


MIREYA VARGAS L.

# Venezuela A Country in Regression

Our  
unconscious  
complexities  
in a few  
sociological  
images



Ediciones: Centro Lyra  
Traducción: Andrea Ramos Hillman  
Diseño gráfico: Pedro Mancilla  
Depósito Legal: xxooxxooxxo  
ISBN: xxooxxoo

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## Presentation

In this essay, Mireya Vargas casts a restful look upon her work experiences in the field of social investment with numerous Venezuelan communities, under the light of C.G. Jung's complexes theory. And this she does in a novel way, presenting us with the realities of a diversity of human collectives through the stories of individuals and family groups in which we can all recognise ourselves.

Individual and collective crises emerge in light of new contents of vital importance, interior or exterior, which challenge the capacity to assimilate and integrate them. For an individual, these assimilation and integration processes go through recognition and acceptance. These processes lead, in psychotherapeutic terms, to an acquisition of awareness. Although something comparable may happen in society, in this case it is expressed in the legislation and in the creation of institutions that endeavour to assimilate and integrate these contents.

The difficulty found in this road to awareness often consists of painful and unconscious complexities, which prevent access to pieces of memory that have been sequestered. Rafael Lopez-Pedraza used to say that a complex is an un-lived piece of history. To this seminal idea I would add that it has not been lived with the emotion to which it would have corresponded, often as a consequence of the immaturity of personality in early age; other

times, because they occurred in situations that prevent one from experiencing such emotion, simply for reasons of survival. The destructive element of a complex of this nature is due to it developing in a blind spot –something encrusted and encased in a shell, protecting it from pain—, in the paralysis in an area of the emotional life which interferes with our appreciation of present reality and distorts it, particularly when the latter contains elements which are in some way associated with this ‘unlived piece of history’. The keys to the complex are the pain and the biological dislike towards what it spans.

Jung spoke of personal, familiar, tribal, cultural, historical, geographical and religious complexes among others, as well as of individual and collective complexes. Some postjungian authors refer to cultural complexes, which encapsulate in a somewhat undifferentiated manner several of those mentioned.

In *A Study of History* (1933-1961), written and published during World War II, Arnold Toynbee attributes the emergence of civilizations to a creative elite capable of conceiving a novel and functional relationship between human beings and the universe, nature and their fellow men. Over time, the human accomplishments of a healthy civilization lead to growth and expansion, and to encountering other human groups with sometimes vastly different concepts of themselves and their relationships to nature and the universe. It is in this way that several civilizations have behaved in the Middle East and Western Europe. Most encounters gathered by history end with assimilation and integration on the part of the civilization that possesses the most developed technologies over those human groups with more rudimentary ones. At times, the moral



superiority of the latter group produces end results where both cultures are deeply modified. This is the case of the contacts between European powers and East Asian civilizations in this last century.

In Latin America, where unlike in Anglo America a large indigenous population has persisted, the assimilation and integration of its societies into western civilization has been fraught with great complexity. The encounter between such distant cultures gave rise to the onset of impossible, and sometimes intolerable, images in the psyches of both. The intolerable images can drive us crazy. The Latin American baroque was the first cultural expression of a form of assimilation and integration, which worked during the first centuries of that cultural contact. As it manifests, imagery is produced which turns possible the images that could otherwise have been impossible. Through artistic creation, that which could have unbalanced the psyche finds ways to contain it.

However, the challenges which republican life had to face greatly surpassed its capacity to respond adequately. The demographic explosion of the second half of the past century—the result of the application of medical and epidemiological advances—found the young structures of the Latin American republican life without the institutional and social maturity to rise up to the challenge<sup>1</sup>.

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1 In the first note at the beginning of her book, the author presents a quote by Conrad (itself quoted by V.S. Naipaul) regarding Latin American societies, where always “...something inherent to the needs of successful action would itself lead to the moral degradation of the idea”, a thought which translates into political and institutional immaturity. In terms of individual psyche, the “moral degradation of the idea” can be understood as an abatement of awareness, or in other words, unawareness. A process which, when reiterated, leads to regression.

Migration to the periphery of large Latin American cities has become an impossible challenge, not just for social institutions, but to the psyches of all individuals involved, whether the people in question are the most assimilated into western civilization, or the culturally farthest from it. It is about the ways of living of the different groups, which in many cases are registered in the psyche as reciprocally intolerable images. These images generate psychic tensions and unconscious emotional complexities of an unimaginable magnitude both at the collective and individual levels, which, apart from becoming manifest in strange conducts and plenty of psychic symptomatology, they also find their expression, in many more cases than we are aware, as malignant somatic pathologies. At least recognizing the existence of these complexities can bring us closer to a calmer, more rational look at very painful aspects that affect us all. To make these unconscious emotional complexities more available for the reader to reflect upon is the task that Mireya Vargas undertakes in this work.

In the referred study of human civilizations, more specifically volume 10: “Contacts between Civilizations in Space”, Toynbee analyses the varieties of different social and human forms that are produced in such cases. Relating to the contact between European and Mesoamerican and Andean cultures as a result of the Spanish conquest and colonization, Toynbee writes:

“... [I]t could not be regarded as certain, at the time of writing, that the indigenous cultures would not in some form eventually re-emerge, as the Sirciac society re-emerged and reconstituted itself after a thousand years of Hellenic domination.”<sup>2</sup>

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2 Arnold Toynbee (1957): *A Study of History*. Oxford Univ. Press. Abridgement of Vols. vii-x, p. 101.

In Jungian psychotherapy terms, regressive processes and psychoses are not considered as something negative a priori, since they can represent the step back into the basic forms of the psyche, which are necessary to advance on firmer and ground, more consistent with the complexities of the individual. All in all, it is a process marred with unspeakable suffering, which tunes in with Aeschylus' words *pathei mathos* – “wisdom comes from suffering.” The death of biological organisms can be seen as a regressive process during which the extraordinary cellular differentiation of the various tissues that constitute said organisms is disintegrated and its constituting organisms themselves degrade into their own components: carbohydrates, amino acids, lipids and nucleic acids, which are integrated back into the cycles of nature to generate new life. Death is a horror from the point of view of a living being, but it is a natural, biological process that goes beyond individual valuations. Regarding the title of this book, *Titulin*, the question poses a reasonable doubt: the prognosis is the question.

Dr. *Iván Rodríguez del Camino*



## Acknowledgements

To Rafael López Pedraza, for opening a new road for me in social studies, which parts from the individual, its psychology and complexities, and integrates the inner look into the analysis.

To Pablo Raydán, for always giving me a deeper and more personal perspective in the ordinary conversations of our daily life.

To Iván Rodríguez del Camino, for keeping me company during these paths with his insight and the infinite patient of a teacher.

To Sandra Caula, for organizing my words and transforming them into readable, relatable texts, stimulating a more cultured and creative life with her suggested readings.

To all the members of Socsal who participated for seven years in this study group, learning and bringing forth cases, ideas, reflections.

*Mireya Vargas L.*



“...when one cannot provide an adequate answer  
for history, the psyche regresses.”

*Rafael López Pedraza*

“Then, that stuck moment, in a continual present,  
it felt so similar to the country...”

*Igor Barreto*

“You lost a country inside yourselves.”

*Yolanda Pantin*

“How long does Wonderland last? Five, seven,  
nine years? Does it really end?”

*Rafael Cadenas*





## The Issue

In Conrad's *Darkness*, Trinitarian-born author V.S. Naipaul says that—as Conrad—he tries to approach postcolonial realities “not as a man with a cause”, but offering “a vision of the world's half-made societies as places which continuously made and unmade themselves”. The image of these half-made societies, forever on the way, seemed to me to be a good start to show what I call the ‘in between’ of the national collective psyche, parting from a group of situations or stories that illustrate their complexities.

The term ‘in between’, coined by López Pedraza under circumstances explained further ahead, attempts to explain a particular aspect of the individual and collective psyche that breaks into the daily life, making us prey of unconscious familial, cultural, historical, ethnic and even geographic. It is a way to live trapped, jumping between unknown complexes that lie within us in a painful manner, subconscious to such a degree that they turn us into strangers to ourselves. We live oblivious to these gaps that our psyche inhabits, assuming that it has a possibility of moving to respond to the challenges of present history – often assuming non-existent inner realities.

For 25 years I have worked in projects of human development, and these complexities are ever more evident for my study group and myself. Originally, as a result of my work as a sociologist,

my work was predominantly approached from a collective perspective. However, this perspective was necessarily enriched through an experience of failure. About ten years ago, when I was working in the financing of a project with Warao communities in the Orinoco Delta, I recommended supporting a donation for planting corn. After some time, during a supervisory meeting, the community leader told me that every month, with the money they got for the development of the project, they bought food for everyone. They never planted, but definitively ate well for some time. The project, then, had not worked. Why did that happen? What did we miss when we planned it?

During a conversation with my therapist, Rafael López Pedraza, he illuminated an angle I had ignored by including the individual and its psychology (his psychic possibilities) as part of what should be considered in the processes of human progress. We then talked about the unknown aspects of the psyche, stuck in some point of history and which obey to that which he termed 'complexities', about which we know little in social science. For López Pedraza it was evident that my project could not have success as we expected because I had not considered that a population with a psyche accustomed to fishing, hunting and gathering now was supposed to get used to a very different lifestyle: sowing crops. Realizing this meant for me a new approach to social realities, starting now from the theory of complexities and the collective unconscious as deep psychology studies them.

Then emerged the idea of organizing a study group, supervised by López Pedraza, to discuss the cases we encountered in our fieldwork through different theoretical approaches, which

would initiate a more integral discussion. This group met periodically for seven years, and what I henceforth present is a result of what we discussed.

Talking with López Pedraza, we realized that the situations we faced in our daily work, these complexities of the Venezuelan collective, are so unconscious and moving that the process of approaching them necessarily goes through each of our own subjectivities, each of our own complexes. In this way, new elements became integrated into the sociological perspective which stimulated movements within us. During this period, we discussed many cases which evidenced how unconscious collective complexities invade and trample us, sweeping away our individual possibilities and the forms which could contain ordinariness like a horde, giving its psychic and social limits and rituals.

The relevance of this concern in Venezuela in this day and age has been underlined by several of our writers: “There are pasts that are not yet gone” (2009: 11), says psychologist and novelist Ana Teresa Torres in *La Herencia de la Tribu*, as she points out that heroes are on the loose and kicking the pavement in any populated area in Venezuela or Latin America. Writer María Fernanda Palacios, in *Ifigenia: mitología de la doncella criolla*, speaks of “that other current submerged where it lives, a hidden and powerful American fact ... where the water of our deepest wells lies, and the knot of our most tenacious complexes is formed...” It is about the world of images and not, as she points out, “the boring problematism of identity”, it is that enemy rumour –she says, evoking Lezama Lima— “which knits underneath the visible march of history, the

countermarch of our regresses, rests and fixations” (2001: 11). López Pedraza himself speaks of “cultural anxiety”, in a book of the same name, to describe current times which still do not manage to psychically assimilate the encounter of different cultures, religions and races, from the times of the conquest and the colony, drenching everything in sectarianism, racial complexities, ethnic complexities and even cast struggles.

In our meetings, we try to come closer to these “pasts” and “countermarches”, starting from the present-day individual in the streets in Caracas, its hills and slums, in smaller cities, towns or rural villages, in indigenous communities, just as it appeared to us in our fieldworks. We try to dig deeper into the most unconscious aspects of their psychic lives, their irrational complexities, starting from their ordinary life, but always exploring the images which trapped us and which presented themselves as expressions of this substrate, the representations of which are varied yet constant.

The comments López Pedraza made in our encounters made us see as well that these complexities help us to reflect on them, to have another perspective on our interpretations of reality and realize the projections we put upon it. The meetings were therefore an opening into our own suffering facing those realities. The experience contributed to our differentiation as individuals and to make us aware of the way in which that which is collective imposes itself on each of us and the scope of the relationships where we make our lives.

We live in global societies where the collective --society— is very similar to the irrational, the unconscious collective, and

exerts undue pressure on the individual. Think, for example, of the little space that an individual psyche finds in Venezuela today. I believe the in between is an appearance of the collective within us as an autonomous complexity that inhabits us, hiding, circulating freely from one level to the next in our psyche. It comes in without an invitation and speaks without being asked. It brings with it disturbing emotions. It presents these aspects of our psyche which are paralyzed, that cannot manage to respond to the present, that remain half done, with one foot in history and one in modernity, without all the ingredients integrating in the mix.

In order to come closer to that reality, I present some stories and the reflections they generated in me and the work group with López Pedraza, organized according to the type of complexity that I believe they exhibit. In no way do I pretend this to be an objective, finished study, nor do I wish to be controversial. It is a combination of different visions, different disciplines, and situations we faced in fieldwork and which any inhabitant of these latitudes may recognize.

For me, it is also an approximation of sociology to psychology, to the aspects of the psyche that impact life in society and create the pitfalls that hinder human development. For my psychotherapist and psychologist colleagues, this means seeing the presence of the collective unconscious in the therapeutic space, and determine its weight in individual matters. Always bearing in mind the needs and differences of each perspective, of each form of approaching that reality.



## The Approach

### I

In the coaching meetings with López Pedraza –in which professionals of different fields within the social sciences and humanities took part, alongside psychiatrists and psychologists—, we relied on theoretical approximations from classical analytical psychology, anthropology, sociology and the history of culture. With these different viewpoints we tried to see the experiences discussed in these work sessions as images, in the way one describes the history of a disease, and, even when the pathological manifestations are not evident, establishes the course of events, observes the determined episodes and their natural evolution.

We base ourselves in Carl Gustav Jung’s theory of complexes and the collective unconscious, on López-Pedraza’s reflections on archetypal psychology and image reading, on the observations of some participants on psychobiology and on other recent approaches from post-jungian analysts on the cultural complexes of the individual and society.

We part from Jung’s classical comparison (CW 10, § 54), originated in one of his dreams, to describe the emotional structure through an analogy of roaming throughout a building with constructions from different eras:

“...a building whose upper storey was erected in the nineteenth century, and careful examination of the masonry reveals that it

was reconstructed from a tower built in the eleventh century. In the cellar we come upon Roman foundations, and under the cellar a choked-up cave with Neolithic tools in the upper layer and remnants of fauna from the same period in the lower layers. That would be the picture of our psychic structure. We live on the upper storey and are only aware that the lower storey is slightly old-fashioned. As to what lies beneath the earth's surface, of that we remain totally unconscious."

This comparison was enriched with another one of Jung's reflections on the primitive strata of the soul (CW 10, § 16-17):

"As civilized human beings, we in Western Europe have a history reaching back perhaps 2,500 years. Before that there is a prehistoric period of considerably greater duration, during which man reached the cultural level of, say, the Sioux Indians. Then come the hundreds of thousands of years of Neolithic culture, and before that an unimaginably vast stretch of time during which man evolved from the animal. A mere fifty generations ago many of us in Europe were no better than primitives. The layer of culture, this pleasing patina, must therefore be quite extraordinarily thin in comparison with the powerfully developed layers of the primitive psyche [...] But the lower, darker half still awaits redemption..."

With these two quotations we begin to see the in between as those aspects of our psyche where living is stuck between times or storeys or complexities, according to the image in the dream, like pieces of unlived history, and the aspects submerged in the unconscious depths await to be integrated into consciousness.



Jung speaks here about the perspective of a European psyche, but while discussing the stories that I analyse here it was evident that, in our reality, given its heterogeneous origin and the diverse temporalities that coexist in a universal way, this approximation has the greatest importance. The in between within us seems the expression of a collective unconscious in which there seem to coexist without a clear relevance (and to name only a few identifiable complexities) very primitive stages of the superior Palaeolithic (such as original indigenous populations), or the Neolithic (with forms of settlements and a developed agriculture), together with medieval forms of organization (such as some communities, isolated until just two generations ago, in the Andean states), and more contemporary forms of living.

To the above we can add the influx of an exuberant geography and the fact that all of this diversity would seem to be immersed in a chaotic situation impulse by modernizing dynamics, by demands of historical actualization, which swept the small cultural sedimentations which allowed for a moderately structured life. This reminds me of the Conrad quotation in note 1 in this book: “something inherent in the necessities of successful action... carried with it the moral degradation of the idea” in these half-cooked societies.

The Jungian notion of the complex was also key to our conversations. A complex is a set of psychic representations produced by stuck pieces of history characterized by having a distinct emotional tone or feeling linked to this group of representations. They are usually unconscious, autonomous and are associated to elements of the personal unconscious or to

images from the collective unconscious. Jung defines it in this way (CW 8, § 201):

“What then, scientifically speaking, is a “feeling-toned complex”? It is the image of a certain psychic situation which is strongly accentuated emotionally and is, moreover, incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness. This image has a powerful inner coherence, it has its own wholeness and, in addition, a relatively high degree of autonomy, so that it is subject to the control of the conscious mind to only a limited extent, and therefore behaves like an animated foreign body in the sphere of consciousness. The complex can usually be suppressed with an effort of will, but not argued out of existence, and at the first suitable opportunity it reappears in all its original strength.”

Regarding its activation, it must be highlighted that, for Jung, a complex is like a magnet piece, a centre charged with energy which attracts everything it comes across within reach, even indifferent things, by what it is said to absorb and assimilate. Because of this, when somebody is under their spell, the new data that emerge in their lives is subjected to the sense marked by the complex. To put it in another way, when a complex is activated, the subject lives as if in an unchangeable original prejudice.

However, Jung’s complexes theory mainly tries to understand and formulate individuals’ inner experience, whereas our intention was to analyse the repercussions of these complexes on the collective and of the collective on the life of the individual as well. With this intention, in our discussions we had to include reflections on culture, history and even biology and geography,

and we expanded the notion of ‘complex’ considering that which López-Pedraza calls ‘complexities’, which comes a bit close to that which in contemporary works has been called ‘cultural complexes (Singer and Kimbles, 2008).

For López-Pedraza, complexities are pieces of un-lived personal history, which cannot be reduced to unilateral explanations and which cannot be explained with simple causes. For contemporary analytical psychology, complexes theory is an attempt to build from the tradition “a new idea for the purpose of understanding the psychology of group conflict (...) the psychology of cultural complexes operates both in the collective psychology of the group and in the individual members of the group” (Singer and Kimbles, 2008: 2).

Jung’s notion of archetype, which he introduces into psychology, enriched by López-Pedraza and the school of thought known as Archetypal Psychology, was also an important guide for our discussions. Jung says that the collective unconscious is only patent in its contents, which are expressed through what he calls archetypes. He refers to them as a hypothetical model, not evident—in a manner similar to the patterns of behaviour found in biology—and says that they are “essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear” (CW 9/1 § 6). Thus, the concept of archetype is an indispensable correlate to the idea of the collective unconscious, and indicates that there exist determined forms present in the psyche always and in all places. Jung expresses this very clearly in *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*:

“My thesis, then, is as follows: In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.” (CW 9/1 § 90)

“There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the form of images filled with content, but at first only as forms without content, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action. When a situation occurs which corresponds to a given archetype, that archetype becomes activated and a compulsiveness appears, which, like an instinctual drive, gains its way against all reason and will, or else produces a conflict of pathological dimensions, that is to say, a neurosis.” (CW 9/1 § 99)

Archetypes are vigorous images that, with their emotional and impulsive strength, protect the unsettling life in the depths of the psyche. This allows the figures of the collective unconscious to be expressed as protective images, loaded with or devoid of meaning, but always loaded with emotion and linked to those typical life situations.

With this notion, Jung wants to come closer to an understanding of the emotional that transcends the personal. However

further on the archetypalists considered the psyche to have an archetypal base that is at once collective and individual, and that the archetypes must be seen from a more biological, and also more cultural, way. For López-Pedraza, one of the founders of this school of thought, the psyche learns from the archetypes, as biological constants of our nature that educate it through the image. In the classic text *Hermes y sus hijos* (2003: 8), he proposes to the reader his personal view on the term:

“ (...) Western culture is archetypal from its Greek roots – Homer and Hesiod— and the use of the term archetype, in psychology and psychotherapy, answers to the attempt to use the legacy of these two poets.”

Archetypes contain as a possibility the more civilized and the more archaic aspects of life, a part which organizes and supports the psyche next to another dark or destructive part with which it is harder to cope. The archetype of the Great Mother, for example, brings us closer to the more primitive and dangerous aspects of maternal femininity, to its unconscious devouring aspect, but also contains a possibility of Demeter, who could be one of the forms of the Great Mother, settled in the most civilized world of agriculture and the polis. The dark or primitive part of the archetype is that which drags the individual to the regression mentioned in the epigraph to this work, but acceptance, as in the myth of Eleusis, of the separation from her daughter Persephone, implies differentiation and individuation.

I

We reflected on these analogies and conceptions –the psyche

as a house with different levels that represent different times coexisting and the notions of complexes, complexities, collective unconscious and archetypes— parting from the following diagram of the psyche by Jolande Jacobi (1976: 68), which López brought in one of our first meetings. In it we can see the different layers of contents of the unconscious which form the integral structure of the psychic system of the individual, almost as geological layers.

### **Jacobi's scheme of the psyche**

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A: individuals

B: families

C: clans

D: nations

E: large human groups (European males, for example)

F: primate ancestors

G: animal ancestors in general

H: central fire

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Our intention was to come closer to each situation, each story, on the vertical plane, focused on individuality, and progressively differentiate their unconscious complexities in the different data that was presented to us. Thus we saw that in some cases, what made individual response difficult were familial complexities; in others, geographical, ethnic or even racial, and, in many, all of these aspects came up at once.

To stay on the collective level would have led us to fall into what Jung qualifies as a feeling of universal validity, which naturally comes from the general character that the collective psyche has, leaving aside the particular, the individual essence of each

subject and the dynamic proper of its collective unconscious, expressed in what we try to see as images. Our intention is not to refer to universal essences or to move in the terrain of determinisms, like one who speaks of ‘Venezuelans’ without distinctions, or return to the subject of cultural identity. Instead, we wanted to stray away from the “boring problem of identity” that María Fernanda Palacios refers to. When speaking broadly of ‘Venezuelans’, as sociology might do, we would presuppose the same psyche in an entire collective, thoughtlessly bypassing the individual differences within a human group.

The discussion then, following the Jacobi diagram that López-Pedraza provided as an image, is preferably focused starting from the individual as a unit of analysis, distinguishing between its self and its psychobiology as that which belongs to it and which allows it to connect and live the psychic as something distinct, for within it lies the possibility to differentiate itself from that which comes from the collective unconscious.

The stories I have selected for this exposition represented for us disturbing images over which we returned once and again, trying to encourage reflection as we see ourselves in them, which is perhaps the hardest part, and we are not even sure it happened.

I understand that a thesis with general validity cannot be drawn from a series of stories, and this has not been my intent. I believe these describe realities that will be recognized as recurrent in Venezuela –and, at times, in Latin America— and I only want to present them in order to see the unconscious aspects that they represent, and the way in which this unawareness affects

our collective and individual lives. I also do not pretend to be controversial, but rather give at least an orderly look into a dense and confusing psychological reality, which gets blurred when we try to reduce it and which escapes our understanding in many aspects.



## The Stories

### Familial complexities

#### *The Great Mother that devours all*

I begin with a story that comes from a study on eating habits among families in sectors of Petare in the city of Caracas, conducted in 2004, as part of a project of nutritional education for young mothers. We discussed it in the first meetings and we returned to it recurrently.

Carmen is a sixteen-year-old girl who becomes pregnant by a thug in her barrio, according to the promoters of the project. Her mother opens up room for her to build a home within her same house. A rooftop patio and a half wall were built to make room for the new family, and the daughter moves into this space, fitted with a bed and a TV for the couple, while the baby's cot is placed in Carmen's mother's bedroom – that is to say, in his grandmother's bedroom. She takes on the role of nurturer, while her daughter, malnourished and depleted of energy, spends most of the day in bed with her partner. The girl barely breast-feeds the child to appease his anxiety and pacify him, because she has never had enough milk to feed him. Her life passes on this minimal existential level. The mother/grandmother, on the other hand, takes on a providing role and receives this name ('Mum') from the new child for the rest of her life.

In our fieldwork, we saw this situation to be recurrent in the barrios of many cities: the grandmother looks after her daughters' children, and even her granddaughters' children, and the children keep calling her 'Mum', one generation after the next. It also happens that, in many cases, the original mother challenges the motherly role with the daughter or daughter-in-law, and ends up turning the grandchildren into new children, as if for the mother, life had no other meaning. Yet the situation is frequent in all social strata, and not only in large cities, but also in smaller cities, away from rural villages. The mother and/or grandmother attract and make room for children, recreating her family group, which focuses always on her.

The second story is that of a family in a middle class area (the Baruta parish, in Caracas), originating from the East of the country, and which we came to know through the promotion of a financial education programme –“Bankomunales”— in popular areas. The Salazars migrated from Carúpano to the capital at the beginning of the 1970s. The children completed university courses, while the mother, with the help of the maternal grandmother, worked as a caretaker and looked after children and grandchildren. A family photo shows the descendants surrounding this great mother –Mrs Salazar—, standing in the centre. In front of the picture, she tells us how proud she is of the fact that all of her male children have given her several grandchildren, from different mothers, and how very responsible they are towards them by supporting them financially. Yet the main thing for her is that, although her children have women outside the house, it is always “Mum's house” –they stay with her.

Mrs Salazar's comment speaks to us of a large family that has been through a social mobility process impulse by the mother and the grandmother, with an absentee father, which is quite frequent in our society. However in this family, parental structure is recreated indefinitely around the mother, and the children do not constitute their own family or differentiated homes, but rather return to the maternal nucleus.

The complexities of generations of families superposed around the maternal centrality of these two stories is manifest even in the curious fashion in which houses are built or located within a geographical space: in the slums, in middle or upper class neighbourhoods, or in rural houses, the architecture appears to describe a psychic structure that focuses on the mother. This can be seen most dramatically in the barrios in Caracas: there the houses pile on to accommodate new homes, where usually all the children are brought up together, regardless of their consanguinity, as in the case of Carmen's family. In middle class neighbourhoods, the pattern is manifest in another way, with annexes that become extensions of houses; and in upper class areas, one can even find a whole block fenced in, where all the new families centre around a large central house. These examples show the same logic of extending the feminine origin.

The internal correlate of the situation, which the psychotherapists who participated in the meetings accounted for, is expressed as an unconscious identification with the mother, where there is no differentiation or development of individual consciousness. Thus the separation of child from mother is almost impossible, and paralysis and regression overcome. As a counterpart, we have the absence of the fatherly figure in terms of a masculine

image, which only transforms and develops in the individual in the face of a father who sets limits and hierarchically organizes family life. The inner image of symbolic patricide –amidst great tensions— psychically responds to this.

A short film by Venezuelan Lorenzo Vigas Castes, *Los Elefantes Nunca Olvidan* (2004), which we saw in the meetings, generated an insight on the psychic paralysis that afflicts us as a collective and which would seem to be an unconscious familial complexity related to the impossibility of killing the father. The argument is simple: Pedro is a man who says he has an “elephant’s” memory, and yet he does not recognize his children in the adolescents that travel with him on a truck to the supermarket. During the trip, he talks and cracks jokes with them, even trying to seduce his own daughter, without realizing that these children that he once mistreated and abandoned are preparing their revenge. Yet at the end, the boy, who had been given a gun by the sister, is unable to kill him. Despite the wound, the son gives no answer to the challenge. This short film, with its little dialogue, reproduces a situation that any Latin American recognizes, showing us with incredible simplicity the complexity that underlies in the collective unconscious through the inability to respond to the wound.

Thus we see that the forms of such a basic archetype like that of family takes on varied and anachronistic expressions in our collective, which coexist many times without there being any awareness of them. According to the Jungian perspective, complexes come from man’s history –his own personal history and the history of all the humanity—, and family occupies the first space where they are structured, where reside as well the

central complexities in the images of what is maternal and what is paternal. Yet again, seen from sociology, it resides at the basis of society: family is the central nucleus around which society is organized.

In our case, this absentee father or this excessively present mother configures a psychic distortion that concerns individually many subjects and is expressed in different ways. It would seem that, in the individuals that make up our families, the archetypes of the mother and the father sometimes do not contain or have a very weak constitution, and others have an exaggerated weight on the psyche. They are figures that appear with such confusion that it is difficult to distinguish them, and the effort ends up suffocating the daily life in which the individuality of the psyches of those half-made children is not expressed. Normally, the problematic is not translated into an interior image capable of mobilizing subjects, and is expressed as a complex, persistent even in psychotherapy.

It is very common for the myths of creation to present the emergence of the universe as the result of different unions, where the encounter between “an original masculine current associated to a feminine strength or goddess suitable for reproduction” (Kerenyi 1999) happens. The western family, for example, is partly characterized by the Greek model where the father, represented by the god Zeus, gives shape, contains, provides and transforms, whereas the mother, goddess Hera, provides the unknown and the unconscious. Both figures as interior images, father and mother, suppose strong psychic figures, and psychology has dedicated extensive studies to both. Most approaches acknowledge, in one way or another, that the

complexity of the maternal is ruled by the unconscious, the instinctive, the emotional, while the complexity of the paternal implies the predominance of reason, order, rules, limits, differentiation.

It is also significant that in the Greek myths, sources of a rich psychic imagery, the successive generations that originate the Olympian Gods emerge after the father of the previous generation is sent to the underworld by whom will now bear the role of the father, ever more civilized, humanized and tolerant. This gives rise to a pantheon that backs up the life of the polis, and shows a relationship between Olympians, family order and city order.

Another substantial contribution to familial complexities in the West comes from the Christian ideal of the family being formed for father, mother and child, like the Holy Family, which confers the mother (the Virgin Mary) with the role of “lovingly care for the Incarnate Word”, Jesus, and to Joseph the role of protector and guide to the family, creating “an authentic, stable union of free love, fidelity, reciprocal dedication and respect to a life consecrated in the family which ensures the children shall have a healthy maturity”, as Pope John Paul II points out in his *Familiaris Consortio* of Pope John Paul II to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to the Faithful of the whole Catholic Church on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (November 22nd 1981). This idealized family adds tremendous additional expectations to the reality of the modern family, which in many cases does not agree with it.

In both cases, the pagan and the Christian, family is a nucleus formed by father, mother and children, where the maternal and

the paternal constitute the foundation and origin of this primary form of life, in well differentiated areas through polarities that give children a necessary contention to assimilate both images represented in the parents. Yet between us, these representations that arise from the western tradition acquire more tension under the light of the culture and the homegrown myths. In one of them, for example, the myth of María Lionza, the predominant element is that of “mother nature”, in an abundance associated to its femininity (DHV: 196-199). The permanent reference to nature associated to maternal femininity shows the image of a prodigious mother that contains all, cradles all, gives all and of whom all is expected. It is always exuberant and giving, as it occurs in the Garden of Eden in Christian mythology.

It is impossible not to relate this representation with the archetype of the Great Mother Goddess. She is the mother that dominates all and gives all, and therefore, when a constellation of this archetype is present, a state of unconsciousness in the maternal prevails, and, in many cases, also prevails a paralysis that is transmitted across generations and in which the initiations in different stages in life are not stimulated.

In the mythologies of some Venezuelan ethnic groups, we found as well that the family is centred on the mother as provider of culture and origin of everything, that is assimilated to the earth and that shows a maternal internal image linked to the depths of nature in its most unconscious state. It is the case of the Wayuu group, for example, where the origin of the world is represented by the impregnation of the goddess Mmá, the earth, by Juyá, the god of rain, and from this union are born Wenu’u, the plant and the woman. The Wayuu are a matrilineal society organized

in clans (eiruku). In the extensive matrilineal family “by blood” (apüshi), the eldest maternal uncle (alaula) exerts authority, and the mother runs the family. Paternal relatives “by blood” are acknowledged as allies, from whom solidarity (oupayu) or joint work (yana’ma’) is expected. In this description of the Wayuu, who have been widely studied, there is a familial structure that is similar to that found in most ethnic groups living within the national territory at the time of the European colonization. Again the woman, or the maternal element, centre basic aspects of family, and around her the variations of family life are weaved, even in our days.

Thus, the family stories presented at the beginning of this chapter, under the light of western and autochthonous traditions and mythologies, show a very particular mixed composite that has led us to speak of an in between in familial complexities. It appears that in some families (perhaps those with different origins from our ethnic groups, from African or European migrations during the conquest and the colony, or present day selective migrations), the masculine/paternal element predominates and orientates the psychic transformations typical of to the development of personality. However, in many others, the feminine/maternal element rules the interior images of the archetype of the family in the psyche, and this image appears characterized by abundance, and showed as something that is available to provide without a challenge.

Drawing on studies of anthropology and sociology on families in low-income sectors in 20th century Venezuela, we found that they recognize a familial structure centred on the mother, or ‘matricentric’, regarding blood relationships, kinship and



the affective legacy of the family group. The subject has caused an important debate, and some sociological approximations have valued the restraint that the mother gives to low-income families. However, our intention is to approach the issue from the point of view of individual psychology. From this perspective, the impossibility of breaking out of the maternal area supposes an unconsciousness that can lead to regressions or paralysis.

In previous stories, we saw the maternal image distorted by the role of interior image played by the absentee father, while the mother shows little capacity to set individual transformation challenges for the children beyond mere survival, all the while trying to keep them to herself. Thus, in daily life, family links are transformed into relationships that are difficult to understand and lack differentiation and individual limits.

The complex situation they show, which cannot be explained simply, generates a strong friction because of the way in which various familial structures coexisting in between cause distorted or strange ways of life.

### *The lack of differentiation of the clan*

Another form in which this so-called in between in our unconscious complexities is manifested is in that familial organization where the structure and demands resemble a clan.

Here I do not bring the concept of clan in a specialized manner, as it is used in anthropology, but rather as an image to show an analogy from psychology. According to the classical

definition, a clan is a collection of lineages among whom intense kinship is presumed, since it relies on a common founder, oftentimes imaginary or mythological, which may or may not be demonstrated. Central to this notion, and for what we set out to prove, is that the clan expresses the need of a person to feel themselves as member of a group that lives through them, and for which they live. This group is inseparable from its mythical ancestors and the sacred sites that mark its origins. In other words, within the clan, the individual cannot differentiate to truly become itself (Levy-Bruhl 1939).

From this psychic confusion, in which it is difficult to differentiate the individual and even each family, comes the story of the Pérez-Vivars, which was presented by one of the psychotherapists who attended the meetings. It is a middle class family which lives in Caracas, and which, 30 years prior, acquired an entire city block where houses were built for grown children, who moved into them with their partners and children after marrying. The block was closed at the entrance and the exit, and it shows homes of identical architecture around a common yard which encourages several shared activities, which are repeated in a programme every weekend. The daily schedule is also filled with common activities for all the families. The mother/grandmother still takes on the role of minding the children to a great degree, and daughters and sons-in-law are subjected to the familial collective.

Under these living conditions, beyond what is related to the aforementioned maternal complex, the possibilities of intimacy for each family are reduced to a minimum. As the psychotherapist who brought forth the case expressed, they

see themselves as a 'big family', which implies always being together. However, as a product of this excessive closeness, suddenly a scandal broke this supposed peace and the unity of the familial clan: a pair of in-laws has taken literally this 'promiscuous' lifestyle, and a Pérez-Vivar child of undetermined paternity is on the way.

The confused relationships manifest in this story appear exceptionally depicted in two films by the great Argentinian filmmaker Lucrecia Martel, which present the daily life of Argentinian middle class. This makes one think that the story of the Pérez-Vivars reflects a situation that is frequent in the continent and that does not only affect the most economically deprived social classes. In *La Ciénaga* (2001), we see the dynamic of two families that spend a few days on holiday at their summerhouses in Salta. One of the protagonists appears obsessive from the beginning, insisting that she wants to purchase the children's school materials in Bolivia, when they are cheaper and nicer, her paranoia looming like a foolish blindness over the nearby tragedy that is felt in the air. Apathy and anarchy are evidenced in the movement within the houses, and together with a reigning lethargy, create an atmosphere of suspense, almost terror. Family members and the servants come and go from their own rooms and those of others, even the bathroom, with no protocols or shame. At times they get dressed or undressed in front of one another, or they check drawers or belongings that are not theirs, they gather on the bed of an alcoholic mother and mix in a way that one perceives as dangerous, although apparently nothing happens. In one scene, a teenage boy goes into the bathroom

as his sister showers to wash off the mud from a swamp where all the children have been playing. Without asking for permission, he takes off his trousers and sticks his muddy feet under the same shower, simply holding the curtain drawn so as not to see each other, although their bodies almost touch through the plastic. The story ends with a disgraceful moment where the prevailing laziness seems to set: the youngest of the children climbs to the top of a high ladder that the mother, the one with who wanted to go to Bolivia, has left forgotten against a wall in the yard, and he falls backwards.

In a later film, *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* (2008), the protagonist hits a boy that is crossing the motorway on a bicycle. The accident is denied as a reality by a large and confusing family, where two married cousins meet in a hotel room for an affair that has absolutely no importance, and a niece demands affection from her aunt, who simply pulls apart from her embraces with some annoyance. What could be secret and forbidden passions, even mobilizing ones, become ‘familial’ relationships of no importance, which happen out of laziness and lack of structure, together with a disarray and numbness that gravitate as an environment. The film ends with a great familiar party, where everyone gathers to celebrate as if nothing ever happened, or as if it had no importance.

Both films, like the legacy of the Pérez-Vivars, remind me of the term “cheverismo”, which López-Pedraza used to refer to what he described as our “piñata and snack psychology”, without the capacity to withstand severity, to recognize and assimilate the tragedy of the own reality or that of the surrounding environment, and which does not become aware from this reality.

## *The foreign ancestor*

Another manifestation of the clan-type structures, psychologically speaking, can be seen in many families of European origins, established in the country for several generations, in which the surname—expressed as collective unconscious—refers to the “clans” to which unknown lineages are usually attributed, always above the “creole” origin only for being foreign.

Further on, when I refer to geographical complexities, I will present stories that showcase a different perspective for this reality. Here, I would like to comment this particular aspect that is related to having a “foreign” surname. The members of such “clans”, whose links with their country of origin has been broken for several generations, suddenly try to show their European origins (generally Spanish, Italian or Portuguese), and sometimes even attempt to find family crests, and, more recently, passports that give them an escape from our complex national reality by preparing a so-called “plan B”.

In most cases, these people have lost almost all contact with their place of origin, and the search for ancestors appears as a sudden need in the context of an economic and social crisis that has lasted several years. It also lacks the religious and mythical context that is transmitted through generations, which grounded the clan in ancient times and gave the psyche of their members a representation in the world.

In these cases the connection with the ancestors of these clan-families—psychologically speaking—is limited to the long lines outside of an embassy to obtain a European passport that

does not necessarily link to Europe. The link that unites the members of the clan has lost all archetypal value, which only gives the opportunity to live in a geographical space that has taken root in human psychobiology, as is the case with ancient clans. Here these ancestors are only a pretext to break the bond to the crisis in the country and an opportunity to escape the suffering that could bring about movements. Thus in most cases it submerges people deep in unconsciousness, manifesting this impulse to run and a loss of self-awareness in their current situation. Put simply, these families which behave as clans appear to respond to regressive forces that reject a particular history and circumstances. However, this attitude also leads to a lack of differentiation, so that the whole familial complex becomes unconscious and even paralyzing.

## **Tribal complexities**

### *Mystery Island*

The following story, with which I will try to explain the tribal complexity of our psyche, originates in an experience we had in the Orinoco Delta, regarding social investments of different companies in development projects for indigenous communities.

Reflecting on this led us to wonder, on one hand, what Jung names “primitive psychology”, and on the other, certain aspects of history and the evolution of humankind that are relevant for the progress of consciousness and the widening of the psyche. I believe that the in between condition which I try to illustrate is generated in the psychic area, due in great measure to a tension between a very unconscious tribal life and what history and culture as civilized aspects of existence demand.

Orinoco means “land of water”, and thus the name of the place gives rise to some reflections. For Jung, water is the most common symbol for the unconscious (OC 9/1, § 40), but also, psychologically speaking, it indicates that the spirit has become unconscious, that it has become collective. It is precisely in this “land of water” that the Warao people live, specializing in navigating through canals and streams, that the experience that we here call Mystery Island, a completely fictitious name. Immersed in this world we identified many complexities present in ourselves, and we were surprised to see how they were constellated as well in our groups or our country, even in the places most distant from that geographical space.

Mystery Island is, like many places in the Delta, an indigenous settlement located in Tucupita, the capital of Delta Amacuro state. It is a kind of large *janoco* –a hut—, not built out of wood and palm but rather cement and iron beams, where an indeterminate number of families in constant migration cohabit.

My first impression when we visited it was of a great disorder, chaos; a confused mass of people. Tenths of indigenous people of different ages were lying in *chinchorros* or walking among them, women cooking on lit stoves next to one another, satellite antennas and several television sets playing films in English or soap operas. On many places had been erected syncretic altars of sorts, covering the beams; on others there were clothes hanging to dry, hung cooking pots, piled wood. Everywhere there wandered stray dogs, sick and famished, and there were fish scattered around waiting to be cooked. The stench was unbearable, as was the noise produced by this crowd chattering wildly, all at once, shouting or arguing in front of us.

I had a difficult time placing them. They appeared to be in between the indigenous and the “creole” elements without being either. They navigated with surprising dexterity in their small curiaras (an indigenous boat) through the streams. They hunted, fished and gathered not only food, but, especially, help from the government or the oil companies. However, most surprising was their repetitive jargon on their human rights as indigenous peoples, their memorized lines on empowerment, participation, sustainability – all trotted out almost like lyrics learned to negotiate.

Their spokesmen also had very significant names: Rambo, Rafael Caldera, Rocky, Carlos Andrés Pérez, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Carrasquel. More than representing a differentiated authority within the tribe, like a chieftain or a priest, these figures gave the impression of a voice emerged from the collective. They threw themselves at us hunting for help, but they were not like ancient hunters of prehistoric times, who, guided by their instincts and taken by fear and anxiety, tried to survive facing the powerful forces of a hostile nature. No, some of these men instead appeared stripped of instincts, of the fundamental energy that a psyche requires to survive. They were something akin to what we have seen time and time again in fieldwork across the country: in urban and rural communities, across all social classes, on different levels of instruction and professional development. For that reason, I felt that what I had before me was not an ethnic group, but rather the extreme image of the tribal complexities of our psyche.

Seeing them was seeing that inner Mystery Island that subsumes us into a lack of differentiation, that homogenizes all, not only



opinions and ways of behaving but psychic contents that will never be developed by a conscience, which makes a more individual experience impossible.

In the meetings with this community, emotions would jostle with no channel or containment. This attitude was markedly different from the one we observed in other neighbouring communities within the same delta, where the chieftain or the wasiratu (the priest) is still a differentiating figure of the tribal dynamics, full of symbolic content and mystic participation with the sacred and nature. Reflecting on this contrast we could perfectly apply what Jung explains (OC 9/1, § 47) about the primitive conscience and the unconscious:

“His consciousness is still uncertain, wobbling on its feet. It is still childish, having just emerged from the primal waters. A wave of the unconscious may easily roll over it, and then he forgets who he was and does things that are strange to him. Hence primitives are afraid of uncontrolled emotions, because consciousness breaks down under them and gives way to possession. All man’s strivings have therefore been directed towards the consolidation of consciousness.”

Mystery Island was a vivid sample of a wobbling conscience swept by the collective unconscious. It showed us in an exaggerated way how the tribal complexities of our psyche—in the national psyche—hinder the conscience and the individual life, and also favour the appearance of the shadow. The lack of differentiation we had before us was presenting a kind of topography of our unconscious: our in between that lives as if in a tribe, in the land of the collective.

The repetitive jargon, the names of the leaders and even the attitudes that the inhabitants of Mystery Island showed towards us gave us the possibility to take notice of another tribal aspect constellated by the in between of our psyche. Wherever the unconscious is presented to the psyche as something literal, all of its projections about the unknown, the strange, the foreign or the opposite are actualized. The tribal constellates what C. G. Jung termed “the shadow”, what we deny about ourselves and see in others, and thus stimulates our unconscious to relocate to specific, exterior objects onto which it projects the defect, evil, disturbance, or even the polar opposite: the advantages, the positive, the ideal.

To illustrate this aspect of the tribe we comment on several images from indigenous groups native to Venezuela that gave rise to analogies which evidenced elements of the shadow. Yet one in particular stood out to us for the clarity with which it displayed projection.

The Wayuu call all other nearby indigenous groups (Motilones or Yucpas) kusina, and those who are neither Wayuu nor indigenous alijuna. Translating this term is difficult, as it can mean ‘foreign’, or ‘foreigner’, or ‘possible enemy’, and, by extension, it can designate anything considered unknown or potential danger. The kusina and the alijuna are located outside of the limits of the clan and for this they cause distrust. They can become social and psychic realities, and even become true “ghosts”. The “ghosts” must observe a pre-established behaviour, and if they do not, they cause very basic emotions associated with revenge in this ethnic group. This distrust toward foreigners reappears in other Venezuelan groups, such as the Piaroas or the Guahibos.

Approaching the tribal images, as a psychic complexity was a resource we used in our coaching meetings to discuss what is a very common happening in daily life across the country: the way in which we perceive what is beyond the frontier of our conscience. Seeing the shadow from the tribe can appear limited or subjective, but it has the advantage of bringing us closer in a simple way to its presence within ourselves, something that is usually rather difficult to detect.

For example, the concept of the *alijuna* or the *kusina* allows us to capture the analogous mechanism that takes place when we project elsewhere in the national collective what is censorable, unpleasant, what we would like to pretend is not part of us, our psychopathic inferiorities (unacceptable impulses, desires and embarrassing actions, distorted and twisted expressions). This could happen on the political, social and even ethnic or racial planes, when we call others: “chavista”, “escualido”, “imperialist”, “bourgeois”, “lumpen proletariat”, and other similar terms. In these denominations held as insults there seems to act a projection of the shadow in between cultural conflicts not incorporated into the dynamic of the psyche.

Such an unconscious side to our life is difficult to admit, and it contradicts everything we would like to see and that we would like others to see in us. Our autonomy and even our individuality see themselves challenged by this shadow, and they make us feel their closeness like a threat, just as we could see the neighbouring tribe. Analogously we also see that suffering when we find in, for example, the “streets of Caracas”, disturbing unconscious forces, come from the shadow, which show what we are from our inferiorities and take all of our energy to agitate the darkness within all.

Jung teaches us that we all have a shadow that is only reduced inasmuch as it has been incorporated into the conscious life, because when we are conscious of inferiority, at least we have the opportunity to work on it and integrate it. However if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it can never be incorporated, and it is no wonder that it reappears suddenly, literalizing itself in an oversight of consciousness. It would seem that in our case this shadow is presented projected massively over others, as a literal expression of an inner conflict of the soul: other tribes, Yankees, Spanish conquerors and Christopher Columbus, neighbouring countries, work colleagues that do not share the same ideology, peers and relatives, political groups, the media, the empire, paramilitaries, businessmen, DirecTV, presidents of neighbouring countries, extra-terrestrials or anything that does not belong to the own tribe. There is no tension of opposites, only polarization.

The shadow is after the collective paranoid states that overtake us, after the permanent suspiciousness and distrust literalized in the state of war, or the “Plan B” in Miami, Panama, Costa Rica or Spain, preferred paradises of Venezuelans. This the heavy quality of this dark side of our unconscious is exacerbated, so that it does not see the darkest parts of itself and injects into reality a kind of darkness and distorted perceptions. In many cases, it shows an individual capacity to deal with difficulties and the superficial life in a “Portable country”. To live the ordinariness of the beginning of the 21st century in Venezuela allows us to understand this unilateralism, and the very polarity of the psyche taken by the shadow and its complexities.

I believe that the destructive aspect of so much unconsciousness appears in recurrent expressions that we hear in our fieldwork, but also in ordinary life. Words like “I don’t care I don’t have anything, I only care about others not having anything..”, or “the good thing about the process [the Revolution] is that then nobody will have anything”, or “we might all be equal, but equally low”. These words by themselves speak of a complexity in which hateful feelings towards the fellow man are mixed, a man that is felt like a foreigner within the own community or the country.

It would seem that the tribal aspect of our psyche is not manifested as an inner conflict that might become conscious, and even that it would disappear from the current psychological inventory, only to reappear dressed as a hostile neighbour that provokes our anger on purpose and justifies our aggression. I believe that this conflict we dump to the exterior is the struggle with the neighbouring tribe within us, with what we ignore of ourselves that is dressed as an enemy so we do not have to fight the battle. The violence rates in Venezuela, the way in which we are killing ourselves, indicate the enormity of that shadow.

The tribal aspect of our psyche leaves us exhausted in between, without energy to respond. It actualizes when we wonder obsessively, like a collective cry, why we are not acting, why we are not outraged, why we are putting up with violations, damage and trampling. Then it is as if a part of our psyche, where tribal complexities prevail, are like that Indian on a chinchorro in Mystery Island, waiting for nature to provide or to receive outside help.

Perhaps, as Arnold Toynbee says (1998: 132), in our genesis we have not lived “the virtues of adversity”, the difficult conditions

that contribute to our realizations much more than the easy ones. That is how we end up without shadow, without the capacity to deal with drawbacks and problems, in a childish belief that we are a “rich country” venerated by all, and whose disgrace can only be explained by envy and evil from some guilty party that harms us. Then nothing blossoms or lasts in the easy life, without psychic challenges, and leaves us in between, between the tribal and the modern, forever searching for El Dorado or the Great oil-giving Mother, for example, or the “help” of the government expressed as a “Mission”.

Trapped in the middle of these complexities we become incapable, individually and collectively, of rising to the challenges of current circumstances, without assuming what we cannot accomplish as failures, struggling against a shadow that overwhelms us permanently. To sum it up with a statement from López-Pedraza (2007: 60) in an essay about asthma in Venezuela, the in between condition “even leads us to think about an unfathomable psychobiological fault that we can associate to geological faults. A geological specialist may be able to detect them to a certain degree, but this does not mean that their study will work to fix anything.”

Yet still the tribal, as an inner complexity of the psyche, is a constraint to jump the homogeneity barrier and realise that which makes us different within the “tribe”. The greater the unconsciousness, the lesser the individuality, and thus it is almost impossible to achieve one’s own thing authentically. As Jung has pointed out, an individual conscience is always wider and more differentiated, and more emancipated from collective regularity, and it has more free will.

In contrast I show the following quote from the French philosopher Alain Touraine, taken from an interview conducted by Judith Casals Cervos in 2006:

“What I am upholding is a totally inward look, of an individual that wants to define itself from the inside, without reference to anything external... defined by its singularity. It may be that this individual is left abandoned, ignored and dies like an animal. But it may also be that it takes awareness of the reality that surrounds it and decides to do something, decides to affirm and defend itself. Especially defend itself. The individual has the right to defend its existence, its dignity. In that case, there will be a redefinition of the goals, values and norms, starting from the individual alone, that has no other meaning but being an individual. As it encounters other individuals it will reinvent its morals, which will then transform into ethics in one way or another in concrete situations. Yet its only principle is defence, the affirmation of the right of the individual to be an individual.”<sup>3</sup>

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3 Translated from the original text in Spanish: “Lo que defendiendo es una visión totalmente hacia adentro, de un individuo que quiere definirse a sí mismo desde dentro, sin referencia a nada exterior... definido por su singularidad. Puede ser que este individuo se quede abandonado, ignorado, y que se muera como un animal. Pero también puede ser que tome conciencia de la realidad que lo rodea y se decida a hacer algo, se decida a afirmarse y a defenderse. Sobre todo a defenderse. El individuo tiene el derecho de defender su existencia, su dignidad. En ese caso, habrá una redefinición de las metas, de los valores y de las normas, a partir del individuo solo, que no tiene otra fuente de significado que ser un individuo. Y a medida que se encuentre con otros individuos reinventará una moral, que después se transformará en ética de una manera u otra en situaciones concretas. Pero su único principio es la defensa, la afirmación del derecho del individuo a ser individuo.”

## Geographical complexities

The next stories, followed by my comments, try to present the way in which the geographical complexities are manifested in the present-day Venezuelan individual as an unconscious attachment to the geography, hampering or hindering the assimilation of new realities. All four have their origin on contemporary events that have given rise to displacements within the country or migrations to other countries. The unconscious attachment to a country and a culture, generally underestimated, has manifested here as unexpected failures, psychosomatic illnesses and even some forms of madness, as these stories show, and which we discussed several times in our meetings because of the great impact they had on us.

*Here I will stay...*

During a project providing psychosocial support to those affected by the Vargas landslide tragedy in 1999 we met José, a tireless community activist born in Maiquetía (in Vargas state). We found him in January 2000, planting little flowers in front of an old, almost collapsed manor, trying to give shape to a space where everything was destruction: destroyed houses, the streets and the square covered in dry mud, the old boardwalk lost in the middle of a beach that stole several meters off the ocean. He had lived in this manor, which belonged to a rich family for which he worked as a caretaker, with his three children for a few years, and there he stayed despite the devastation that surrounded him. The living room of that house is where we met for the psychosocial support meetings for the inhabitants of the area.



José said that before the landslide he had been a keen enthusiast of El Ávila, and in order for the tourists to know it, he would organize hikes on the mountain and cycling trips throughout the coastline motorway at its foot. He had also worked at the port in La Guaira, always trying to stay near the ocean and the mountain. He told that from the large windows of the manor, always open and “kind of tucked in the street”, he would see the goings-on in the square, worked for the community and shared with his neighbours, “all the time.” According to José, “Macuto made you be outside, in contact with nature and the community, where we all lived together.” It seemed that outside of that community life and apart from that geography, there was no life for him.

Of the manor, all that was left was the living room, where José, his children and some family members and neighbours slept, cooked and lived. For a long time they were unable to remove the petrified mud that occupied the other two thirds of the house. That incongruous living room, contrasting with the large-scale destruction of its surroundings, was akin to topography of his own psyche. On one corner stood a nativity scene where Joseph, Mary and Baby Jesus were tucked into a hanging car from Macuto’s old cable car, decorated with blinking lights over a painted ocean full of fish and a boardwalk with dolls that represented people drinking beer and eating fried fish. It was surprising to see the details in the mountain, the dedication in the painted sea, the tiny figures created by his memory. That nativity was there for over a year, keeping an eternal Christmas in the manor where he continued to plant his little flowers, in the middle of the destruction.

What is remarkable is that José never managed to break his bond to that place or that house that was not his, in spite of the precarious living conditions that he had to face, since the reconstruction of the home was extremely slow and was never completed. The separations in the house were the remnants of a television elevator that separated the rooms, and there he lived amidst these imaginary rooms.

Years later, when the bridge that connected Caracas to Vargas collapsed and drivers were forced to drive through the old motorway to reach La Guaira, we found José on the road, dressed as a park ranger, alienated, guiding traffic. I had the feeling that he had been gobbled up by that landscape of which he could not let go, and he acted as if possessed by the overwhelming nature.

### *Soulless Land*

In a study about those displaced by the Vargas tragedy that was relocated to the plains, I met Marta, a woman from the coast with a peculiar walk that resembled the movement of the waves against the boardwalk in Macuto before the landslide. Her speech was musical, rushed, with cut-off words, always extroverted. Marta's closeness was suffocating, as were her immediate confidence, as is common with Guaireños.

She told me that before, she used to live in Carmen de Uria, an area near the coast that was completely wiped out. After the landslide, she was accommodated at a makeshift shelter in a warehouse in La Guaira, where she stayed until she moved definitively to the plains in 2002.

The first thing that surprised me was that Marta even missed the uncomfortable collective life of the warehouse. She would say that, with the other displaced people, she was at least still closed to everything she knew: the Vargas people and especially her ocean and her sea. The plains instead seemed to her to be a “soulless land”: “there are no mountains and no sea, the fish is from fresh water and it tastes like dirt, people live as if inwards, without sharing at the square and with the windows shut.” Her tight leggings, so common in the working-class areas of La Guaira, shocked the people and she could not get used to “that silence, that distrusting look, that weird music.” Marta did not like the plains people: “they wake up at dawn and go to bed early, they eat when the sun hits them right on the head and have dinner right when it goes down.” “They walk quietly, their steps are slow and silent, they hum songs and they repeat everything you say to them without taking sides, always distrusting.” “Their bodies are the colour of the earth... like clay, and their faces are round like a cat’s.” Sadness overwhelmed her.

Marta missed especially her dead mother, whom she had left in a cemetery that was washed away in the landslide. She spoke of her as if she were alive and she told that many times she would realize she was “feeling across her old –imaginary— dressing table”, looking for her mother’s picture. It was as if for her, the geographical space and her mother were the same thing.

In 2004, she gave up and returned to Catia La Mar, between Caracas and La Guaira. The last time I saw her, back in the coast, she told me: “I’d rather die in my land that far from it... here is where my soul is.” In her house, she covered the hole in her wall with cardboard. Underneath the house ran the stream.

## *Plan B*

One of the psychotherapists in the group brought forth the story of Andrés and Carmen, married professionals with two children, middle class, under 40 and the children of European migrants. Both worked at important international corporations that have today been expropriated by the government. Afterwards they were hired by prestigious national companies, in good positions and with possibilities for professional development. Yet in light of the anguish of the political situation and the frank decay of the political situation, they decided, like many, to develop a “Plan B”, as is the expression Venezuelans use as of late to discuss having a plan at hand to live and work outside the country.

The couple invested an enormous amount of energy on migration procedures and organizing the logistics of leaving the country. The initiative was hers, panicking about rumours about the government being able to remove their parental authority. Her husband was anxious about the possibility of having their properties expropriated. Overnight, and in order to leave with no strings attached, they sold off all their properties and belongings and lived for a while with Carmen’s parents before emigrating to the north of Spain, the land where her parents hail from and to which they never wish to return.

They left with a million dollars, the product of the sale of their assets, and a strong desire to start off fresh, but their first year proved extremely difficult. Carmen could not stand “not seeing El Ávila”—without the mountain she felt unprotected. She could not stand the cold or the humidity.

The second year was even worse, as their adaptation difficulties became even more evident to them. Carmen still could not comprehend the routines and ways of being of her neighbours, or Andrés those of his clients. It seemed to them that living outside of the tropics required adaptive physical conditions that they lacked. The differences in the light, the water, the soil and the air made every attempt to produce anything, even a plant, extremely challenging. The children showed less capacity than their classmates to withstand the contrasts in the weather. During that second year, “the weather” made Carmen ill, and she fell into a deep depression. One of the children failed the school year and Andrés’ business went bankrupt, so he ended up selling cold meats at a supermarket. Carmen left him and returned to the country.

During an interview with her psychotherapist upon her return, Carmen told that now she was broke, but happy. She can see El Ávila, she has the light she longed for, the breeze that is not freezing, the smells and tastes of her land. Now she bakes cakes and sells bottled water, and sometimes she works as a taxi driver. Yet it would seem her failure has eluded her completely, and she did not even notice – the geographical complexities devoured her without her reaching any awareness. She says: “something tied me to the land, to my Venezuelan soil. It was like an imposing energy, a calling from the soil itself.”

Carmen’s story is repeated in families throughout different social classes and diverse geographical origins, from urban or semi-urban settings, and even in the most unprivileged classes as they try to leave the country. It would seem that some have the ability to live their geographical complexities in a more

conscious and integrated way, but for some, the complexity sweeps it all away.

### *Transplanted land*

María Gabriela's story, also brought forth by a psychotherapist from the group, brings us to Miami, Florida, the land of nostalgia for the "Saudi Venezuela" of the 1980s, for which cheap purchases and Disneyland represented the ideal of perfect happiness and the North, the land where everything is possible.

María Gabriela is a young woman of humble origins, married and with two daughters, who thanks to the process of social mobility in Venezuela, to her studies and her working capacity, managed to move to a middle class neighbourhood in eastern Caracas. But overnight she won a green card lottery, so she sold off everything in order to, as she said, "not have to put up with Chávez anymore", and she left for Miami, keeping in touch with her work contracts in Venezuela from there.

With the idea of putting down roots she bought a house there, enrolled the children in school and acquired everything she needed to be comfortably settled, yet deep down she could not manage to let go of the Venezuelan land. Thus she strived to reproduce the country there, and she got lost in a longing for a topography, a gastronomy and a climate that were nothing like her dreamed Miami.

The most surprising thing was that María Gabriela would catch any Venezuelan acquaintance on her Facebook that was travelling to Miami, and she would place orders with them: a

tin of Toddy powdered drinking chocolate, Toronto or Savoy chocolates, dried sweet chilli, devilled ham. During Christmas she would ask them to bring her ingredients for hallacas, bollitos, Mexican coriander or any other herb that was difficult to find. She spent enormous amounts of energy hunting down these opportunities to bring Venezuela into her home, especially the flavours and smells that reminded her.

In the end she had to return: she fell ill with breast cancer, perhaps boosted by such an unattached and demanding lifestyle, and she is trying to start a new company. Her daughters are not with her anymore: they asked to live with their grandparents, and María Gabriela acknowledges that she could not overcome her almost atavistic attachment to the country, nor did she manage to adapt herself to live in a geography and ways that she always felt strange.

### *Soul and land*

In order to discuss these stories more, we reread an essay by Jung that allowed us to understand the pre-eminence of geography within our collective and our standing in between the assimilation of the land and its forms to our psychobiology.

In “Mind and Earth”, he points out that the mystery of earth “is no joke and no paradox”, because it configures the soul as an adaptive system borne of the conditions of the earth. Later on he says (OC 10, § 19):

The soil of every country holds some such mystery. We have an unconscious reflection of this in the psyche: just as there is a

relationship of mind to body, so there is a relationship of body to earth.

The stories I presented, so common in Venezuela today, show us the way in which geographical complexities are expressed without individual differentiation, and they foreshadow the way in which each individual psychologically lives their bond with a landscape and a set of traditions. It would seem that they show geography taking us in a very unconscious way, as if there were an analogy between mother earth and the maternal complex, and we ended up lost in an atavism that acts in within us in an autonomous way. Sometimes this seems to be because it makes us lose all connection to progress beyond geographical conditioning, and others because it submerges us in a distancing from our earth, in an uprooting that is also very unconscious.

During the meetings with López-Pedraza, we tried to distinguish psychologies linked to cultures where they emerge complexly related to a specific geography. Very broadly, in Venezuela we could discern the following:

The Andean – agrarian, patriarchal culture where the cold forces people to live indoors, encouraging introversion;

The Zulian – from hot lands reaching the 38°C and restless, extroverted characters, born traders, always at the border;

The Plains – the flatlands seem to give them a psychology, finding it difficult to see limits, and where the Great Mother rules in its most primitive form; hunters, fishers, herders, oftentimes nomads;



The Centre-West – with its curious richness that appears to be a product of the confluence and crossing of roads, entrepreneurial by nature, attached to family like clans;

The Coast – where maroons, escaped slaves from plantations that formed isolated communities, with a strong extroversion marked by their African ancestry;

The Guianese – throughout the south, the Amazonia, the unconscious rainforest with its disturbing riches, mining lifestyle and miners that dig but do not set roots or get rich;

And the Oriental – of the coast and the sea, extroverted, witty, with a chatter that is reminiscent of the splashing of the fishing that barely lets the inner world resonate.

The image of the soil we have in the soul, which Jung refers to in the quotation, is expressed in the psychobiology of each individual, encouraging ways of living and being and cultural resources for settling, adaptation and psychic life. When there is consciousness of this image, it may facilitate attachment, taking roots and having cultured links to where we live while, indirectly, it facilitates changes by showing the difficulties and limits that we face in them. Yet when it is as unconscious as in the stories we presented, or there would seem to be simply an original lack of attachment, the movements activate atavisms that hinder the adaptation to new situations or leave us in that in between, leading to failures like those narrated, living halfway between one place and the next, permanently longing, sick, without managing to assimilate the new reality or becoming aware of the way in which the old one ties us.

## *Specialists*

Yet the geographical complexity led us to a different subject that took several hours of discussion, and which we termed “specialization.” This was because adjusting to certain geographies or vital circumstances imply developing very precise types of knowledge and skills which, in extreme situations, demand all of a subject’s energy, and so there is nothing left to allow time for reflection, recreation and cultural creativity.

One privileged case is that of the super-specialization needed to survive in a Caracas barrio. Requirements include the ability to go up and down two or three hundred steps every day, riding on trucks up steep hills, establishing specific movement schedules in order to avoid local gangs, knowing when to duck or set up barricades to avoid dying in crossfire, waking up early to get the water that arrives only once a week, keeping children at only a few meters’ distance so as not to lose them, haul gas cylinders, water buckets or shopping bags up those hills, sending word to collect lunches prepared at the “feeding houses”<sup>4</sup> and divide each ration between two or more people, circumvent the difficulties of getting out in the middle of the night with a small child having a medical emergency without being shot... These life conditions demand all of our energy to stay focused, and thus there is no energy to develop the necessary skills to live under different conditions. The specialist, by definition, knows nothing else but their share of reality.

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4 “Casas de alimentación”, or “feeding houses”, are set up in family homes located in vulnerable communities or subject to extreme Poverty, where the owners voluntarily provide the physical space to cater to neighbours who cannot provide for themselves, such as families, the elderly or the homeless.

It is of note that this specialization is also necessary when the natural conditions are very particular, as is the case of the Warao who survive in the Mariusa baïne in the Orinoco delta, surrounded by an immensity of water inside a janoco. Their feet become prehensile to walk on wet logs, they drive their little canoes with surprising dexterity as they fish for morocoto, catfish and other species in the river, they know how to navigate the tides of the area, they distinguish between shades of green and blue which an unaccustomed eye cannot see, and it is surprising to see their ability to catch larger river species and speedily haul them into their canoes.

When survival is so demanding, the whole of psychic life specializes. There is no greater or more overwhelming complexity than that which is derived from this human and environmental conditioner which in some cases makes the necessary creativity to rise up to present challenges possible –and in others, impossible. Particularly demanding life conditions can give rise to creative exits or simply paralyze us, because we cannot achieve an adequate answer to a challenge that overcomes us. Toynbee (1998: 275) says that the decadence of a civilization comes from the decay of its creative capacity and the dominating super specialization, especially when the elite loses its capacity to create and drive upcoming challenges. Nevertheless, specialization has also served to advance civilizations, to give rise to more complex societies that require novel answers to demographic growth, geography and the pressures of consumption, bringing with it innovation, technology and industrial development.

What I mean by this is that it is not possible to arrive at a simple explanation; speaking about our geographical complexities

means recognizing that the way in which a psyche responds to the challenges of reality is never simple, and that within the collective unconscious we find other elements, like geography, history, religion, culture and even the spirit of a time, which occupy an important space in life and underlie that permanent need for actualization in our biology.

## **Ethnic complexities**

### *Buena Esperanza: the Hacienda and the Pardo in the Psyche*

The Acevedo family, of the Barlovento area, helped us to imagine what we term our ethnic complexities, and the role of the figure of the Pardo within them. We met them during a psychosocial support project for people affected by the 1999 landslides, in which we worked for two years. I believe their story illustrates the way in which old wounds prevail actively in our present lives, and become embodied within our psyche in the figure of the Pardo.

The Acevedos' house is a rural dwelling in an area we will call Buena Esperanza. We learned through them that the name comes from an old hacienda that existed in the area from the times of the colony until the beginning of the 20th century. It was a cocoa plantation that no longer exists, just as cocoa is no longer the main source of income of the inhabitants of that area because “the land is aged”, as they say. The Acevedos barely have some crops at the bottom of the house, and they only turn to it in emergencies. Their income comes mostly from the support they receive from central or regional government, and projects they put forward to gather funds. The main source of income for the area is, let us say, the “projects.”

The family understands itself as descended from African slaves, and while they tell us of their present difficulties, they narrate their story embedded in the history of the place, as they say their grandparents told them. In an imprecise but very excited way they describe what they had heard from their elders about daily life in the hacienda: their ancestors worked in the hacienda where the “big house” of the gran cacao<sup>5</sup>, where he lived with his wife and children (“a creole white man that ‘shacked up’ with black and mestiza women”). They describe it as a white house with thick adobe walls covered with lime and protected plots that separated it from the rest of the plantation. Beyond the house was the yard where the cocoa would be dried, the centre of the production dynamics, and it was also the barrier between the families in the big house from the world of the barracks. That was the place where the lives of the field workers unfolded. The life in the big house and the lives of the barracks were only connected by the foreman, a “pardo” (“not white creole, not black, not Indian”) and the women who worked in the kitchen and the house. Going by their stories, we imagine that the hamlet where the Acevedo home is located was once one of those barracks outside of the big house.

They also tell that the children would spend every day climbing up trees, scaring off birds, while the adults would work long and exhausting days in the plantation. That reminds them of

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5 “Gran Cacao”, meaning “great cocoa”, is a historical idiom in Venezuelan speak that developed from the times of the colony, when cocoa was an important source of income and riches in the country. Plantation owners were very rich and would eventually purchase noble ranks, and they were thus nicknamed “gran cacao”. It remains a popular term for a person with money and contacts.

the work songs the women sang during harvest or while doing chores, and they hum a few that sound like a moving lament. From here comes, in the most nostalgic way, the painful stories of the abuse that their grandparents endured, and especially, the memory of the most painful punishments: those inflicted by the pardos. They describe them as those people “half white and half black” with access to the big house, the kitchen, the traders and the barracks, where they would “do and undo their mothers and grandmothers”. They present them as an intermediary between both worlds, but who also makes them unwell.

This is a subject that stirs them in a particular way. They tell us that the pardos were responsible for handling trade and bringing working tools into the hacienda, so they ended up making good money. They mention then someone called “Andresote”, a pardo from neighbouring Río Chico, who owns the largest corner shop in the area, and who was most hated by everyone for his “contempt for whites and blacks”. We do not really know if they are talking about someone who used to live there before or if it is an ancestor to the current owner of the corner shop, but the “accusation” of getting rich falls square on the pardo.

In their sayings, the way they joke with each other, we notice certain racial prejudice, always very unconscious, and often even turned against themselves: “you had to be black...”, “bad (kinky) hair is always on the black or the pardo who comes knocking”, “a black who runs is a thief; a pardo who studies is a thief”. They tell that their grandmother preferred their granddaughters to marry whites “to better the race”, instead of marrying blacks or pardos from Barlovento.

Seeing how alive these colonial conflicts are in the 21st century, and in the inhabitants of an area only two hours from Caracas, made me remember the classical study of anthropologist Gilberto Freyre *Casa-grande & senzala*. Freyre says that all Brazilians have in their soul and body the shadow of the Indians or the blacks, and that in Brazil there is a figure similar to the pardo: the “preto”, who in his status in between whites and slaves was capable of cruelties similar to those described in many drums songs in Barlovento. Yet Freyre’s “preto” seems to be more of a conscious phenomenon which has achieved valuation and a clearer spot in the collective Brazilian psychology. Conversely, the tension that the fusion of ethnicities, religions and forms produced during the conquest and the colony in Venezuela, repressed or denied by the independence processes that Brazil never lived, may have originated an unconscious conflict in our collective psyche, precisely because it is assumed as non-existent and overcome.

In *Los Días de la Ira*, the great Venezuelan essayist Antonio Arráiz says that the civil wars that took place in Venezuela between 1830 and 1903 –the poorly named ‘revolutions’— had a different ingredient to other revolutions around the globe: “racial hatred”. For Arráiz, many revolts and uprisings in our history have that same component, and even the own abolition of slavery as a banner –declared or dormant— was meant to favour the individual uprisings of those who hoped to reach power by rekindling old resentments, especially those of pardos and blacks. As examples, he mentions characters like Cisneros, Chirinos, Infante, Castañeda, Escalona, Gavante, Faría, Farfán, the Monagas and even Páez, who were all considered pardos

during the times of the colony and the Independence process; and their mottos and struggles were real wars of resistance against these huge ethnic complexities, more destructive insofar as those wounds never integrated into the consciousness or found an interior answer.

According to the Dictionary of Venezuelan History (DHV) of Fundación Polar, the term “pardo” was used from the 18th century in Venezuela to refer specifically to the children of whites with African blacks or their descendants. Before, during the 17th century, it qualified people with darker skin, in between black and white. The term mulatto –a word that originally comes from the Arabic mullawad, which means mixed or of mixed ancestry— was also employed at the time to refer to pardos, but with a more derogatory connotation, since, as Juan de Solórzano explains, it indicated “..having quite an ugly and extraordinary mix, and giving to understand with that name that they are to be compared to the nature of mules...”.

Starting on the 18th century, due to the demographic growth of the slave population, there was an important demographic development among pardos and several notorious pardo groups emerged, especially in the Caracas province, and which worried the colonial authorities. In the 18th century, other groups that belonged to the “pardo guild” were the zambo (mix of Indian and black), the morisco (child of a Spaniard and a mulatta), and the coyote (mix of mestizo and Indian). Yet many members of the guild manifested their intention that the mix of mulatto and Indian or black should not be considered a legitimate pardo, since it would take them into a lower sphere. This entirely convoluted situation highlights the ethnic in between of those



who were no longer white, Indian or black. This gave rise to a psychic in between among those who, upon not being able to find fair location or belonging, accumulated resentment, hatred, envy and especially sadness; but also craftiness, creativity and cunning.

The social and political conflicts of the time added a large shadow to the ethnic complexity centred on the intermediate figure of the *pardo*. Indeed, some *pardos* were subject to slavery, but especially after 1700, most remained free, thanks to the dispositions that allowed freeing the slaves and the children fathered by white men. However, and despite being a dense social layer, *pardos* were always seen within the pernickety colonial society, regarding blood purity, as “a generation propagated not by the holy alliance of the Law, but by the clumsy unions frowned upon by religion...”.

Because of this, there were many prohibitions that kept them from participating in the social and political life, although their luck was not always the same, and especially in the 16th century they had some of the rights that Europeans enjoyed, such as being admitted to sacred orders and being able to marry whites. In 1621, they were forbidden from public offices; in 1643, from military service; in 1776; from marrying whites. They were also kept from upwards mobility through education, because their access to formal instruction was limited. They were ineligible for public offices and they were excluded from the army, especially higher ranks. Thus their only option was to do the jobs that the colonial society considered “low quality”. Among *pardos* were artisans, shopkeepers, muleteers and other simple jobs learned through practice. Thus they accumulated a great

resentment that was repressed, yet still large aspirations that, lived unilaterally, are very destructive.

The famous Royal Decree of “Gracias al Sacar” in 1795 stimulated their expectations of promotion and bettered their social condition in a sensible way, since it provided the opportunity to “become white” for a certain amount of reals of fleece. Still, the creole whites, always at odds with pardos, tried to reduce the effects of this concession of the crown without effectively managing to do so. In 1797 they were allowed into medical school and to work as doctors thanks to the lack of medical professionals – something which gave them better standing. Slowly yet surely, pardos started taking on the jobs that no whites wanted to do and working in several different positions that were indispensable for life in the city. In the 19th century they formed guilds and brotherhoods, and slowly they became a despised but needed element in society.

This benefits encouraged the possibilities for pardos, and on top of that, their numbers grew in such a way that it was impossible to establish strict differences between the different types of “people of colour”. What was certain is that at the same time the tensions between social and psychic opposites only grew: on one hand between whites and pardos, and on the other between pardos and mestizos, Indians and blacks. We must consider as well that creole whites had their own shadow with regard to European whites, which was so large that not only did they consider pardos and blacks as inferior people, but also white Europeans and from the Canary Islands. Influential creoles, for example, opposed the marriage of their women to white Spaniards, and thus endogamy was promoted

when selecting a partner, which ultimately hindered their demographic development. All of this would appear to show the development of an ethnic character that still lies underneath our collective unconscious.

I would like to remark here that the *pardo* remained as an in between in our psyche, as an image of the psychological conflict that unfolds submerged in the collective unconscious, and blossoms with quite an intense emotional tone, a product of that tension of the movement of history and the watertight and paralyzed compartments where we have left our racial prejudices. Our inability to name *pardos* in present day shows its imprecise, intermediate status, neither here nor there. It would seem that for historical reasons –and complexes—, the most remarkable aspects of the *pardo* are the negatives, the darkness, like the Acevedos do in their story. Within the figure is the in between of the impossible longing to come closer to the white man that is envied, but also shame for containing the black or Indian as an inferiority. The answer that historical heroes incarnate by *pardos* give to this conflict shows a deep psychic need that has no external solution –through heroic acts—, but rather in the inner world, by recognizing the complex and integrating it.

It would seem to me that in the stories and sayings of the Acevedos –but also in the common pejorative terms in Venezuela, which are centred on racial particularity— we can see that within our psyche still underlie ethnic conflicts that originated in the colony. The diversity of ethnicities, religion, economy, culture and social organization has produced in our case a cultural anxiety –as López-Pedraza calls it—that is not fully integrated into our consciousness. Throughout history abound examples

of the suffering caused by processes where diverse cultures are integrated, but in our case, what is particular is that the lack of consciousness of the conflict appears to have boosted it as much as its denial by the egalitarian, modernizing deeds.

Today, the Acevedos live in their hamlet of twenty homes and two hundred inhabitants, but with over 40 legally constituted civil societies, presided alternatively by ones or others, trying to “reap” government resources. They envy those from nearby towns San José de Río Chico and El Guapo, and they are dazzled when they are called to discuss with the municipality, as they make promises that will never be fulfilled. They remain, as they say that their grandmothers used to tell them, “waiting for somebody to come and bring something.”

Like they are, responding to the aftermath of a landslide in 1999 with old aches and longings, it would seem that our psyche has stayed in between, living in the present and in the colony. It has become an autonomous complex that makes us see the world in a distorted way, loaded with deep feelings of rancour and inferiority. Our psyche is still grieving imaginarily at the Buena Esperanza hacienda.

## Final thoughts

The notes I have developed so far are largely inconclusive, and I present them only as some intuitions about issues that are hard to pinpoint and are painful for consciousness, just as are the complexes in the psyche. However all the effort in reflecting on them, of getting an idea of the dynamic of the psyche present in those stories and their repercussions on me, has changed greatly the way in which I approximate my studies on the understanding of the human element and the efforts I do in my job to further progress.

Indeed, my current approach to undertake interventions and consulting to organisms and companies tries to consider especially the individual, the singular and concrete person that barely appears in current sociological, political or economic theory, in which people are usually reduced to an identity and a collective. I believe in many cooperation initiatives for development or social investment in specific populations, the individual –its needs, capacities and psychological dynamics— is considered even less, as is the subjective element on which I am trying to focus. This is in spite of the answers depending only on the individual.

I have learned during years of coaching with López-Pedraza that it is necessary to see human progress as something that goes beyond collectives and understand that changes are always

individual –one by one—, no matter the size of the society within they are inserted. These particular movements have repercussions on family dynamics, organizations, community and even society. In the end, that human being that is the subject of our efforts is many things at once, and, above all, a combination of complexities –usually unconscious—, and thus their progress (and not abstract ‘progress’) must respect its own forms and rhythms.

The many failures I experimented in the development projects I had to supervise or evaluate throughout my career confirm this learning: the deep changes occur always in the individual, in the material aspect but especially in the subjective aspect –meaning, that of the psyche. That individual change has repercussions on the other members of the community, expanding like the waves when a rock falls on the surface of the water.

Nevertheless, this approach supposes accepting that there will not always be good results or success in the traditional way expected by those who design projects or invest in human, social, sustainable or any other type of development. A project of planting maize with the Warao supposes acknowledging their psychology and valuing the fact that their needs are not developing sowing capacities, but rather sort out the daily intake of their group. Or else it involves considering, in the case of support for low income populations in urban environments, that they consider their lifestyle as optimal and they feel happy, even though their minimal conditions for survival are not covered. We must know that there are people that want to remain in the streets of their barrios despite the risk of ending up murdered, or microenterprises that do not want to

grow or reach balance points, because they are not interested in accumulating or being profitable, but on covering their day-to-day. All of these images that are incomprehensible from a rational perspective, and sometimes even impossible for some of us, embody very different cultural valuations and complexities. They are mysteries that force us to study and reflect until the psyche finds an image that helps to respond in our work and in daily life.

With great resistance, and seeing my own movement difficulties, I had to accept that there are also psychic complexities that are so deep that, as López-Pedraza says, are akin to an unfathomable “geological fall”. Sometimes these complexities do not move, they are petrified. It is a starting point in the psychotherapeutic approach which I had to accept in my work: in all people there are aspects of the psyche that do not move and have no possibility of moving, and others that do. Therapy must focus on the second and respect the first. And now I must add that any work in the human field should also focus on the complexities that have the possibility of moving, to see if, with some luck, reflection happens and new answers arise. This leads us to set the goals of human progress on a more human, realistic plain, to stop expecting changes to always be a direct consequence of what the policy designer wants, or the aid worker, or the entrepreneurial social investor. In other words, this approach leads us to get the social sciences out of the rigid relationship of cause and effect within a reductive, logic framework that leaves limp any discipline that does not consider the complexity of the human.

Seen in this way, human progress is not and cannot be an always upwards, cumulative line of achievements to rise to a

living standard or a standard of wellbeing, as the current notion of development pretends it to be. Progress is more the joint movement of individual, different people, who together comprise the life of a society with its possibilities and difficulties. And that movement implies many times a doing and an undoing: paralyses, regressions, oscillations. The potential of each psyche –a subjective and oftentimes irrational issue— must be considered when speaking of human development.

Trying to delve deeper into these aspects that are foreign to social sciences, the last meetings with López-Pedraza approached the subject of emotions in the collective. There is very little I can say about this, because there is much left to investigate, reflect and analyse in this sense. Yet still I believe it is undeniable that emotions are a fundamental part of this cartography that must be considered to study the human. Emotions, for example, such as shame and indignation that should appear in a society when the individual is violated –when the uniform, the undifferentiated is imposed—, and that because of this “geological fall”, we do not really feel as we should in order to face the tyranny of the collective.

This work is also a tribute to Rafael López-Pedraza, from whom I learned everything I am now sharing, and which contributed greatly to what I am today. Without a doubt, he was a great teacher in the study and comprehension of human nature through psychotherapy. Thanks to his limitless curiosity, he was able to approach our field with powerful intuitions, which gave rise to a full change in our way of posing the job of cooperating with individuals and communities. From each story he would lead us to an image of the psyche, which is fundamental



how suggestive and full of possibilities images are. With his knowledge of psychotherapy he led us to build a comprehensive approach to the infinite variety of the human being in social life and to build a bridge between psychology and sociology that consider the cultural complexities in the psyche.

Yet, above all, Rafael taught me that real progress supposes the differentiation of the individual within a cultured life (adapted to their environment through cultivation and the development of its psychobiological and cultural possibilities) that makes room for the creation of richness, not just material but also psychic. As I close with these lines it has been three months from his death, and I have again watched an interview we did with him in January 2010, where he explained the in between of the psyche. He explains there that the cultured life happens because culture is the substrate and the foundation of an individual psyche that allows it to respond to the challenges of its present history. Culture understood in this way is not a mere illustration or knowledge, but rather something that comes from far back and far below, and has transformed in ways that constrain, that shape our lives. He added that a cultured life comes from the capacity to distinguish emotions and give them the proper place to respond to tragedies always present in human existence; it is considering and appreciating the variety of the human and its possibilities to transform, move and settle in reality.



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