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PROMOTING COMMUNITY PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL BENEFIT



## Countercurrent Subject (Human Actor) and Community

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## Countercurrent Subject (Human Actor) and Community

### Abstract

The first part of the conference tries to show how the constitution of qualitatively human social actors and of humanizing communities are processes that implicate each other and that these processes cannot happen in the dominant direction of this *historic figure*. Therefore, the title does not express one of the ways of being a human social actor and of creating a community; it expresses the only one possible. The second part analyzes the way in which the inhabitants of Latin American popular neighborhoods become human social actors. It characterizes their way of being as being-in-between: in-between the rural and the urban, in-between the popular neighborhood and the city and in-between the heterogeneities of the popular neighborhood. The being-in-between those coordinates gives place to various human types, some better at impersonating subjectuality than others. This is born of the obsession we characterize as agonistic conatus for a dignified life. In considering conviviality as the mode of relation of the inhabitants of the popular neighborhood, we ask ourselves how to pass from it onto community, given that community is not in the history or pre-history of the popular neighborhood. The community would be a contemporary construction. In clarifying the factors that contribute to the formation of communities, we weigh the religious organizations and study the role of the church base communities (CEB's in Spanish) which are the humus of liberation pastoral work. We give importance to the external factor that catalyzes the process, demonstrating its risks and the need to overcome the illustrated modernity relationship.

### 1. Today every human (subject) actor and every community are built countercurrent to the dominant direction.

*Human actors (subjects), personalized communities and genuinely democratic and open societies are directly proportional.*

We begin by manifesting our conviction in that human beings always have the possibility of constituting themselves as qualitatively human actors and living in personalized communities. The conditionings of the actors or the environment, or, moreover the combination of both, can enhance or hinder this constituting process; in the negative case it can even hinder it greatly, but never cancel it. The possibility of becoming a person is always in the hands of the person, accepting the life received from others as a gift and being a gift to others, in an open manner; as well as it is in his or her hands to live in personalizing communities, meaning, in relationships with a name and face, horizontal, mutual and open.

From the start, we are establishing the equivalence between the truly human actor and the person (Ellacuría, 1991: 265-311; Moltmann, 1986; Masiá Clavel, 2004: 77-167; Ladaria, 1995: 79-93; Gevaert, 2003: 43-62, 139-141; Díaz, 2002; Forte, 2000: 89-105; Comblin, 1985: 59-75; Masiá Clavel, 2005)<sup>1</sup> and we characterize the community as one of the fields

that people create and in which people develop as such. The other field is society. Both fields from the point of view of the persons' constitution are equally relevant and directly proportional, given that people are such due to the relationships (Levinas, 1993:23; de la Torre, 205: 263-306; Masiá Clavel, 2005: 263-306; Alfaro, 1988: 219-238; Trigo, 2008c; Gergen, 1992: 204, 183-219; Zubiri, 2006: 210)<sup>2</sup> they establish and these relationships are precisely the ones that constitute communities and society, as we have characterized them. Society is not an inevitable decadence of community, that would be understood then as what is really humanizing, nor the necessary and desirable traditional communitarianism, that with its fixism prevented the development of the individual's virtuosities. In society the actors join their assets to form social bodies inhibiting their ownness; whilst in the community they do not inhibit it but rather they enter with their own name and face (Ellacuría, 1991: 189-194, 303-311).

In society it is indispensable that each actor inhibit his ownness because if not a truly ecumenical social body is not formed. For example, if a bureaucrat treats each one as such a specific person and not as a citizen who has the right to that service, he or she would prefer the people of his or her own environment or those with whom he or she has an affinity or interest and would relegate those with whom he or she has nothing to do with or those that militate on a different side. What personalizes the

performance of a bureaucrat is his or her relative unpersonalization to concentrate all his or her energies and interest in seeing to the one that legitimately requests his or her services. What depersonalizes is, on the contrary, not inhibiting particularities that connect him or her directly or inversely with the users, when they all have the same right.

In the community, on the contrary, what is demanded is that each one accept the other, each one with his or her ownness, that recognizes them and that interacts from the somehow transcendental elements that constitute the community. For example, in a family two brothers can dislike each other; but as long as each of them acts from their common origin that binds them, they will truly care for each other, and they will recognize themselves in the most genuine manner and each will seek the other's wellbeing.

So then, when speaking from here on of community, we are always assuming the correlation of society, without which the community actually closes in on itself, it becomes corporative, and in this way it depersonalizes its members. (Barcellona, 1992: 121-126)<sup>3</sup>.

***Individualistic individuals and corporatized communities are at the same time a reaction and product of corporatized and globalized business.***

This note is essential in our *historical figure*, in which the threat of depersonalization is so widespread and is occurring so closely that people tend to take refuge in corporatized communities, without realizing that the massive threat comes, mainly, from globalized corporations. Opposing the family or other community, experienced as a corporation, to the global corporatized business means strengthening the existing corporatism that makes it impossible for it to constitute itself as a human actor to which it is folded until it defines itself by its logic.

Thus, communities that are not built up with the constitution of truly free and democratic societies are not personalizing communities. We talk about the constitution because no current society is, and because it is not dependent only on its institutions but on the actions undertaken in that direction by these human actors. Just as the existence of human actors will depend on the type of repeated actions.

From what has been said it appears that the existence of qualitatively human actors and humanizing communities is seriously threatened by environmental individualism (Goizueta, 2009: 85-

100)<sup>4</sup>, which is mainly the product of global corporations, meaning that it is ultimately threatened by the global corporatized companies. But in turn these companies would not have achieved so much power if there had been a critical mass of qualitatively human actors and humanizing communities.

***Incompatibility between global corporations and human actors, personalized communities and democratic and free societies.***

A direct struggle is thus posed between these corporatized and globalized companies and the individuals who revolve in their orbit, on the one hand, and qualitative human actors and the communities that are defined by free, mutual, open relationships and the truly democratic and free societies, on the other.

But the struggle takes place with different weapons: corporatized companies are based on seduction and imposition, from the latest technology in the service of money and power. Individual actors and communities and societies, in turn, encourage freedom, a freedom that takes place in symbiotic relationships, both in coming out of themselves and giving themselves out to other people in the communities, as in pooling assets to build ecumenical and dynamic social bodies, that become the field of personalizing communities and qualitatively human actors.

However, the actors, communities and societies that we have characterized spend most of their energies not in overcoming market totalitarianism but in exercising from their own principles and their own logic with such poise that were able to perform, relatively unaffected and independent from the dominant direction of this *historical figure*, yet not outside it, but just acting their civilizational and cultural assets (namely the culture of democracy (Trigo, 2007: 49-63), that of human rights (Barcellona, 1992: 105-109) and life), many of which have no place nor full development in the dominant direction of the totalitarian market (Barcellona, 1992: 127-137)<sup>5</sup>.

So, to them combat is not to destroy the globalized firms but only to de-corporatize them, returning them, from the culture of democracy and from politics, to the fluidity of history that they are determined to remove to function in their present, designed and controlled by them and projected

indefinitely (de Sebastián, 1999; Barcellona, 1992: 132)<sup>6</sup>.

***Today there is only the possibility of countercurrent individuals actors and communities.***

If individualism and corporatism are the two axes around which the dominant direction of this historical figure is structured, it is clear that both human actors and communities can only come to constitute a countercurrent (Touraine, 2006: 297-301; 2009: 143-207). Thus the title that has been proposed to me, as an actor and community in countercurrent, does not express, in my opinion, one of the classes of potential actors, that of those who go countercurrent to the dominant direction of this *historical figure*, but the only possible condition in this situation, of all qualitatively human actors and all non-corporatized community (Morin, 2010)<sup>7</sup>.

Indeed, the fact that human beings understand themselves as beings aspiring to be born of themselves, that are unaware of constituent bonds (and therefore communities) and simply establish relationships for pleasure or convenience is the condition of possibility for corporations to prevail without counterweight turning them into addicts of merchandise through advertising and subjecting them to the wage relation, reduced to a private contract. The introduction of individualism entails that the only organizations that understand themselves of themselves, in themselves and for themselves, are the globalized corporate enterprises (Bauman, 2005; 2010). This is so because of the abstract legal universalism in which politics lie, that in reality are a product of it, is the way to protect, making them invisible, the existing power relations in which the globalized corporations prevail, that are ultimately controlling policy. (Barcellona, 2005; 2010).

These companies could not reign without counterweight, if they were facing not isolated individuals but actors freely released that are able to resist temptations and pressures, who are capable of an authentic experience of reality, who are strongly oriented to life, to live, let live, to live together and give life; that recognize others, especially absolute others that are the poor and cultures considered as inferior by their own, because they are so free that they sacrifice themselves for what goes beyond their interests. With such actors companies cannot scientifically plan what they sell because they are not influenced by advertising campaigns but they consume only what they need and what empowers them humanely, without any compulsion to consume

more than that. These individuals live in a culture of democracy and are therefore able to fight steadily not for a spectacular policy but one that is genuinely deliberative and democratic, which limits corporations, preventing the market from unfolding with a totalitarian logic (Barcellona, 1992: 26-28)<sup>8</sup>.

In fact individualistic individuals and corporatized companies are the two poles of the same horizon because those who do not want to be seen as mere members of sets, corporatized sets, exacerbate their individuality, without realizing that when they believe that they live from themselves, they are choosing from the menu offered by corporations.

In turn, the perception of the frightening banality that induces this scheme governed by the totalitarianism of the market leads to a growing number of people who enroll in fundamentalist organizations that include some kind of communalism, or meaning of corporate community, in which relationships follow pre-established guidelines made by the leadership in a non-deliberative manner. The reason is that the threat of human wreckage is so direct that many think that the deliberate use of personal freedom is a luxury we have no right to have. When the enemy does not act with any regard, one cannot be in a plan of maximums. It seems more expedient to enroll in an organization with clear approaches, not governed by the guidelines of the market, and to follow their own guidelines.

Overcoming this scheme, that equally ignores the qualitatively human actor and the humanizing community, must include a genuinely democratic type of politics that is not restricted, as proposed by current liberalism, to safeguard individuals but that includes some form of sharing of the partner's' assets. However, that type of politics will never come to pass if there is no real critical mass of human actors involved in non-fundamentalist communities and in free associations that promote life and the recognition of others, especially of those who are different and above all the poor, and that are able to make sacrifices for that which transcends their individual interests.

It is therefore an illusion to think that you can be an authentic human actor and live in personalizing communities within the established order. The installation in the society of risk or the state of welfare requires in the best of cases, the acceptance of a degree of insensitivity for others so frightening, especially those who cannot become established or that are outside, which is the negation of qualitative

humanity, that includes positive effective recognition of others and sacrifice for what is beyond their individual and corporate interests. That is in the best case, because the common thing is that, whether one tells oneself or not, one actually participates in oppression and exclusion, both at work and in political options.

We believe that the attempt to preserve oneself in existence, that Spinoza theorized as the first and only principle of positive virtuality (Spinoza, 1980: 91), expresses the principle that drives the lives of those who benefit from the dominant direction of this totalitarian global market (Levinas, 1993: 10; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1994: 82)<sup>9</sup>. He expresses the radical individualism that many fail to recognize in themselves, but from where they in fact operate. Staying in existence above all involves the struggle of all against all for the better position and which allows for the less scrupled to prevail. This priority, which necessarily becomes adversarial, prevents the formation of qualitatively human actors.

Being a qualitatively human actor in many environments becomes a venture so countercurrent that is ultimately heroic.

It is not ideal that human actors and humanizing communities have to build themselves on a countercurrent. It rather expresses an anomaly: the failure of the dominant direction of this historical figure. The current direction is so inhuman that for it to prevail it is not enough to keep up the continuous exercise of compulsion and fear and, of course, seduction. A constant mass idealization is essential so that its true degree of distortion is not perceived, the abysmal degree to which the established order oppresses reality, the frightening degree of dehumanization in which there are those who, seduced and / or fearful, fold into it and, above all, their abettors.

So we have to fight relentlessly so that within this historical figure another direction prevails in which its civilizational and cultural assets are expressed and developed and, for that matter, it becomes a good conduit of human actors and personalized communities and even promotes them. We believe that there are minorities working from alternative logics so that they don't only resist but seek to overcome the existing order. The alternative is easy to see, not only in their way of living and thinking but in that they volunteer to do it not for sheer moral reasons, but for the joy of giving and sharing in life.

However, we want to note, that while it is true that it is undesirable for individual actors and communities to have to build themselves on a countercurrent, we must also recognize that those who manage to build themselves under such adverse circumstances do it with an excellence that they would not have achieved otherwise.

## 2. Actors human (subjects) and communities in the popular neighborhoods of latin america

This horizon that we have briefly outlined provides a framework for the understanding of a sustained experience over more than three decades, especially in popular neighborhoods of Latin American cities and groups in solidarity with them, from my membership with the historical trend known as Liberation Theology (Trigo, 2004)<sup>10</sup> and from the platform of a research and social action center that we Jesuits run in Venezuela called Gumilla Center (Gumilla, 2004: 163-171)<sup>11</sup>.

What I have found is that, unlike the attempt to remain in existence, which Spinoza theorized and that according to Horkheimer and Adorno constitutes the *ethos* and the *pathos* of the West, the attempt which is the source of the suburban culture is the dying attempt for a dignified life, whose core expressions are home (home and family) and the infrastructure of the popular neighborhood, their habitat interactions and that result in conviviality and the assumption or, indeed, the creation of a character as a way of becoming a person (Trigo b, 2008). Then we will develop this proposal.

### *Popular neighborhood culture and subculture of poverty.*

First we must distinguish between the culture of the popular neighborhood and the subculture of poverty. The latter is in fact not a culture as it requires not only the constitutional reference to the others but also to itself and neither is it guided by the transcendent claim of becoming qualitatively human. In this situation all sense of process has been lost and one only lives to satisfy the most basic needs and drives. By analogy it can be called culture because this way of life, or more properly stated, of survival generates automation, we can even say that some habits on one hand, achieve a certain stability, in other words the fact of survival, but that on the other hand, make it extremely difficult to induce a proactive change.

The breakdown of families and habitats and more generally of conviviality that characterizes the atmosphere of the popular neighborhood, because of the violence spread by the lack of productive work and expectations, lead to an internal breakdown in which the individual abandons himself, no longer relates to himself and therefore loses ties with others. This phenomenon is increased by the abandonment of the State and city, a growing neglect in many Latin American cities.

The subculture of poverty is the cancer of the culture of popular neighborhoods and unfortunately for quite many citizens of the capital it is what characterizes neighborhoods.

***Being-between as the characterization of a popular neighborhood resident. Types that result.***

More generally many still believe that in the popular neighborhoods there is no culture because its inhabitants ceased to be farmers and have not fully embraced the city. Because of this condition of uncertainty which they attribute to the residents of popular neighborhoods, many people considered them dangerous because they are unstable.

I would like to stress that, indeed, the inhabitants of popular neighborhoods aren't characterized by their rooting, such as the Indians or peasant farmers or urban dwellers of traditional families, but a vital position that we characterize as being-between.

The popular neighborhood resident is between rural and urban, because when he moves he isn't thinking of the neighborhood but of the city. This situation gives rise to three human types: the stranger, if he emigrated because there were no means of making a living, but still valued his way of life. The outcast, if he emigrated to the city because the peasant way of life became narrow and humiliating for him and yet he did not become assimilated into the city to which he aspired. His desire is to be in the city and he demonstrated with his attitude that he is in the neighborhood because he has no means of leaving, yet he does not live it but rather suffers it.

Additionally the location between the farmland and the city cannot be marked by one of the two extremes, but by the creation of an actor between them, such as the popular neighborhood is a place between the two. This is, by excellence, the creator of the culture of the popular neighborhood and while he establishes himself he creates it.

So, the culture of the popular neighborhood is obviously a contemporary culture, as is Western globalized culture, on the other end of the spectrum of Latin American culture, and as the indigenous, Afro-Latin, traditional urban or rural cultures are not, those who think that culture is something settled throughout many generations that is received and assimilated. This perception of culture explains that those in the traditional culture cannot understand that the popular neighborhood-dwellers, who are new people, may have their own culture.

The popular neighborhood resident is also between the neighborhood and the city, as he is settled in the popular neighborhood and works in the city. Every morning he commutes to the city and returns at dusk. This situation gives rise to two types of humans. The intermediary, when his loyalty is with the city organization that he represents in the neighborhood and the mediator, when he belongs to both sides and mediates between them and above all in himself.

The intermediary has an extensive presence in the popular neighborhood, an ambivalent, if not negative position. The city, on the one hand, does not know the culture of the popular neighborhood, but on the other, does not want the neighborhood to be constituted from itself but rather pretends to control it. This attitude is shared by charity institutions that typify the popular neighborhood merely by the shortcomings that they attempt to remedy, to promote organizations that attempt to become the paradigm to which those in the neighborhood have to come to, or political organizations, which come to the popular neighborhood promising realizations in exchange for votes, and from there to the State that gives, in exchange for loyalty, that which they are required to give the citizens in any case being that they are subject to their rights. This is why all these organizations operate with internal, as well as with external agents, with intermediaries from neighborhoods: people shaped by the logic of these institutions that therefore despise their neighbors and place their identity into learning the institutional proposals that they represent. These are asymmetric relations, both theirs in regard to the institutions, which are of subordinate participation, and in regard to the popular neighborhood, which are aimed at obtaining favors in return for status or other benefits.

The characteristic of the mediator is the symmetric mediation for loyalty, both to the neighborhood as well as to the city. His relations with the city are not subordinate but symmetrical: he is a self-aware citizen, dignified and productive and therefore the

city is happy with his performance and his person, he, as one of them, may also appear before them as one from the popular neighborhood and defend the neighborhood against the city giving them a genuine understanding of the neighborhood. But in the popular neighborhood he does not act as a representative of the city but as a popular neighbor aware of the dignity of the neighborhood, who struggles to make it worthy all the way from the condition of actors of the neighborhood to the respectful and qualified concourse of the city. Nor does he shun his rural roots and the countryside, as one of them, he defends the popular neighborhood and has a genuine vision of the city and in turn the popular neighborhood and city present the reality of the country with its abandonment by the State and its potentialities. From my point of view the status of mediator is the highest possibility of human fulfillment (Trigo, 2001: 85-128)<sup>12</sup>.

There is a third manifestation of being-between that characterizes people of the popular neighborhoods: to be between the heterogeneities of the neighborhood. First it should be noted that the city somehow homogenizes its inhabitants, with the result that cultural diversity is expressed primarily in private life or corporate partnerships. Everyone in the popular neighborhood tends to manifest himself as he is, even if it represents drawbacks. First of all because the popular neighborhood is not a refined mold that decants whoever enters it. That is a traditional and living city, for example, in Venezuela, Maracaibo. By contrast, the neighborhood is a contemporary creation to which everyone contributes from what he is and has. Moreover, in the popular neighborhood there is barely any place for privacy in the sense of the city, because for starters the virtual absence of public spaces and the proximity and small size of family spaces leaves almost no room for privacy. In addition, the typical neighborhood environment is conviviality. Thus, in the neighborhood, heterogeneities are easily apparent. It is normal for them to give rise to misunderstandings, friction and animosity, but that, as coexistence is a matter of life or death, there is awareness that we must try to overcome the negative and relate positively.

This all of a sudden complicates life, which is already too complex, as we said, for the residents of popular neighborhoods. If everyone is looking for his life from his origin and expectations, this task becomes more difficult when perceiving in the daily friction very different ways of dealing with reality. Even though the inextricable diversity also sharpens

the drive to each find his own identity and consistency. There are some who accept this diversity as an asset and take it into account in their relationships. But for most part, at best, this is a point of arrival. Many, waving to everyone and expressing benevolence, starting with their relatives or acquaintances, their countrymen or co-workers or those for whom they have political, religious or sports affinities. Also, obviously, they seek to relate positively to their immediate neighbors.

This variable also results in different types of individuals, from the bully, the one that maintains a low profile, seeking not to bother nor be bothered, to the one that manages to treat everyone well, although without delving into the relation or the one that regularly fosters neighborly relations opening up to diversity, enriched by it and enriching others with their contribution.

***The agonistic attempt for a dignified life, source of popular neighborhood culture.***

However, all these types, with their different self-awareness, are faced both with the fact that there is no place for them in the city and a State that increasingly abandons them to their fate, and therefore having to face the challenge that they will not live, if their life is not born from within themselves. And these people, so distinct from one another, accept this challenge, a daunting challenge that wears them out and that is about to make them insane, but that also constructs them as intense and dense human actors, because they are always under tension, but ordinarily are able to live naturally, and because their lifestyle requires them to be versatile. Indeed, they have to make their homes, set up the neighborhood's infrastructure, find a job in the city and have the ability to move in it, to establish popular neighborhood relationships, acquire a trade, build a family. And they must do everything at once, because without all these elements human life is not possible and they aspire to a truly human life. Therefore the efforts of the people in the popular neighborhoods are actually alterative. They have to learn everything and do everything.

And everything takes place within a countercurrent. The State does not even provide security, much less adequate infrastructure, quality education or social security. They really have no rights. That is, neither the State nor the city recognizes them. Therefore their effort for life is agonistic: a commitment to live when there are no conditions in which to live, especially when death lurks. The inhabitants of the

city, especially the middle and rich class can take life for granted and the pursuit to qualify it. The goal of neighborhood resident is living, because life cannot be taken for granted. Violence, malnutrition, diseases of the poor, lack of stable work and the neglect and contempt felt, threaten life. And the popular neighborhood residents strive to live tenaciously, as if it were an obsession.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* it is stated that "they learned that dominant obsessions prevail against death" (García Márquez, 1968: 346). This quote is the key to the book and in the novel it is referred to as the obsession of love. In the novel the carriers of the constructive obsession that makes life possible are women, who are not carried away by illusions and settle in daily life. Also in the neighborhood love as the source of life, not the love of the *telenovela* and the bolero but the love lived every day without almost naming it or only being named when it symbolizes this everyday waste of life or when it helps to live in a very tight trance, it is what explains this obsession from which flows the culture that constitutes them into human and humanizing areas. And it is also true that women in the neighborhood are the more qualified and consistent carriers of the constructive engagement from which their culture flows.

When, overcoming the customary neglect of the State and the lack of productive work, as well as the constant tension to manage to live where there are no conditions for it, the person that reaches this constructive engagement becomes an extremely qualitative human actor.

It is obvious that not all popular neighborhood residents achieve these levels of humanity. To live upstream, as we have characterized, wears terribly, requires a constant tension that not everyone can afford. And not a few turn primal until they become beast-like, returned to their drives; others become threatened wild beasts that spread terror in the popular neighborhood; others who are convinced of the futility of the effort, remain at a critical minimum. Others, specially male, handicapped by reliance on the figure of the mother who keeps them from becoming actors and because of a macho subculture that imposes on them teenage parameters, leaving everything to start over, each time with an increasing human precariousness. Others mimic as citizens and subordinate themselves to any organization in the city, trying unsuccessfully to climb or at least believe that they are someone. But others, in the midst of their weaknesses and

disadvantages, that make them think again and again that they are overstretched and cannot cope any more, they manage, however, to edify themselves as eminent human actors in the endless process of raising their home and family and of building the neighborhood.

These are, above all, those who we said created a place and an identity between town and country, mediators between the popular neighborhood and the city (and also the country) and those who came to accept as their own asset the heterogeneities of the neighborhood, interacting constructively with them.

***The characteristic of the popular neighborhood is the conviviality, not the communities.***

Faced with the idea that more than a few city people tend to have neighborhoods and areas of dense communality, we have to say that in popular neighborhoods there are hardly any remains of traditional communality and therefore its communities have to be of contemporary creation, including the family.

Moreover, most of its inhabitants never lived as in a community. We could say that the ancient inhabitants of the highlands, from Mexico and Guatemala to Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and perhaps some provinces of northwestern Argentina, such as areas of high cultures in Indo America, that in the colony, reduced to villages, continued to live as indigenous communities, although subject to the "encomenderos" (land trustees), and the mestizo people that originated from them, still preserve community structures, although they were not recognized by the liberal governments of the nineteenth century. However, many of their members, perhaps the most capable, as was the case in the European Lower Middle Ages, leaving their communities and moving to the cities, and to the popular neighborhoods, because they felt that the narrowness of these ancient structures, more conducive to preserving than to engaging in dynamic processes, drowned their personal development.

The rest of Latin America did not resist the cultural clash with the Europeans and, despite the protection of the missions, that at least prevented their destruction and made possible some cultural mixing and technological transmission, as Spanish villages settled in its territory and they were left in their peripheries, becoming their proletariat until they disappeared as communities.

In the prehistory of the neighborhood people, at least since the nineteenth century and in many cases before, there is the hacienda (a large estate), where camaraderie reigned, but where community was absent and emphasized the individuality of some laborers from the mass of men that felt they were the landowner's men. Those with most developed individuality, that did not resist the subordination and abuse, would go to tame virgin soil and settle on their own. To mention the prototype case, much of Colombia has been settled that way and therefore the bitterness of the peasants whom the guerrillas and paramilitaries in particular have driven from their land, so dearly their own, without the State coming out in their defense.

As we have seen, in the case of origin of plateaus as elsewhere, to the neighborhood come individuals to find not only livelihoods but to become themselves. In no way are they the outcasts who think only of survival. In them there is a clear establishment purpose.

While it is to be acknowledged that in the neighborhoods of Andean origin there is a certain propensity to build communities under a new egalitarian basis. Perhaps we can say the same of the cities of the highlands of Mexico and Guatemala. But generally speaking, the characteristic of the popular neighborhood is the conviviality and not the community: peers are willing to help each other and live together.

### ***Conviviality and communality***

What distinguishes this way of living, of the community? It differs in that conviviality, even though the interface is continuous and deep, is between individuals who remain as such and do not constitute a we, which is what characterizes the community. The form of relation of conviviality is adjustment: "I want to relate to you and you to me. While we do well, we continue the relationship, but if it does not suit any of us anymore, we part. "

That is why so many do not marry. To marry means to constitute a we. While that way of being is not conceived (the us that constitutes the couple and then the family), it makes no sense to take that step, because those who adjust always have to be validating this relationship; while when getting married, they no longer feel that freely contracted obligation. That is why men say that if they marry,

the woman gets spoiled. I think they are right and should not marry until they change their horizon.

The absence of traditional communality is another indication that the culture of the neighborhood is a contemporary culture.

Now, that convivial individuality is also not the modern individualism that upset the organic medieval society, nor that which prevails today in Latin American cities. Conviviality expresses, obviously, desire, liking and decision to live in an open way. Living as a way of living and finding fulfillment. But additionally insisting that those who cohabit are people with a highly developed sense of their own individuality.

### ***The step from conviviality to the community requires an external component***

Is it easy to move from conviviality to community? Is it ever achieved in a meaningful way in our neighborhoods? First we must establish that to form communities means to exceed the scheme of conviviality. The impetus for a dignified life, that upstream effort which we have characterized as obsession, provides energy and willingness to do so and being-between is a source of possibilities. But in any case to move from the initial state it is necessary that the neighborhood inhabitants have been able to perceive the community's proposal or that they may have known the experiences of specific communities. It is customary to combine the actions of these people informed and taught, with the presence in the neighborhood of people from the city to make the proposal and catalyze the process. In both ways we have established the need, usually, of an external element, either the proposal or the reference communities, or people outside the neighborhood who come to it.

For example, a neighborhood resident who maintains symmetric relations with the city has been able to perceive the nuclear family model in colleagues he esteems or people he admires and respects, and has been able to conclude that he too could eventually form such a family in the neighborhood. Sometimes a proposal comes, for example, from a Christian family movement, through counseling priest or any of the participants. Thus emerging in neighborhoods real family communities that for their symmetrical nature, egalitarian and reduced surplus, both the traditional patriarchal family, which still occurs in some people from traditional villages, for example, in Venezuela, from the Andes and is characterized by

its asymmetrical nature, by the division of roles (the mother in the house and the father at work and on the street) and by its stability, as the matricentric (Moreno, 2007), the predominant one, in which relationships are of mother and child, non-authoritarian relationships that allow a great flow, but in essence dependency relations that greatly hinder the stable formation of the couple.

We have given this example because out of experience we are convinced that the family community is the mother of all communities. Therefore, those living in nuclear egalitarian and participatory families are communitarizing agents in the neighborhood, but that only happens, if the family is not for them, as for more than a few in the city, a compensatory community for the dehumanization that induces surrender without reservations to the logic of the totalitarian market and therefore closed, corporatized.

#### *The problem of external agents.*

Regarding the action of external agents, there are currently two problems. The first is that more than a few of them promote corporatized and even fundamentalist communities. Most political associations are corporate because they seek, not to promote that society is oriented in a certain direction and in that sense support certain public policies, but to obtain benefits, privatizing policy management. So they function as true cliques that manage power illegitimately. On their part, many Christian communities, especially free churches, but also some Catholic movements, are decidedly fundamentalist. However, much of their fundamentalism is not compensatory but alternative and for this reason they achieve some important advances, both in overcoming serious disorders as well as in adopting constructive and integrating habits. But, with these initial gains stabilized, the narrowness of the fundamentalist approach brings as a result that the process stalls or becomes depersonalizing.

The second problem with external agents is that most of them act in the neighborhood from an illustrated scheme. This is the horizon of the agents of modernization of both the first and the second Illustration. In neighborhoods promotion proposals abound and left advocacy groups move, and both believe that those in the neighborhood are disadvantaged or oppressed. In both cases they recognize that they are not to blame for their condition, but still are merely recipients of their action, because they lack the civilizational and

cultural assets typical of a contemporary human being. They are not human actors and to become one they must accept the paradigm that is proposed to them. Therefore they have to stop being themselves: to become alienated.

Naturally, these agents do not believe that those promoted or sensitized are alienated; on the contrary they believe them to be the mirror in which all residents should look at themselves. But that is so because the illustrated believe, even though sometimes they might not be aware of it, that humans as such are only they who have come to a systematic use of critical, analytical and practical reasoning. It is obvious that whatever results of that action will be groups of the institutionalized sponsoring or of the promoting or consciousness-raising agents, but never communities. Because personalizing communities are composed of genuine human actors, not of imposed actors.

#### *Difficulty of overcoming the illustrated modernity scheme.*

It is very difficult to overcome the illustrated modernity scheme (Trigo, 2008: 104-213) because it is so connatural with the agent, that it is maintained even if is contrary to his ideology. For example, in the seventies and eighties the left mythicized the people, proclaiming that it was never wrong and that "the people united will never be defeated." However, those who enthusiastically proclaimed it, in practice tutored the people. The same happened to the pastoral agents of the Catholic Church, even in the first period, with quite a few that included themselves within the Theology of Liberation, when they said, for example, that they were in the discipleship of the people. (Dussel, 1973: 116-122, 168-172) Indeed, it was easier to change contents than mindsets, and harder still, of sensitivity patterns.

Only those who managed to engage in truly reciprocal and horizontal relations with the villagers and were able to see and get their input, managed to overcome the ideological captivity of liberal or socialist modernity and engage in intercultural relations, to ensure that the neighborhood residents were true cultural and social actors. This happened sometimes in the daily side by side activity through an almost imperceptible sequence of discoveries of the consistency of popular people who appeared as real authors of their lives; but it happened, above all, when helped effectively in times of crisis, because they received their contributions at a personal level, they who had come to give and generously deliver

themselves. These people certainly managed to cooperate effectively to establish communities because they also wanted and needed them and thus participated in them not just as promoters and managers but rather as another member, even though being of diverse culture and therefore with specific contributions.

Thus, the external agent may not help constitute personalized communities when the membership to the community is as vital and relevant to them as to the members of the neighborhood or, better, even more. To put it in a personal example: My belonging to community-bases is not relevant to my ministry, that is to my professional work but to my spirituality, that is to my constitution as a human being from the paradigm of Jesus of Nazareth. I would not know how to be Christian otherwise.

Therefore, as the external element considers himself an agent, which is the way of being characteristic of modernity, he cannot help communities to emerge. He must overcome the paradigm and relate as a concrete human being and therefore through mutual and horizontal relations, to make it possible.

In general we can say that in neighborhoods where for a long time organizations and groups have acted in a truly participatory way, either by organizing an intercultural dialogue, or entering the house of the people, that is, their culture, ultimately the emergence of a social fabric enucleated about those who we said that provided for a place, both as a human habitat as a way of being human between the field in the city, around those we characterized as mediators and those who we said moved in an open way between the complexities of the neighborhood is normal. These people embody the neighborhood's "we" and around them move many others who make up this group which is usually referred to generically as the community of that area.

#### ***The ignored fact of the predominance of religious communities.***

I would like to note a fact that conflicts with the general state of opinion. For example, today in Venezuela in research on popular participation the fact that participation in religious communities and associations, in this case Christian, almost equal to other ways of participation stands out<sup>13</sup>. Yet the same respondents believe that what sets the tone in the country is political participation. And it is obviously so. More than that, I would stress that much, among the most dynamic and constructive,

community councils and other organizations that are in the process being conducted by the present government, are of Christian origin and more specifically in the orbit of the Theology of Liberation. Those are who live the most genuine process, that is, more proactive and less reliant on the guidelines of state and on the leader's speech.

I think the media that shapes public opinion and academia are reluctant to take on this phenomenon. But the surprising thing is that neither catholic organization involved in these phenomena of participation are aware of this, although we cannot say the same of the Free Christian Churches, whose intellectuals, by their nature corporatized themselves are likely to display statistics. Thus, contrary to popular belief, most neighborhood communities are religious and not a few groups and organizations that are truly democratic and open are animated by them.

#### ***Church based communities.***

In this environment, the Christian Based Communities (Trigo, 2008a: 139-229), the core generator of praxis that is at the core of Liberation Theology, which are neither fundamentalist nor proselytizing and do not interfere with the neighborhood associations but instead foster and encourage them, but not as communities but by the action of its members, constitute themselves in the ferment of this neighborhood culture, to counter the so-called culture of poverty, which is the cancer of suburban culture, and to promote that in conviviality the community fabric is incubated. In this process I have rediscovered the importance of cultivating the communality of the family.

However, also of the Ecclesial Based Communities it can be said that not a few have been set, especially in the early days, as cells of the left: a committee of theologians or pastoral work groups, the equivalent of the Central Party Committee, drew up the guidelines and materials, and consultants and delegates took them "down to the base." In this case, as in the others we were reviewing, members advanced in many aspects and promoted effective action, but they were not truly communities because their members were not the source of what they had in mind but were rather acting a script written by others, even though they were the elite of the organization and therefore insiders in the movement.

One element on which I think there is no clarity and that is crucial for the establishment and stable and dynamic maintenance of communities is the number

of its members. I think that if they are not expressions of traditional communality but contemporary creations, it cannot be under forty or fifty and the top would be around a hundred and fifty. If the number turns between ten and twenty, which is what we usually have in mind, you usually will not be a base but it likely depends on a coordinator. To stably and creatively fulfill all its functions there have to be many members because, if the whole load is carried by two or three, the community becomes one-dimensional and routinized and results unstable.

We have already insisted that neighborhood residents have to do everything themselves and all at once. Assistance to the community is another burden, but is assumed freely and gladly. So if there are not many and the loads are not distributed, the community ends up not being liberating but a weight that is carried because it seems to make sense and one has committed. It should also be taken into account that a true community is not a party with its internal discipline, but a very heterogeneous group with a varying degree of involvement of its members. If it is a true community, it cannot force accession or require commitments. Everyone does it from himself as of his convictions and possibilities. As the "we" it is born freely of themselves and becomes denser with the exercise, one must be very careful to give it time and not to induce it. But even people who identify with the community's "we", have many other commitments, primarily family and work, and as the community cannot be totalitarian, respects them, knowing that they are not excuses and everyone does what they can and as they can.

***Personalized communities are not countercurrent to the popular neighborhood, although they transcend it by qualifying and safeguarding it.***

In what ways are popular neighborhood communities countercurrents? Let us consider the question as from the neighborhood itself and from the dominant direction of the city.

Regarding the neighborhood they are not countercurrent to the culture of the neighborhood but rather outstanding expressions of it, but transcending it, and thus effectively helping it to give out and safeguarding it from its harmful germs.

We already said that the community is not an ingredient of that culture, hence, the need for external intervention to emerge. Although we insist that this

intervention, even well-intentioned, often prevents these communities to properly being base communities; and if they are, or are not communities but groups of the agent or cells of an organization, or are not personalized but corporatized or fundamentalist communities. So, it is not easily for personalized communities to arise.

Sometimes, we say, the problem is merely of conception: it is thought of as small groups that are only capable of sustaining a traditional communality and not be expressions of this era.

A typical example of traditional communality is that of the groups of the Legion of Mary when the ordinary meetings are not attended by a priest. If the priest attends it might also be that he is part of that culture and therefore may not be an obstacle or he might be clerical, as is usual, and then he keeps the group from being a community and transforms it into a church group. If they do everything themselves, their limit is that they rigidly follow a manual, but the advantage is that they dominate this code and can act with competence and above all plan actions from their knowledge of the neighborhood and run them in a personalized way. These people do not make the neighborhood advance, but they help to maintain its human qualities as they undertake it and carry out through relationships impregnated with respect and affection and are able to effectively help their neighbors.

Personalized communities as a contemporary fact (the most prominent example is the Church Based Communities) are distinguished from the healthy traditional ones in that they take into account daily life, but not least in its historical character. It is posed then that living in community does not abstract the situation, but takes it into account explicitly, analyzing it and taking action on it. For example, they take into account gang violence and ritualized teen violence, the state services and how they affect the popular neighborhood, the relationship with municipality and the initiatives there are for it, just as the country's situation with the opportunities and drawbacks.

The most characteristic trait is not the meetings for formal analysis but that these are taken into account and come to light to treat specific situations and when treating them specifically. Thus, what they have in hand, for example in the case under consideration of the Church Based Communities, is that what God asks or the following of Jesus, does not belong to a specific segment of reality, in the

example considered, the religious realm, but it is realized in the framework of all reality and is based on a way of being human with the two harmonics of deep trust and deep solidarity. So when in community with God, for example by reading the Gospels, they process all life.

In doing so, these people learn to look deep into problems, become aware of their responsibility and ability, they gain self-mastery. Each person responds to what God asks, an inside knowledge of the other is acquired and a sacred commitment that is the source of fraternity is fostered. These people become sisters of their popular neighbors. People know that they can count on them and that they can expect to receive some assistance. Therefore when there are initiatives and there are people in the community there tends to be trust in that there will be consistency and transparent work. As a result of all that the community is people with respect for their neighbors.

From what we have said it is easy to see how the lives of communities promotes and qualifies conviviality.

It also safeguards it. The culture of the popular neighborhood, due to its condition of agony, is very unstable: it is constantly remaking itself because it struggles for life, so disproportionate to its possibilities and in such unfavorable conditions, it steadily erodes it.

The culture of the popular neighborhood lies in the constant actions in pursuit of a dignified life. It depends at all times on a critical mass to appear of such actions, so that the constructive part of that culture overcomes its anomic trends. That is why it helps greatly that there are personalized communities that are a constant source of such actions, stable platforms of a shared dignified life. Being a whole and a stable platform, the community can dialogue with troublemaking elements. It can dialogue because it does not exclude them, because it does not render them impossible, because it treats them with respect. That is why they, to preserve their esteem, which they need to maintain despite all the awareness of their dignity, are able to change behaviors or at least limit themselves giving up some space and time to their neighbors.

Personalized communities are indeed running countercurrent to the dominant direction of this *historical figure*. They are a part of the overcoming alternative. Above all, they contain its civilizational and cultural assets.

Let's start with the civilizational ones, which may seem a paradoxical statement. Do the neighborhood people, have the civilizational assets of this *historical figure*? Young people from the neighborhood have them in a modest amount that is to say to the extent to which city professionals have them. We tend to forget that suburban culture is a contemporary culture. That is why it has an inclination towards them and their sense more than the traditional people of the city. Besides, they actually do have some of these assets, for example, computers and all types of phones and they make them perform much more than most. If pathology is a symptom of psychology, that in the popular neighborhood someone may be murdered to grab a last generation cell phone and this expresses the deep appreciation that there is for them, the same applies to the theft of computers in schools.

Regarding cultural property and the agonistic attempt for a dignified life that characterizes suburban culture, it is active in the face of everything the tenacious, methodical and constructive effort which is boasted of by western culture. More than to it, this effort applies to life, first and foremost so that there is, because, as we insist, there are no conditions for it, it cannot be taken for granted, as happens in the city. But also to their human qualities, which include not only dignity but also the symbolic capacity, the joy for life that becomes evident in the conviviality and the party.

## Notes

1. For a notion of person who retains the essence of self of modernity and who also incorporates the structural respectability and thus the relationships, see Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*. Trotta, Madrid 1991: 265-311. Moltmann, *El hombre*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1986; Masiá, *Fragilidad en esperanza*. DDB, Bilbao 2004: 77-167. Ladaria, *Antropología teológica*. EVD, Estella, 1996: 79-93; Gevaert, *El problema del hombre*. Sígueme, Salamanca 2003: 43-62, 139-141. Díaz, *¿Qué es el personalismo comunitario?* Fundación Emmanuel Mounier, Madrid 2002. Forte, *La eternidad en el tiempo*. Sígueme, Salamanca 2000: 89-105. Comblin, *Antropología cristiana*. Paulinas, Madrid 1985: 59-75. Masiá (Ed.), *Ser humano, persona y dignidad*. DDB, Bilbao 2005.
2. "That which is human is only offered to a relationship which is not a power" (Levinas, *Entre nosotros*. Pre-Textos, Valencia 1993: 23); Torre, *Significancia intercultural e interreligiosa del*

*concepto relacional de persona*. En Masiá (Ed.) 2005: 263-306; Alfaro, *De la cuestión del hombre a la cuestión de Dios*. Sígueme, Salamanca 1988: 219-238; Trigo, *Relaciones de fe*. ITER Humanitas 12 (2008). In a sense different from ours, because for him what has been operated is the shift of the romantic and modern individual to the postmodern relationship, says Gergen, also something that we hold, "it can be said that relations precede the self and are fundamental" (*El yo saturado*. Paidós, Barcelona 1992: 204). From our perspective inclusive and not adversarial, because for us personalizing relationships are only those that are established from the genuineness, its findings are very encouraging (1992: 183-219). For Zubiri relations are not the basics: "Just because reality is respectively open, just for that might there be a connection" *Respectividad de lo real*. En *Escritos Menores*. Alianza, Madrid 2006: 210)

3. This distinction between the community with preset structures in which participants are not subjects but merely deliberative community members and as a community of free subjects based on mutual recognition, be it family, a neighborhood community or any organized group and the emphasis, therefore on the fact that it is not nostalgia but a communalist leap forward as developed by Barcelona in postmodernity and community. Trotta, Madrid 1992: 121...

4. Goizueta writes about US liberal individualism in *en Caminemos con Jesús*. Convivium Press, Miami 2009: 85-100.

5. The need to overcome the market environment and imagine other manners of attending to the needs and desires from the concrete individuals and the cooperation ties of cooperation that are freely entered into, an effort made possible by the enormous development of the productive forces that can lead to other manners of reaching the social product purchase and sale. As underlined by Barcelona, 1992: 127-137

6. de Sebastián, *El rey desnudo/Cuatro verdades sobre el mercado*. Trotta, Madrid 1999. For Barcelona democracy is the "antidote against the emergence of technological de-politization that seems to dominate the current phase in the systemic order and is the only obstacle to the economic theology of success and unlimited growth" 1992: 132.

7. Morin insists on the point although he also emphasizes the cultural and civilizational that make it possible and even foster this possibility in a truly countercurrent manner. *¿Hacia el abismo?* Paidós, Barcelona 2010.

8. Barcelona speaks of "systemic monism", 1992: 26-28.

9. This is the way it was expressed by Levinas in *Entre nosotros* (Pre-Textos, Valencia 1993: 10 and it is what is sustained by Horkheimer and Adorno in *La dialéctica de la Ilustración*. Trotta, Madrid 1994: 82.

10. My last publication on the Theology of Liberation is titled: *¿Ha muerto la Teología de la Liberación?* Mensajero, Bilbao 2004.

11. See for example, *Horizonte del Centro Gumilla*. SIC 664 (may 2004:163-171) and the web page at: [www.gumilla.org.ve](http://www.gumilla.org.ve)

12. For me, Jesus of Nazareth, paradigm, prototype and archetype is the classical mediator. See Trigo, *Jesús, paradigma absoluto de humanidad*. In *Jesucristo, prototipo de humanidad en América Latina*. Obra Nacional de la Buena Prensa, México 2001: 85-128

13. The type of group they claim to belong to or to have belonged to is in the first place to religious groups (37%) and in second place to sports groups (17%), with values below 10% actually belonging to co-operatives (5,6%), to community councils (5,4%), Parents associations and representatives (6,7%), neighborhood associations (8%) and political parties (5,9%) (*La Participación Social en Venezuela. Una aproximación cuantitativa*. Caracas, April 2009. Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales).

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