In your country, Ignacio Martín-Baró remarked to a North American colleague, its publish or perish. In ours, its publish and perish. In November 1989 a Salvadoran death squad extinguished his eloquent voice, raised so often and so passionately against oppression in his adopted country. A Spanish-born Jesuit priest trained in psychology at the University of Chicago, Martín-Baró devoted much of his career to making psychology speak to the community as well as to the individual. This collection of his writings, the first in English translation, clarifies Martín-Baró’s importance in Latin American psychology and reveals a major force in the field of social theory.

Gathering essays from an array of professional journals, this volume introduces readers to the questions and concerns that shaped Martín-Baró’s thinking over several decades: the psychological dimensions of political repression, the impact of violence and trauma on child development and mental health, the use of psychology for political ends, religion as a tool of ideology, and defining the real and the normal under conditions of state-sponsored violence and oppression, among others. Though grounded in the harsh realities of civil conflict in Central America, these essays have broad relevance in a world where political and social turmoil determines the conditions of daily life for so many. In them we encounter Martín-Baró’s humane, impassioned voice, reaffirming the essential connections among mental health, human rights, and the struggle against injustice. His analysis of contemporary social problems, and of the failure of the social sciences to address those problems, permits us to understand not only the substance of his contribution to social thought but also his lifelong commitment to the campesinos of El Salvador.

My Personal Review:
The Jesuit priest, scholar, social psychologist and philosopher Ignacio Martin Baro wrote in the text "Religion as an instrument of psychological warfare which is a part of this book, about how religion can damage an individual's autonomy and self esteem. He wrote about how the evangelical protestant church grew at a great rate in El Salvador during the civil war that raged there during the 1980s. Some people argued the evangelical churches could quench the thirst of the people in a way that the catholic
Baro researched what the political consequences of this shift were. He meant that the shift in allegiance of people's faith was a political instrument used by those in power and that this was in fact a kind of political/psychological warfare. With this he meant that the government sought to change the mental climate of the people (the enemy). The American sponsored army in El Salvador, on the side of their regular military operations also waged a so-called LIC (low intensity conflict) which was aimed at winning the people over to their side. The people often took the guerrillas side and therefore it wasn't enough with a pure military victory, they were also forced to win an ideological one as well. Therefore it developed into a sociopolitical war instead of merely a military one. Propaganda and the spreading of lies and rumors where common place in this type of warfare which main purpose was to make the population insecure. Therefore it was important to tap into the religion since many people in the country looked to it for guidance in the hard times.

The liberation theology that Ignacio Martin Baro represented, which was the theology that spoke for the poor and oppressed, gave the people a tool to use in the struggle against the army. It stated that it was not god's divine will that they should be oppressed but instead it prompted them to get organized both politically and religiously to fight back against the oppression. Therefore, the more progressive Catholic churches that taught liberation theology became a threat to those in power in El Salvador.

Trying the tactics that the military usually used with a "dirty war" proved futile against these movements since it usually only ended up creating martyrs. Instead, the military changed their strategy to psychological warfare that focused on trying to get as many people as possible to convert from these progressive churches and their theology of liberation to these evangelical churches. The government in El Salvador tried to channel the people into fundamental evangelical protestant churches that preached "the true faith", that was grounded in "the individual's salvation", and left it to god to transform "the sinful world" not man. These evangelical churches had sermons that contained strong anti communist sentiments. These evangelical churches had a theology that left it up to the holy spirit to intervene in the world and make changes, not man himself. Many North American evangelical churches who had close ties to some of the most conservative American political movements where invited by the government in El Salvador to conduct missionary activities within the country. So what it came down to was a war for the definition of the god image. The government wanted to take away the immanent god image from the peasant. They wanted to take away the god who acted in the world and through people. This is usually described as a horizontal religiosity which leads to critical thinking and social liberation. Instead the government wanted to implement a god image that said that god was remote, far from earth and acted on the people. This can be described as a vertical religiosity which leads to alienation and social submissiveness.

This was ultimately done to marginalize people and drive them away from any type of social protest. In these fundamentalist evangelical protestant churches people where encouraged to cut the ties to their past political...
activities and instead engage in intense individualistic religious activities. When the government in El Salvador was confronted by liberation theology and the horizontal religious perspective their response was to try to get the people to convert to a form of religion that made them more passive.

Tragically Ignacio Martin Baro, the Jesuit priest who made these findings public was assassinated by the El Salvadorian army. He was murdered together with five other Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and her 16 year old daughter in 1989. Living under a constant threat because of his subversive writing he foresaw his own death. He wrote about his possible assassination: "above all, the authorities try to create an official version of facts, an "official history", which ignores, distorts, falsifies and invents crucial aspects of reality. This official history is imposed to the public through an intense and aggressive propagandistic effort, which is supported through the weight of the highest official ranks... When facts that contradict the official history filter to public opinion, authorities raise a sanitary chord around them; these facts are then relegated to oblivion. The public expression of reality, and above all, the exposure of the official history... are considered subversive activities. But they are not. They only subvert the established order of falsehood. We come then to the paradox that those that dare to talk about reality or to denounce abuse, become at least culprits of justice". Noam Chomsky wrote of him the following: ...a mind that was probing and humane, wide-ranging in interests and passionate in concerns, and dedicated with a rare combination of intelligence and heroism to the challenge his work sets forth to construct a new person in a new society"

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