



# the JUST word

## Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing & Human Rights at Grassroots International

A Partner of Boston College Center for Human Rights & International Justice

### MBI Psychosocial Healing Projects in Haiti, Guatemala, and Palestine

Meredith Hawkins and Joan Liem, MBI Committee Members

Support from donors this past year has enabled the Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights at Grassroots International to sustain the funding of 11 grassroots projects. Many of the projects we support are facing devastatingly challenging times including the intensified siege and bombing of Gaza, another re-invasion of Haiti, and violent state repression of peaceful democracy protests in Guatemala. Impacted people will feel the effects of dominant power and its structures for generations.



Actoras de Cambio, Guatemala

Funding for healing justice and wellbeing is always needed, although especially so during times of increased violence. It is in the face of shared frustration, pain, and loss that we strive to raise the funds necessary for the transformative work of our grantees to continue. We continue to learn about how our projects embody Ignacio Martín-Baró’s liberation psychology and reflect organizing activities that many social movement activists refer to as “healing justice.” Healing justice encompasses a set of beliefs and practices articulated through the lived experiences of multiple traditional communities and the work of social movement activists both within the U.S. and beyond our borders. It represents efforts to redefine and respond to what

have traditionally been viewed as pathologies or individual biopsychological mental health problems. Martín-Baró focused on the intersection of individual suffering and broader societal crises (e.g., structural inequality, racism, patriarchal violence, and climate disasters)—that is, what he called psychosocial trauma. He urged us to respond to the ruptured social relations caused by these traumas and accompany local communities responding through transformative social change. Healing justice work can take a variety of forms, and we believe it can

be more deeply understood through the embodied practice of groups such as those we have been funding.

You will find brief descriptions of all 11 partner projects in the MBI 2022 newsletter. In this 2023 newsletter, we have highlighted three of the organizations fighting against particularly heightened backlash, violence, and the denial of their human dignity and basic human rights in Haiti, Guatemala, and Palestine. We hope that this brief article serves as a call for support from local, national, and international communities committed to psychosocial wellbeing.

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## Our Mission & Values

Through grant-making and education, the Martín-Baró Initiative fosters psychological well-being, social consciousness, active resistance, and progressive social change in communities affected by institutional violence, repression, and social injustice.

### OUR VALUES

- ◆ We believe that the scars of such experiences are deeply seated both in the individual and in society.
- ◆ We believe in the power of the community collectively to heal these wounds, to move forward, and to create change.
- ◆ We believe in the importance of developing education and critical awareness about the oppressive policies and practices of the United States and of multinational corporations.

### OUR GOALS

- ◆ To support innovative grassroots projects that explore the power of the community to foster healing within individuals and communities that are trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice.
- ◆ To promote education and critical awareness about the psychosocial consequences of structural violence, repression, and social injustice on individuals and communities, while educating ourselves and the wider community about the community-based responses of grantees in their pursuit of social reparation and a more just and equitable world.
- ◆ To build collaborative relationships among the Initiative, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and social change.

## MBI Psychosocial Healing Projects in Haiti, Guatemala, and Palestine continued from page 1



KOURAJ Activists

### KOURAJ, Haiti

Over the last year, Haiti has been looking to the international community for support in their efforts to restore peace and security in the face of continued gang violence and the complications of poverty, food shortages, and the lack of governance that has created a growing political power vacuum. The Kenyan police force deployed at the beginning of October to help with these issues was approved by the United Nations Security Council and brought in for their experience leading international missions of this type; however, they simultaneously face accusations of using excessive force when responding to political resistance and Covid lockdown procedures in Kenya. Groups like Amnesty International have questioned the legitimacy of the forces being deployed in the name of Haiti's defense.

Simultaneously, anti-LGBTQI activities are on the rise in Haiti. Religious leaders continue to march throughout the country protesting same-sex relationships and promoting anti-LGBTQI sentiments. Same-sex marriage is not legal in Haiti, and harassment, discrimination, violence, and stigmatization against the LGBTQI community are condoned and even promoted by government officials, as there are no laws prohibiting hate crimes or protecting LGBTQI rights.

KOURAJ was founded in 2011 after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti after religious leaders blamed the LGBTQI community for the earthquake, defining it as a divine punishment for their lifestyle. Government officials routinely discriminated against “Masisi” Haitians, often withholding international aid and services from them. The word “Masisi” was originally a derogatory term used by Haitians against LGBTQI people. It has since been reclaimed by KOURAJ and used to unite the LGBTQI community by turning the insult into a source of identity and pride. KOURAJ has sought to fight against all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and to root out internalized oppression within the LGBTQI community itself. This democratically organized group is led by an Executive Committee that shares its ideas and actions regularly and openly with the Masisi community at large at monthly General Assembly meetings. KOURAJ's work has been defined and carried out for the last 12 years entirely by and for members of the “M Community.” Their work has been focused on four main areas, including advocacy, health services, community mobilization, and networking.

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**Contributing authors and editors:** Heather Brennan, Timothy Karcz, Ashley Shackelton, and M. Brinton Lykes. **Contributing authors:** Saya Khandhar, Urmitapa Dutta, Meredith Hawkins, Joan Liem, and Paula Worby. **PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK.** Contributions can be made online at: [grassrootsonline.org/donate/](https://grassrootsonline.org/donate/) (In the drop down menu “I want to support” choose Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights), or by check made out to Grassroots International, noting on the memo line that it is for the **Martín-Baró Initiative** and sent to **Grassroots International, 179 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02130**, using the included donation envelope. Contributions to Grassroots International are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by the IRS code. For questions or comments, please email us at [martinbarofund@gmail.com](mailto:martinbarofund@gmail.com).

This year, with funding from MBI, KOURAJ has been conducting human rights trainings with community police so that they might better understand and support the rights of the “M Community.” They have also been setting up a system to track and record cases of homophobic acts against “M Community” individuals and are working with other human rights organizations to accompany victims of homophobic violence as they seek justice.

### Actoras de Cambio, Guatemala

Guatemala emerged from 36 years of armed conflict in 1996 and despite the transitional justice processes and prosecutions of



Actoras de Cambio: Breaking silence, Speaking out...

some of those responsible for gross violations of human rights during those years, the country remains plagued by gang violence, corruption, extreme poverty, and extractive industries depriving local

communities of water and resources. Anti-corruption candidate Bernardo Arévalo of the recently formed Semilla Movement party won an upset second round election and hopes to be inaugurated as President in January 2024. However, there is ongoing resistance to this transition within the current government, and Indigenous leaders throughout the country have organized peaceful demonstrations demanding a democratic transition. Repressive forces in the current government threaten to derail those efforts through radical repression and a coup.

Members of Actoras de Cambio work to collectively “reclaim their voice, body, [and] history” and “trust in their life, affirm their humanity, dignity, and their legitimacy.” This collective of sexual violence survivors is composed of Mayan and mestiza women speaking out about the violence committed against women and their communities during the war and currently. They view their work as a long-term political and social process aimed at breaking the silence of survivors and the blame they have experienced while bringing forth a practice of commemorations and healing grounded in traditional and contemporary beliefs and healing practices. They do so through narrative-based theatrical performances, political action, festivals, scholarships, and memory work.

Throughout the past year and recently in the face of increased violence following these pro-democracy protests, Actoras de Cambio has worked to build a documentary that outlines the process of gaining autonomy for their community, their theater projects, and the recovery of ancestral knowledge

through various means. They also worked to develop healing training workshops with leaders of the social movement, sharing their healing-action methodology in response to sexual violence as well as building a collaborative space with Cakchiquel women from Comalapa. Their pilot project focuses on art as a means of healing among children.



Afaq Jadeeda and Grassroots International Staff

### Afaq Jadeeda and Lajee Center, Palestine

In the past year, and notably within the past few weeks, following the horrific devastation within the Gaza region, Afaq Jadeeda and the Lajee Center have been working within their communities to survive in the face of the immediate violence and the ongoing oppression of occupation. Trina Jackson was able to visit these projects as part of a recent Grassroots International trip, strengthening our ties with them and sharing some of the images in this newsletter.

Afaq Jadeeda (New Horizons) is located within the Nuseirat Refugee Camp in the Gaza strip, and the Lajee Center works with the new generations of the Aida Refugee Camp in the West Bank. Afaq Jadeeda’s mission has focused on community development by providing services to children and women. The MBI grant has resourced Afaq Jadeeda as they seek to support the psychosocial wellbeing of over 200 children, ages 10-16, who live within the camp through engaging them in creative activities, encouraging participation in hobbies and crafts, and developing their ability to express their feelings to family and friends. Similarly, the Lajee Center’s overarching goal is to provide refugee youth with cultural, educational, social, and developmental opportunities. Funding from the MBI has supported the Center in launching their latest coalition, the Palestinian Resilience Research Collective. This collaboration involves Palestinian community health workers who have developed and published a training manual for locally-based community health workers called *Existing in the Crossfires: Cultivating Trees of Sumoud Beyond the Wall – a Psychosocial Workbook*.

We urge you to continue your support for those on the ground struggling against violence and corruption and seeking wellbeing and human rights through their organizing while simultaneously caring for themselves, their families, and their communities in the face of unimaginable devastation.

# SOLIDARITY ENCOUNTER: Healing Justice in Black Feminist and Palestinian Liberation Movements

Urmitapa Dutta, MBI Committee Member

*I have come to understand that the word Palestinian and the word Indigenous are the same; The word Indigenous is the same word as survival...this is a moment of decolonization or bust.*

– Devin G. Atallah



*We know viscerally that our country will be liberated. This is engraved in our hearts and minds and soul despite everything that this world has put on us.*

– Ayman Nijim



*...for this earth  
Knows to thrive in a kernel of dirge  
Outsinging, serenade the broken...  
Living learns what it means to endure...*

– Theyiesinuo Keditsu

Close to 200 people along with members of the Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights came together on October 25, 2023, with Devin G. Atallah, Ayman Nijim, and adrienne maree brown to learn from them about healing justice across different liberation movements. Solidarity, as a legacy of Ignacio Martín-Baró, is about bearing witness; it is about paying attention, registering wounds, and refusing to turn away.<sup>1</sup> His legacy continues to inspire efforts to bear witness to state terror, fostering a greater understanding of the long-lasting effects of political violence on communities and the imperative for liberation. In this spirit, the solidarity encounter of Oct. 25 was about bearing witness to Palestinian struggles in the face of catastrophic, genocidal violence perpetrated by the Israeli state (underwritten by the United States) against Palestinians in Gaza and beyond.<sup>2</sup> We gathered at a moment of bearing witness as Western media and public discourse dehumanizes thousands and thousands of Palestinian lives, including children, massacred by Israel in Gaza in the past few weeks. We listened to

the persistent and steadfast voices of our Palestinian friends and colleagues Devin and Ayman; we felt the reverberations of the fear, the grief, the rage, and also the care with which they are carrying the voices of their beloved people in this moment. This critical moment, as Devin reminded us, is a moment not only of survival against the throes of Israeli colonial occupation and a genocidal regime—a survival that is nourished by Indigenous love—but also of Palestinian love for their peoples, their lands, their soil, and their waterways. This is a visceral knowledge and certainty that is part of the Palestinian psyche.

In this moment, adrienne maree urged us to consider our complicity—especially those of us who live in the United States and/or pay U.S. taxes—as a shared burden and a collective responsibility to act. What does it mean when we can avert our gaze away from the massacre of Palestinian lives and life worlds by an Israeli settler colonial occupation and apartheid regime? That we can carry on with our lives in the face of this

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1. This Solidarity Encounter was organized by *Grassroots International* as one of a series of opportunities to introduce a wider public to its work, with a focus on healing justice and liberation psychology. Ignacio Martín-Baró was a Spanish Jesuit, pastor of a rural Salvadoran parish, social psychologist, and professor at the Universidad de Centro America José Simeon Cañas in El Salvador. Martín-Baró was a pioneering figure in the development of liberation psychology, a school of thought rooted in Latin American social psychology and liberation theology. Grounded in his experiences in El Salvador, Martín-Baró emphasized the importance of understanding the psychosocial dynamics of oppression and the rupture of social relations that communities experience under oppressive regimes. His work continues to inspire critical action toward addressing the psychosocial consequences of political violence and work towards the liberation of oppressed peoples.

2. The United Nations Special Rapporteur calls this violence a form of ethnic cleansing: s.

## SOLIDARITY ENCOUNTER: Healing Justice in Black Feminist and Palestinian Liberation Movements continued from page 4

catastrophic siege? In this privileged space, where we have the luxury of averting our gaze, adrienne maree reminds us that we need to garner the courage to shoulder more, to embrace more, to speak out and speak up. Her heartfelt refrain of “I am so sorry” echoed acknowledgment of this complicity over the last 75 years. Highlighting profound parallels between the harrowing legacies of Black slavery and Indigenous genocide, she reminded us that our collective strength lies in holding fast to one another and reclaiming the sacred land that was stolen, for without a home, there can be no true healing.

We are bearing witness to an extreme unmasking of the colonial world, manifested in the Israeli settler colonial project that seeks to annihilate Gaza, to render beloved Indigenous lands into a desolate cratered landscape—what Devin describes as “the backside of the moon.” Unmasking these colonial veils, he reminds us that these cratered landscapes epitomize the unfathomable void of colonialism. Inasmuch as the settler colonial state massacres Palestinian bodies, it cannot infiltrate the Palestinian soul that remains unshackled, unbounded, and soars free, even as Palestinian bodies are under siege.

Healing, for Palestinians in this moment, as Devin shared with us, is about centering life and living. It is about registering joy and persistence in struggle, steadfast in the desire for freedom undeterred by colonizers’ attempts to quash it time and again. It is about holding on to love and the desire for freedom, even when that love has to be stolen back from colonizers who punish Palestinians for loving their land. As Devin writes in *Beyond Grief: To Love and Stay with Those Who Die in Our Arms*:

“What does it take to love our babies, our living, and our dead in the midst of Israel’s genocidal colonial conquest? How do we care for our massacred bodies and all the collective residues of horror as our people are so violently thrown out of human consideration? When can we release our tears and let them fall free? This is not grief. This is our revolutionary, Indigenous love fighting against the apocalyptic violence of genocide. And when we love like this, anchored in Palestinian feminist praxis, we live and die with dignity, and we become the freedom we are demanding.”



Banner welcoming Grassroots International and MBI to Gaza

As we reflect on what solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for decolonization means, we look back to Ignacio, whose legacy serves as a potent reminder that the struggle for liberation from colonial occupation is not confined to a specific time or place. He emphasized that the work of liberation requires dismantling enduring structures of colonial oppression, promoting self-determination, and advocating for the rights of Indigenous and oppressed peoples worldwide. This is possible when—as adrienne maree has shown us and written in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*—solidarity becomes the embodiment of love within and across our communities and myriad relationships:

“Liberated relationships are one of the ways we actually create abundant justice, the understanding that there is enough attention, care, resource, and connection for all of us to access belonging, to be in our dignity, and to be safe in community.”

### Grassroots International Vision Statement

We envision a world in which a universal commitment to the health and well-being of the earth and all its peoples, fueled by successful global movements for social, economic, and ecological justice, has transformed production practices, consumption patterns, and economic and social relations to ones based on sustainability, equity, and dignity.

## Martín-Baró Initiative's Co-Founder Rewires

Saya Khandhar, BC CHRIJ Research Assistant

On October 26th, the Lynch School of Education and Human Development (LSEHD) and the Center for Human Rights and International Justice (CHRIJ), both at Boston College (BC), hosted a “rewirement” celebration to honor M. Brinton Lykes’s decades of commitment and contributions to justice, activist scholarship, and education. This year, Lykes will transition out of her position as a full-time professor at Boston College but will continue collaborations with organizations including the CHRIJ and the Martín-Baró Initiative (MBI) for Wellbeing and Human Rights at Grassroots International.

The celebration event hosted the music ensemble *Sol y Canto*, a Boston Music Award-winning duo that is known for their inspiring Latin roots music. Their performance included original compositions as well as songs from Cuba and Nicaragua that were played on a variety of different instruments.

The evening’s events also included several speakers. Among them were Daniel Kanstroom, Professor of Law at BC Law School and Co-director of the CHRIJ, and Ramsay Liem, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at BC and co-founder of the MBI along with Lykes. The various speakers and guests—colleagues, friends, former students, and family members of Lykes—reflected on her lasting influence and impact as an outstanding educator and pioneer of many activist and liberation movements. Due to her unwavering and ongoing commitment to international struggles for justice, Lykes titled the event a “rewirement,” since those who know her know that she could never retire from

fighting alongside those who live at the margins. Quoting Michelle Fine, a professor of critical psychology at the City University of New York, Liem said: “Brinton Lykes was decolonizing before it was cool. She

was liberation theorist, feminist activist scholar, transnational intellectual muse before all of these things were avant garde.”

Lykes’ courageous endeavors have been broad yet unique, and many of the evening’s speakers aimed to capture her spirit through creative metaphors. Gilda Morelli, Associate Professor and Department Chair of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology at BC’s LSEHD, likened Lykes to gumbo, the New Orleans Creole dish. Like gumbo, Lykes is “rich in flavor, spicy, and draws on cuisines from around the world.”



Trina Jackson, Brinton Lykes, Chung-Wha Hong

Lykes spent decades in Guatemala accompanying the Indigenous Maya Ixil and K’iche’ communities of Chajul during and in the aftermath of the country’s genocidal war. In addition to the speakers present at the event, the women she worked with during this time recorded a video thanking Lykes for her efforts in feminist community action that continue to support them today. Marcie Mersky, one of Lykes’ colleagues in Guatemala, sums up Lykes’ work as being “framed by a constant and ongoing search to understand, to empower, and to heal.” Indeed, Lykes’ time in Guatemala was notably characterized by her work with women in their communities to “assert their rights and demand recognition by others of their inherent dignity.”

Though the ways in which Lykes’ legacy will carry on are evidently varied, her celebration carried a strong theme of her commitment to love, compassion, and justice. She ended the evening with reflections of her own, thanking all for pausing to be together and challenging us to reflect on the many ways in which our world remains in crisis. She notes that for many of us, ours “is not a time for celebration but of all too much grief and all too much rage.” Lykes hopes that her rewirement will allow her to continue to live amongst us all with greater flexibility and to have more time to listen deeply to stories from those who “invite us to unlearn and then to relearn from the diversities of being, doing and knowing that are emerging within a pluriverse.” She describes the pluriverse as an invitation to shift our thinking, one that moves us away from the idea that the universe and knowledges produced in “EuroUnitedStatesian” contexts are universal. Instead, the pluriverse recognizes that there are many different living systems and ways of “knowing-being-doing.” With deep gratitude, humility, and hope for the future, Lykes closed with a quote from Cornel West: “Justice is what love looks like in public.”

## Heartfelt Thanks to Jean Entine



Amid our grantees' and partners' growing needs during 2023, the Ignacio Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights was delighted and deeply grateful to receive a very generous posthumous gift from the estate of Jean M. Entine. Jean was a longtime resident of Cambridge, MA and an activist, consultant, and fundraiser for many progressive causes and NGOs in greater Boston and beyond. She was a co-founder of the *Boston Women's Fund* (BWF), former executive director of *Women for Economic Justice*, and program officer for *The Boston Foundation*. She served as a board member of various organizations including the *Center for Constitutional Rights* and *Grassroots International*. Jean worked with MBI's and BWF's co-founder, Brinton Lykes, on a host of projects and programs, and the two traveled together on their first trip to Central America in the 1980s. Jean learned about and supported the MBI in its earlier iteration as the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights. All of us at the MBI and beyond miss her deeply and are grateful for her generosity and ongoing support in the wake of her untimely and unexpected death in 2022.

## Living Lives of Integrity and Love: A Tribute to Clark and Kay Taylor

*Paula Worby*

Kay and Clark Taylor, longtime supporters of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights (MBF), died on October 22, 2022 (Kay) and on October 1, 2023 (Clark). They supported both the MBF and Grassroots International over many decades. Clark also served as a member of the Board of Directors of Grassroots International. Kay was a Master Gardener and their home in Needham, MA was a palette upon which she cultivated colorful and diverse living systems. They regularly welcomed friends and family of several generations to their home and hosted many intense debates and discussions about local, national, and international social and political challenges. Clark and Kay were both educators and they worked independently and together uplifting their commitments to “liberating education” and as activists committed to human dignity and confronting inequality in all forms. Clark was instrumental in the formation and many innovations that supported non-traditional students at the College of Public and Community Service and then at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, where he taught until 2001. Together they dedicated years to their church's Social Action Committee and Immigration Task Force.

Clark and Kay modeled respectful solidarity through a unique sister community relationship between a Needham, MA church and a remote rural indigenous village in Guatemala. Begun in the late 1980s to provide international accompaniment to a war-torn community and now 37 years strong, the partnership supported the community's autonomy and trusted its wisdom, providing ongoing funding with few strings attached. The partnership brings US visitors to rural Guatemala in a learning encounter, rather than as presumed helpers—a charac-



teristic of too many North-South exchanges. The partnership emphasizes turning that human connectedness into US participants' greater awareness of the history and negative impact of US policies. “Persuasive” is how Clark's friends recall him—whether encouraging people to take on leadership roles or join him in demonstrations. Clark and Kay's commitment to listen deeply and learn to unlearn shone brightly. According to the Guatemalan village friends who mourn: “Our community feels the void left behind and remembers the beautiful moments that Clark and Kay spent in our lands. Now it is our turn to keep up the struggle and strengthen their teachings for the upcoming generations.”

*Paula Worby is a health information editor and uses vacation to travel as an interpreter with the Guatemala Partnership groups annually.*

# 2023 Annual Memorial Event

Co-sponsored by the Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights at Grassroots International; Campus Ministry; & the BC Organization for Latin American Affairs, the Boston College Center for Human Rights and International Justice presents:

## SCREENING OF WHAT LUCÍA SAW LLEGARON DE NOCHE

Tuesday, November 14 | 6:00 PM – 8:30 PM | Gasson 305

Refreshments  
to be served.  
RSVP here.  
Or at [tinyurl.com/LuciaRSVP](https://tinyurl.com/LuciaRSVP)



### SYNOPSIS:

During a night of 1989, in the middle of the Salvadoran civil war, six Jesuit priests were murdered at the UCA University. The news has an immediate international repercussion since their contribution was key in the foreseeable peace agreement after a decade of bloody war. Who killed them? The government immediately blamed the guerrillas but an eyewitness debunked the official version. Her name is Lucía and she works as a cleaning employee at the UCA. She has seen who were the real killers: the army. Now she will have to choose between testifying for the truth or protecting her family.

Part of BC's International Education Weeks.

This Event is Free and Open to the Public.



The Martín-Baró Initiative  
for Wellbeing and Human Rights



BOSTON COLLEGE  
Campus Ministry

BOSTON COLLEGE

CHRIJ

Center for  
Human Rights  
and  
International Justice

Commentary after the film by  
Salvadoran-US professors at BC:



**Ernesto Valiente**

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology  
School of Theology and Ministry



**Andrés Castro Samayoa**

Associate Professor  
Lynch School of Education and Human Development

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