

Expanding conceptions of liberation: Holding Marxisms with liberation psychology

Theory & Psychology
2018, Vol. 28(3) 340–357

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DOI: 10.1177/0959354318767757

journals.sagepub.com/home/tap



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Abstract

By considering how psychologists are able to hold (that is, support distinctive ontologies) Liberation Psychology (LP) with Marxisms, this article interrogates psychological approaches to liberation in two ways. First, against the foundations of LP and Marxisms, as well as attempts to formulate psychological Marxisms and Marxist psychologies, the paper examines how holding LP with Marxisms facilitates a necessarily expansive, innovative, and democratic conception of liberation. Second, by exploring matters related to history, epistemology, reflexivity, and the State, a theoretical holding of this kind is shown to permit psychologists nuanced ways of engaging complex psychosocial phenomena in their work. It is concluded that by holding LP with Marxisms, psychologists employ a sensitivity towards a local–global nexus of interlocking liberation struggles, while taking seriously matters of power, space, time, identity, violence, and freedom.

Keywords

liberation, liberation psychology, Marxisms, resistance, solidarities

Marxism and Liberation Psychology (LP) are, today, associated most strongly with their respective pioneers: Marxism with the German political analyst, economist, and philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883)—as well as, albeit to a lesser degree, his writing partner and friend Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), another German intellectual—and LP with Spanish-born Jesuit priest and social psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró (1942–1989). These writers were staggeringly eclectic in their work. Marx drew on, among many others, Hegel, Shakespeare, Feuerbach, Spinoza, and Shelley (see Marx, 1867/2010), whereas, in his writing, Martín-Baró evoked and expanded on the writings and teachings of Freire, Fanon,

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Christ, Arendt, as well as Marx—to mention just a few (see Martín-Baró, 1994). Yet, neither Marx nor Martín-Baró was entirely innovative. Socialism as well as notions of class-based revolutionary praxis, often linked exclusively to Marx, can be traced back to venerable epochs (see Hobsbawm, 2011) that predate even the French and Haitian Revolutions (see James, 2001). Similarly, the work of Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1963), which preceded that of Martín-Baró, could arguably be understood as a kind of proto-LP. Therefore, although Marxism and LP owe much of their development and respective lexicons to Marx (oftentimes alongside Engels) and Martín-Baró, neither owes its entire genesis to these thinkers. This is important in acknowledging that the contemporary relevance of Marxism and LP lies in the traditions associated with each.

In heeding Hayes' (2004) insistence that a comprehensive and formalised Marxist psychology is not possible, this article does not engage in a kind of theoretical cross-pollination, whereby the inherent psychosocial character of the Marxist project is outlined so that Marxist analyses can be readily situated within an LP paradigm. Nor does the paper confine LP's global relevance to Marxist or class-based axioms, *à la* a reductive form of economic determinism. Instead, the task of holding LP with Marxisms seeks to embrace as well as enact innovative and complex liberatory praxes that respond to a social-psycho-material dialectical tirade. In what follows, I provide brief sketches of Marxisms and LP so that we might envision holding together the two in a manner which is sensitive to an ineluctably ambitious formulation of liberation.

Sketching Marxisms

Capitalism, whose present-day, global modality is usually referred to as neoliberalism, constitutes a number of economic and political practices that link human well-being to individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills. Neoliberal doctrine posits that human freedom is realised most fully in an industrialised framework, characterised by free, or minimally regulated, markets, whereby the financialisation, privatisation, and/or marketisation of (almost) everything is understood as socially beneficial and therefore commonsensical. However, despite advocating free markets and individualised competition, the neoliberal State is characterised by monopoly control (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal societies frequently draw on State powers to impose, drive, underwrite, and manage the internalisation of production and finance, oftentimes violently. Proponents of neoliberalism believe this kind of interventionist governance to be more efficient than democratic State guidance (Saad-Filho, 2017).

Marxists, accordingly, understand all habits, discourses, spatial arrangements, and social values as reflecting the oppressive functioning of capitalist free markets and, subsequently, seek to challenge and dismantle them (Jameson, 2002). Marxism, as a political and revolutionary movement, combines an historically sensitive analysis of capitalism, along with its ideological infrastructure, with the practical task of overthrowing it in order to create a socialist, and eventually communist, classless society (Parker, 2009).

Marxist theory proposes that society consists of an economic base—also known as the infrastructure—and a superstructure, or superstructures as some prefer to think of it/them. Where the base includes the relations of production, which determine one's class

status, and the forces of production, which work on the world to produce all material life, the superstructure is made up of a given society's institutions and ideas, such as culture, religion, family, law, and the State (see Marx & Engels, 1972). Although orthodox Marxists insist that the base determines the superstructure (Jameson, 2002), it has since been argued, notably by Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (2014), that the base and superstructure are in a dialogical relationship, reciprocally informing one another.

In his analysis of the economic base, Marx (1867/2010) focuses on what he refers to as labour surplus, that is, all value created over and above the wages that are paid to workers. Surplus value is later realised in the form of money when goods—which have both use and exchange values—are sold as commodities (Barker, 2004). Under capitalism, labour surplus, as well as the manner by which debt and rent is organised, is controlled by a minority of distributors (that is, the ruling class, or bourgeoisie, who own the constantly revolutionising means of production) and is produced by a vast majority of exploited workers (the working, or proletariat, class), who sell their labour to the bourgeoisie. Under this system, capital is used to control and regulate the working classes who, themselves, function as commodities within the free market (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015). As working classes are “the nerve centre” of capitalism, they are understood as having the most potential to revolutionise it.

Although the proletarian and bourgeois classes normally receive the most attention within Marxist analyses, Marx also spoke of a petty-bourgeois class, which constitutes small-time capitalists like traders and shopkeepers, as well as a lumpenproletariat class, or those populations that exist outside of formal wage labour relations. Marx did not believe that the petty-bourgeois or lumpenproletariat were likely to gain the kind of revolutionary class consciousness required to seize the means of production and overthrow capitalism (Hamber, Masilella, & Terre Blanche, 2001; Marx & Engels, 1972). Today, one of the tasks of contemporary Marxism is to analyse how neoliberalism has reconfigured class structure, reconstituted class power, and shaped flows of capital (Harvey, 2005).

While Marx's (1867/2010) primary focus was the base, later, the work of so-called structural Marxists (see Althusser, 2014) began to take the superstructure more seriously. The superstructure produces ideas that legitimate capitalism and hide its violent distortions of everyday life (Hamber et al., 2001). Such ideas are necessary for social domination, and are known as ideology (Eagleton, 2011). Ruling classes typically wield ideology—which Jameson (2002) understands as “structurally limiting” (p. 276)—to control both material and intellectual forces in a society, and produce in people a false consciousness (Marx & Engels, 1972).

In considering base–superstructure relations, the oppressive conditions under which workers live often prevent them from seeing themselves in the material world and, subsequently, a crucial sense of their being is lost (Eagleton, 2011; Marx & Engels, 1848/2015). Workers are said to feel alienated from the process of production, the products of their labour, one another, the way in which they live in the world, and their individual identities—the latter of which some Marxists refer to as “species-being” (see Marx & Engels, 1972). People may then address these feelings of alienation through commodity fetishism (see Marx, 1867/2010), which, by attributing seemingly magical powers to consumer goods, gives way to a fleeting, superficial, and fundamentally

hollow kind of satisfaction (Harvey, 2005). In this regard, by subscribing to the logic of consumer capitalism, we obscure the exploitative relations from which commodities and feelings of alienation arise (Barker, 2004).

The conflicting class interests produced under capitalism are referred to as class struggle, which is essentially a struggle over the labour surplus. In the capitalist creation of labour surplus, there are inherent tensions—or contradictions, as Marxists prefer to call them—which lead to crises of capitalism (Marx, 1867/2010; Marx & Engels, 1848/2015). Rather than deviations from the ordinary, Marxism insists that these crises are woven into the very fabric of capitalism, and must, in the task of overthrowing capitalism, be exasperated by workers if society is to move towards revolutionary change.

In attempting to examine the complexity of capitalism's contradictions, Marx developed a materialist interpretation of the dialectical method proposed by German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (Hamber et al., 2001). The Marxist dialectic, known as historical (or dialectical) materialism, perceives progress as that which results from various reciprocal, relational, interwoven, and co-determining sociohistorical processes that are in continuous conflict and contradiction with one another (Hayes, 2004). In this regard, historical materialism posits that the advances made under capitalism—usually at a great cost to human life and well-being—are able to serve as the condition for socialism, whereby such advancements will benefit a majority population instead of a minority (Eagleton, 2011). Therefore, by attempting to consider meaningfully how social tensions/contradictions form a whole, the theory–method of historical materialism dialectically analyses history in relation to its material effects (Jameson, 2002).

Although materialist in focus, Marxism does not disregard the discursive, spiritual, psychological, and ideological spheres that are constitutive of people's lives (Marx & Engels, 1972). Rather, Marxism emphasises that people's material needs must be met if they are to attend meaningfully to metaphysical issues. In this way, people's consciousness is determined, and can be understood, through their engagement with the material (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015).

Numerous enactments of Marxisms have been observed throughout history, including the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1917, as well as various student and worker struggles that occurred in the 1960s (Parker, 2009). Indeed, during the 20th century there was a time when one third of the world purported Marxist ideals. This included many distorted caricatures of Marxism, such as the dictatorial regimes of Pol Pot in Cambodia, Joseph Stalin in the former Soviet Union, and Mao Zedong in China. It follows then that throughout the 150 years proceeding the publication of the first volume of Marx's (1867/2010) opus, *Capital*—the manuscripts of the second and third volumes were reworked and published by Engels after Marx's death (Hobsbawm, 2011)—definitions and understandings of Marxism have been tremendously contested. Certainly, myriad academic, political, and activist work has sought to update, revitalise, and disavow Marxism to such an extent that today, much thought operating under the banner of Marxism cannot be found in Marx's writings.

We might begin to disentangle some of the contestations within Marxism, or rather, as suggested by Foster (1999), between Marxisms, by considering a brief terminological remark: where the work of Karl Marx—some of which is highly problematic—is referred to as *Marxian*, the rich and contentious tradition of work that emerges from Marxian

thought is known as *Marxism(s)*. Today, very few people interested in serious socialist emancipation would subscribe wholly and uncritically to Marxian thought, which, to take only a few examples, assumed an abhorrently lenient approach to some instances of colonialism (see Eagleton, 2011); was oftentimes overly masculinist and patriarchal, extending little consideration towards gender and how women are typically expected to enact arbitrarily unwaged household labour (see Federici, 2012); described in especially disparaging terms the lumpenproletariat (see Fanon, 1963); and contributed little to questions of racial capitalism (see Robinson, 1983). In many respects then, Marx's writings reflect his position as a white Victorian patriarch. We would do well to position our own liberatory projects within the tradition of Marxisms that emerge from, but are at the same time very critical of, Marxian thought. It may be said that such a tradition seeks to link (and indeed intervene in) the oppressive functioning of capitalism, and how this is immersed in and bolstered by other kinds of interlocking, socially divisive, and violent oppressions.

Marxisms are, today, not relevant because of an inevitable overthrowing of capitalism, but because the present neoliberal modality of capitalism continues to prove its unsustainable global operation (Hobsbawm, 2011). Therefore, Marxist critique—with its simple evocation that if we focus on revolutionising the economy, it will diminish the power that it holds over our humanity (Eagleton, 2011)—remains, in different ways, relevant to all societies in which the oppressive forces of capitalism operate (see Rodney, 1972).

Sketching liberation psychology

Seedat and Suffla (2017) characterise “ruling psychologies” (which are largely structured by, and serve as an appendage of, bourgeois ideologies) as those that are “enacted to naturalise extractive relationships, acquisitiveness, and accumulation, and privilege extreme notions of individualism and competitiveness,” and in this way “minister to the hegemonic neoliberal order” (pp. 422–423). These psychologies are typified by their apparent ahistorical and apolitical stance, an inability to acknowledge their complicity in oppression, and their refusal to engage explicitly with any kind of liberatory agenda. Such psychology is then “another site of cultural imperialism and intellectual occupation” (Seedat, 1997, p. 261) that exemplifies an “ethnocentric, classist and sexist nature” (p. 266).

Against the backdrop of these oppressive mainstream psychologies, LP does not emerge as a distinctive field of psychological inquiry or practice. Rather, it represents a paradigm from which to enact psychology in a manner that is ethical, critical, democratic, and that serves oppressed people. LP refutes the idea of what Martín-Baró (1994) referred to as the “permanent psychological present” (p. 30), which works to conceal unequal power relations by emphasising scientific neutrality, restricting repertoires of investigation, and postulating an individualising and irresponsible treatment ideology (Burton & Kagan, 2009). Psychology that strives towards liberation must embrace new and innovative praxes, methods, processes, and capacities through which people are able to achieve freedom, liberation, and a lasting escape from various structures of power, oppression, and exploitation (Foster, 2004). Although LP is a particular way of doing

psychology, meaning that it can undergird any of the discipline's numerous fields, it has been implemented most successfully by educational, political, social, and—especially—community psychologists (Montero & Sonn, 2009).

Most iterations of LP take seriously Martín-Baró's (1994) insistence on the paradigm's three core elements. The first of these emphasises that LP must focus on new horizons, that is, the construction of a psychology that prioritises the people it endeavours to help, rather than its own disciplinary status or the careers of psychologists. In this way, LP strives to decentre attention from itself and to subvert the colonially informed institutional arrangements from which mainstream psychologies originate. Accordingly, LP connects the individual to the collective, often through group emotion and/or trauma, in an attempt to enact social change. This is in stark contrast to mainstream psychologies' individualising, separatist, and biomedical approaches to trauma (Montero, Sonn, & Burton, 2017; Seedat, 1997).

In seeking new horizons, iterations of LP that are grounded in the academy typically engage an individual–collective dialectic through research methods that stress participation, empowerment, and social action. These methods are usually employed within what Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1984) refers to as Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR methods are coupled with dialog, or horizontal communication between psychologists and patients/participants/co-researchers, as a means of encouraging ongoing reflexive engagement from psychologists (Malherbe, Suffla, Seedat, & Bawa, 2017), as well as those whom they endeavour to help (MacQuarrie, Rutledge, & Begley, 2011). LP is thus marked by its receptivity to innovative, participatory, narrative, and biographical methods, such as Photovoice, participatory film-making, collaging, storylines, and creative writing (see Seedat, Suffla, & Christie, 2017, for a number of examples in this respect), all of which aim to disrupt reliance on the kinds of conventional methodologies that are associated with mainstream psychologies. Enactments of LP then depend on these innovative methods to harness people's everyday use of language (whether it be linguistic, visual, or multimodal) in the development of emancipatory discourses and praxes. Therefore, in seeking new horizons, it is common for liberation psychologists embedded in the academy to make use of qualitative forms of analysis that centralise discourse, rhetoric, and conversation in constructions of psychosocial experience (Seedat, 1997).

LP's second core element is one that locates a new kind of epistemology within liberatory action and the understanding that truths are constructed rather than discovered (Martín-Baró, 1994). In this way, LP is sceptical of hegemonic knowledge forms and attempts to revive the repressed knowledges of majority populations by focusing on people's individual and collective voices as a way of developing their critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; Montero & Sonn, 2009). Such critical consciousness, in a similar manner to the Marxist notion of revolutionary class consciousness, constitutes a process—usually in confrontation with dominant ideologies—that is maintained through continuous efforts (Montero, 1994). In locating new epistemologies, LP does not categorically reject all contemporary modes of psychological knowledge. Rather, it attempts to interpret critically such knowledge and unlock its liberatory potential. In so doing, dominant knowledges may be reconceptualised and decoupled from their subjugating

mandate which primarily services those elite interests that are typically representative of white, able, male, and middle-classed bodies (Seedat, 1997).

The last of LP's core elements encourages psychologists to focus on a new praxis that receives every perspective critically and aims to transform and clearly articulate reality so that we know what it is, what it is not, and what it ought to be (Martín-Baró, 1994). For this reason, practices of LP are often linked to social justice movements (Burton & Gómez, 2015) which do not rely on distanced, individualised, and/or temporary psychological fixes. Instead, psychologists operating within the liberation paradigm facilitate the autonomy and the critical consciousness of people who may then enact further psychosocial change. A sense of community, that is, conceiving the self in relation to others and the society in which it is embedded (Martín-Baró, 1994), is then fostered among oppressed peoples as a means of reversing and transforming some of the effects of oppression (MacQuarrie et al., 2011). In developing such a praxis, LP's conception of liberation stays attentive to psychosocial processes (Seedat, 1997).

Those attempting to actualise LP's three elements have sought to do so in numerous ways, such as attempting to de-ideologise domestic practice so that one may become aware of that which was previously unknown (see Montero, 1994); de-alienate consciousness by recovering historical memory as a means of gaining critical insight and promoting community cohesion (see Martín-Baró, 1994); develop a critical consciousness in an effort to transform oppressive realities (see Freire, 1970); and engage in problematising everyday, seemingly natural, life (see Montero, 2009). Marxist notions of false consciousness, ideology, and alienation are therefore of chief concern for liberation psychologists. It should, however, be emphasised that although LP takes an anti-capitalist stance, it is not necessarily Marxist in orientation.

LP is particularly malleable with respect to how it envisions and indeed galvanises people towards material and psychosocial transformation (Montero, 2009). Acknowledging LP's achievement in centring participation of the Other in social change processes (and in this respect widening the Marxian focus on the proletarian class), Montero and her colleagues (2017) urge people to examine how truly liberatory processes and outcomes can follow this kind of work. We might then consider Montero and Sonn (2009), who emphasise that when attempting to articulate psychology's liberatory and participatory trajectory, LP should look to thinkers, such as Fanon (1963), who take seriously questions of power and have explicitly inscribed liberatory energies onto psychology. Yet, in looking to these thinkers, we must formulate an LP that is able to respond to our particular context (Burton & Kagan, 2009), and in this way we can utilise LP's inherent malleability to our advantage.

In relation to the above, LP may perhaps best be formulated as a paradigmatic process of disciplinary, epistemological, and societal rupture that seeks to transform conditions of inequality and oppression, as well as the institutions and practices that produce them. In this regard, the collective and individual become empowered in order to enact material social change (Montero & Sonn, 2009). As a psychological paradigm, LP strives towards a multidisciplinary that contextualises the way in which we practice and conceive psychology by ensuring that conceptions of the psychological are always psychosocial.

Considerations of Marxist psychologies and psychological Marxisms

Paying particular attention to concepts like ideology, subjectivity, alienation, and consciousness, a considerable volume of work has attempted to bridge perceived gaps between psychology (often of a Freudian variety) and Marxisms (see Brown, 1984, for a fairly comprehensive, although somewhat dated, overview). Some of this work has been reified within a globalised “academic canon” that typically valorises the work of Euro-American able-bodied white males (see, e.g., Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Jameson, 2002; Lyotard, 2004; and numerous texts produced by the so-called Frankfurt School—see Wiggershaus, 1995). Other attempts to explore psychology and Marxisms have taken the form of edited books, such as *Psychology and Society: Radical Theory and Practice* (Parker & Spears, 1996), book chapters (e.g., Hayes, 2004), academic journal articles (e.g., Brown, 1984), and special issues of journals, such as *Theory & Psychology* (Parker, 1999) and *The Annual Review of Critical Psychology* (Arfken, 2011; Pavón-Cuellar, Moncada, & Painter, 2015).

In addition to work that explores how capitalism affects psychological and physical suffering (e.g., Brown, 1984; Fanon, 1963; Olivier, 2015), considerations of Marxisms and psychology have taken on somewhat systematic forms. For example, Parker (2009) suggests four ways by which critical psychological analyses are able to adopt a revolutionary Marxist approach, Hamber and his colleagues (2001) posit seven steps for developing Marxist action within enactments of community psychology, and Hayes (1989) considers how we might psychologically read Marxist, particularly Althusserian, notions of ideology. It may then be said that although no perfect unity of Marxisms and psychology has been formulated, there is certainly a rich literature that considers them together.

Marxisms are, however, rarely appreciated meaningfully alongside LP. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that LP draws from Marxist theory—with some (such as Gokani, 2011) even insisting that Martín-Baró was a Marxist—which makes the dual consideration of LP and Marxisms a somewhat messy, if not seemingly redundant, affair. Nonetheless, there is a small number of studies that have—albeit briefly—examined the two together. For instance, in connecting Martín-Baró’s (1994) conception of de-ideologising reality to Marxist notions of production and consumer capitalism, Dobles (1999) insists that Marxism’s principal contribution to (liberation) psychology is a way of conceiving how we might shift our psychological research and clinical foci from the individual to the social, while remaining sensitive to the contradictions of the capitalist order. In another example, Gokani (2011) reviews the influence of Marxisms on both Latin American and North American practices of community psychology as a means of highlighting LP’s embrace, in Latin America, of Marxist concepts. Finally, in what is to my knowledge the most detailed consideration of LP and Marxisms, MacQuarrie and her colleagues (2011) draw on Marxist theory and LP praxis to assess change processes in their work with teenage mothers. Although frequently emphasising the distinctions between the two, these authors draw on Marxisms and LP to problematise “change” and, working with participants, examined how such change could lead to revolutionary outcomes.

Despite Marxisms and traditional—usually Euro-American-centric—psychology receiving significant attention, research that interrogates Marxisms and LP remains scant. It seems important then, that if we are to realise more fully the benefits of holding Marxisms with LP, further theoretical work in this area is required.

Orientating liberation psychology and Marxisms

Before exploring the ways in which LP and Marxisms can be held together, it is perhaps worth interrogating how each is philosophically constituted. Where LP is conceived as a paradigm upon which all fields of psychology can and should operate (Foster, 2004), Marxism is, more specifically, a movement with particular, albeit feverishly contested, theoretical, methodological, and analytical positions (Parker, 2009). Yet, neither can be neatly confined to a single discipline. In the case of LP, Burton and Kagan (2009) stress that liberation psychologists working today must focus their efforts on interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity if LP is to retain global relevance. Similarly, Marxist analyses and insights, which have been employed in a range of settings and disciplines, are not wholly or exclusively economic, sociological, political, or philosophical. In considering the complex task of holding the fluidity of LP together with the expansiveness of Marxisms, a simplistic welding together of the two is not only undesirable, but also tremendously difficult, if not impossible. Certainly, one cannot posit unproblematically a comprehensive conception of a Marxist LP. Rather, any attempt to enact psychology in a liberatory manner, it may be said, will benefit from considering how LP has engaged, or indeed holds potentialities of engagement, with the analyses and the theoretical as well as methodological tenets of Marxisms. Holding LP with Marxisms does not pursue a perfect unison of the two. Rather, each is to be drawn from in various and creative ways that respond to shifting liberatory concerns.

Unlike Marxisms, LP is not the subject of tremendous contestation by those who practice it. Instead, psychologists working within an LP paradigm have sought to adapt—rather than reject or transform—its principles in accordance with different social circumstances. For example, Burton and Kagan (2009) note that when LP is practised within the Global North, Martín-Baró's (1994) focus on fatalism—a dominant ideology in Latin America—must be shifted to a focus on individualism, that is, a more relevant ideology in these contexts. Similarly, Seedat (1997) examines how the central tenets of LP can be applied in South Africa after the official dismantling of apartheid. Therefore, where Marxist thinking—understood as relevant to all capitalist societies (Rodney, 1972)—is conceived as “a universal enriched by all that is particular” and “enriched by every particular” (Césaire, 2010, p. 152), LP attempts to develop a “socially appropriate agenda” (Seedat, 1997, p. 261) with respect to the particular context in which it is applied.

Today, the often invisibilised institutional backdrops of psychology, which incontrovertibly includes LP, and Marxisms shape how each is (and is not) constituted and enacted. It would appear that both LP and Marxisms have been captured by the very neoliberal agenda to which each is opposed. For example, LP must, in large part, be sanitised and confined to institutional arrangements that seek to maintain an oppressive social order (Seedat, 1997). Any enactment of LP that is explicitly anti-social is unlikely to receive funding, ethical approval, institutional backing, resources, and/or State

support. Similarly, contemporary Marxisms are advocated primarily by academic cohorts and/or petty bourgeoisie (usually one and the same), rather than working classes—effectively dislocating its revolutionary impulse. Although there are exceptions, as demonstrated by the Naxalites in central India (see Roy, 2011), it remains something of an irony that contemporary Marxisms are confined to the bourgeois institutions to which they are fundamentally opposed (Parker, 2009). If Marxisms and LP are, perhaps too simply, understood as reactions to dominant and exploitative institutional ideologies, their present-day iterations are, in many regards, beholden to these ideologies that work to suppress and neuter their respective emancipatory prospects.

In what follows, I attempt to demonstrate how holding LP together with Marxisms equips psychologists (as well as psychology) with a conception of liberation that dispels a “false problem of ... priority” (Jameson, 2002, p. 85), whereby one kind of oppression is understood as absolutely distinct from and/or invariably deserving of greater concern than others. Conceived in this way, actually existing projects of liberation that are relevant to pressing emancipatory concerns will, at different moments and within various settings, harness praxes of feminism, anti-racism, public health, decolonisation, anti-ableism, spatial emancipation, economic liberation, food security, animal rights, environmentalism, and sexual justice, along with a host of other interlocking sites of liberation. By holding Marxisms with LP, psychologists are able to engage a necessarily ambitious, complicated, nuanced, and expansive vision of liberation within their work.

Holding Marxisms with liberation psychology

When we hold one item with another, we are supporting the distinctiveness of each. Although holding can necessitate comparative analysis, where each item is set against the other, as well as “theoretical blending,” whereby different theoretical positions are synthesised to form a single, hybridised theory, holding is perhaps most conducive to exploratory considerations. In this way, the very act of holding allows us to envision parallel ontologies, that is, how two items might exist beside one another. It follows then that holding Marxisms with LP does not offer one as a panacea for the shortcomings of the other, nor does it insist that one is necessarily incomplete without the other. Instead, a holding of this kind facilitates an exploration into innovative ways by which LP, together with Marxisms, is able to move psychological theory and practice in liberatory directions.

As capitalism organises the contextually bound subject by means of quantifying and rationalising experience in relation to free markets (Jameson, 2002), it seems apparent, even uncontroversial, that psychologists must, to some extent, consider how capitalism shapes their work and influences people’s psychological processes, which constitute the focus of their work. Similarly, it is unlikely that psychologists would disagree that a given political economy exercises tremendous influence over a society’s mental health institutions (Brown, 1984). However, holding Marxisms with LP—rather than simply considering how capitalism affects psychological work—allows us to identify the dialectical relations that exist between individual-collective psyches and capitalism, so that we might harness these towards liberatory change that is both psychosocial and psychopolitical. Further, holding Marxisms with LP highlights the manner by which psychology

remains a fundamentally classed discipline. Where Hamber and his colleagues (2001) highlight that community psychology—which has taken most readily to the LP paradigm—is practised almost exclusively in low-income areas, Martín-Baró (1994) emphasises that mainstream clinical psychologies are practised primarily with elite classes who can afford them and to whom their Euro-American-centric paradigms are largely tailored. This suggests that the poor should be ascribed a different sort of psychology than the rich. In holding Marxisms with enactments of LP, we begin to advocate a different kind of psychological praxis that serves to change the way we *do* psychology and that remains sensitive to the notion of psychology—including iterations of LP—as a classed practice which, perhaps implicitly, serves to bolster capitalism's divisive, unequal, and class-based agenda.

Materialist historiographies and the task of future-building

When we hold LP with Marxisms, we afford particular attention to how people's contextual embeddedness functions alongside their individualised temporal location, that is, we engage psychologically with the time–space dialectic. Those operating from an LP paradigm tend to insist on the importance of historical memory, with historiography and its relationship to historical erasure—such as that wrought by colonialism and ongoing coloniality (see Fanon, 1963)—forming a key component of LP (Burton & Gómez, 2015). Marxist historical materialism, however, roots history proper as emerging from revolutionary class struggle (Eagleton, 2011; Marx, 1867/2010), concerning itself less with the version of history that is prioritised (see Benjamin's, 2007, Marxist treatise of historiography and meaning for a notable exception in this regard), and more with ways that history has unfolded, and indeed how the working class can take control of this unfolding process. For example, Marx's (1867/2010) concept of “original accumulation” asks us to return to questions of how capitalist societies initially accumulated capital—which, in Europe and the Americas, included slavery and colonialism (Rodney, 1972)—so that we are able to develop a materialist understanding of the violence and dispossession that forms the foundation of capitalism. It may therefore be said that where Marxisms emphasise the materiality of history (that is, centralising physicality and space in conceptions of time), LP stresses historiography (which is concerned primarily with constructions of time in relation to epistemology) as the crucial determinants in retrieving an understanding of the present condition. In this regard, Jameson's (2002) now well-known aphorism “Always historicize!” (p. ix) cuts across both LP and Marxist engagements with the present, albeit with different emphases.

If we are then to hold Marxisms with LP, we must strive to conceptualise history as a politically motivated narrative construction which scaffolds the present in material and ideological ways. In this sense, we seek to illuminate the forces that drove, and continue to drive, capitalism's fundamentally dehumanising (neo)colonial project of relentless accumulation, while linking how we understand mental health to historical experiences of alienation, exploitation (Olivier, 2015; Parker, 2009), and internalisation (see Fanon, 1963). In remaining attentive to Seedat's (1997) caveat that the destruction of class-based society does not necessitate psychological independence, we may conclude that liberation psychologists are unlikely to agree with the Marxist evocation that

“the history of all hitherto existing society is a history of class struggle” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015, p. 2). However, Marxist considerations of materiality, interlocking struggles, and dispossession are able to enrich LP’s conceptions of historiography, collective trauma, and—in the spirit of dialectical thinking—how liberation psychologists can harness interlinking histories of oppression and struggle towards liberatory ends. In short, holding Marxisms with LP enables psychologists to rethink the task of facilitating conscious historical participation from those who have been systematically removed from history (Rodney, 1972).

In working towards and striving for liberatory ontologies, Marxisms and LP differ somewhat in their respective visions of an egalitarian future. Here, Marxists are concerned primarily with proletarian ontologies, where LP concentrates on the social margins, which may include the lumpenproletariat. Yet, curiously, neither articulates explicitly such an emancipatory future, a realm of specificity which Eagleton (2011) insists belongs to capitalist considerations. If we understand LP research as that which facilitates creative and emancipatory future-building (Montero, 2009), any enactment of PAR must take seriously matters of culture (Montero, 1994). As the Jamaican-born Marxist cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1980) explains, culture constitutes shared maps of meaning that have various practices, hermeneutics, and power dynamics written into them. Considered from an LP paradigm, as these maps store people’s collective pasts, they are essential in conceiving democratically a liberatory future within which shared histories are centralised (Montero et al., 2017). However, one should remain critical of culture and its relationship with liberation. All culture, whether it be high, low, dominant, or subaltern, retains oppressive ideologies and is often reproduced and/or co-opted by the mechanisms of capital accumulation (Benjamin, 2007; Jameson, 2002). Accordingly, liberation psychologists must undertake a critical disentanglement of political meaning from specific cultural arrangements so that, in the task of future-building, they are able to consider dialectically the simultaneously liberatory and oppressive character of culture (Harvey, 2005). Holding LP with Marxisms in this sense facilitates the connection of cultural with political class struggles, and works these into a democratic conception of a yet-to-be-written future that transgresses capitalism’s historical (dis)location of cultural meaning within free-market consumption, and locates truths within an ongoing and participatory meaning-making project.

Converging epistemologies, ontologies, and resistances

LP and Marxisms engage, at various moments, with epistemologies in different, converging, and colliding ways. The contours of these epistemic considerations must be explored if we are to imagine holding the two together. As discussed earlier, LP is fundamentally a relational paradigm, constructed explicitly in opposition to the positivist, individualising, and totalising conceptions of Truth and universality to which mainstream psychologies aspire and base their global reputation. Yet, like Marxisms, LP does not reject absolutely the notion of master narratives, *à la* postmodernism. Rather, it endeavours to recover truths from marginalised majority populations, whose ontological and epistemological positions are continually distorted and erased under dominant claims to Truth, which usually serve to legitimise systemic violence (Fanon, 1963;

Montero et al., 2017). LP considers the collective as crucial in challenging, undermining, dismantling, and/or reconstructing the structural character of such violence, and, in its Freirian mandate of critical consciousness, assumes an overtly political position (Montero, 1994). Marxists, on the other hand, engage with epistemology somewhat differently. By locating meaning within the material world, including material (re)production and the history thereof, Marxists oppose the capitalist axiom that locates—and subsequently detotalises—meaning within unregulated markets (Žižek, 2014). Indeed, in resisting capitalism, Marxisms utilise historical materialism as a theory–method for retrieving truths from the ways by which working class struggles conceptualise and act to institute egalitarian, socialist societies.

Therefore, where liberation psychologists posit constructive self-definition as central to liberation (see Seedat, 1997), Marxists emphasise a democratic, self-determining meaning-making project, that will come most fully to fruition in a classless society (see Eagleton, 2011). Certainly, then, if some Marxisms remain inattentive to psychological epistemes, different enactments of LP may neglect materialist epistemologies. Together, these perspectives equip us to understand how the hegemony of the ruling class restricts meaning, dignity, and freedom within the parameters of a market economy that serves to oppress—both psychologically and materially—almost all who live under it (Harvey, 2005). In this way, holding LP with Marxisms enables psychologists to redefine and subvert, in a democratic and participatory fashion (Martín-Baró, 1994), the very grammar of capitalist meaning-making which gives way to Truth without meaning (Žižek, 2014).

When examining how LP and Marxisms approach the potential of epistemology to form solidarities, one must consider notions of individualism. Neither Marxisms nor LP—as is often thought of both—abandon the individual for the collective. As Jameson (2002) notes, capitalism “maims our existence as individual subjects” (p. 4), and it is our task as agents of liberation to reassert and to reconstitute subjectivity so that we may realise new horizons of individuality. As the Irish writer Oscar Wilde (1891) insists in his pamphlet on socialism, individualism in and of itself is not destructive, and to fetishise it as such only serves to embolden the manner by which consumer capitalism wields the separatist qualities of individualism—that is, individualism without social responsibility—in order to alienate our species being. Certainly, under capitalism, it is capital, rather than people, that retains independence and individualism (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015). LP is therefore correct to resist the sort of apolitical individualism, and its accompanying forms of alienation and competition, that is fostered and attended to by mainstream psychologies (Seedat & Suffla, 2017). By redefining our species being within liberatory coordinates, wherein “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015, p. 35), holding Marxisms with LP sets in motion a process that wrests individualism from hollow commodity fetishism and meritocracy and attempts to reassert individualist concerns in projects of solidarity and community-building.

There are, however, clear differences in how liberation psychologists and Marxists understand individuality. Where LP’s attempts to de-alienate consciousness address issues of internalisation and allow for the potential to retrieve a situated and liberatory imagining of the Jungian collective unconscious, Marxists consider the individual as a

kind of social product, who, through the fostering of a revolutionary class consciousness, is able to seize upon the contradictions of capitalism in order to reclaim the means of production. Holding the Marxist individual-group nexus with LP's conception of the collective unconscious allows psychologists to conceive individual psyches as bound and dialectically composed through people's material realities. Solidarity proper cannot then be founded exclusively on class consciousness, that is, the sort of class reductionism that Gramsci (1971) referred to as economic superstition. The critical consciousness-raising processes of LP allow us to conceive class consciousness against a largely traumatic materialist history within which the psyche is (and indeed collective psyches are) forged. In other words, by holding LP with Marxisms, psychologists are able to consider comprehensively people's class status—as well as their classed experiences—in relation to individual and group trauma. In this sense, we begin to actualise the revolutionary potential inherent to a materialist conceptualisation of the collective unconscious, whereby the positive psychological effects of collective resistances are embraced (MacQuarrie et al., 2011).

Holding together LP and Marxist approaches to epistemologies, ontologies, and resistances enables psychologists to conscientise people to their shared oppression with others as well as to the ways that capitalism has historically organised oppression, power, and privilege to favour some social groups over others. Certainly, listening to people's experiences of, for example, racist, patriarchal capitalism might enable the emergence of a meaningful, empathetic sort of solidarity, as well as a platform to resist and dismantle the kinds of stagnant, ready-made roles and identities that are prefigured by capitalist social dogma (Hayes, 2004). It may then be said that by shifting participatory meaning-making towards a holistic conception of social justice that embraces dialectically the material and the psychological, LP acknowledges the Marxist roots from which its de-ideologising project theoretically emerges, and attempts to decouple hegemony from a capitalist political economy in order to realise a new, liberatory kind of humanism.

Organic reflexivity

Where the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971) remarked that philosophy has “not been able to create an ideological unity between the bottom and the top, between the ‘simple’ and the intellectuals” (p. 329), British critical psychologist Ian Parker (2009) asserts that psychologists accumulate cultural and, normally, financial capital while performing what seems to be a social good. Although LP prioritises those who are suffering over the psychologist and indeed over the discipline of psychology, it must be conceded that there is a very real distance, marked by unequal dynamics of power, between the psychologist and those whom psychologists seek to help. Within the liberatory tradition, this distance is oftentimes attended to via people's reflexive awareness of it, as well as the effects, sometimes negative, that we have on others by virtue of trying to help them (see Malherbe et al., 2017). For liberation psychologists, reflexivity is a notoriously tricky, yet crucial, practice that highlights—but does little to rectify—the shortcomings of emancipatory praxis.

Enacting one's reflexivity in line with the Gramscian conception of the organic intellectual aggrandises the psychologist's liberatory enactment. Gramsci (1971) believed

that “non-intellectuals do not exist” (p. 9), and that where those he refers to as “traditional intellectuals” (p. 9) maintain social order and are removed—or believe themselves to be separate—from class struggle, organic intellectuals remain alert to how they are most needed within the struggles of marginalised populations. In this regard, no single social group is able to lay claim to the tenets of the organic intellectual. Holding Marxisms with LP lets us imagine how the organic intellectual might enact reflexivity. In striving to destabilise power dynamics, reflexive organic intellectuals should be perpetually aware of their complicity within these dynamics that they are, simultaneously, working to change. In this way, we begin to actualise a liberatory understanding of reflexivity that takes seriously the positionalities of everyone involved with LP work and endeavours to foster solidarity and empathy through interrogating both the mechanisms of oppression as well as the places that particular individuals occupy therein. Such an enactment of liberation then remains self-conscious and fluid; always sensitive to the liberatory requirements of the moment.

Considering the psycho-State

As space, time, identity, meaning, social relations, violence, culture, and freedom—and the dialectical relations thereof—are of central concern when holding LP together with Marxisms, we must interrogate how these constructs are mediated and governed by the State. Although psychology in the main is perfunctory, nondescript, and/or entirely unengaged with State matters, Martín-Baró’s (1994) conception of a political LP reminds us that all of those who act on behalf of the State are psychological subjects. It follows then that the State is both a political and a psychological construct, with all State functioning, as well as ideological and repressive State apparatuses (see Althusser, 2014), being driven by psychological processes. Yet, aside from Martín-Baró’s (1994) work, LP rarely meaningfully considers the State. This is contrary to those strands of Marxism which are explicit in defining the capitalist State as “hegemony protected by the armour of coercion” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 263), that is, comprising the social institutions that seek to gain—violently, if need be—the consent of people in “the management of the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015, p. 5).

Holding Marxist conceptions of the State with LP opens up a space for liberation psychologists to engage more rigorously with the State, whereby the superstructural arrangements that drive and control society may be understood as psychologically damaged. In this sense, reflecting on the mental health of what we might refer to as the psycho-State acts to bring those fields of psychology—such as mainstream clinical psychology—which have, traditionally, been resistant to LP and are typically confined to the base, into the realm of politics, and, in attempting to change such politics, evokes within such psychological practice a liberatory impulse.

Concluding thoughts

Marxist notions of class, base–superstructure, economic crises, and the market need not form incongruous oppositions to psychological conceptions of the psyche, subjectivity, and consciousness, and should certainly not be opposed to LP’s preoccupation with

de-alienation, de-ideologising, and problematising everyday life. Holding LP with Marxist struggle enables psychologists to form a cohesive psycho-material resistance to the plethora of interlocking oppressions that are maintained by capitalism. In this sense, researchers, psychologists, clinicians, counsellors, clients, patients, and participants should engage with power in a manner that is reflexive, critical, and that takes seriously individualism and “united action” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2015, p. 30) within the local–global nexus of struggle.

As it is unlikely that many of the stark incompatibilities of LP and Marxisms can be reconciled or synthesised in the formation of a Marxist-LP, this paper does not offer a comprehensive outline of how psychologists can or should hold LP with Marxisms. Instead, it explores some of the ways in which holding the two together enables psychologists to complicate notions of liberation, articulate and engage psycho-political mechanisms, and re-imagine the kinds of conditions necessary to re-program psychology so that it is relevant to the struggles for liberation of majority populations.

Acknowledgements

Conversations with Maxine Rubin and Ray van Wyk, as well as professors Shahnaaz Suffla and Mohamed Seedat, informed my conceptualisation of this paper.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa and South African Medical Research Council-University of South Africa Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit.

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