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INTRODUCTION

Political Psychology in Latin America

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When we talk about Latin America, in geographic terms we refer to the region of the American continent that extends from Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of Chile and Argentina to the Rio Grande on the United States–Mexico border. In terms of language, Latin America is the set of American countries where a Latin-based language—Spanish or Portuguese—is spoken. In the cultural sphere, Latin America includes countries that differ from Anglo America because of their colonization predominantly by Spain and Portugal. However, Latin America is all this and much more: It is a geographic, human, and social space where the multiple faces of the region coexist, sometimes in a harmonious way, other times in a conflicting way; it is a region with an exceptional wealth of natural resources and some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world; and it is a territory where interculturality is lived and embodied (Torres Martínez, 2016).

The cultural richness of Latin America comes from a unique combination of Indigenous Peoples, the transplanted Europeans who conquered the region beginning in the 16th century, the migrations after independence in the early 19th century, and the continuous processes of mixing and integration. Realities are so diverse in the region that some say there is not one Latin America,

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but as many Latin Americas as countries or subregions forming part of it; hence, any intent of reducing it to a single entity would be nothing more than accepting a myth or a fiction. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify an essential unity that springs from its very diversity (Tünnermann Bernheim, 2007). Latin Americans have a common history of five centuries of colonization and exploitation, and at the same time, we share an extraordinary capacity for resilience and solidarity.

Despite all its natural, social, and cultural wonders, Latin America is characterized by political tensions, high rates of corruption among its ruling classes, and great inequality that is expressed in terms of not only income and wealth but also of access to essential public goods such as education, health, and social security. Such is the level of inequality that a woman born in a poor neighborhood in Santiago, the capital of Chile, has a life expectancy 18 years lower than a woman born in a wealthy area of the same city (Bilal et al., 2019). The inequality also extends to skin color and ethnicity; Afro-Latin Americans and Indigenous people are more likely to be poor and less likely to finish school or get a formal job (Comisión Económica para América Latina, 2019). Upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature, Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez (1982) said this about Latin America:

Because they tried to change this state of things, nearly two hundred thousand men and women have died. . . . One million people have fled Chile, a country with a tradition of hospitality—that is, ten per cent of its population. Uruguay, a tiny nation of two and a half million inhabitants which considered itself the continent's most civilized country, has lost to exile one out of every five citizens. Since 1979, the civil war in El Salvador has produced almost one refugee every twenty minutes. . . .

I dare to think that it is this outsized reality . . . that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and . . . nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty. . . . (paras. 4 and 5)

Almost four decades later, the Latin American reality has undoubtedly changed: Democracy has replaced dictatorships, and war has given way to peace. But the region's democracies are still fragile, and that peace is not yet complete. Latin America is still a convulsed region, experiencing important social changes and great political instability, and factors related to political psychology are highly relevant and present in everyday life. Our social problems are multiple and multicausal, but they certainly have a political character and psychological impact. Hence, it is not surprising that political psychology has undergone important development in our region, and it has emerged mostly in response to social needs (Ardila, 1996).

This book presents a broad spectrum of perspectives, illustrating how political psychology has addressed critical social issues in Latin America. Local

researchers have focused on the complex issues arising from the region's political dynamics, in an attempt to generate not only basic disciplinary knowledge but also situated, pertinent, and relevant knowledge benefiting the societies where it has been produced. The chapters that make up this book are excellent examples not only of the diversity of research problems addressed by Latin American political psychology, but also of its epistemological, theoretical, and methodological heterogeneity. Certainly this book does not pretend to provide an exhaustive review of all the fields and themes addressed by the discipline, but it includes a broadly representative sample of its variety. The authors convened in this book were selected because of their sustained production of empirical research on some of the topics identified as emblematic of the discipline's development in the region (Brussino, 2018; Montero & Dorna, 1993; Polo et al., 2014) and because of their commitment to rigorous scientific research on topics of high social relevance.

Chapter 1, "Citizens and Democracy: Political Legitimacy Processes in Latin American Democracies," by Silvina Brussino and Daniela Alonso from Argentina, gives an accurate description of the political context in which political psychology has developed in the region, allowing a better understanding of the rest of the chapters. This chapter analyzes the role of citizens in the legitimacy processes of the region's political systems, describing the theoretical and empirical contributions of Latin American political psychologists in this area. The authors show that explicit support for democracy coexists with a growing discontent regarding the functioning of this political system, and they stress that the motivation and capacity to act politically outside the spaces provided by the system are distributed unequally among the population and are associated not only with individual ideological motivations but also with structural social aspects. This relationship between motivation and capacity to participate and structural variables means that higher status groups have greater possibilities for participating in the political sphere through unconventional channels, such as social protests, and that the gap between groups that have access to the symbolic and political capital and those without such access seems not to be narrowing, but rather to be widening.

Chapter 2, "Emotions and Protests: Contributions to Political Psychology From Latin American Research," by Rodrigo Asún and his colleagues from Chile, addresses precisely the topic addressed in the first chapter and a central component of Latin American political psychology: the analysis of processes associated with the emergence of social movements and the reasons that lead individuals to participate in political protests. The authors approach the problem of participation in social protests from a lesser known perspective, as the study of the role of emotions in protest behavior. The first part of

the chapter offers an overview of the Latin American body of work on this topic, highlighting its main contributions and limitations. In the second section, the authors present an original empirical study that draws on the richness of the regional literature and overcomes some of its limitations, seeking to understand the role played by emotions in protest participation. The main findings show that in the same mobilization event, different groups of people can experience different emotional constellations, and these constellations can have different mobilizing potential, stressing the relevance of positive emotions.

Chapter 3, “A Psychopolitical Approach to Social Inequality in Latin America,” by Débora Imhoff from Argentina, highlights the social and political relevance of social inequality and poverty in the region. It shows how Latin American political psychology has addressed this large-scale social problem and its relationship to subjective micropolitical processes, allowing an understanding of the connection that individuals and groups establish with the sociopolitical sphere. The chapter systematizes the main findings of psychopolitical research on social inequality in Latin America, presenting studies on social inequality perception, work oriented to operationalizing the justification of social inequality, and research that seeks to identify the variables that contribute to its explanation. The author suggests that dissemination of information related to levels of inequality in the region and the different aspects that characterize the phenomenon has been substantial. She also proposes the necessity for political socialization programs that allow individuals from earliest childhood to critically evaluate the current social order and that provide collective action tools to enable people not only to question the situation but also to modify it through political organization and participation.

Chapter 4, “Youth Civic Engagement: Challenges for Social Cohesion in Latin America,” by B. Paula Luengo Kanacri and her colleagues from Chile, addresses the subject of how civic engagement can support social cohesion in a region that needs such cohesion structurally. On the basis of the assumption that the quality of social interactions among individuals and their active involvement in society build the foundations for a cohesive society, the authors analyze evidence for the role of certain psychological processes as predictors of civic engagement. Through three empirical contributions developed in the Chilean context, the authors focus on how young people learn and exercise their citizenship and how civic participation can support social cohesion in the school context. The authors conclude that in order to improve civic and political commitment in youth, it is essential to have educational programs that, based on local empirical evidence, seek to promote citizenship capable of strengthening social cohesion.

Along the same line of addressing the challenges of social cohesion, one of the goals of Latin American political psychology has been to understand and denounce segregation, discrimination, and prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples, who in most cases are subjected to persistent social exclusion. Chapter 5, “Bias Against Indigenous Chileans in a Conflictive Context: Literature Review and Theoretical Integration,” by Camila Salazar-Fernández and José L. Saiz, focuses on biases against the Mapuche, the largest Indigenous minority group in Chile, who face high levels of social exclusion and poverty and are involved in chronic and asymmetric conflict with the Chilean state and forestry companies. A systematic review of the literature provides abundant evidence of the existence of contemptuous bias against the Mapuche, and although non-Indigenous Chileans recognize the existence of interpersonal discrimination against the Mapuche, at the same time they support violence carried out against them by the police in the name of the state. The authors highlight that intergroup biases in conflictive contexts can be considered psychosocial barriers that maintain or increase conflict, impeding progress toward peaceful coexistence. They emphasize that these barriers can be overcome through interventions directed at reducing adherence to bias to allow groups within a society to initiate and continue negotiations, reach agreements, and engage in reconciliation.

Chapter 6, “Psychology of Peace: Findings and Challenges for the Multi-dimensional Transformation of Violent Social Practices,” by Wilson López-López and his colleagues from Colombia, is also framed by the study of conflict and reconciliation and is part of a continuous effort in Latin American political psychology to explain the complexity of causes and consequences of armed conflicts and to find ways to face the challenge of building a culture of peace and reconstructing societies after, or even in between, war and violence. This chapter is based on the case of the Colombian conflict, one of the longest armed conflicts in contemporary history, and is intended to be a contribution to peace building both in Colombia and in other places where violence has been a determining factor in individual and collective life. The authors propose a model that seeks to articulate the multiple dimensions of social and armed conflict from a psychosocial approach, considering the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociojuridical dimensions, among others. The authors emphasize that social transformations are essential to contribute to the construction of a culture of peace but that social transformations are not enough if they are not linked to structural transformations.

The next two chapters deal with a problem that has played a central role in political psychology: ideology. Chapter 7, “The Relationship Between Political Ideology and National Identification in Latin America: A Meta-Analytical Synthesis,” by Agustín Espinosa and his colleagues from Peru, begins by

describing the study of national identities in Latin America, a relevant topic in the political psychology of the region since the 1980s, to understand how the particular sociopolitical context in Latin American countries has shaped the way their citizens develop or present a sense of belonging to a social category related to a nation-state. In the second section of this chapter, the authors present a meta-analysis that examined the nature of relationships between national identity on one hand and right-wing authoritarianism and social domination orientation on the other in samples from 11 Latin American countries.

Chapter 8, “Political Communication and Ideology,” by Idaly Barreto and Iván Felipe Medina-Arboleda from Colombia, also addresses the issue of ideology, but from a very different perspective. This chapter is framed by a classic subject studied in political psychology—political communication—and begins with a brief review of studies on this topic in Latin America, presenting an excellent synthesis of the main methods used for the analysis of political communication. The authors present empirical results of two original research studies on presidential speeches from five Latin American countries. The first study focuses on the microanalysis of discourse with the purpose of identifying the belief systems exhibited in the presidential speeches. The second study analyzes the contexts of the discourses at the macro level in terms of economic and political indicators for each country.

The final two chapters provide empirical data and reflections on a topic that has undergone important development in Latin America: collective memory studies. Chapter 9, “Memory as a Political Action: Reflections From Postdictatorial Chile,” by María José Reyes and her colleagues, presents an ethnographic case study to shed light on the construction and transmission of memories in La Legua, an urban-peripheral community characterized by historical resistance to the Chilean dictatorship and serious ongoing problems with violence and social conflict. The authors problematize one of the assumptions of Latin American political psychology: that social memory is a resistance practice by itself. They also discuss the uses of memory in state policies, which generate the configuration of a single official memory and identity that do not correspond to the multiple identifications and collective memories of this community’s members.

Chapter 10, “Arguing for a Liberation Psychology,” by Mauricio Gaborit from El Salvador, presents a theoretical and practical proposal that has had an undeniable impact on political psychology in the region. The author explains the nature of liberation psychology and calls attention to some of its outstanding contributions. He presents a research example dealing with historical memory in postwar El Salvador that explores the psychosocial importance of the memory of collective trauma and the role it plays in mental

health. The conclusion reminds psychologists that there is an inescapable obligation to address social problems and outline possible solutions from the perspective of solidarity and the commitment to accompany the popular majorities in their quest for liberation.

To close the book, the Conclusion synthesizes the cross-cutting themes addressed in this work, identifies the book's main limitations, and proposes some future directions for Latin American political psychology.

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