



**Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications.** Edited by Maritza Montero and Christopher Sonn. New York: Springer. 2009. 303 pp.

*Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications* arrives at a most welcome time. This volume serves to keep the psychology of liberation (PL) in the consciousness of our field, forever challenging traditional academic notions of how to arrive at and use knowledge. PL was born in Latin America in a unique social and historical context. However, its applicability beyond Latin America and the field of psychology has been proven over time and is documented skillfully in this volume.

When I first held this edited text in my hands I knew that I could expect diverse approaches, disciplines, and views. Indeed, the volume emphasizes the thinking of three outstanding PL scholars: Ignacio Martín-Baró, Orlando Fals Borda, and Paulo Freire. A profound analysis of the theoretical legacy of these masters is offered by several authors in the book (Jiménez, Burton and Kagan, Montero, and Flores Osorio).

The authors in this book have analyzed, synthesized, and elaborated on the legacy of notable liberation psychologists, making it a body of knowledge that transcends the original aspirations of these founders. The coherence, consistency, and broad lens that the authors in this volume put forth as a collective demonstrate that PL has transcended the frontiers of the Latin American region into what Burton and Kagan call “cross cultural application.” The vision is concretely captured in the structure of this volume, which is co-edited by a South African man and a Venezuelan woman and includes many other non-Latin American authors.

The book also underscores the important role that academicians have played in developing PL in Latin America. Academicians have considered the real nature of praxis when developing theories and concepts; their research and action applies to the most diverse communities. This is another reason why the book is absolutely relevant: it constitutes a coherent and provocative reflection of how PL plays out in a variety of contexts. This reflection is supported by ample international literature on diverse related topics.

Most authors in this book have incorporated methodological issues, which has always been a need in both community psychology and PL. This is the only way to go a step beyond what some have labeled a utopia: incorporating these methodological dimensions into PL theorizations to facilitate the promotion of social transformation and change. A perfect illustration of this attention to methodological issues is Montero’s chapter on methods for liberation. Although she has written extensively about methods for social transformation (2006), her emphasis now is on Freire’s notion of problematization and conscientization as methodological tools for liberation.

Flores Osorio gives readers a review of praxis and liberation in the context of Latin American theory. His account of how praxis and dialectics have been the basis

of several theoretical movements in Latin America (as a result of its history, social, and economic context), is not only a historical piece, but a critical analysis of these theories and of the commonalities they share. This work illustrates that, in Latin America, context is not an abstract category but is part of a broad and comprehensive explanation of reality. For example, the theory of dependence has been incorporated into the conceptualizations of sociology, psychology, and other disciplines. Flores Osorio's work acknowledges the predecessors of PL by defining ways in which pedagogy, sociology, theology, and other psychologies have influenced it.

In my view, Bernardo Jiménez' chapter in this book is the best comprehensive analysis of Martín-Baró's legacy to PL, enriched by moving descriptions of the personal Martín-Baró. Jiménez' work strongly suggests that PL constitutes a movement: fluid, critical, and innovative. Jiménez reminds us of the potential for fundamentalism in PL, a challenge that was initially identified by Martín-Baró. Jiménez concurs with Flores Osorio in his description of participatory action research as the methodological proposal of PL, and enriches Martín-Baró's original thinking in this area. This author elaborates an original proposal "for the possible solution of the dilemma of teleology, as well as a particular view of activist commitment."

Burton and Kagan present an in-depth analysis of the relevance of Latin American PL for European psychology by discussing how, in any context where we can find oppressed groups and policies of exclusion, the principles of PL have heuristic and practical value. The authors have developed an excellent review and comparison of the differences between social psychology in Latin America and in core capitalist countries, particularly underlining the emphasis on social and contextual factors. They could have probably discussed more what they call "methodological pragmatism," a notion that has generated tension and disagreement in some sectors. A unique contribution of these authors is the innovative and interesting alignment they make of principles of Latin American psychology of liberation with potential approaches to disability and mental health as precursors of "a social model for disability." Their proposals raise new questions: for instance, is it possible to aspire for an "adequate" psychology without falling into the same mistakes this approach intends to overcome?

However, the reader quickly realizes that *Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications* is not an attempt to provide a static review for historical purposes. Rather, the volume represents a moving forward of PL, both expanding its scope and strengthening its utility. The scope is broadened in the application of PL to diverse community contexts (in Ireland and Africa, for instance), as well as historical contexts. Its depth is attained through methodological and intervention innovations. The selection of applications acknowledges the diverse phenomena (racism, immigration, war, colonialism, and transitional contexts), geographical locations, and political conditions in which PL may contribute by generating critical reflection and questions, as well as potential routes for research and action. *Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications* should be a central reference

book for those who need to learn not only the origins but also the development and future challenges of psychology of liberation in the world.

In all, *Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Applications* serves to remind us of the place of psychology of liberation in the field of psychology and challenges PL scholars to grow and contribute to its growth.

Blanca Ortiz-Torres  
*University of Puerto Rico*

## REFERENCE

Montero, Maritza. 2006. *Hacer para Transformar: El Método en la Psicología Comunitaria*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós.