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THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ARMED STRUGGLE

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According to Ignacio Martín-Baró, the problem of mental health, understood from the principle that each individual is part of a network of social relations, arises when a situation threatens these interactions and generates a negative impact on the psyche of the individual. Armed struggle is considered the greatest cause of affectation of human relations, with socio-economic effects that lead to irrationality and dehumanisation (Ignacio Martín-Baró, 1990). The impact varies according to social class (mainly affecting those involved in the front line and people with greater vulnerability due to their lower purchasing power), involvement in the conflict, and temporality. Children exposed to situations of violence are mentioned as being more vulnerable, since they are at a stage of growth in which they are still in the midst of personality development, and therefore being exposed to armed struggle (defencelessness, danger and constant alertness) makes it possible for their personality to be mediated by dehumanisation characterised by violence and irrationality. Likewise, Freud and Burlingham (1943) quoted by Raija-Leena Punamäki in "A childhood in the shadow of war. A psychological study of the attitudes and emotional life of Israeli and Palestinian children", mention that the impact goes to the emotional, behavioural and moral level; it transforms their feelings, symbols, language and concept formation. Raija-Leena Punamäki mentions the example of an Israeli child, who mentalises that being armed means self-confidence and symbolises tranquillity.

The perspective to explain the response to the context of armed struggle varies, whether it is an abnormal response, or a normal response to an abnormal context. The important thing is to recognise that there is a psychic impact, which according to the literature search based on past experiences with aversive stimuli due to social conflicts, affects people's development, giving rise to processes of dehumanisation in many cases, understood as the impoverishment of the capacity for lucid thinking, truthful communication, sensitivity to suffering and hope (Joaquín Samayoa, quoted in *Psicología Social de la guerra: trauma y terapia*).

According to Ignacio Martín-Baró, it is pertinent to speak of trauma as a permanent negative residue in the psyche of a person in the face of an experience of great impact on his or her life.



Analogically, psychosocial trauma refers to some historical process/situation that affected an entire population, taking into account the three variables mentioned above to describe the impact on each individual in the group. However, the suffering involved in traumatic situations, such as armed struggle, also offers the opportunity to strengthen resilience in certain people. Monsignor Romero is mentioned in the paper by Ignacio Martín Baró, entitled "War and Dehumanisation: a psychosocial perspective on the war in El Salvador", as a great example of the development of virtues such as altruism and love in solidarity.

It is relevant to consider that ultimately, the psychological and social resources that the individual manages to develop and mobilise in the face of socio-political disasters are perhaps the only means of survival in these conflict situations. In a study conducted by Raija-Leena Punamäk with Palestinian women, political and ideological commitment was identified as sources of strength and coping in the face of traumatic experiences.

Samayoa mentions that there are cognitive and behavioural changes due to the need to adapt to the context of armed struggle, such as selective inattention, clinging to prejudices, absolutisation, ideological rigidity, evasive scepticism, hatred, revenge and paranoid defence, referring to these as characteristics that precipitate the dehumanisation of the person. Also mentioned is the insecurity fed by uncertainty that does not allow for clear objectives in life, and in the face of this, the need to bond or to have a sense of belonging to a social group.

From another perspective that complements Samayoa's vision, according to a group headed



by Elizabeth Lira, who based themselves on the situation of state terrorism in the Pinochet era in Chile, they mention that the fear experienced by individuals acquires relevance in the social and political conduct of society. The processes triggered by fear are the following: a sense of vulnerability, a continuous state of alertness, a sense of powerlessness / loss of control over one's own life, and an altered sense of reality in the face of the difficulty of objectively validating one's experiences.

In terms of impact at the level of analysis, according to clinical psychology, psychological effects often include anxious and depressive symptoms, loss of identity, regressive behaviours and the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In a study by Derluyn, et al. (2004), post-traumatic symptoms were observed in 97% of 71 Ugandan child ex-soldiers. On the other hand, a study by Hewitt, et al. (2013), identified that 83% of adolescents exposed to armed conflict in rural Colombia exhibited internalised depressive and anxious behaviours. There is also evidence from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, where the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents ranged from 23-70%, anxiety from 40-100%, and depression in 11.3% of that population in Palestine. In Israel, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder was 5-8%, mild depression 25-35% and major depression 3.3%. (Dimitry,L., 2012). Clinical psychological problems are varied and also driven by a very poor quality of life, characteristic of various armed struggle contexts, such as in Yemen, where, according to the UNHCR, 80% of Yemenis require humanitarian aid to survive; or the experience of being a refugee; there are currently 110 million refugees and displaced persons in the world (UNHCR, 2023), according to Martín-Baró this group of people, who

are usually women, children and older adults, is the prototype most affected by armed struggles.

Emotional blunting is a common response to situations of rights violations and traumatic situations, and this is where a large part of the problem of managing the psychological damage of armed struggle or socio-political conflicts lies: not expressing what has been experienced, albeit from a place of containment in which the level of fear and anxiety is controlled. Despite the incredible capacity of human beings to adapt, there is an effect on their attitudes, values and behaviours, which is why this stress can affect their personality to the point of no longer being functional for society, whether the conflict continues or not.

In the post-conflict period, other problems arise, linked to prejudices, or the feeling of a poor support network, there is an evident change of schemas, which will govern the individual's future decisions, accompanied by fears and probably untreated psychological symptomatology.

From the macro-social approach, the enrichment of support networks and safe spaces is essential; these spaces buffer social trauma and strengthen emotional adjustment mechanisms, such as resilience (Piñeros-Ortiz, et al., 2021). León Rozitchner mentions certain contributions from psychology in the face of psychosocial alterations, among them, promoting or generating spaces where specific topics that affect people's mental health are explored, stimulating their affective expressiveness, recognising and validating what is felt, generating a unification of emotions and facts, which in turn favours the feeling of belonging and social containment. Do not neglect coherent and clear information about reality, nor the confrontation of dissociative attitudes, as well as continuing to include strategies and techniques

that favour the practice of healthy activities.

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