# Praxis and Liberation in the Context of Latin American Theory

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> *Myths are the folk's walking dreams…*
> *They are rich sources of knowledge*
> *for the people who have invented them;*
> *to unravel them, one just has to interpret them,*
> *to decipher them. In order to reach this goal,*
> *there is only a valid method: to relate myths*
> *to the real life of the people. Otherwise,*
> *one just adds fiction to prior fiction,*
> *mixes delusion with other delusions*
> *(Albert Memmi, 1988, p. 139).*

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the epistemology and critique that developed in Latin America during the 1980s in opposition to the hegemonic scientific paradigm of mainstream social sciences. The notion of "Latin American theory" will be here employed to refer to the analysis of social inequities, thus addressing the challenges that Latin American social scientists posed, during the 1960s and 1970s, to the ethnocentric social sciences developed in Europe and the United States.

Theory of dependency (TD), theology of liberation (TL) and philosophy of liberation, Freirean popular education, critical or militant sociology, community-social psychology, and psychology of liberation (PL) are the theoretical orientations considered here, as they all express an empirical and intellectual need to comprehend the dynamics that occur between the oppressors and the oppressed. The consciousness developed by scholars as to the circumstances that generate oppression and exclusion spurs the construction of theoretical proposals which are oriented to understand reality in order to transform it. Within this framework, concepts of liberating praxis, conscientization, and commitment acquire identity not only as ways to do practice

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but also as theoretical constructs which become central for explaining psychosocial phenomena that prevail in the Latin American region.

The epistemological pathway that leads Latin American TD, philosophy, psychology, theology, education, and sociology to construct a theoretical–practical (praxis) corpus is focused on social transformation. With this goal, they propose to enact the 11th thesis of Marx about Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world: the point now is to change it" (Marx, 1975/1845, p. 428). Latin American praxis questions hegemonic conceptions of social sciences, taking as foundation an ethical and political project, as well as its contextual space–time dimensions. From this point, dialectics, Marxism, and hegemonic theology, as well as their different expressions, are reinterpreted. Emphasis is placed on the development of consciousness from those who are oppressed, analyzing the fatalism nourished by a belief in a Christendom whose values were biased to favor dominant sectors and their status quo.

Critical reflection about proposals developed within Anglo-Saxon and Francophone frames of reference, which are not suited to develop adequate responses for the problems generated among Latin American societies, becomes a *sine qua non* condition for building a Latin American science (Fals Borda, 1973). Marxism and theology are reinterpreted in Latin America from the contextual perspective to alleviate the needs of the poor and to promote better working conditions of peasant workers and native Americans. Focusing on these concerns, classic Marxism is oriented to analyze the fact that social contradictions are not reduced to *class struggle*. In the Latin American region, other conflicts appear, such as the tension among the native population ("Indians")[1] and ladinos[2], or the tension among colored and white populations, and struggles that generate a double process of exploitation and oppression. These reinterpretations, which will be discussed later, have meant the resignifying of central categories and concepts of Marxism and theology. Thus, dialectics as a tool for generating knowledge and the concept of praxis as a liberation principle are developed from a critical horizon, motivated by the need to understand the dynamics that occur among those who oppress and the oppressed, to explain such processes, and to transform it, demonstrating in doing so the human need to construct freedom as a historical need.

## Dialectics and Knowledge

In Latin American social theory, dialectics is employed as a method and a rational strategy, which advances the notion of representation and moves it up from the notion of concept. Concept, in this light, would be a statement that contains as

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[1] Common term used by the population in Latin American countries.

[2] Ladinos do not consider themselves as "Indians,", although they come from the racial mixing of native Americans and European colonizers, whereas the term native Americans groups a bigger diversity of ethnic groups whose historic background can be traced prior to Spanish presence in the continent. Nevertheless, Ladinos and native Americans share the double oppression condition as well as the cultural destruction produced through the independent and liberal and neoliberal or dependent phases of Latin American history.

many categorical relations as possible and which is reflected as a synthesis of multiple determinations. In spite of considering laws as basic for explaining the world, dialectics poses that knowledge is not generated unless it is mediated by social discourse. So, in order to produce knowledge it is necessary to consider mediations among individuals, nature, and society. Latin American scholars criticize dialectics as employed by Marxism–Leninism and they advocate a return to the Hegelian notion of reason, considering that overcoming contradictions means to reach the concept that contains them. This chapter follows the Latin American social sciences tendency to use Hegelian dialectics. Following Kosik (1967), reality is analyzed at the same time as the development, as well as the expression, of the being:

> Dialectics does not reach knowledge from the outside or complementarily, nor is one of its characteristics. Knowledge is dialectics itself in one of its forms; knowledge is the decomposition of the whole. Concept and abstraction, in the dialectical conception, have the meaning of a method to decompose the unitary totality, in order to mentally reproduce the structure of the thing, that is, to understand the thing (Kosik, 1967, p. 30).

In Latin American theoretical thinking, dialectics means mediation and synthesis of social praxis. It is a way to see through the immediately apparent and it is produced by a process of abstraction and concretion. Dialectics is a synthesis of the diverse or a synthesis of multiple determinations. Hegelian logic explains reality as both nature and spirit. Logic, according to Hegel (1982), is structured upon the Being, Essence, and Concept doctrine. These factors operate to explain the development of the real as the articulated wholeness of negation which prefigures the concept. In Hegelian logic the Being has three conditions (1) quality, (2) quantity, and (3) measure. In Essence, one can observe the existence, the phenomena, and the reality. In concept, there is the objective, the object, and the idea. Hegelian dialectics is a methodological alternative that overlooks the hegemonic social sciences bias that underestimates reality. It is an alternative to understand reality in its whole complexity and as a result of praxis. Dialectics, as philosophy of praxis, studies reality as the totality of the essence and the existence, of the essence and the appearance, as was written by Kosik:

> (…) reality is not originally presented to man in the form of an object of intuition, analysis and theoretical comprehension. An object whose complementary and opposed pole would be, precisely the abstract knowing subject that exists out of the world and isolated from the object; reality is presented as the field in which man exerts practical and sensitive activities, upon whose base surges the immediate practical intuition of reality (Kosik, 1967, p. 25).

In this sense, Latin American social sciences consider reality in the midst of its contradictions. It is reality reflected both in particular and universal senses: the fundamental and the secondary factors; identity and struggle of contraries; the complementary and the antagonist; negation and affirmation, all opposites are considered as moments to be transcended in terms of continents of synthesis of the diverse. Thus, dialectics becomes a rational instrument for investigation, one which furthers the present, the appearance of social reality, through a string of abstractions–concretions tending to transform reality.

## The Concept of Praxis

Praxis is here defined as a principle of transformation and synthesis produced when the theoretical–practical contradiction is solved. It is manifested as the subversion of the prevailing mode of thinking and of the cognitive concretion. Concretion means the synthesizing judgment which expands the comprehension of a concept. Praxis represents the foundation to develop a critical consciousness and to transform the present as an action pursuing freedom.

In the Latin American theories analyzed here, the concept of praxis derives from two sources. First, it derives from interpretations of the Latin American Episcopal Councils (Buga 1967, Bogotá 1968, and Puebla 1970) regarding conclusions from the II Ecumenical Vatican Council (2003), which were in a first moment contrary to Marxism, and later theoretically linked to it. Second, it is based in the conditions of oppression and exclusion suffered by the majority of the population, as evidenced by the Marxist. Based on these two sources, for Latin American scholars praxis adopts the form of a tool for knowledge and a way to transform the oppressing reality.

Praxis as a transforming principle transcends the theory–practice contradiction and fosters the definition of interactions between action and reflection. Thus, the interpretative and speculative tendencies of theoretical philosophy are left behind. As Gramsci (1977) pointed out: "Philosophy of praxis intends to explain, and that is why it is a philosophy, an 'anthropology' and not a mere canon of historical research" (p. 233). So, praxis accelerates the process of historical transformation. When a theoretical position is organized and turned into action, reality as an object is transformed. This leads Gramsci to state that by identifying theory and practice, practice becomes rational, and theory becomes realistic and rational (Gramsci, 1998). In Latin American theory, the concept of praxis is cause and consequence of constructing consciousness and lays the foundations for a political and ethical position of Latin American scholars. By viewing reality from a frame of reference which is different to the one employed by mainstream social sciences (positivism, pragmatism, functionalism), Latin American thinkers intend to understand the present as a denied reality, one that has to be transformed.

Praxis is subjected to, and at the same time subjects, the transforming experience. Praxis is the unity of the diverse, reflected as a synthesis generated by a process that goes from abstraction, as an intellectual particularity, to concretion as an expression of thinking, which is to say, concretion as theory. Abstraction is defined as the moment when history is reproduced, and concretion is the reflection of the material moment. Thus, praxis assumes the sequential dialectical process of abstraction–concretion–abstraction (particularity–totality–particularity) oriented to totality. In this way, praxis is posed as a method, as part of an episteme, a way to know the mediated reality; and as a possibility to transform the world, while at the same time, as totality and particularity. Liberating praxis gives sense to Latin American social research when it elaborates active conceptions, founded upon the individual gaining consciousness of self and otherness, which is to say, when the person is

aware of the rich possibilities offered by society and the Other as generators of knowledge (Gramsci, 1970). Praxis as a liberating transformation principle is a tool to unravel factors that determine oppression and exclusion, the status quo of Latin American people.

In this sense, philosophy of praxis introduces the analysis of the social nature and historical development of human beings in the realm of knowledge. It assumes that practice is not independent of theory, for one is the base and consequence of the other. And likewise, the truth value of knowledge or of a theory depends upon their explanation being manifested in social practice. Such philosophy maintains that, in practice, humans perceive sensations and impressions. These are modified qualitatively by being reflected upon, and in the process become concepts, elements to comprehend the world in its complexity, in the unity of essence and existence, and in the relation of exteriority–interiority, concreted in the transformation of reality (Mao, 1972).

Praxis goes beyond the sensorial stage, it becomes the foundation for reasoning and the principle to determine mediations between essence and existence (reality); it forms a theoretical corpus (concepts, postulates, and categories) to apprehend reality. A theoretical corpus to comprehend the laws of the world, not a mere heuristic, interpretative activity, but as an action that transforms the world, in such a way, theory becomes a principle for transforming the present. But if a theory becomes a conversational topic, it may loose its meaning (Mao, 1972). The TD (Bambirra, 1983; Furtado, 1969; Gunder Frank, 1973; Marini, 1975), when it became a topic of university conversations, hence departing from praxis, probably illustrates this point.

Summing up, praxis is the notion that demonstrates reality as a dynamic continuum. Praxis should be considered as a principle that affirms and, at the same time, denies the present, transcending the individual to validate society. Praxis implies an infinite cycle of practicing–knowing–transforming, the cycle that builds the unity between knowing and doing. An example of this praxis is Freire's proposal of action–reflection–action, heavily influenced by Mao's idea about practicing–knowing–practicing.

## Academic Context for Producing Latin American Theory of Liberation in Human and Social Sciences

During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the Latin American region experienced a deepening of its social and economic contradictions. The ensuing crisis manifested itself in popular actions and corresponding reactions of repression from governmental forces. The following are a few examples of popular actions: in Venezuela, military Dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez was overthrown in 1958; in 1959, Cuban revolution toppled the Batista regime; and in the same lapse, several revolutionary uprisings speckled the Americas. On the other hand, several military dictatorships

got hold on Central and South American nations: Nicaragua (1933–1956), Guatemala (1954, 1963, 1982), El Salvador (1960) Brazil (1964), Argentina (1966, 1976), Uruguay (1972, 1974), and Chile (1973). In 1959, the government of USA planned and put into action counterinsurgent programs by creating experimental centers for training militia coming from different Latin American governments. Such actions were executed along strategic development programs like *Alliance for Progress* or the very same CEPAL model[3] that is analyzed later in this chapter.

When social problems were exacerbated, Latin American governments unleashed politics of repression and terrorism throughout the region; some famed leftist intellectuals assumed a militant position, and along with leaders of workers, Native Americans, progressive clergyman and farmhands organized revolutionary movements, or at least, movements to oppose authoritarian regimes. Some university students abandoned classrooms to enroll in armed groups and take to jungles and mountains away from urban centers of Latin America. These processes provoked intellectuals with an ethic compromise to adopt a critical position against the political–academic perspectives posed by communist elites of the region, thus questioning dogmatism and Stalinism. In 1967, the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS by their acronym in Spanish) was created as a regional expression. Contradictions among young leftists and communist parties were aggravated. Upon reflecting about anticolonial African movements, *sui generis* interpretations of Marxism emerged, interpretations that pursued a reality beyond the struggle of classes. These Marxist interpretations found fertile ground in the Latin American region, which did not show strong industrial development and was populated by a significant Native American sector.

At the same time that student movements against the Vietnam war arose in the USA, several particular resistance organizations were developing around the world: African-Americans fighting for their rights; workers consolidating unions; the social upheaval of the so-called Spring of Paris in 1968; alongside workers, Native Americans, and peasants organized to tackle particular problems; and several student movements surged in Latin America. Some of these movements were organically linked to revolutionary processes. Others were simply searching for curricular reforms. In any case, such movements opened the way to develop a critical thinking in the region, a school of thinking that promoted social research with a compromise to transform reality, and a compromise with social processes of liberation. As Fals Borda wrote:

> One of the emerging themes for sociology would be, without a doubt, sociology of Liberation. I mean the use of the scientific method to describe, analyze and put in action knowledge to transform society, to subvert the structure of social classes and balance of power that mediates such transformation. Sociology of Liberation would enact all measures tending to ensure an ample and real satisfaction of all the people's needs (Fals Borda, 1973a, 1973b, p. 23).

In Nicaragua, after the execution of long ruling dictator Anastasio Somoza (1956), the popular and student movements got stronger, leading to the development of the Nicaraguan Patriotic Youth Movement (Juventud Patriótica Nicaragüense) in 1960.

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[3]Economical Commission for Latin America (CEPAL).

At the same time, construction workers and urban transportation drivers went on strike; the next year, 1961, different strikes were repressed by the Nicaraguan government. In Mexico, actions against the regime of the ruling party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) manifested the citizenship's malaise. In 1968, students from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, along with a sector from the left took over the streets in huge demonstrations that were stopped by the Mexican government in the slaughter of the Square of the Three Cultures at Tlatelolco (Mexico City).

In the same year, Brazilian students were mobilized in search of academic petitions. Such movements spurred on other social actions: metallurgic workers went on strike and students and workers expelled authorities from their offices in Belo Horizonte and São Paulo. Following the thread of TL, ecclesial grass root communities emerged. On the academic field, a critical approach to social sciences was promoted. Both tendencies generated strategies for social community work, directed to transcend misery and exploitation and, thus, to create a theoretical–conceptual corpus adequate to Latin American reality.

Meanwhile, in Latin American countries suffering from military dictatorships (Brazil, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia), parishes, ecclesial grass root communities and people fighting in the mountains became natural think tanks devoted to intellectual reflection. Peasants, Native Americans, and urban youngsters and scholars started to develop a liberating praxis. As stated earlier in this chapter, to know reality in the Latin American situation implied to transcend the traditional conception of class struggle (Proletarian-Bourgeoise), fundamentally because social problems evolved around the ownership of land, the dire need to live with dignity, the ethic imperative, and the possibility of producing and reproducing life itself (Hinkelammert, 1998). Criticism of communist parties' conceptions, which were considered incapable of theorizing their own reality, gave way to theories constructed by and within the oppressed (workers, peasants, Native Americans, students, and professionals). There needed to be social bases to comprehend the development of a dependent capitalism and the growing processes of exploitation.

Latin American theoretical production generated in the academic context, which assumed the commitment of denouncing the origins and consequences of oppression, became suspicious to the eyes of the USA government and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which in turn promoted and financed a tough plan of action directed to attack state universities and leftist intellectuals. An example, the Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas" in El Salvador, where PL was originated by Ignacio Martín-Baró in 1986, was shocked by the murder of Martín-Baró, and other fellow priests (Armando López Quintero, Ignacio Ellacuría, Joaquín López y López, and Segundo Montes) who were all practitioners of liberation theology.

It can be stated that due to social and economic problems prevailing in Latin America during the period under analysis, social sciences experienced an important moment for theoretical production and the region emerged as a focal point for diverse schools of social thinking (Osorio, 1994). Scholars linked up with social

and revolutionary organizations, aligning thinking and action at the service of social transformation, posing theories that consider the dynamics of oppression–exclusion, doing praxis upon a commitment with the population, generating ideas as new ways to conceive knowledge and questioning in practice the hegemonic modes of production of knowledge[4] that used to orient social thinking.[5]

## *The CEPAL Theory and the Theory of Dependency*

During the last half of the twentieth century (1950–1970), a group of social scientists teamed up at the Economics Commission for Latin America (CEPAL, by its acronym in Spanish), who had abandoned the mainstream thinking, and full of enthusiasm due to the victory of the Cuban revolution (Bambirra, 1983; Domínguez Ouriques, 1994), assumed a different approach to analyze particular problems of the region. They took a Marxist critical perspective, mixed with functionalist and Weberian formulations (Osorio, 1994). This constituted the source for the TD. Thus, social sciences in the Latin American region advanced significantly with both formulations (The CEPAL theory and the TD), in terms of generating a critical, theoretical perspective, opposed to the hegemonic political practice. Both theories also parted with the conceptual and practical positions of Communist parties of the regions, heavily sustained by Stalinism (Núñez & Burbach, 1987). The first working period of CEPAL was signaled by the merging of similar schools of thinking; later on, theoretical and epistemological divergences emerged among their participants, which were expressed by contradictory findings and proposals (Bambirra; Osorio).

At a first stage, the formulation of the TD implied a break from the dominant perspective of the CEPAL, which gave space to other social disciplines that favored the construction of knowledge from a critical perspective. According to CEPAL, Latin American problems should be analyzed in terms of a center and periphery model, leading to a rupture with the CEPAL researchers. Such difference opened an autonomous thinking space for Latin American researchers (Osorio, 1994). The ideas from CEPAL were not consistent with marginality problems, the poverty zones surrounding the urban population, or the inability of private enterprises to generate jobs for the region. According to Hinkelammert:

> (…) Theory of Dependency surges from criticizing ideology. In relation to thesis like the one from the liberal politician cited here, such theory contended, during the sixties and seventies, that estimating the particular gain does not tend to obtaining any general gain or

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[4] Hegemonic is here employed in the sense of cultural and economic dominance of certain social classes.

[5] At the Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala, a movement of professors and students broke up with the Humanities Faculty and created the School of Psychological Sciences, which in the seventies and eighties suffered repression because it was considered a center for subversive actions, due to the engagement the faculty and students had shown with the oppressed sectors in that country, by creating spaces for psychological care in marginalized zones.

common good (balance, as the economists pose it). Particular gain goes against the general gain, it is in the direction of what is bad for everyone (Hinkelammert, 1998, p. 182–183).

Rodríguez (1993) points out that the ideas from CEPAL are consistent with the classic and Keynesian economic theories, which consider growth as a process of capital accumulation of capital process, associated to technological progress. It poses a gradual growing of capital density and an increase of labor productivity, as well as a betterment of the quality of life. Nevertheless, reality was not consistent with those concepts, so the TD got better results.

Along TD ideas, the development of peripheral capitalism, or dependent capitalism, was analyzed. In Chile, a new organization was created, the Latin American Institute of Social and Economic Planning (ILPES, by its acronym in Spanish), which incorporated other specialists to ongoing discussions under a multidisciplinary approach, deepening the distance between the Latin American conceptualization and the hegemonic thinking promoted by organizations depending from the United Nations.

TD developed in three main branches: one oriented to Marxism, whose formulation states that dependency is directly linked to the accumulation and exploitation processes of global capital (Bambirra, 1975, 1978, 1983; Dos Santos, 2002; Marini, 1974, 1975, 1995, 1996). These authors emphasize the characterization and contradictions of dependent capitalism at its monopoly integration phase, as well as on the formulation of criteria to orientate in different ways tactical and strategic conceptions promoted by revolutionary movements, as a principle to produce a Marxist TD. The second branch is represented by Fernando Enrique Cardozo and Enzo Faletto (1974). It is closer to the developmental formulations of CEPAL. They assume the developmental thesis according to which social control of production and consumption is the basis for sociological analysis. This line of thought requires the analysis of the internal situation producing social tensions, as a foundation for the economic and political structure, which in turn will constitute nodes to comprehend and trace possibilities for development. The third branch was lead by André Gunder Frank (1973, 1974) and proposed that economic, political, and cultural dependency are derived from colonial underdevelopment and thus, structural dependency and exploitation in Latin American capitalism will only produce a substandard development.

The central themes of the TD are the economic and social history of Latin America; capitalism as a global system; the concepts of development and underdevelopment; international capital accumulation; the particularity of the Latin American capitalism, and the diversified industrial pattern as a model for development.

The epistemological production movement generated by theorists of the dependency generated explanations about the social and the global situation of Latin American which can be summarized as:

(a) Development is built upon the possibilities of relations among local social classes, local economies, and economies of national control. In this explanation the capital is foreign, and that promotes the exit of any surplus from the Latin American countries, thus reducing internal economic activities and inhibiting the development of the National State, the bourgeoisie, and middle classes. A second option poses that local groups take control of the main exportation

items, opening up bigger possibilities for expanding and diversifying the economy and social classes, so the State necessarily assumes the condition of State–Nation (Osorio, 1994).

(b) The center-periphery system is analyzed as a model for imperialist and dependent economies. From that point, the CEPAL theory is complementary to the Imperialism theory, by generating an explanation for the functioning of the capitalist system in underdeveloped countries.


## Education for Freedom

Paulo Freire was the pioneer of an education for freedom. He grounds his proposal in the need for liberty of those oppressed. The pedagogy developed by Freire states the need to build new relationships between individuals and their knowledge. He stated that reflection will only come out as a transforming action. As an engaged thinker, Freire elaborated an educational project that implied a *practice of freedom* and developed the pedagogy of the oppressed, contradicting the dominant pedagogy. That pedagogy considers that it is through the subject gaining consciousness of his subjection, that he/she will accomplish liberation (Freire, 1970). The notion of liberation introduced by Freire influenced strongly Latin American social sciences (social work, psychology, critical sociology, theology, and PL).

Education for freedom questions the rigid, bureaucratic scholar daily life, as well as the schemes of knowledge-power which are manifested in the educational process.[6] Education for freedom seeks relevant strategies which propitiate the people's learning and discovering of new possibilities for autonomous action (Barreiro, 1985; Brandao, 2002; Freire, 1999). Education for freedom implies a symmetrical relation between the actors of the educational process, which through critical investigation, defined by Freire a liberating praxis, seek to transform the present (Freire, 1964, 1970, 1982; McLaren, 2001). According to the Freirean perspective, a person that educates is obliged to recognize the other, the person that is being educated, as an active protagonist of the process of constructing and appropriating culture, as a human experience that transcends the oppressor–oppressed contradiction. Following Freire (1999), to act politically, intellectuals, along with the oppressed, have to "read" the world, understand potential dreams, hopes, and wishes of liberation, to be able to interpret the way in which oppressors understand the world through school systems that do not permit to see the persons behind ideologies.

Praxis as a theoretical–practical synthesis is an important concept in education for freedom. It is a step to identifying the factors, conditions, and determinations that prevent peoples' participation in political life. Those factors keep them away

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[6] The concept of knowledge-power in not analyzed here in the sense that Foucault posed, which is to say, considered as discourse, but as a practice that tends to preserve conditions of oppression and exclusion.

from knowledge, close to the ideology that masks the reasons that the capitalist society has to deprive them of their right to produce and reproduce life. Education for freedom (Freire, 1970) propels people to understand the meaning of oppressive actions, giving way to the construction of a reality whose center is the person. To reinvent the world and to establish symmetrical and inclusive relationships for participation is the project immersed in the liberating praxis. The epistemological conception that underlies such a formulation implies transforming ongoing school practices, which transmit dominant ideology (Brandao, 2002), in a systematic adventure with creative and critical proposals based on an active and shared process of teaching and learning, and thereby generating a liberating education oriented to build other possible worlds.

For Freire, conscientization is not a mere revelation of reality, because "its authenticity is realized when the practice on unveiling reality constitutes a dynamic and dialectic unity with the practice of transforming reality" (Freire, 1999, p. 99). That is to say that attaining consciousness means transcending the idea that unveiling reality does not mean an automatic transformation of it, that education is not only an act of knowledge, but also an act of transformation with respect to economical, social, political, ideological, and historical factors. It is an act that manifests the state of oppression of the person, which is thus in need of acting in order to transform such conditions. In this sense, the person is not considered as a passive viewer accepting an inevitable gap between her/him and what is to be taught. On the contrary, she/he is considered as an active person. Thus, education becomes a strategy oriented to teach the right that every individual has to live by creative acts "capable of unleashing other creative acts, in a literacy process in which man [sic], not being its object, develops the impatience, and the lucidity which is characteristic of the states of study, of the invention of vindication." (Freire, p. 100). Education as a liberating praxis, by assuming an existential compromise with the oppressed, helps to understand the problems that are suffered by the population, becoming a counterideological strategy to transcend the thinking–action, theory–practice, and ideology–language contradictions. Therefore, in collective praxis it is:

> (it is…) as equivocal to separate practice from theory, as it is equivocal to separate language from ideology, or to separate the teaching of matters from the calling to the student to become himself the subject of learning by apprehending the teaching process. From a progressive perspective, one has to experiment the dynamic unity between the teaching of the matter and the teaching of what it is, and the teaching of how to learn. By teaching mathematics, one teaches also to teach and to learn, how to experiment the necessary epistemological curiosity for producing knowledge (Freire, 1997, p. 120).

In the education for freedom, literacy programs (Freire, 1977) aim further than just teaching to decipher texts. Those programs develop an ideal strategy to attain popular concientization, based on comprehending the colonial–historical process of oppression. Such programs assume that the present can be assessed as a logical consequence of the past and with a view to the future, unveiling in the reflection process the diverse ways in which oppression manifests itself. Thus, in education for freedom, Freire considers necessary that:

(…) the teacher knows that when he says "here" and "now", the one that is learning will frequently understand "there". Even when the teacher dreams of putting his "here and now", his knowledge at the service of the students, this desire will be overlapped by the teacher's understanding of the different meaning of "here" for the one that is learning. At the very least, the teacher has to consider the existence of the difference of meanings and has to respect it (Freire, 1999, p. 58).

In the program for freedom developed by Freire, the teacher does not transfer knowledge mechanically to a passive and compliant subject; teachers work with a person with human potential to appropriate knowledge as a starting point for conscientization. Educative process has to look for mechanisms that propitiate people widening their worldview and opening their possibilities for transcending the present; education should advance from candid conscience to critical conscience, from the sensorial to the conceptual, from cognitive action to liberating praxis.

## Critical Sociology

While Freire was developing educational concepts related to conscientization, thinkers in other fields were seeking for work strategies for the liberation project. According to Fals Borda (1985), in 1970s, objectives of the concientization model started to be biased, apparently influenced by Piaget, rather than influenced by Marx thereby losing contact with the need to transform social and politic reality. In the late 1950s (Fals Borda, 1959) and early 1960s, a new strategy of sociological research was developed. It was first called action research (AR), and later named as participatory action research (PAR). Montero (2006) states that the name of PAR was introduced in 1970 by Marja-Luisa Swantz describing her work in Tanzania, but Fals Borda (1985) claims that Bangladeshi sociologist Anisur Rahman was the one who first proposed the notion of PAR. Such a proposal implied a conceptual definition. Fals Borda contends that the conceptual substitution of AR by PAR generated some confusion, since after the 1977 Cartagena International Conference on Critical Research, "…the idea of action research was adopted by many researchers which were not thoroughly informed" (Fals Borda, 1985, p. 490). Thus, PAR was introduced under circumstances that implied the need to build an epistemological frame of reference oriented to break the dual character of the subject–object of investigation posed by mainstream science (Fals Borda, 1985).

Orlando Fals Borda (1973a, 1973b, 1981, 1985) criticizes traditional sociology, proposing its reorientation and justifying a rebel science. He suggested that as Latin American reality is transformed, it needs particular ideas for its definition, which in turn requires a particular methodology. Such a critical position "will lead us to quarantine, as a starting point, those concepts that we have learned in texts and classrooms" (Fals Borda, 1973a, 1973b, p. 79). That is the way to develop social research that is engaged with the oppressed, employing

strategies to transcend practices that had transformed the conscientization model in discourse, and thus depriving it of its liberating sense (Fals Borda, 1973a, 1973b). According to Fals Borda (1985), the liberating sense was reintroduced in Latin American social sciences by going back to the Marxist concept of praxis, which from the beginning was immersed in the conscientization practice, although not clearly defined, perhaps due to the lack of sociological research methods. Fals Borda (1985) states that: "The philosophical stone for transcending a paradigm was founded on the idea that knowledge for social transformation did not lie in the training of consciousness for liberation, but on the practice of such consciousness" (p. 489).

Orlando Fals Borda (1981) defines PAR as the necessary action of knowing in order to transform based on five characteristics: authenticity and commitment; antidogmatism; systematical devolution of the knowledge produced in the research with the people's participation, feedback to organic intellectuals; balance between action and reflection; and a modest science based on dialogical techniques. He states that militant sociology must: "Determine real starting points (levels of conscientization for vindications that might push successive struggles for justice, schooling, health care, etc.) to advance toward class struggles oriented to more fundamental, strategic changes" (Fals Borda, Bonilla, & Castillo, 1972, p. 50).

Militant sociology pursues scientific strategies at the service of the people, thus contributing to transform social structures (Jacob, 1985; Jiménez, 1994). Militant sociology helps to know reality with and within the people, countering, as a principle, actions and ideas from dominant scientific frames of reference. While training social scientists, militant sociology should explain to students how to transcend the split between subject and object, and to build a different notion of scientific objectivity founded on praxis and ending in a process of social liberation. "Study and action combined to work against exploitation and dependency conditions that have characterized us so far, with all the degrading and oppressive consequences of poverty and the culture of imitation" (Fals Borda, 1970, p. 25).

Fals Borda considers important that universities leave behind ideas about knowledge being generated exclusively in developed countries (Fals Borda, 1985). He thinks necessary that Latin Americans realize that it is feasible to produce knowledge from action based on the engagement with the oppressed ones, in interdependency with scientists from diverse areas and from a multidisciplinary work. Thus "making up for the scarcity of resources, while at the same time approaching the time of a real step of the underdeveloped countries toward better levels of conviviality" (Fals Borda, 1973a, 1973b, p. 7).

Fals Borda (1973a, 1973b) claims that an important set of theories built upon a liberating political process were generated at the onset of a crisis in the Latin American social sciences. Liberating theories surge as a consequence of the thesis that to change the world, it is necessary to understand it. That is why sociology of liberation is in itself an act of scientific creation at the service of social transformation and, consequently, theory and practice, idea, and action are synthesized as liberating praxis.

## *Theology of Liberation*

The origins of TL (1968) are in the First Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM by its acronym in Spanish), at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (July 25th to August 4th, 1955), after the Eucharistic International Congress. In that conference, matters pertaining to the clerics, monks and nuns, seminars, masonry, the surging of Protestantism in Latin America, laicism, superstition, communism, and immigration were discussed. The meeting was also the chance to present to the Vatican the CELAM project, approved by Pope Pius XII on November 2nd, 1955 in the Rio Conference, opening the way to develop concientization of the bishops with respect to Latin American reality.

   After the founding of CELAM, in 1967 (Buga, Colombia), and the Conferences in 1968 (Medellín, Colombia) and 1970 (Puebla, México), the Catholic Church started critically reflecting on the dominant pastoral positions in Latin America. This reflection considered the situation of the people from the perspective of their conditions of oppression. Theoretical conceptions different from the ones posed by dominant theology, and even different from the ones used in universities, were then constructed. This new ecclesial position started from an analysis of justice and the problems of poverty, considering community as the space where freedom can be realized. López stated:

> Our reality, seen through the spectrum of underdevelopment, with all the inhuman drama it implies; because of the economical, political, cultural dependency; because of the severe and growing inequalities; because of the drama of frustrations, our reality is interpreted by priests as a "sinning situation" (López, 1980, p. 221).

The II Ecumenical Vatican Council made by Latin American bishops was carried out in four stages. The first one was headed by Pope John XXIII during the summer of 1962. At his demise (June 3, 1963), the other three stages were conducted by his successor, Pope Paul VI, until the closing of the deliberations in 1965[7] (CELAM, 1977, 1968, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; López Trujillo, 1980). The interpretations of the priests were influenced by the conditions of regional underdevelopment, oppression, and exclusion suffered by large sectors of the population (Native Americans and workers). Such interpretations were also influenced by theoretical postulates from the TD and the so called Easter experience[8]. That experience is the basis for the concept of liberation as a tendency to a deep social and individual conversion that leads to structural change (CELAM, 1977), a concept developed in Medellín, linked to the life saving action of Christ, to his death and resurrection, considered in large sectors of the Catholic church as related to liberation. Thus, it was stated that:

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[7]Reflections from the II Vatican Council were the base for the meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), celebrated in Medellín, Colombia 1968 and Puebla, México in 1970.

[8]Easter experience is the interpretation that theologists of Liberation give to the death and resurrection of Christ, to which they assign the meaning of birth of the new man and construction of freedom.

> Liberation is not something exterior to man, something received passively by man, without his interventions; liberation is a process that surges from the Easter mystery of Christ, in which man is called to participate in a radical conversion effort, a permanent assimilation of Christ dying and coming back to life (CELAM, 1977, p. 57)

Under the rule of John XXIII "the dominant matrix of theology is broken. A new matrix is founded. One not based in power, but in no-power, not on domination but on subjection, not from above but from below" (Dri, 2001, p. 291). Thus, in the II Vatican Ecumenical Council, European theologians look toward the construction of a new church, and to regain the dominance of the catholic. Whereas the Latin American bishops, gathered in the Latin American Episcopal Conference (Medellín, Colombia, 1968) stated that "poverty marginalizes large groups. Poverty as a collective act is an injustice that claims to heaven" (CELAM, 1968, p. 51). TL emerges in light of this and postulates that:

> To know Jesus we have to penetrate, guided by the Spirit, in the mystery of his life, his message and his liberating action. Such knowledge will lead to follow him closely, in the concrete space of the history of this people which, with non-diminishing patience and spirit of faith, look forward to a better future (Hernández, 1997, pp. 13–14)

As it can be observed, the global social crisis of the decade of the 1960s was particularly acute in Latin America and was the frame for the emerging of the TL, during the Second Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín, Colombia (1968). Nevertheless, also in Colombia, Camilo Torres (1974) had professed praxis on the basis that faith without practice is nonexistent and that praxis without theory is a gimmick for the conscience. In the CELAM (1968) meeting, a document was issued in which Latin American bishops consider that the notion of development does not contain the aspirations of Latin American church, goals, and aims that are included in the concept of liberation. These aspirations are described as follows.

### Aspirations of the Theology of Liberation

- Choosing man, choosing our people integrally conceived
- Choosing love for the poor
- Choosing integral liberation
- Overcoming social injustice and hate originated in selfishness
- Practical definition of the engagement as educators of consciences
- Denouncing everything that goes against justice
- Acknowledging the lack of political conscience of the people and assuming political participation in the public life of the nation

As it is clear, TL emerges from confrontation and from the need of the Church to acknowledge its mission at the service of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, an option that cannot be understood as exclusive. It stated its option for the poor, who have been suffering underdevelopment, who are victims of injustice in different ways, and it is an option that does not ignore other sectors of the population.

The pauperization process being lived by Latin American people, and the manifest need to build a liberation project with and within the oppressed is postulated as the center of attention for theologists' of liberation. In this sense, Gutiérrez (1999) states that: "Theology of liberation is one of the forms in which the adulthood that Latin American society and its church are reaching has been expressed during the last decades"(p. 31). Coinciding with Paulo Freire, TL searches for the conscientization of the oppressed, while stating the responsibility of catholic priests in building a world in freedom, a world where the poor get back human dignity from the solidarity founded by theologists

> The call to follow engages us in a task of service and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. We have solidarity when our life links with the human being in a dire situation, unable of coping with it by himself [sic]. In the words of the Jesuit martyr, Ignacio Ellacuría: "solidarity is taking care of the younger brother" (Hernández, 1977, p. 61).

In 1979, the Second Latin American Episcopal Conference was held in Puebla, México (CELAM, sf), and the conditions of extreme poverty of Latin American people were once again analyzed. It was concluded that such conditions must be transformed and that the church has a commitment to do it. Documents issued in that Conference become important foundations for reflection about the role of Catholic Church in the construction of a just society. The preferential option for the poor is defined in terms of considering that in the very faces of the poor it is possible to recognize Christ suffering, and thus transforming the imposed colonial system.

As noted earlier, TL surged from a dialog with social scientists that have as a reference a preferential option for the poor and an epistemological perspective built upon Latin American interpretations of Marxism. Theologists of liberation consider that the oppressed are the subjects of the Kingdom of God, and a fundamental condition to organize a society which respects spirituality and freedom. Praxis of the TL is concreted through the organization and the work carried out by ecclesial grassroots communities, conceived as the church born from the people in order to liberate itself, and people born out of the renovated Church, developing a solidarity identity in its active presence in the world of the poor (Castillo, 1991; Saravia, 1986). Ecclesial grassroots communities do not seek haven on a religious perspective, they claim for justice and liberation through collective praxis.

The pathway traced by TL does not imply an instrumental act, but the construction of an ethical–political position, oriented to interpretation and denouncing of the conditions of oppression. Praxis is carried out in structuring a dialogical–hermeneutic model referred to concrete historical subjects with a particular conception of the world, in which poverty, oppression, dignity, and liberation will be fundamental referents.

## Philosophy of Liberation

Likewise, in the field of Latin American philosophy an intellectual work linked to the liberation process of the people has been developed, under a critical, ethical–political paradigm, known as philosophy of liberation. It started with the TD

applied to the regional analysis and the conscientization of some Latin American philosophers with respect to the social, economical, and political situation of the region, specially the conditions of oppression and exploitation suffered by marginalized sectors. Mario Casalla (1973, 1975, 2003), Augusto Salazar-Bondy (1985), Leopoldo Zea (1965, 1985), Enrique Dussel (1987, 1988, 1990, 1998, 2001), Franz Hinkelammert (1974, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2002), and Horacio Cerruti (1983, 1986, 2000, 2001) are eminent representatives of this tendency. According to Zea (1965), Latin American philosophical thought presents three stages, which have as its highest point the philosophy of liberation (Cerruti, 1983), a term that appeared in1973, to describe the philosophical work developed in Argentina by Dussel (1975) and Scannone (1975).

Philosophy of liberation states that reality can be thought from the particular history of peoples and from a critical and creative space which can be useful to transform that history (Cerruti, 1983). Such philosophy contends that no national liberation is possible without freedom of those oppressed, which implies going further than the philosophy of identity, probing deeper than Western ontology and rationality, starting from an ethical–political commitment a process ending in the resolution of the interiority–exteriority contradiction. Latin American philosophy of liberation redesigns philosophy around the concept of the Other, the poor, the oppressed. It is theoretically and practically integrated with communities that need to transform their oppressive conditions of submission. From that point emerges the need to reflect about the peripheries and reflect from the perspective of the oppressed, orienting action toward the center, which is to say, toward the one that dominates, to whom a critical and subversive message must be delivered.

Philosophy of liberation does not pretend to ignore occidental traditions, but to transcend them and to denounce them as forms of ideology that masks social reality and puts it at the service of the centers of power. To that end, philosophy of liberation proposes to analyze social–historical reality, affected by the human and affecting humans in terms of survival.

## Community-Social Psychology[9]

From the 1960s, some psychologists (Quintal de Freitas, 2000; Serrano-García & Vargas, 1993) in Latin America working with other social scientists began developing a practice immersed in the community (Arango, 2007). From the start, community psychology had a rapid growth, making difficult its characterization and thus, putting obstacles to identify it as a new discipline (Serrano-García & Vargas) and to delimit it theoretically and conceptually. Places that have been signaled as foundational for its development are scattered through the Americas (Montero, 1994; Montero & Varas Díaz, 2007; Serrano-García & Vargas). Montero (1994)

[9]In this section, I refer specifically to community-social psychology and not to all practice of psychologists or social scientists in the community, oriented by diverse theoretical perspectives, even from hegemonic frames of reference of psychology and social sciences.

states that in various "Latin American countries the subdiscipline had been adopted, either as part of the general programs of social psychology (Brasil, Colombia, México, Venezuela, for example) or as community oriented courses" (p. 23). The term community-social psychology, accepted as an academic discipline, appears for the first time in Latin America, in the 1970s (Montero, 1994, 2004; Sawaia, 2001), when in 1975 the Program of Community-Social Psychology was created at the Psychology Department of Universidad de Puerto Rico (Montero, 1994, p. 22).

Community-social psychology was generated as a counter expression of the mainstream models of the discipline (Ussher, 2006), oriented to the study of individual behavior and processes of behavioral interaction (Serrano-García & Vargas, 1993). It is a consequence of the need to transform the oppression that characterized existence of large sectors of the population (Montero, 2004). This particular need implied a critical revision of the methodological–theoretical sources, starting from concrete links with poverty and oppression in Latin America. By looking at this reality, some social psychologists question a psychology oriented to the individual "…practicing with utmost care fragmentation, but not giving answer to social problems" (Montero, p. 43), and they deem necessary to work with the oppressed, considering their social engagement as the principle for action (Montero; Sánchez, 2001).

Those questions were behind the impulse toward community work, under the premise that knowledge must be produced by a direct relation with the people's problems, originated by the dominant socioeconomic structure (capitalism), pondering the impact that structure has on the social formation (Montero, 1994; Rivera-Medina, 1992; Rivera-Medina & Serrano-García, 1990; Sawaia, 2001). In the process, psychologists step out of the classrooms (Giuliani & Wiesenfeld, 1997), developing a praxis linked to problems deriving from oppression and exploitation (among peasants and workers). As Sawaia (1998) states: "The surging of community psychology is due to the same forces that, at the late seventies, catapulted different social sectors to street demonstrations, as well as pushed scientific academy to level up the equality of rights" (p. 179).

In that frame, community psychology directs its work toward the study of psychosocial factors that sustain, develop, foster, and maintain the control and the power which people can exert over their environment. It also helps to develop consciousness of the people's possibilities for solving their main problems (Montero, 2004). This is done due to social commitment, which is to say that psychologists must be engaged with transformation and social change, according to Montero (1998):

> It is the development of a way of doing directed to develop, along with members of the community, critical processes through which action, its causes and consequences are subject to analysis, so as to unveil hegemonic ways; interests leading to mask certain relations, impeding the comprehension and transformation of circumstances on which those facts are produced, naturalized, and generate paralyzing explanations that block changes (pp. 256–257).

By practicing CSP, and as consequence of popular education and PAR, the professional that employs this discipline becomes a facilitator of popular organizations, of promotion and participation. He/she is transformed into an organic intellectual

(Buci-Glucjsmann, 1978), who contributes to seeking collective strategies to solve community problems from critical praxis.

In the first stage of its development, CSP merges concepts and tools of disciplines like sociology, political science, economy, popular education, and social work, (Rivera-Medina & Serrano García, 1990; Wiesenfeld, 1994) not necessarily generated in Latin America. As Montero (1996) writes:

> (…) there is influence from Latin American sociology, which at that time proposed the TD analyzing relations between center and periphery and their effects on underdevelopment; from Marx and Engels (*Economical–philosophical manuscripts of 1844*); from the Lewinian concept of action-research, rapidly transformed in the sixties and seventies by social researchers like Fals Borda and Paulo Freire into participatory action-research. There is influence of social constructionism, as formulated by Berger and Luckman; influence of Marxian philosophers and sociologists like Goldmann, Gabel and Habermas, or influence of Marxists like Gramsci (p. 28).

It is clear in this statement that the dynamics of oppression, colonization, and exclusion suffered by Latin American people for centuries, and particularly acute in the 1960s, were a determinant factor in building CSP, a discipline developed as a consequence of the commitment to transform conditions promoted by the multinational discourse. A discipline building and giving new meaning to concepts, in direct relation with problems generated by a society that by including, excludes. In the 1980s, CSP started to produce a particular theoretical–conceptual frame of reference (Lane, 2000; Montero, 2003; Rivera & Serrano, 1989), without leaving behind proposals presented by critical sociology and education for consciousness, to which, nevertheless it added changes produced in practice.

In brief, CSP employs the concept of praxis and the dialectic thesis with a different framework from the one so far employed in the mainstream. CSP talks of an epistemological praxis which allows one to interpret concepts differently, as direct consequences of conditions of underdevelopment, oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and poverty on which most of the people lived; such interpretations also include specific conditions of the zones where researchers worked (Central America, South America, or Puerto Rico).

## *Psychology of Liberation or Social Psychology of Liberation*

In this section I refer to the construction of PL, departing from the work Ignacio Martín-Baró. Psychology of liberation or social psychology of liberation (SPL) is not exclusive of the Latin American ambit. There are experiences of PL in Africa, such as the work carried out in the Northern part of that Continent by Franz Fanon[10] (1965, 1973, 1974), as well as the work of Albert Memmi (1969, 1988), and in the Southern part, such as those of Stephen Biko (1986) and of Chabani Manganyi.

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[10] Fanon did also work at the Caribbean region.

There are also liberating ideas in the work of Alberto Merani (1973) in Latin America. The proposal of Ignacio Martín-Baró (1983, 1986, 1989, 1990), besides the opus of the aforementioned authors, is motivated by the need to seek an intellectual project linked to the liberation of people oppressed and colonized by USA and European ideas.

Martín-Baró (1986) considered, as community psychologists also did in the 1970s and 1980s, that the best findings of the psychology developed in Latin America emerged from the relation with social conceptions like the ones coming from the TD dependency, TL, critical pedagogy, and critical sociology. To those should be added contributions coming from the philosophy and ethics of liberation.

PL intends to uncover psychological processes to decolonize oppressed people; in that sense, it directs its praxis to psychosocial problems generated by the social formation imposed and developed in the Third World. PL proposes goals to analyze manifestations of power and their incidence on the worsening of living conditions; to reject the situation of the oppressed and to defend the right to live in dignity; to unveil circumstances affecting the people's health; to generate strategies to develop collective consciousness; and to transcend ideological mechanisms provoking immobility and passive acceptance of oppression and exclusion all over the world.

The analysis of the ideological–political conditions in which the psychology developed in a neocolonial system, as well as its application within a destructuring and alienating framework, produced in practitioners–intellectuals a necessity to look for mechanisms, strategies, and epistemological conceptions to build a theory with, for, and from the oppressed, based on a liberating praxis; because as a group, the contributions of the psychology so far made to the history of Latin America, could not be seen neither in their action nor in their practice (Martín-Baró, 1986). Reasons that explain why psychologists were simply reproducing foreign theories are found within the dependency of the discipline regarding forms of posing and solving research problems taken from other cultures and other societies and forms which could not answer to the demands coming from popular movements – of trade unionists, of peasants, of students – in Latin America. As Martín-Baró (1974) states:

> Paucity of the contributions of Latin American psychology is better understood when it is compared to other fields of intellectual work. For instance, TD has been an original effort of Latin American sociology to explain the *raison de être* of the underdevelopment in our countries, without recurring to explanations derogatory of Latin American culture, linked to the «protestant ethic» conception (p. 765).

Hence, PL seeks concrete options to transcend oppression and exclusion, situations that are manifested in unemployment, lack of housing, health and nutrition. For PL the ethical–political dimension is a principle for action, which demands to question instrumental positions and individualizing mechanisms propelled by the neoliberal school of thinking. Thus, it requires that practitioners question the psychology that was being taught at many Latin American universities, so detached from reality. A psychology that was according to Martín-Baró doing the following:

(…) to look up to the Big Brother, already respected in the social and scientific fields, borrowing from him its conceptual, methodological and practical assets, waiting for a chance to negotiate at the social instances of each country a social status similar to the one obtained by their North American colleagues (Martín-Baró, 1986, p. 220).

PL opens the way to daily reflection–action with the oppressed–excluded, criticizing at the same time its own discipline. In that process, praxis facilitates breaking up with the slavery to the colonial discourse, which imposes mercantilism on the society and on the individual. According to Martín-Baró (1986, 1989), to build a PL requires a decolonization process, as well as to forge close links with the excluded. PL demands that psychologists be aware of the role they have played as agents of hegemonic powers in the Latin American region, by doing a reality-veiling practice; and strengthening alienation (i.e., consumer-oriented psychology, mental health psychology, certain psychosocial interventions), instead of uncovering it.

For Martín-Baró (1986), Latin American psychology must renounce to attain a privileged rank in the scientific hierarchy and to receive social status conferred by communities operating with the discourse of power. Instead, Latin American psychology should generate knowledge at the service of the popular sectors, in order to solve their problems. This means to assume an ethical–political compromise to build with the excluded ones a dimension different from the present negative reality.

## Conclusion

Summing up, I can state that the TD, critical sociology and critical pedagogy, the PL, TL, and the philosophy of liberation, as well as community-social psychology are disciplines that generate theoretical and empirical answers in which the notions of dialectics and the concept of praxis are employed in a different way to those employed in many European and North American ambits; although in Latin American social sciences, there also are lively critical discussions of social and philosophical theoretical elements coming from both those regions. To dialectics and praxis, Latin American thinkers add work categories such as poverty, oppression, dignity, and the need for liberation. Thus, scientific action is linked to an ethical–political position as factors for transformation.

The notion of praxis in Latin American theory emerges from a dialogic–hermeneutic perspective created between the oppressed and organic intellectuals, oriented to produce knowledge capable of transforming the present. Liberating praxis implies the need to rethink problems, with and from, the oppressed; with a commitment to unveil and characterize conditions of oppression and exploitation suffered by large sectors of the population.

In this chapter, I have presented the notion of praxis as cause and consequence of the conscientization process, a process built and developed by theoretical–conceptual traditions based on an ethical–political perspective and on the critique of hegemonic frames of reference (positivism, pragmatism, functionalism, instrumentalism,

among others). Likewise, I have shown praxis as an attempt to comprehend the present as a reality to be refused in order to transform it, through a process that implies apprehending for transforming.

Liberating praxis, as a result of the action–reflection–action process is central to research cultural mediations and to overcome dualistic oppositions present in positivist science (organic–spiritual, individual–society, body–soul), so as to build a practical–theoretical perspective from which historical sources blocking the production and the reproduction of different life conditions may be explained (Dussel, 2000). Thus, praxis becomes the founding stone for Latin American liberation. Finally, I suggest that conditions of oppression and exclusion in which most of Latin Americans live, demand from practitioners and researchers, work explaining the history of the successive modes of colonization, and constructing cultural identity as a principle to transcend the present, to leave behind the dominant rationality and to integrate reason, emotion and ethic values.

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