

"Communion and Liberation" Movement: Transnational Practices and Discourses

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Abstract This paper intends to describe how the general organization of the "Communion and Liberation" Movement is interpreted and operationalized locally in South America. Communion and Liberation is an international catholic movement headquartered in Italy, where it enjoys a standing social and political influence. Previous studies tend to characterize the movement in terms of its general institutional structure and philosophy, based mostly on official sources and public activity in the Italian context. However, there is little information about how the movement works at the basis level, and how it does so in contexts different from Italy. In fact, Communion and Liberation is a movement addressed to laypersons and conducted by them at the local level, hence it can be also understood as a network of contacts and bonds that creates forms of sociability and of experiencing faith that cross different national, regional and cultural borders. In this regard, this paper presents some findings about how Communion and Liberation is understood and put into practice in specific locations of South America. Data comes from an ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2012 with two different groups of Communion and Liberation. The first one took place within the university group of a city located in the central region of Argentina and the second one within the adult group of a city located in the south of Brazil.

Keywords Discourses, Practices, Communion and Liberation

and later to other cities. The experience was adopted initially by the name of Student Youth (Giuventù Studentesca – GS) and developed under the aegis of the Catholic Action of the Archdiocese of Milan. During this first year the support given by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini was crucial for the continuity of the movement. The current name, Communion and Liberation, first appeared in 1969, when the collective resurfaces as an independent movement after a period of crisis. The name "*Brings together the conviction That the Christian event, lived in communion, is the foundation of man's authentic liberation*" [1]. In the 70's Communion and Liberation initiates a period of expansion and consolidation within and outside Italy, calling high school students in addition to convene an increasing number of university students and adults. During this process, the movement [2] becomes explicitly recognized by the Vatican since Paul VI and particularly John Paul II [3]. Currently, Communion and Liberation is present in approximately 90 countries on every inhabited continent and is guided by the Spanish priest Julian Carrón, who succeeded Giussani after his death.

The organization of Communion and Liberation is transnational by definition: it began and is headquartered in Italy, but is currently present in several countries around the globe. This means that Communion and Liberation involves both an organizational structure and a network of interpersonal ties that necessarily crosses national borders, covering much of the planet and thousands of people. The organizational structure of Communion and Liberation is thus understood to constitute also a network of bonds and contacts that facilitate and create forms of sociability not limited to the local level. Likewise, it promotes and encourages a way of understanding and experiencing the movement that, at the local level, is understood as supranational; or even better, the overlapping of frontiers constitutes one of its defining elements. However, it is at the level of local communities that CL places the focus of its activities and philosophy. Communion and Liberation understand the movement and, by extension, Catholicism itself as a network of concrete relations between individuals. To Communion and Liberation, Christianity always happens

1. Introduction

Communion and Liberation (CL) is an ecclesial movement emerged in Italy, whose origins date back to 1954. It was born when the priest Luigi Giussani (1922-2005), started to act as religion teacher in the Berchet classical high school in Milan, with initiative to rebuild a Christian presence in the life of the students. This initiative quickly grew within that institution and expanded to other schools

"through a person", that is, arises from the encounter between individual subjects who engage in a personal relation. That means that CL is not conceived -according to its own theology- as a formal affiliation to an institution, or as diffuse links between strangers. Consequently, great importance is given to moments of meeting of each local group and the strengthening of ties between its participants, which are always understood in terms of friendship [4-6].

Considering this particular configuration, this paper intends to explore the articulation between the private organization of this movement and the practices and discourses of its members at the local level. The local level is addressed through two local Communion and Liberation communities in South America. One group corresponds to a college group of the city of Santa Fe, located in the central region of Argentina and the other to the adult group of a city in the southern region of Brazil. Taking these cases as empirical reference, an attempt will be made at exploring, how the general configuration of the movement is articulated with the way in which its participants understand and experience it in those particular contexts. In other words, the intention is to describe how the particular structural configuration of CL is updated and specified in the actions and speeches of the members of the selected groups. The aim is to conduct a comparative overview between the two cases, which reveal the specific ways in which Communion and Liberation is interpreted and works locally in South America.

Practices and speeches are understood in the general framework of the practice theory [7-10]. In Ortner's terms, "It is a general theory about a production of social subjects by means of the practice in the world and the production of the own world by means of practice" [7-8]. Following the same author, the theory of practice offers a dialectical synthesis of classical opposition between the "structures" of the "social world" on the one hand, and the "agency" or practices of people in their daily lives on the other hand. Based on this perspective, it is understood here that both the structures of Communion and Liberation shape the practices of its participants, as these practices create the movement and its structures as it exists in the different places where it has been established. Structures refer mainly to institutional organization and also theories and doctrines that the movement officially adopts and propagates. Practices, refers to actions that participants perform daily to sustain the movement, including its speeches. Whereas at local level the organization of CL is entirely in charge of the participants themselves, that is, laypersons, this approach appears to be particularly appropriate.

In addition, this approach is shown relevant since previous studies tend to emphasize the structural dimensions of Communion and Liberation, before the ways in which it is embodied in the actions of its participants. Zadra's [11] descriptions on the organizational form of Communion and Liberation will be taken as a starting point, to analyze how this general configuration is manifested in the selected cases. On the other hand, previous studies on CL relate primarily to

the Italian context, where the leadership of the movement as well as the headquarters of its most important institutions are located¹. There is little research on Communion and Liberation based in the South American context, away from ideological and institutional center of the movement. In this region Communion and Liberation does not enjoys social and political influence it has in Italy, where it is widely known by the population and participates actively in the political system. In this sense, this paper will offer a description on how CL works locally in South America, where it can be considered a small movement. In sum, it is in this gap in the literature and in this difference on the context that lies the interest of this work.

2. Review of Literature

As just mentioned, most of the literature about Communion and Liberation takes as empirical reference the Italian context, where CL is recognized as a religious movement of great call and also as a political force [11,12-15]. This literature tends to focus on the remarkable growth of the movement from its origins and tries to unmask the factors and meanings behind that success [11,12,15]. Thus, different works deal with the historical and institutional development of Communion and Liberation, its internal organization, its philosophy and worldview, its relations with the Catholic Church, its articulation with politics [13-14], and its meaning within the broad Italian national context along the years of its development. Also, the movement has its own books about the history, meaning and organization of the movement which serve as references for researchers [16-19].

Among these works highlights the pioneering study of Abbruzzese [12] dedicated to illustrate the structural articulation and cultural evolution of a movement that is qualified as integrist within a secularized society [20]. As the work of Abbruzzese, the other studies give privilege to a perspective of macro-structural analysis of the movement. Thus, the works tend to offer broad characterizations, in which the movement as a whole is discussed and its general outlines are described. It is from this type of analysis that Communion and Liberation has been categorized, generically, as a fundamentalist and integrist movement, by reference to their political ideology and power relations [13]. In turn, these works are based mainly on the texts and official communication channels of the movement, as well as its major events, its leading figures and their actions in the Italian public space.

Weighing the factors behind Communion and Liberation's success, different authors highlight the importance the

¹ This is not referring just to the headquarters of the movement, but also a series of cultural, economic philanthropic initiatives formally independent from the movement, but inspired by its charisma. Among these may be mentioned Compagnia delle Opere (CdO), Movimento Popolare and the Association of Volunteers for International Service (AVSI).

movement gives to communal life [11,12,15]. That translates in an organization deeply rooted at the local level, where it groups members by "ambiance", that is to say, by age and geographical proximity [14], in the theoretical and practical importance given to grassroots structures [15] and in the close and concrete bonds among participants [12]. These aspects, located at the microsociological level, have not received sufficient attention by themselves in previous studies, considering the relevance they have had for the continuity and expansion of the movement. In fact, if Communal life has been outlined as one of the foundations of CL dynamics as a whole, it has not been posed as a main subject by any previous researches nor addressed empirically². In this regard, to observe the construction of bonds and community dynamics at the local level will help to understand in detail one of the foundations for the functioning and success of Communion and Liberation.

On the other hand, to approach the specific manifestations of the movement in South America, it will help to understand how their avowedly flexible and self-managed structures [11,16] adapt to others contexts than Italy. First, South America is a different context depending on the geographical and cultural distance from the center of the movement. Second, and most importantly, South American Communion and Liberation does not enjoy the social and political visibility that holds in Italy. Overall, we can say that CL is a little-known Catholic minority movement, without direct influence on politics and dependent on theological productions from Italy. In such a scenario, the maintenance of the movement largely rests on the initiative of the basis, making the bonds of solidarity among participants even more important.

Regarding the South American context -particularly Argentina and Brazil, focus of this article- there is little literature on Communion and Liberation. In fact, it has been found only one specific research about the movement, which analyzes the arrival and establishment of CL in Argentina during the 80's [21-22]. This work attempts to link the history of the local branch of CL to the social and ecclesiastical context of the country in those years, marked by the return of democracy after the last military government. Like the previous work, this research seeks to make general characterizations of the place and meaning of CL in the Argentine national context. Beyond this study, Communion and Liberation is barely mentioned by the social sciences in the region, usually in panoramic analysis of the local religious field. In any case, CL is roughly characterized as a type of integrist [23-25] and conservative Catholicism [26-27] regarding its general features, without a first-hand research on the subject. Considering this background, this paper seeks to contribute with an empirical and localized research, to the knowledge of the dynamics of

Communion and Liberation in South America.

Conceptually, Communion and Liberation has been categorized as a Roman Catholic "ecclesial movement" by regional social sciences. The term is the same used by the Catholic Church to refer to a variety of lay associative initiatives emerged during XX century. Indeed, local conceptualizations of ecclesial movements are mostly based on Roman Catholic Church official documents on the subject and very dependent on confessional philosophers. In this sense, Soneira[28-30] characterize ecclesial movements as forms of associations internal to Catholic Church which share a series of ideal-typical features: a) to be inspired by personal charisma of a priest or lay; b) to exceed the church's organizational frame, territorial frame (dioceses and parishes) as well as functional frame (specialized sectors, as different pastorals); c) tendency to predominate in urban middle classes; d) to appear as expressions of dissatisfaction with sociocultural context in which they operate and with current ecclesial model; e) tendency to constitute belief communities with a strong group identity and religious affiliation; f) to occupy the space left vacant by previous forms of lay association (like Catholic Action) and by religious orders; g) to have born or at least grown generally in Europe, during the sixties, inspired by Second Vatican Council. Communion and Liberation in fact shares all this features, being usually mentioned among the most important ecclesial movements in the world[28-31].

Among authors that address ecclesial movements in general, there is a consensus about the political meaning these movements have in the Catholic scenario, specially in Latin America. In fact, ecclesial movements are usually seen as part of a conservative movement conducted within Catholic Church in reaction to progressive sectors growing within the same structures. These progressive sectors are represented by Liberation Theology and Basic Ecclesial Communities, which represents the "preferential option for the poor" made by many sectors of Latin American Church after Second Vatican Council [32]. In this analysis, "progressive church" is associated with a socially engaged religion, which takes part in the political game in favor of their bases. It is also associated with a contextualized theological thinking that takes into consideration the cultural and economic realities of popular sectors. Conversely, "conservative church" is characterized as a restoration movement, which tends to reinforce hierarchical influence over religious practice and is clearly anti-socialist and oriented to elites and middle sectors [26-27,33-35].

Compared with Basic Ecclesial Communities surged from Latin American deepest reality (that is to say, from economic cultural and political subordination of big part of society), ecclesial movements are seen also as attempts to transplant European models in a clearly different context. This point is made by Soneira[28-30] and Suárez[31] who, however, do not delve into this contextual differences, nor in the implications for the movements' organization and expansion. Both authors, in fact, highlight the need for case studies in Latin America to fulfill this gap in literature.

² At least, communal life of Communion and Liberation has not been placed as the main subject by any research we have had access to. Most literature about this movement is written in Italian, fact that limits the disclosure of its results within the international scientific community.

Considering this, this paper intends to contribute to this task presenting primary data about how a particular ecclesial movement has adapted to South American context. As well, this paper will help to understand what is, empirically, this “conservative church” embodied in ecclesial movements. At least, it will contribute to illustrate the meaning of such a label by presenting primary descriptions of concrete groups.

3. Materials and Methods

Qualitative methods are the most appropriate to the object of this work. Indeed, this research deals with questions about how social reality is created and endowed with meaning, that is, it seeks to understand senses, processes and actions that cannot be apprehended in terms of magnitudes [36-38]. Consequence of such methodological perspective is the inability to clearly separate theoretical and empirical levels. In a qualitative approach, data is produced from a few initial ideas and theoretical concepts, and involves a strong inductive logic since the beginning of the process. The observations of particular situations lead to formulate concepts, ideas or hypotheses that, in turn, guide subsequent data search and redefinition of such concepts, ideas and hypotheses [39]. In addition, considering the lack of empirical investigation on Communion and Liberation in South America, this research will necessarily have an exploratory and descriptive character. For this reason, it will not use theoretical models in the strict sense of the term. On the contrary, based on theories of practice and in previous structural characterizations of CL, this paper will seek to understand how the movement is operationalized by groups located in specific contexts.

In turn, due to Communion and Liberation's characteristics, ethnographic method is shown as the most appropriate to approach the movement. Indeed, following Zadra³ [11], CL is characterized by an intense community life at local level, by its success in infusing a theologically informed worldview among its participants, and by focusing its operation in weekly meetings of religious education. Close observation of these aspects requires a dive in the movement, to make possible to interact face to face with the participants on a daily basis. Among the practical aspects, we must consider that most of the operation of CL locally is not public, being necessary to negotiate with the group to observe activities in action⁴. Beyond that, participants of CL use a specific language and their own intelligibility codes derived from Giussani's theology. Understanding this language, as well as the operationalization of the theological

ideas in everyday life, also requires a more or less prolonged coexistence with the group. If this prior framework of intelligibility is not understood, nor are the senses that actors give to their actions, nor the way the movement is explained and justified itself.

Beyond practical considerations, the ethnographic method has a long tradition both in the field of sociology and anthropology, which endorse its use [40-47]. Theoretically, ethnography will be understood in the broad sense intended by Agar [40] as process consisting in the resolution of problems of understanding across tradition boundaries, or, in other words, as process of mediation between different frames of meaning. Technically, it will be understood in Hammersley and Atkinson's [41] terms, as a method or set of methods in which “*the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues which he or she is concerned*” [48]. Following this definition, it shall be considered part of the ethnographic work not just participant observation in the strict sense, but also the analysis of printed documents the movement distributes among its participants and digital materials delivered through the Internet. This refers to books written by the founder of the movement, the magazine *Tracce* [49] (official monthly publication), CL websites, emails and various informative materials related to local and international events.

Thus conceived the ethnographic fieldwork was developed in two phases. The first one was completed between November 2008 and September 2009 with the university group of Communion and Liberation in a city located at the central region of Argentina. The second one was performed with the adult group of the same movement in a city located in the southern region of Brazil, between May 2011 and December 2012⁵. The first group was selected due to its performance in the university environment of the city, where it contrasted with other student groups based on secular ideologies, mostly left-wing students' movements. The second group was chosen as a basis for comparison, being also located in a medium size city relatively far from the capital. In both cases, the fieldwork was conducted initially at weekly meetings that mark the rhythm of life of the group and was subsequently extended to other spaces. Among these it is necessary to mention monthly assemblies, charities, spiritual retreats and informal meetings. The observations were recorded in field diary and lately, elaborated in monographs [4-5].

3 The different characterizations of CL agree about its main aspects. Zadra's work was chosen because it has a similar thematic and theoretical cut: it is a largely descriptive work, focused on the structure and ideas of the movement.

4 Strictly speaking, the selection of this approach was conditioned by the very subjects of study. When contacted to collaborate with the research, those responsible for the group immediately remarked that participating in the meetings is the only valid way to understand what CL is about.

5 The second phase of the fieldwork was completed within the context of a Master's Degree research, supported by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, CAPES (Agency for the Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education). The identity of the group studied during this phase will not be revealed due to ethical concerns.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The General Features of the Movement

In general terms, it is possible to characterize the organization of Communion and Liberation based on two related tensions. On the one hand, there is the need to stay in, and even expand over, a multiplicity of national, regional and local contexts, while maintaining, at the same time, the unity of concept and practice required by the minimal definition of the movement as such. In turn, this double demand may be understood at the same time as prior and concomitant to another one, observed by Zadra[11], who states that CL combines a high degree of political and ideological centralization in its leadership in Italy, together with an also high degree of financial and organizational autonomy of the different local communities⁶. In fact, it is thus understood that the manner in which it divides those aspects and decisions that are to be left in the hands of the adherents from those that the movement leadership establishes as being fundamental and equal for everyone follows the lines of this simultaneous—and almost banal—pressing need for expansion while, at the same, remaining unchanged. It is worth mentioning, however, that both dimensions, as presented by Zadra, are not totally distinguishable in practice: to CL members, the organizational aspects, including the most ordinary operational tasks, are invested with a sense of importance not alien to the "ideology", and this is a constitutive part of the movement's "organizational policy".

In particular, the organization of CL is quite horizontal and the local communities constitute its minimal working units. The authority lines among them and the national and international leadership operate through a system of "leaders" and "diakonias", placed at different levels, maintaining fluid communication among each other. There is thus a general leader or "international leader", a position currently held by the Spanish priest Julián Carrón [50], who is in charge of managing the movement at a global level. He does so with the cooperation of an "international diakonia", a sort of council made up of leaders from the different countries in which the movement is present. In turn, each country has national "leaders" who play a role somewhat similar to Carrón's in each country, and a national "diakonia" made up of all CL leaders from the different cities in the countries in which the movement is present. This scheme is repeated locally; there are leaders and diakonias in all the locations in which the movement is established and has gained certain relevance.

The leaders are required to travel on a regular basis to meet with higher level leaders and with peers at the same level, in order to receive guidelines, orientation and news in the first case, and coordinate actions and events in the latter. Moreover, leaders have to participate in the large events organized by the movement several times a year at national level (local leaders) and at international level (national leaders). At a minimum, these events are attended by the leaders of a specific level, but depending on the event, they are also attended by the members in general, or at least by those who are more regular and have a high degree of commitment with the movement. It is through these contacts developed on a more or less regular basis, but always planned and continuing over time, that the unity of concept and action is maintained. It is here where ideas and tendencies are transmitted, all of which will be impressed upon the movement locally, and this is the way in which the experience of the different communities is linked, or at least an effort is made to show the underlying unity existing among them.

Similarly, the figure of the "visitors" can be understood. They are priests with a high degree of commitment who are required to periodically visit and follow up on communities that are particularly distant or located far away from the reference centers, whether Italy or other more active centers or communities at a national level. On these occasions, relatively large events are organized in which priests hold talks and lectures, and present books and other material of the movement. They also attend private meetings with local leaders and mentors considered to be of relevance, and participate in informal gatherings with the members in general (the focus being placed on the youngest, high school and university students), where music and food is shared in a personal form of interaction with participants. During these events, visitors transmit the orientation provided by the leadership for the movement, communicate their concerns about the local or national community they are visiting, and bring general news about the movement's evolution worldwide.

This mechanism of planned and continuing trips, meetings and contacts, both in a horizontal and a vertical sense, is believed to create, allow, produce or even negotiate, through the leaders, the articulation among the different local communities themselves, and with the hierarchy in Italy. Moreover, the "minimal definition" of the set is given by a common repertoire of activities, about which there exists a consensus on what is fundamental and what accessory, and a unity in the printed material that constitutes the basis for the movement's activities and the main means for propagating and teaching its philosophy and conceptions of the world. CL publishes books, magazines, booklets and posters that are translated into all the languages deemed necessary, and are distributed to places in which the movement is present. Books and booklets are minimally translated. The same goes for posters, which contain a graphic design identical to the originals. Minimum content of the magazines and the prayer and singing books is translated and maintained in all cases;

⁶ "The movement is held together, in large part, by the ideas propagated by his founder, ideas largely contained in a popular series of books and disseminated through the movement's highly effective planning and communication apparatus. While each local CL group is organizationally and financially independent, ideology and organizational policy are highly centralized around the charismatic founder, Luigi Giussani, who, with his council, directs national activities from the headquarters in Milan". Quote extracted from page 134 of Zadra's article (reference 11).

however, content related to each region or country is added to the different national or regional editions. For example, the Brazilian edition of the magazine publishes news on the Brazilian CL community as well as current news about the country, while the Spanish edition, addressed to Latin America and Spain, publishes news relevant to those regions.

The center of CL's activities is the participation in weekly meetings called "Schools of Community" in which participants engage in group reading of books or other texts selected by the movement leadership, and then do the exercise of linking the readings to recent events in their daily lives. The reading material analyzed in the Schools is selected every year and the same material is used worldwide. In general, the material chosen for these meetings are books written by the movement's founder and, occasionally, by his successor [51]. All CL groups are expected to read at the same pace (ideally, all CL groups should read the same passage weekly), and in order to achieve this, the texts are divided into various chapters and subtitles to make division simpler. In addition to these meetings, monthly meetings are organized in a similar manner with the purpose of reviewing the material assigned for the period. Another central activity is charitable work ("Caritativa") for which specific training material is provided, and which is performed on a more sporadic basis.

For the purpose of the present analysis, as it will be discussed below, vacations and spiritual retreats organized by CL at national or regional level are particularly important. Militants from all over the country meet at a specific place during some days, coordinated by a leader, usually a priest. Spiritual retreats take place twice a year (for Easter and Christmas), and at least summer vacations are proposed for groups (and occasionally winter vacations as well). These activities provide opportunities for the same persons to meet every year or every six months (in addition to the trips mentioned before), which helps develop and maintain bonds. Likewise, the numerous trips taken by leaders and mentors are opportunities to build a network of contacts and affinity relationships among those in charge of leadership. Moreover, the day-to-day activities of the local groups provide daily contact among the participants since the activities related to the movement may take up most of the time not dedicated to work or study and, in practice, the movement group tends to claim also the free and leisure time.

4.2. Differences between Local Communities

Beyond these general guidelines, there exist differences among the groups researched mainly related to the size and consolidation degree of each. In fact, the Santa Fe group is composed of several dozens of regular members who have participated in the movement for several years. The person responsible for the introduction of the movement in Argentina is among its members and still holds a position of leadership in the city and the country, both formally and effectively. Additionally, there is a large number of less committed members, who have joined the movement more

recently or who attend events or meetings in a less frequent or regular basis, but who nevertheless contribute to the movement consolidation and are counted among its members. This volume allows for the subdivision of the group according to age and occupation, as expected. There are groups at high school level and in universities (in turn organized according to higher education schools). There is also a group of "young workers" and several groups of adults, organized according to their professions or affinity relationships. The organization of these groups parallels the general organization previously described.

The group has a clearly defined and stable organizational structure locally, with clear cut division of work, and functions are served by specific persons during a certain period of time (at least among university students, rotation in "office" is encouraged). Needless to say, it is the most committed members the ones who assume the responsibility of the different functions, without any remuneration. Also, the movement has an institutional office in the city, and a network of institutions that are either formally or informally associated with it. In fact, the CL and the city's Catholic University are connected since the local leader of the movement is a professor of Philosophy and director of the graduate program in the same area at the university. Even though the link derives from the double function performed by the CL leader and is not official in nature, in practice, it means that numerous students, as well as some professors, in that field of study, are members of the movement. Likewise, speakers connected with CL are invited as visiting scholars to give lectures and make presentations in the city. Additionally, there are some NGOs in the city linked to the movement, some of which are associated to larger ones located in Europe, while others emerged as local initiatives of the members of the movement, although, in general, they replicate the model of those already present in the old continent [52].

In contrast, the group from the south of Brazil is made up of a reduced number of long-serving regular members who attend meetings on a relatively regular basis, are joined by some other long-standing members that only occasionally participate in everyday activities, and by some other people who have only recently been incorporated (though some had had experience in CL in other places) and who, in general, have a more limited participation. The actual scenario shows high circulation of persons, some stay and become full members, and many others attend some meetings and come back sporadically or not at all. Consequently, in this case there is only one group of adults and one of adolescents made up mostly of the children of the older members.

Accordingly, most of the organizational tasks are performed by the local leader, who sometimes delegates some specific tasks to other members. One exception worth mentioning is the annual food drive organized by all CL communities of Brazil and considered as charitable work which, in the group analyzed, is performed mostly by men. For some members, the organization of this event, which takes up several months every year, is nearly all the

participation in the movement, except for vacations and retreats. Moreover, people who do not consider themselves CL members participate in the food drive. Thus, the group from the south of Brazil constitutes an embryonic and changing structure; its everyday work is based on interpersonal agreements and negotiations rather than on established rules. Consequently, only those activities deemed fundamental by CL are performed by this group (School of Community, Caritativa, retreats, and recently meetings). Nevertheless, the group's continuity still depends on the individual efforts of a small number of persons.

The Santa Fe group presents a different scenario since it kept to the complete schedule of activities and also pursued other initiatives that, though not mandatory, are recommended by or are deemed to be in line with the CL "charism"[53]; it organized events of public interest to make the movement known or to establish its presence in certain spheres, such as public university. In contrast, the Brazilian group is somehow withdrawn, investing most of its efforts in the consolidation of its own community and the movement's in the city. For example, the leader coordinates three Schools of Community so that those who cannot attend the main meeting can still participate in the movement's main activity. It is also worth noting that charitable work is defined according to the needs of the movement itself: some teach catechism to the members' children, others update the university mural, others coordinate student groups. In the south of Brazil, charity is directed at the group itself.

At this point, the aforementioned financial and organizational autonomy that CL gives to the different communities, which is part of the movement's institutional policy, bears relevance. As one of the Santa Fe University leaders put it: "Organization is secondary to existence", implying that the group's existence takes precedence over liturgical correctness during the meetings. Their interpretation of spiritual retreats can be understood in this sense. The movement defines retreats as opportunities for meditation and prayer that contribute to prepare believers for the most pivotal events of the Catholic calendar. The Brazilian group considers these retreats as opportunities for socializing and sharing communal life, and the moments of withdrawal and religious study are relegated to second place. The decision of focusing on communal life with peers was made by the leader in order to strengthen bonds among participants, who do not always have daily contact or enjoy close relationships; the decision caused some uneasiness with the priest sent from São Paulo to coordinate the meeting.

Likewise, there are differences between the degree of contact the groups studied have with the national centers of reference and with the rest of the movement. On the one hand, CL Argentina considers the Santa Fe group a center of reference at the national level, and the local community keeps close contact with other communities, in particular with the Buenos Aires group. On the other hand, the location of the group from the south of Brazil is peripheral to the centers of reference, especially São Paulo (southeastern

region), and does not maintain regular contact with the national leadership and other communities. In particular, when important personalities are sent from Italy to visit the South American countries, they visit the Santa Fe group when in Argentina, but do not visit the southern region when in Brazil. Also, as the Brazilian group does not have relevant personalities among its members, it hardly ever receives visiting intellectuals or members from other cities on a regular –and mostly unscheduled– basis, as was the case of the Santa Fe group. In the Brazilian group, the local leader is solely responsible for maintaining contact with the national leadership by means of the obligatory trips to São Paulo in the role of local leader. Contact with the rest of the communities in the country, beyond personal contacts, is made during national vacations and retreats in which some of the members participate.

Furthermore, visitors sent directly from Italy to visit Argentina also travel to Santa Fe to visit the group, while only a local visitor –a priest from São Paulo– visits the Brazilian group researched at least twice a year. The national visitor sent from Italy (who, in principle, is the same one for Argentina) visits only those cities of greatest significance for the movement. It is worth pointing out that since visitors are specific persons who are assigned the task of visiting certain local or national communities periodically, a trust relationship is expected to develop with the members of the communities they visit. However, when visitors come from Italy, if relationships are indeed established, it is with leadership and other important members. Local visitors, on the other hand, succeed in developing more personal bonds with members, a fact facilitated by the smaller size of the group. As to differences, the design of the schedule of meetings and activities prevents communities from becoming isolated, although it logically cannot prevent the consequences of a marginal situation within the general setting, namely, a more relaxed organization and interpretation of the activities.

The differences could be related with the history of the movement in those countries and localities. In fact, the person who played the principal role in bringing the movement to Argentina lives in Santa Fe, and was in this city where he started the first CL communities in Argentina in the second half of the 1980s. This person is Anibal Fornari, one of the current national responsible for CL in Argentina, who is also director and professor of the Philosophy degree of the Catholic University of Santa Fe. During 1984, Fornari and other catholic laymen met with Luigi Giussani in Montevideo, invited by Uruguayan catholic thinker Alberto Methol Ferré. After that encounter, Fornari started the first CL group in Argentina, within the "Colegio Mayor Universitario", a student residence maintained by the Catholic Church, where he worked as a teacher. The movement grew up in the city encouraged by Fornari's charisma and networks both in the Church and the academic world. Evidence of this was the international meeting celebrated in Santa Fe in 1985, addressed to the Argentinian, Uruguayan and Paraguayan communities of

CL, which was attended by Luigi Giussani himself [54]. Until now, and in big part due to Fornari's influence, Santa Fe is one of the central locations of CL in Argentina.

According to Fabris [21-22], in a national level, Communion y Liberation expansion was supported by the Bishop of Avellaneda Antonio Quarracino[55]. Quarracino managed the arrival of two Communion and Liberation priests from Italy, Leonardo Grasso and Cesar Zaffanella, between the end of 1984 and the first months of 1985. This priest arrived as missionaries and played an important role in the establishment of the movement in the country. They remained close to Quarracino and the ecclesiastic hierarchy, holding different official positions in the institution and influencing other priests to join the movement. Another cornerstone in the national history of CL is the *Equiú Magazine*, purchased by CL in 1987. The magazine, addressed to a catholic public, became a mean of dissemination of CL activities and ideas, until 1993, when it was closed. During this first years CL has had an intense activity in the country, promoting cultural activities, conferences, seminars and meetings.

Unlike the case of Santa Fe, there are no influential personalities, such as Fornari, in the Brazilian group studied. Furthermore, all important references for Brazilian CL are settled hundreds of kilometers far from the southern region. The group studied was born when a CL Italian priest arrived to the city as a part of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Mission, in the mid-eighties. The priest started to work in catholic spaces frequented by young people, as the Emmaus and the university pastoral groups, where he formed a small circle of followers. The priest started to apply CL methods within the regular university pastoral, and only formalized the group as an independent movement once it had stabilized a nucleus of members. Two years after his arrival, the priest left the city and the group continued to exist without the coordination of any Church official and remains this way until the present. Three of these young people are still part of CL local group as adults [5].

In the national context, history of CL is longer and more known than in the case of Argentina. It started with a mission sent by Communion and Liberation headquarters to Brazil, considered a social emergency context. However, since 1968 protests, all members of this mission, except the founder, abandoned the movement to join left-wing groups⁷. The movement is extinct in the country until late 1970s, when it returned by two different ways simultaneously. On one hand, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns met the movement in Italy invited it to come to Brazil to work in the university pastoral. Then, through an agreement celebrated between São Paulo diocese and Communion and Liberation, a group of lay members started a pastoral service at the University of São Paulo and the Catholic University of São Paulo. On

the other hand, there were Italian CL priests who arrived to Brazil in Diocesan missions and started similar experiences among college students of the cities where they were allocated, specially Belo Horizonte and Manaus. These three cities remain until now as the centers of CL in Brazil.

4.3. The Identity of Experience

In fact, out of all the differences identified, those related to the interpretation of the activities are not perceived as such by the members. Those related to magnitude and degree of bonding of the group with the rest of the movement are considered to be secondary compared to the identity of the experience they claim. This is not unconnected to the second tension already mentioned: Communion and Liberation shall emerge successfully in the different contexts and circumstances of its members, since "organization is secondary to existence". To them, differences in resources, degree of contact with other communities, number of members and the more or less meticulous manner of performing the required activities does not affect, and is secondary to, the unity of experience members claim to have. This common experience is supported by means of readings and a common language, similar accounts on the manner the encounter with the movement takes place and the "conversion" to it, focus on certain aspects of the Christian myth, and certain associated liturgical or devotional rites (such as using plainchant to pray, a monastic musical tradition in medieval times), and finally, a minimum nucleus of ritualized basic activities whose similarity is carefully maintained in the different contexts, with the Schools of Community as central.

Beyond these objective elements common to Communion and Liberation as a whole and focusing on the subject of sociability among members, the idea of friendship they apply and the way they actually put it into practice are worth highlighting. In both cases, the members interpret the way they bond together as friendship, that is to say, on a personal basis. This means, specifically, that they do not just share the time to perform those activities related to the movement – activities which already take up most of the time not devoted to work or study –, but also that they share leisure time, time reserved for the intimate circle, the family and significant others. They share birthday, graduation and wedding parties, as well as all other celebrations and everyday outings and gatherings. Likewise, they constantly help each other in case of need or difficulty (even trivial needs) and, most importantly, they maintain daily close contact, almost like a family.

Often maintained for many years, these ties of friendship are perceived as a sign of divine grace and a confirmation that it is real friendship. For instance, a large number of members of the Santa Fe university group have known each other since childhood precisely because of the bonds of friendship among their families. Some of them had been roommates as students and would get together to study and go out to dinner, at night or on weekends. Members have

⁷ According to Fabris, this episode foresaw what happened later in Italy, in GS crisis. During this period, large part of the members left the movement to join left-wing organizations. An account of this crisis can be found in reference 16.

achieved group intimacy; they see each other as the people they trust, those with whom they engage in daily conversations and with whom they choose to spend important dates. This is also the case with the Brazilian group where members have built close relationships of trust, which includes their families (almost all the members are married with children). They talk to each other over the phone daily and visit frequently, organize play dates with their children, and are regular guests at every birthday, baptism or first communion party. They invariably know the other members' vicissitudes of daily life and make their best efforts to help out even in trivial matters, like babysitting for them for some hours.

Conceiving the bond as friendship, however, is not limited to those members that have known each other for a long time and see each other daily. In fact, from the very moment a person starts attending the meetings, he/she becomes a friend and is quickly integrated into a network of invitations and favors, as long as he/she shows commitment to the group. Even when they do not know each other personally, a member of Communion and Liberation is always someone you know, someone who deserves to be trusted from the beginning, and with whom you establish a relationship of strong affinity *a priori*. Among movement participants, there is undoubtedly a common set of references, symbols and elements of identification, and a certain unity of experience on which that affinity is based. This, to a certain extent, constitutes "the shared element" they believe to have as members of the movement, even when they have not met in person, and which is attributed to God or Christ. This shared understanding functions as a sort of a priori information [42] and the movement provides behavior codes that result in a kind of fine predisposition and agreeableness that facilitates and encourages socialization among people who participate in regional and national meetings, and with it, the development and maintenance of bonds (remembering always the guarantee provided by the movement as an institution).

Now, if a member of Communion and Liberation always considers another member as a friend *a priori*, then friendship spans all over the world, or at least in those regions and areas of the world where the movement is present. These elements make any Communion and Liberation community a point of reference for trips, exchanges, even relocation in another city or country, whether temporary (to study at a university abroad) or permanent (marriage between movement members from different countries). In such cases, the local group of the movement becomes the first or one of the first social circles to integrate the newcomer in his/her new destination and helps him/her to settle and adapt to the new environment⁸.

Within this framework, the warm welcome given to strangers and the quick manner in which they become a part of the local group and its trust circle is deemed by both groups as evidence or proof of the true and "exceptional" character of the bond that links them as friends, and friends as members of Communion and Liberation. They frequently mention the need for a divine explanation of the potential network of bonds that becomes real and effective on such cases. It is an instance of counterfactual thinking: they understand that such thing would not happen "any other way".

Occasionally, in those places where the movement is more firmly established and has a consolidated institutional network—understood mainly as bonds with universities and NGOs that are, if not affiliated or formally dependent upon CL, in practice made up of and led by movement followers, and that share its conceptions of the world and its inspiration as to the purposes and methods for action—, it is the movement structure itself that encourages the displacement of its adherents: participation in large events in Italy, stays abroad for graduate studies, and internship opportunities with local and European NGOs. In these cases, the appeal for friendship is not considered to be contradictory or confronted with the appeal for the density of international networks, the degree of contact with the rest of the world (Europe in particular, especially Italy), the prestige of the universities they have ties with, the ease to cross boundaries and settle in different countries, the international scope of its NGOs and the sort of missions they conduct, the relationships with prestigious persons and institutions, among other similar factors. To them, the "identity of the experience" is neither incompatible with, nor altered by, this institutional basis and the network of relations and contacts it formally, or informally, entails. On the contrary, this structure may serve as a legitimizing argument of the experience that unites them, since this is not an isolated group but a well-organized movement present in the contemporary society and world. In any case, they claim, if such a network was and is possible, it is as a result of the true and common nature of the experience.

As any research based on ethnographic accounts, the results presented here are not generalizable beyond the groups and the interval of time in which this research were conducted. Nevertheless, the interest of this paper lies in the specific and localized character of the descriptions it brings rather than in the generalizability of its outcomes. Indeed, the purpose was to analyze the operationalization and interpretation of CL at a local level, in specific locations of South America. Communion and Liberation was characterized as a conservative and fundamentalist movement, where authority plays a central role. It was also described as a widespread movement with strong institutional structures and a particularly rare success in

⁸ This was observed in Santa Fe, especially when people moved to other cities, but was particularly marked in the Brazilian group. More than half of the CL members of the studied city integrated into the local group after they moved from other cities. All of them had prior knowledge of the movement and most had actually participated in it; however, as a standard they are not effectively participating at the time of departure. In general, the change of

city triggers, together with some other instance of crisis or breakup, the reunion with the movement or is the starting point for a more frequent and lasting commitment with it.

engaging individuals with its ideas and communal life [11]. In spite of it, there were little descriptions about how this structures and this communal life are created and sustained locally and daily. Nor there were descriptions about the concrete ways by which groups located far from the center of the movement are able to articulate an international movement and feel part of the same “friendship” as thousands of other people around the world. Are these micro-mechanisms what this paper intends to describe to complete previous researches on CL.

5. Conclusions

In this article the relationship between the organizational structure of "Communion and Liberation" Movement and the practices and discourses of its members has been analyzed. The mechanisms used by the movement to maintain a minimal unity of concept and action while sustaining, at the same time, a structure and a network of relations and contacts that encompass several thousand members in many countries were described. The system of trips, gatherings, and meetings of leaders and members in general, both in a horizontal and a vertical sense, provides the fundamental pattern to articulate the movement at the local, national and international levels. This mechanism guarantees that even the smallest communities located far from the centers of reference will not become isolated from the movement; however, it cannot prevent the consequences of a marginal position within the national arena, namely, an embryonic organizational configuration and a more relaxed interpretation of the movement's activities.

In fact, these differences are not recognized as such by the members, or they are deemed to be secondary to what is fundamental, that is to say, the unity of experience they share as members of the movement. This unity is built upon a myriad of references, symbols, and shared meanings present in the texts written by the founder and other mentors, including a common vocabulary, similar reports on how they met and joined the movement, weekly participation in the School of Community to read texts that have, among other aspects, fixed format and content. Amongst all these shared elements, however, an understanding of the bond that holds participants together plays a central role. The fact that participants are considered friends allows for agglutinating communities at the local level, where daily interaction goes beyond formal participation in CL's activities, taking up time dedicated to leisure activities and family, and often lasting for many years.

In addition, this concept and the predisposition it entails, also play a role in cases of temporary or permanent relocation to other cities, regions or countries. Whether or not the members have met in person before, they invariably consider other members as friends a priori, and treat them accordingly. This facilitates the integration of new members from other cities or countries who come to participate in specific projects or are driven by the movement itself. Thus,

the widespread institutional and social network that Communion and Liberation has in a large part of the world is not seen as contradictory or confronted with the bond of a personal and emotional nature they claim to have. Quite the contrary, both network and bond are deemed to have resulted from the shared unity of experience which is, ultimately, Divine Grace.

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