Psychosocial accompaniment represents an attempt to create a decolonial form of solidarity practice that addresses psychosocial misery. “Accompaniment” is a term currently used in social medicine, peace activism, human rights, pastoral support, and social and liberation psychology. It is used when speaking of accompanying the ill who are also poor (Farmer, 2011), those caught in prison and detention systems (Lykes, Hershberg, & Brabec, 2011; Raebir, n.d., New Sanctuary Coalition), political dissidents (Romero, 2001), refugees (Jesuit Refugee Service), those suffering occupation (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine), victims of torture and other forms of violence (Rodriguez & Guerra, 2011), those forcibly displaced (Sacipa, Vidales, Galindo, & Tovar, 2007), those suffering from human rights violations (Mahoney & Eguren, 1997), and those attempting to live peacefully in the face of paramilitary and military violence (such as the peace communities in Colombia, see Fellowship for Reconciliation, n.d.). In Latin American psychology, “psychosocial accompaniment” has arisen as a role that is distinct from that of psychotherapist or psychological researcher, though it may include elements of each. It does not apply individualistically oriented diagnostic and intervention strategies from above, from a position of professional expertise. Instead, those who accompany respond to invitations to come alongside others, to learn about and witness the situations that concern members of a community, to provide advocacy when desired, to co-create spaces to develop critical inquiry, radical imagination, and participatory research, and to respond to expressed needs. It is participatory and dialogical, honoring the knowledge, experience and desires of community members.

The root of acompañamiento is compañero or friend (Goizueta, 1995). It draws from the Latin ad cum panis, to break bread with one another. Accompaniment often, though not exclusively, occurs in communities that are struggling with various collective traumas, including poverty, violence, forced migration, racism, and environmental assault. While accompaniment of one by another in times of difficulty crosses all cultural and economic groups, psychosocial accompaniment is focused on the kinds of psychosocial misery created by structural injustices. Its practitioners attempt to work across levels of organization, witnessing and addressing individual and group distress, while working to change the systemic causes of the duress.

In the U.S. the provision of psychosocial care happens predominantly within the related paradigms of individualism, individual psychopathology, and medicalized practice. Professional training in human services rarely questions these foundations, and thus
Against the Wall: Re-Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Border.


What are the structural long-term perspectives?

As President Trump works to dismantle Obamacare, a more public option for healthcare in the U.S., and funds are withdrawn from public programs and welfare, the need for psychosocial accompaniment will increase. While some highly trained professionals may advocate for shifts toward psychosocial accompaniment, training for it needs to be accomplished at the grassroots level in order to make it more available and less costly. In addition, there is the need for non-remunerated provision of psychosocial accompaniment. This need is not only for those requesting accompaniment, but also for those providing it. As we shift toward a more interdependent model, accompaniment is experienced as mutual because liberation of one is ultimately tied to liberation of all others.
If you come here to help me, you are wasting your time.

If you come because your liberation is bound up with mine,

then let us work together.

Aboriginal Activist Group, Queensland, Australia, 1970’s

References:


Portions of this are taken from the author’s article “Psychosocial Accompaniment” in the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*.

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