that marginalized Colombia from playing a visible role in the Latin American project of political Psychology (Díaz-Gómez, 2007; Díaz-Gómez et al., 2015). Colombian Psychology delayed the establishment of a social Psychology chair in the curricula of the faculties and programs of the country for a long time. Thus, the critical orientation that was being developed in the other Latin American countries was almost absent in Colombia. This study reviews four historical moments: the intellectual colonialism of Colombian Psychology (1947-1960), the social Psychiatry in the years of *La Comisión* [The commission] (1961-1980), the community Psychology and the coexistence (1980-1991) and, finally, the psychosocial

studies, including the adoption of the 2011 victims' law and the peace process with the FARC (2012-2018).

In the last section, we will critically review the results the PAPSIVI psychosocial care program over the last six years, and the Group-Level Emotional Recovery Strategy (ERE-G), after three years of enforcement of the Law 1448. We will try to determine the political and ethical challenges that Colombian psychologists must face in the future. The discussion is mainly based on the reports collected from the victims' consultation (Mesa Psicosocial); on the reports by the ombudsman to the Congress of the Republic; and by the Historical Memory Center (Capri & Swartz, 2018).

Applied Psychology in Colombia: Intellectual Colonization

The establishment of Psychology in Latin America originated in a heterogeneous form by the encounter of multiple disciplines. A first wave of European psychologists migrated to Latin America⁴. They played an important role in the development of the discipline in the continent (Alarcón, 1997) and in the founding of the first applied Psychology laboratories in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru, and Mexico (Alarcón, 1980, Klappenbach & Pavesi, 1994, Carrascoza & Manero-Brito, 2009).

The laboratories established a tradition of applied Psychology in Latin American countries (Jacó-Vilela, 2007). The Psychology of the continent was quickly irradiated by Spanish psychologists, professors, pedagogues, and philosophers who belonged to the experimental tradition. Among them are: Mercedes Rodrigo (1891-1982), Francisco Giner de los Ríos (1839-1915), Julián Besteiro (1870-1940), Urbano González Serrano (1848-1904), and Dr. Luis Simarro (1851-1921) (Klappenbach & Pavesi, 1994). Colombian Psychology counted

4 During the 29th International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP, 2018) the Focus of Lecture Symposium was held: European Psychologists Emigrant to Latin America by members of Division 18: History of Applied Psychology where the role played by European psychologists in the configuration of Latin American Psychology.

from the beginning with foreign professors who deeply enriched the disciplinary knowledge of the profession. Horacio Rimoldi (Argentina), Oswaldo Robles, Rafael Núñez and Concepción Zúñiga (Mexico), Enrique Solari (Peru), and José Mallart (Spain) were among those (Villar-Gaviria, 1965).

The first institute of applied Psychology was founded in Colombia on November 20th, 1947 (Ardila, 1973). This foundational event in Colombian Psychology was granted by the work of Mercedes Rodrigo, who arrived in the country in 1939 to carry out the selection processes at the Universidad Nacional (Ardila, 1998). Mercedes Rodrigo made possible the independent selection processes of the University and created from it the foundation of the Institute of Applied Psychology (Jaraba-Barrios, 2014). Rodrigo's position holds an important political responsibility, since she oversaw the university's admission processes. Colombia faced deep conflicts between conservatives and liberals, that made institutions as the Universidad Nacional subject to political pressure. To that extent, the decisions made by the Spanish psychologist were constantly monitored and interpreted as manifestations of political preferences.

The position occupied by Mercedes Rodrigo was so coveted that, according to some narratives, her exile in Puerto Rico may occur at the direct request of the conservative president Laureano Gómez who had seen in her a "professed communist" (Matiz, 1998). With the departure of Professor Rodrigo from the country, the psychiatrist Hernán Vergara Delgado was appointed at the program's direction (Matiz, 1997). Hernán Vergara carried out a reform to modify the curriculum of the Institute of Applied Psychology. After Vergara's arrival, a total reorganization of the professors' staff took place, including more physicians, mostly psychiatrists.

The former group of teachers at the Institute (1940-1948) interpreted Psychology as an experimental and applied science. Among other things, it achieved for the first time the adaptation of psycho-technical tests to the characteristics of the national population. Since Vergara's leadership, a kind of

hegemony of psychiatric thought was established in the Institute, that would later become Faculty in 1957, during the deanship of the psychologist Beatriz de la Vega. In 1964, after the arrival of the rector José Félix Patiño, a reform was made in the curriculum, in which "a basic one-year program was prepared in common for the three careers: Psychology, Sociology and social work" (Villar-Gaviria, 1965, p. 11).

With this reform, the psychologists' academic education and professional training involved sociological and humanistic subjects. The humanistic-psychoanalytic Psychiatry deeply influenced the training in Psychology for about two decades, having Erich Fromm and some post-Freudians as its most influential authors. From that, Psychology sought to meet the demands of some public and private institutions of the country's clinical, educational, and industrial sectors (Mankeliunas & Restrepo, 1973, Domínguez-Blanco & Duque, 1999, López-Parra & Urrego-Arango, 2012).

Psychology at the hand of Psychiatry was framed in a current of thought of social Psychiatry quite revolutionary for the time, that would later influence by the antipsychiatry of Laing, Szasz or Basaglia (Nesbitt-Larking, 2014). The hegemony of social Psychiatry at the School of Psychology at the Universidad Nacional had many detractors because it somehow involved deepening the Psychology's condition of vassalage and dependence from Psychiatry and medicine.

Rubén Ardila, historian of Colombian Psychology, was one of the psychologists who opposed the hegemony of social Psychiatry at the School of Psychology, leading to the implementation of a five-year plan that sought to strengthen Psychology as a profession. In 1975 Rubén Ardila stated the following: "During this period 1970-1975 Colombian Psychology matured, surpassed, and opened new areas of work [...] in that plan it must be included that psychotherapy is a field of adequately trained psychologist without requiring supervision of the psychiatrist" (Ardila, 1975, p. 436)⁵.

5 Original Spanish: "Durante este periodo 1970-1975 la psicología colombiana maduró, superó su estancamiento

The five-year plan, launched in 1970, lasted until 1975 and led Psychology to become independent from other disciplines and fields of knowledge. Many of the social Psychiatry-oriented works were developed in the 60s. Also, the sociological orientation had a short life, leading the Colombian social Psychiatry Psychology to adhere to the experimental and applied Psychology. In 1965, Álvaro Villar Gaviria –in one of the first historical compendia of Psychology Colombia writes:

I exclude in advance Psychology when the mere speculation is reduced without the systematic use of a methodology, i. e., as a branch of philosophy no other purpose than speculation without practical applications, without direct observation, experimentation, and regardless of the current, biological and mathematical foundations⁶. (Villar-Gaviria, 1965, p. 7)

This orientation determined the future of the discipline and made not very visible the role of Colombian psychologists in the development of the Latin American project of social Psychology. The experimental and applied focus delayed for more than three decades the convergence of Psychology with other disciplines, as Fals-Borda's Sociology (Carrillo, 2020; Montero, 2008), that produced the school of social Psychology of coexistence at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and Universidad del Valle (Univalle) in the 1980s. One of the possible reasons for this absence, as pointed out by Álvaro Díaz-Gómez (2007), was the intellectual colonialism exerted by the North American and European psychological literature.

y abrió nuevas puertas de trabajo [...] en ese plan se debe incluir que la psicoterapia individual es un campo del psicólogo adecuadamente entrenado, sin que se requiera supervisión del psiquiatra”, translated by the authors.

6 Original Spanish: “Excluyo de antemano la psicología cuándo ésta se reduce a la mera especulación sin el uso sistemático de una metodología, es decir, como una rama de la filosofía sin otras finalidades que la elucubración sin aplicaciones prácticas, sin observación directa, experimentación, y con prescindencia de los basamentos actuales, biológicos y matemáticos”, translation by the authors.

The Commission: Social Psychiatry and the Sociology of Fals-Borda (1955-1980)

In 1986, Orlando Fals Borda published a text in which he compiled the names of intellectuals that belonged to the second wave of independent intellectuals in Colombia, organized by areas of knowledge, who were the heirs of the “generation of violence” (Fals-Borda, 1987). In the list of the second wave of independent intellectuals, in the field of social Psychology, Fals Borda acknowledged the work of two social psychoanalysts directly involved in the creation of the Institute of Psychology at the Universidad Nacional: The psychiatrists and psychoanalysts Alvaro Villar Gaviria and José Gutiérrez (Ardila, 1978).

Like Orlando Fals-Borda, both Villar Gaviria and Gutiérrez belonged to the National Commission Investigating the Causes and Situations of Violence in the country (henceforth the Commission) created during the time of the Frente Nacional (National Front), that lasted from 1958-1974. The Frente Nacional was a political agreement between Conservatives and Liberals that consisted of “the equitable distribution of governmental power between the liberal and conservative elites” (Moreno-Parra, 2018; p. 170) with the purpose of ending the era of violence or acute conflict (1948-1954) that produced more than 300,000 deaths (see, Guzmán-Campos et al., 2010). The Commission was the first political institution investigating, documenting, and collecting information that allowed determining the causes of bi-partisan violence (Jaramillo-Marín, 2012).

Álvaro Villar Gaviria was a doctor graduated from the Universidad Nacional and specialized in Psychiatry, who would opt for psychoanalysis. In 1953, according to Rubén Ardila (1998), he was part of the first staff of the Center for Psychology at the Universidad Nacional of Colombia. From 1962 to 1966, he was dean of the School of Psychology at the Universidad Nacional. In 1978, he published a book titled *Psychology and Social Classes in Colombia* that was constituted one of the most significant works of social Psychology

in Colombia (Villar-Gaviria, 1978, Arango-Cálad, 2012). The work of Álvaro Villar very early diverges from the orthodox clinical psychoanalysis that was professed in the Colombian Psychoanalytic Association. For decades he focused on the study of a more sociological approach to Colombian culture (see Lizarazo et al., 1964).

José Gutiérrez, also a trained doctor graduated from the Universidad Nacional, was committed to political causes from a young age. He was a member of the Communist Party and assiduous follower of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. When Gaitán was murdered in 1948, Gutiérrez decided to continue his medical studies in France, especially in existential and phenomenological philosophy (Uribe-Tobón, 2015). After his journey to France, Gutiérrez returned to Colombia. In 1961, he wrote the first book on political Psychology in Latin America, *From the pseudo-aristocracy to authenticity: Colombian social Psychology* that would lay the foundations for his next work of 1961, *The Colombian rebellion: Psychological observations on political news* and the important work *Non-violence in the Colombian transformation* in 1964 (Gutiérrez, 1961; 1964).

The works of José Gutiérrez and Álvaro Villar soon became references for Marxist left intellectual circles. The same time, those circles saw in the psychoanalysis a tool for the emancipation from the chains unconsciously rooted in our culture. The work of both social psychiatrists' psychoanalysts was known by Orlando Fals-Borda whom we consider as the Colombian intellectual with the greatest recognition from the community of psychologists, especially by Ignacio Martín-Baró and Maritza Montero.

The book *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes: A Sociological Study of Saucio* published by Orlando Fals Borda in 1955, based on the ethnological tradition of Lévi-Strauss, was one of the first studies of the ethos of peasants in Latin America (Fals-Borda, 1955a). The work of Fals-Borda is undoubtedly a precedent of community Psychology. He found that the Colombian peasant's society is a result of a "cultural conditioning promoted

by economic adversities, political calamities, by certain religious attitudes and by the crystallization of ignorance" had resigned all possibility of change of himself and of his immediate reality (Fals-Borda, 1955b, p. 80).

In a community work with the peasants of Boyacá, he found that two of the elements from the colonial legacy that determined their political behavior were passivity and agrocentrism: "The traditional *passivity and agrocentrism* that is transmitted as a cultural heritage should give way to a constructive and streamlined production. It is necessary to vary certain passive attitudes based on the old type of agriculture that is practiced" (Fals Borda, 2009, p. 51)⁷.

The works of Fals-Borda were rich in descriptions of the daily life of the peasants. They also outlined the conditions that can lead to a revolutionary action or to the intensification of violence in the countryside, generated by the conflict between conservatives and liberals. Fals-Borda was one of the first academics to study the historical-cultural processes that determine the development of determined political attitudes as popular resistance and the cultural and physical survival of the exploited classes (Fals-Borda, 2002).

In the first issues of the *Revista Colombiana de Psicología*, two articles by Fals-Borda were published, outlining what he called *Psycho-Sociology* (Fals-Borda, 1955c). Psycho-Sociology was defined as the objective analysis of the social reality and sought to learn to work with the peasants and not against them (Fals-Borda, 1955c). Fals-Borda, together with the Catholic priest Germán Guzmán Campos and the sociologist Eduardo Umaña, published the most invaluable and historical work during the time of the commission in 1964 titled *La violencia en Colombia*. For a long time, it was the

7 Original Spanish, "la tradicional *pasividad y agrocentrismo* que se transmite como herencia cultural debería dar paso a una constructiva y a una producción racionalizada. Es necesario que varíen ciertas actitudes pasivas que tienen como base el tipo antiguo de agricultura que se practica", translation by the authors.

only study that presented a rigorous systematization of data, dates, and stories of victims during the most acute period of bipartisan violence in Colombian cities and countryside. This characteristic made it an ostracized document and its authors were considered opponents by those responsible for triggering such bloodshed. The work was almost ignored by the psychologists: A fact proved by the absence of citations in scientific journals or research books published by the different institutes or faculties of Psychology of the country.

Nevertheless, the mid-1980s was for sure an important milestone for the understanding of violence in Colombia as a structural phenomenon in the country's civil life. The emergence of various outlaw actors, including paramilitary groups, drug cartels and guerrillas, forerun an imminent socio-political crisis, fueled by terror and barbarism (Legrand, 2003; Richani, 2013). In view of this situation, it was necessary for the psychologists' guild to make a statement on the Colombian social reality. It is no coincidence that the topic of the XVII Colombian Congress of Psychology, held in 1988 in the city of Barranquilla, was: "Towards a Psychology for Colombian society" (Alzate & Arango, 2008).

The slogan clearly calls Colombian Psychology to become a conscious practice of social reality, that would get involved in addressing the phenomenon of violence and its ravages. The main advocate for this call was Ignacio Martín Baró in his keynote: "Towards a politics of Psychology" (Martín-Baró, 1986; 1988). The call to cement a project and think a discipline at the service of Colombian society implied three essential challenges: To recover historical memory; to de-ideologize common sense; and to strengthen popular virtues (Martín-Baró, 1989).

This meeting provoked a debate and somehow led the Colombian academic community of psychologists to think about a horizon where Psychology as a profession would achieve an active status in society. For the first time, Psychology was challenged to mind not only about its contribution to help solve the problems of the country's social structure, but also about the impact of

the psychologist's work in the configuration of society. From the 1990's onwards, the approach to the issues of violence facts in Colombia began to be included in the psychological research agendas (Sacipa-Rodríguez & Montero, 2014).

Community Psychology and Coexistence

In the early 1980's, in Colombia, Gerardo Marín produced interesting works in social Psychology that have been considered as the first works of political Psychology (Molina & Rivera, 2012). Gerardo Marín was also one of the first Colombian psychologists to talk about community Psychology. However, his work of 1973 on measuring dogmatic attitudes and Machiavellian are just examples of an experimental social Psychology applied to the study of political attitudes (Marín, 1976). He does not completely distance himself from applied social Psychology, as demonstrated by his definition of community Psychology, "Community Social Psychology, although incipient and therefore bad defined, shares with the Applied Social Psychology the emphasis on obtaining scientific data in a natural environment" (Marín, 1980, p. 173).

Gerardo Marín glimpsed some elements of psychosocial intervention and defined the community social psychologist as an agent of change that aims to "produce enough details available to evaluate the characteristics of the problem of how the community perceives and indicate possible intervention guidelines" (Marín, 1980, p. 175). The legacy of professor Marín, along with the scholarship of Ignacio Martín-Baró in the years 1977-1979, made possible the birth of an academic community of social Psychology in the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana from 1985. This led to the opening of the master's degree in community studies directed by Ángela María Estrada until 1998 (See Molina & Rivera, 2012).

During the 1980's, in the Universidad del Valle in Cali, a school of community Psychology oriented to psychosocial intervention was established, in response to the intensification of the armed conflict in the country and to the wave of displacement of hundred victims following the armed groups' violent

actions, which hit cities throughout the Southwest (departments of Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Nariño, and Putumayo). The displaced victims settled in a disorganized way in the suburbs (so-called invasions) and poor neighborhoods of capital cities as Cali (capital of Valle del Cauca), that increased the rates of violence, poverty, and re-victimization (Arango-Cálad, 2006).

In 1976, the Department of Psychology and the Bachelor's Degree in Counseling Psychology at the *Universidad del Valle* counted on the advice of the North American psychologist Forrest Tyler to develop a community-oriented curriculum that allowed teachers and students to become aware of the difficult situation in the region. At that time, community Psychology seminars became the backbone of professional training. Precisely during that period, many dissertations and internships were oriented towards community Psychology (Alzate & Arango, 2008). Unfortunately, as Carlos Arango states: "Although there were significant developments in community Psychology, the whole of the teaching staff was not appearing to be committed to a community approach in Psychology" (Arango-Cálad, 2012, p. 87)⁸.

Although the staff had a sociological theoretical ground, it was often detached from social practice. It became evident when the social psychologists of the country were called to participate in supporting the victims of the Armero catastrophe in 1986⁹. According to Mejía, Barrero and Jiménez, as reported by Carlos Arango-Cálad: "The natural disaster of Armero meant a whole ethical confrontation in front of the task of the psychologist, because there was evidenced the contradiction between the theories brought

from the outside and the specific realities that were lived here" (Arango-Cálad, 2012)¹⁰.

In 1994, as result of the little interest on the part of the teaching staff in carrying out research of the community line, at the Institute of Psychology of the Universidad del Valle there was no consolidated reference to community Psychology school for Latin America. The major achievement of community Psychology in the 1980s was the realization in 1981 of the First Encounter of Community Psychology with advice from the Institute of Psychology of Univalle and professor José Amar Amar (Arango-Cálad, 2012).

From the work with popular sectors of Cali, Colombia, the proposal of a community Psychology emerged striving for the construction of a peace culture through educational strategies and dialogues between criminal gangs, families, community, and leaders to encourage coexistence, democracy, and citizen's participation (Arango-Cálad, 2001).

The research-action-participant method of Fals-Borda was the beacon of the work carried out within the framework of the Psychology of coexistence held at the Institute of Psychology in Univalle. In the words of one of its founders Carlos Arango-Cálad:

participatory-action research was used as a strategy to build coexistence with thirty leaders of a popular neighborhood. The daily life and its cycles were characterized, the relations of coexistence, the psychosocial processes and the community projects for its transformation and strengthening. (Arango-Cálad, 2001, p. 79)

This perspective attributes a conception of the subject as a function of the specificity of thought and flexible acting in which acts occur in the framework of an infinite number of social situations (Sarmiento-López & Yáñez-Canal, 2019).

8 Original Spanish: "Si bien se dieron desarrollos significativos en psicología comunitaria, no se veía que el conjunto del profesorado estuviese comprometido con un enfoque comunitario en psicología", translation by the authors.

9 The Armero catastrophe was a natural disaster caused by the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano that affected the departments of Caldas and Tolima (Colombia). It represents the deadliest volcanic eruption of the 20th century, 25,000 inhabitants died as result of the tragedy (Albornoz-Plata, 1994).

10 Original Spanish: "El desastre natural de Armero significó toda una confrontación ética frente al quehacer del psicólogo, pues allí se evidenció la contradicción entre las teorías traídas del exterior y las realidades específicas que aquí se vivían", translation by the authors.

One of the memorable experiences was the study-intervention in poor neighborhoods of the city of Cali, called “El Cali que queremos” [*The Cali we want*], concluded that social transformation projects must consider the subjective identification processes that underlie the daily life of every member of the community.

Changing the ways of collective life is the first step to construct a political solution to the conflict (Arango-Cálad, 2006). Cultural modification involves intervening in the subjective individual and the social-community field. The usual approach of community Psychology was to perceive the community as an organic whole that should be empowered. However, the experiences of Arango’s working group stressed the commitment to community empowerment and community and participatory development, as the final battlefield for the social transformation of a given community.

The Nature of the Current Practice in Colombian Political Psychology

At the beginning of the new millennium, emerging research groups developed lines of research on issues related to violence, armed conflict, victims, and psychosocial care. The academic production of Colombian Psychology presents incipient indicators of the interest in these topics (Barrero-Cuéllar, 2015; Cudina & Ossa, 2016). It is important to acknowledge that these initiatives are an effort to build schools of critical and investigative thinking. Besides, they have helped to lay the foundations of a professional training that addresses those social problems of the country.

This was an important aspect of the development of Psychology in the last decade, that makes us foresee the possibility of forging a Psychology for a post-conflict Colombia (Mora-Gómez & Brown, 2019). In this evolution, the work and efforts of a committed academic community reflect an urgency to address the discipline’s decades-long failure to address the nature and complexity of the country’s social phenomena.

We suggest that these are the prodromes of the transition towards a possibly different Psychology

for Colombia. In the last decade, research agendas clearly show a preference in addressing, among many others, issues of historical memory; the analysis of psychosocial factors that affect the mental health of victims of the armed conflict; studies with a gender approach; initiatives to promote a culture for peace building; and issues of restorative justice (Burgess & Fonseca, 2020).

In 2012, the Law 1448, promulgated in 2011, so-called Victims Law, was implemented as a strategy for the symbolic and economic reparation of the victims of the Colombian armed conflict (Delgado-Barón, 2015). The article 137 stated the immediate creation of the Program of Psychosocial and Integral Health Care for Victims (PAPSIVI). According to point 7 of the article, interdisciplinarity of the program is granted by psychologists and psychiatrists with the support of social workers, doctors, nurses, and community promoters (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2011).

The PAPSIVI is established under the Ministry of Health and mainly focuses on two tasks: Psychosocial care and healthcare with a psychosocial approach. The concept of “psychosocial” was defined in the PAPSIVI’s framework document as “a transversal process of attention and access to the rights of victims in regard of assistance and reparation measures” (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social, 2017, p. 26). The psychosocial intervention is based on the legal notion of a victim contemplated in Article 3 of Law 1448: “those persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered damage for events that occurred as of January 1, 1985, as a result of violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that occurred with occasion of the armed conflict” (Congress of the Republic, 2011).

PAPSIVI’s strategy defined four modalities of “attention” or areas of intervention: Individual; family; community; and collective. Individual attention refers to the moral, physical, emotional, and mental injuries suffered. Family care is focused on changes in family roles and structures. Community attention is related to the reconstruction of the social fabric. Finally, collective attention is

related to addressing the damage to communities, population groups and social sectors that share a particular identity (Gobierno de Colombia, 2018). Currently, of the 7,155,469 victims registered in the Comprehensive Care and Reparation Unit for the victims, only the 3% equivalent to 212,505 have been users of psychosocial care service. Unfortunately, there is no data repository detailing the type of psychosocial care provided and there are few metrics of the effectiveness (see, Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas, May 21, 2019).

PAPSIVI has been in place for 6 years, so far. Collective reparation exercises took place between 2012 and 2015 in communities as El Tigre, El Placer, Juan Frío, and Libertad, with the participation of around 1825 community weavers (Unit of comprehensive care and reparation of victims, 2015).

The “*Sujeto de Reparación Colectiva*” (SRC) [Subject Collective Repair] is developed in different phases: Enlistment; damage diagnosis; formulation; and implementation (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social, 2017). In the enlistment phase, the collective subject of reparation, the scope, objectives of the reconstruction of the social fabric are socialized. In the diagnostic phase of the damage, the violent events and the consequences and any sequelae generated are identified. In the next phase of formulation, the specific strategies that could solve the consequences identified in the previous phase are selected in a participatory manner. Finally, the implementation is in charge of the *weavers* or community leaders, with whom collective grief are carried out, rituals among others (Mesa Psicosocial, May 6, 2016).

Obstacles to the Process

The difficulties of psychosocial care in Colombia can be categorized in three main issues: Outsourcing; decontextualization of professional groups; and administrative bureaucracy (Villa-Gómez et al., 2017). Outsourcing consists of the State delegating the psychosocial care process to non-governmental entities (foundations, universities, corporations, etc.), often without sufficient experience and little knowledge of the legislation

and the cultural and political context of the focus population of intervention. Outsourcing often results in non-continuity of processes that require long-term development, as community care that includes the reconstruction of the social fabric and community rehabilitation. According to some experiences of PAPSIVI professionals, the lack of knowledge of the cultural context has hindered community attention related to the reconstruction of the social fabric.

According to some leaders of victims participating in the IV session of the National Victim Board, the constant characterizations of PAPSIVI led to a re-victimization of the population that is the object of care: “In my territory PAPSIVI has gone four times, but each time that they go they make a characterization and do not take into account the previous process advanced, that becomes a revictimization and makes us feel used” (National Victim Board, December 13 and 14, 2018).

PAPSIVI has worked in an externalist and bureaucratic way, in that sense, they end up making it difficult to fully recover the victim, as the former congressman and psychologist Ángela María Robledo (2013) stated: “the national government does not have data on minimum advances an information system, even if it is precarious and can show some progress in inter-institutional coordination and coordination” (p. 5).

The bureaucratization of PAPSIVI can be characterized in three aspects:

- a) Replica of the failed existing healthcare system. The deficiencies of the current healthcare system have been transferred to the comprehensive system of care for victims. According to the 2017 report of the ombudsman to the Colombian congress, over a total of 1003 cases identified only 78 received mental and psychosocial care (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2017). “They only give two or three appointments in the first year and in the second year they send another person, and then again they are asked to answer the same questions” also cases like, “it is already your fourth visit and this is all we can do for you, they already compensated you. And, in addition,

your case is already registered, registered in the Victims Unit, so this is already the last visit and is the closing” (Mesa Psicosocial, 2016).¹¹

b) Budget variations. During 2015, PAPSIVI suffered a reduction in the budget in most of the territories.

c) Disarticulated system. PAPSIVI does not have a single administrative unit. There is no coordinated and strategic action between the Ministry of Health, the victim’s unit, and the Historical Memory Center.

The professionals constituting the operator’s body must expand their epidemiological reading of the victims. That is, they must go beyond the legal category of the victim determined by Law 1448, leading to a resignification of the victim’s condition. The few epidemiological studies are limited to showing frequencies about the psychological affectations or typecasting the suffering of the victims in psychiatric diagnoses. At the national victims’ tables, it has been suggested that PAPSIVI should have its own “indicators of emotional reparation”. It is also necessary to insist on a differential and critical approach to psychosocial care, to create a commission of experts to accompany and make visible a national discussion about working with victims.

Given so many administrative deficiencies and institutional inability to develop a comprehensive system for psychosocial care for victims, there is a political and ethical challenge for the professionals who have been leading these processes, namely for psychologists. They have the immediate challenge of convening a participatory national discussion about the extension of the validity of the 1448 law on victims and proposing that it become a public policy. It is essential that the integrated teams

11 Original Spanish “Solo dan 2 o 3 citas en el primer año y en el segundo año envían a otra persona, y entonces de nuevo se les pide que respondan a las mismas preguntas” también casos como, “ya es tu cuarta visita y esto es todo lo que podemos hacer por ti, ya te indemnizaron. Y, además, tu caso ya está registrado, inscrito en la Unidad de Víctimas, por lo que esta es ya la última visita y es el cierre”, translation by the authors.

psychosocial care operators in the country begin to publish and generate research knowledge integrating psychosocial intervention proposals with a cultural and political approach (Millán et al., 2020; Aguilar et al., 2021; Cudina, et al., 2022; Arango-Cálad., 2019).

Some Notes on Psychological Research Agendas for a Post-conflict Colombia

Since the establishment of the negotiation talks to carry out the peace agreements between the Colombian national government and the FARC, in Havana (Cuba) on September 4, 2012, the academic community in general has been interested in developing reflections and studies that would provide an understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon of violence in the country. The internal armed conflict in Colombia and its vicissitudes has been an object of study by various disciplines (Venegas-Luque et al., 2017; Plazas-Díaz, 2017). From an interdisciplinary point of view, each discipline integrated data, methods, concepts, and theories that enabled a comprehensive understanding of a complex phenomenon (Másse et al., 2008; Van den Besselaar, 2012).

Also, Colombian Psychology soon initiated research about this phenomenon in the different fields of intervention of the discipline. Since the beginning of 2017, the armed conflict is studied by articulating diverse lines of work and fields of intervention of Psychology. We can identify at least six lines of work and research within the discipline that have been constituted since the signing of the peace agreements¹² (see Figure 1).

12 In the last five years, the academic production of Psychology that has focused on approaches to the internal armed conflict has grown significantly. This academic production in turn has made it possible to account for particularities that favor a comprehensive understanding of the Colombian conflict and has opened the possibility of strengthening specialized lines of research that have contributed significantly to its approach and understanding. The figure presented in this paper is a map of co-occurrence of concepts that allow us to reveal lines of research based on the sample of academic production. The data that makes possible to visualize the figure was elaborated from the work of Camilo Rincón-Urrinago (2019) “Psicología de la justicia transicional en Colombia” (Psychology of transitional justice in Colombia).

armed conflict in Colombia (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018). It is necessary to move towards multidimensional work proposals that contribute to ensure the integration of civil society in the territories. The tearing of the social fabric as a result of war, disasters or neoliberal policies, should be considered as a key element of the reconstruction process.

A fifth line has been focusing on intervention with children, women and families who are victims of forced displacement. This phenomenon has been a consequence of the internal conflict for many years. The psychological, social, and legal impact is an aspect that has left an enormous damage on victims of displacement due to violence (Lozano & Gómez, 2004). It is necessary to establish the psychological implications: The discipline becomes a field that has much to say in this regard to facilitate the guarantees of land restitution processes and the welfare of uprooted families.

Finally, a sixth line has to do with studies that focus on the approach to mental health related to the armed conflict. In contexts of violence as those experienced in Colombia, mental health is highly at risk of being affected not only immediately but also in the medium and long term. The situation is complicated by the little attention so far received. Chaos and violence increase the risk of psychological trauma. The domestic conflict not only generates deaths, injuries, and physical disabilities, but also leaves traces in the psychic lives of individuals, families, and society (Tamayo-Agudelo & Bell, 2019; Bell et al., 2012). Psychology as a guild is able to support the generation of public policies in mental health that contribute to the intervention of the social trauma that the war has left for years and that allows us to move towards a post-conflict Colombia, and instituting Psychology in the country (Cudina et al., 2022).

Concluding Remarks

Amidst the complexities of the country, new emerging problems and social phenomena, there are still large social inequality, precarious employment

conditions, insufficient healthcare and education that were ultimately some of the structural causes of the armed conflict. For a long time, the political commitment of the disciplines was prevented, because of processes that exceeded the disciplines themselves. However, it seems that the existing agreements and the latest collective popular expressions are headed towards a different Colombia.

Before the awakening of a new Colombia, the psychologist inevitably faces a twofold call: On the one hand, to commit its praxis to the construction of social coexistence (ethical dimension); on the other hand, to provide the means to support social transformation (political dimension). Ignacio Martín-Baró as defined this twofold commitment the *Politics of Psychology* (Martín-Baró, 1991). In its ethical-political dimensions, Psychology has a shaping effect of society, that is in essence the disposition of a social and political power in Psychology (Martín-Baró, 1985).

This involves analyzing the practices of the psychologist in the different fields of intervention and observing the contributions of Psychology in social changes as well as the advances of the discipline in the country. Psychology was absent in processes of reconstruction of the historical memory of the victims as that produced in the late 1960s, at the end of the period known as “violence”. In general, the contributions of Psychology in the care of victims with a community focus during the 80s were forgotten.

The emergence of a political project for Psychology in Colombia needs to question the psychologist’s relationship with politics in its social and historical context. Although it is true that today it is difficult to frame a way in which Psychology unfolds all its potentialities, it is important to recognize that some terrain has been plowed. The entire psychologists’ union in the country has the opportunity and the burden to address the call of social unity; to contribute to mend the social fabric; and to accompany the work of ideological criticism of some committed academics.

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