

Keynote Address:

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Rodrigo Iván Cortés Jiménez

Member of the Mexico-United States Binational Security Working Group,
Washington, DC

We intend to analyze family and social networks in order to understand the transition from the migrant family to transnational communities. We have to start from the binomial relationship that exists between family and society. There is no society without families nor families without society. There is a two-way link from family to society and from society to family.

Networks created by families make the fabric of social networks possible. This relationship can be positive, since it provides the elements for the survival and development of families and from families to society; it can also be a negative relationship: in a society vicious and virtuous circles can be generated simultaneously between family and society.

When a family does not function properly, an element of dysfunction is also transmitted to society. When society and several of its key elements, economic, political, or cultural, do not function properly, families are also affected. Family is therefore the most important instance for the process of socialization.

In order to understand this in more deeply, we will look at the different dimensions of this binomial, the anthropological dimension, the family dimension itself, and the social dimension, from the perspective of anthropology of encounter.

Man is a being of encounter. What is encounter? If we go to the great Spanish philosopher Alfonso López Quintas, we can say that an encounter is not a tangential juxtaposition, that is, it does not mean being in the subway at rush hour, crammed

cheek to cheek with all the others; no matter how crammed they are it is not an encounter with someone, it is juxtaposition, .

An encounter involves something as active as interweaving two or more areas of life, which are centers of initiative, sources of potential. Encounter means that two people meet, their spaces intermingle and constitute a degree of unity, of connection. Such interweaving involves a form of presence, which is a common form of union, hence the community.

In time or space a mutual presence remains, a union exists that will give fruit. This occurs in couples, in parent-child relations, in fraternal relations, among families and among communities. This is why this dimension is so important to human beings. A human being is a being of encounter, by origin, development and fulfillment. Man comes from a previous encounter; he is debtor, so to speak, to an encounter prior to his being. Human beings develop in their encounter with others. Let's look at the mother-child relationship, where that encounter, that interweaving of spaces is very strong. The relationship that exists between the child, still inside the mother's womb and, after, is a presence that in fact is physical, since one is inside the other. When the child leaves the womb, that bond remains, and it is through this bond that the person develops in the early days and stages. Encounter with others is essential for growth.

In an encounter, a person updates his basic human potential, such as intelligence, willpower and emotions. Let us say that in terms of these faculties, when the person is attaining the object of fulfillment whereby he is fulfilled, he will attain self-fulfillment, which in philosophical terms, is referred to as the transcendent properties of being, such as goodness, truth, beauty and unity, and these are attained precisely in the encounter with others. This is how we fulfill our intelligence, our will, and our emotions.

In the strictly family dimension, we find that the family, the first area of close and natural that human beings have, is therefore the place where complementarity, integration and transcendence are lived. Complementarity is experienced physically, emotionally and, psychologically, or, as the song by Roberto Carlos goes "we are

concave and convex" and that is in the actual physiological and anatomical dimension, but also in the emotional, psychological, and physical aspects.

This complementarity becomes integration; we become integrated into the family. It is an expression of love, of a couple, that yields fruit and that is why they say: "they are no longer two but one" and this leads us to consider the transcendental aspect.

From here we connect to the social dimension, the family, which is the basic cell of society. We have often heard this expression repeated, quite rightly, because the family is the basic cell by which society is formed. If we say that a human being is social, it is because he belongs to a family. Here we find in a concrete, real and daily form the social dimension of the human being.

The family is also the first political unit, since in the family there is government and administration, and it constitutes a source of common good for all family members. The family is also like a spiritual womb, in that it does the same for the community as a mother's womb does for the unborn baby, because preparing and protecting it, until it delivers it as citizens to society. So, citizens come from families.

This important dimension makes family a subject of rights and of obligations. This is extremely relevant and not mere chance, and is the reason why universal codification of family relationships exists.

Family connects to society and we have to assume that it is the first and fundamental prerequisite in relation to the possibilities of making society. Family is transcendental as the very place where social problems can be solved, through something that is key to understanding its value: reciprocity, communication and solidarity, both for gender and generations.

Such relations, framed in care and authenticated authority are constituted in self-giving relations. In them people give of themselves, they are valued for what they are, not for what they do.

As a group, the family constitutes a social formation with its whole structure, its own organization and a series of highly specialized functions.

As an institution, family represents a vitally important social sub-system, within the wider social system it belongs to, not just as any part, but rather as a seed, as a foundation, as a constituent.

That is why, those who defend the disintegration of family life, its possible death or disappearance, do not understand that family has a substance that cannot disappear. It can go wrong, it can be badly used, but it cannot disappear.

Although its contribution is constitutional and fundamental, this does not mean that family life is optimal at all times, but there is a natural tendency to try and make it work as best as possible. Families can be malfunctioning, but they still achieve their goal over and over again.

This brings us to specify what family functionality is, the function performed by families in society, which at the same time humanizes society and each one of us.

A family that performs the functions that society expects from it is a family that prepares its members for socialization, practices generational equity, transmits culture and constructs certain social channels for its members. To explain further, these are the four specific and fundamental functions of family.

We can point out that generational equity presupposes a solidarity that could be called diachronic. What does diachronic and synchronic mean? Diachronic is, in a way, like a vertical relationship of communication and solidarity between parents and children, from parents to children, and then from children to parents, and then to their own children, once they have become parents, and so then, there is a kind of vertical communication, or solidarity that goes up and down.

There is also synchronic solidarity or communication on a horizontal level between husband and wife, between couples or between siblings. This diachronic and synchronic intermingling provides us with the fundamental element of society, that is, as we will see later, the social and family element.

The family also facilitates the transmission of culture, learning not only of a language, but of a number of things we cannot even imagine.

Socialization provides the mechanisms for belonging to a social group, which includes emotional education and social channeling which is very important because families commit to avoiding behavior considered socially harmful. Family dysfunction can be due to pathology, disability or imbalance.

Pathology is when there is a pattern of abusive behavior.

Family Disability is when one of the family members is missing

Family imbalance is when there is no harmony.

This leads us to stress the question of this intermingling, which we could call the substantial question in the family, constituted by relations within the family.

Family is constantly constituted through its social statement because it is where the relationship that exists between generations, grandparents, parents, children, who are themselves a social subject, takes place.

Family functions, as already mentioned, are based on this relationship.

Only family, I insist, is the multipersonal subject performing diachronic functions that only such a subject can give. This is so valuable that it becomes the good to be overseen in most family codes in civil law, so that this synchronic relation of horizontal communication can exist among those who promote such synchrony.

Communication and solidarity between people of different ages is the most important mission of the family. Maternal parent-child relations are the axis on which society is structured. The recognition of these relationships enables society to communicate better. It is in the family where we learn different basic rules to establish contact and communicate with our peers.

Good grooming in the rules of social communication and healthy habits, not only makes life easier for everyone, but contributes to the overall welfare of society as a whole, and so society is a family of families. This is what connects a family network to a social network, the fact that they are a family of families.

Family therefore is one of the most important factors in society. It is in families that succession of mankind takes place. Therefore that synchronous relationship is very important, because only with that synchronic relationship can there be a diachronic relationship.

8.000 generational successions, considering an average of 25 years each, have formed our civilization. Our history begins when homo sapiens appeared about 200,000 years ago, and man has expanded his community in time and space. It has been possible to connect all that culture, history, technology precisely because of the succession in the diachronic relationship, made possible through synchronic relations, which we usually call family.

There would be no social progress without families as the transmission of knowledge between generations would be unattainable, there would be no legacies or inheritance. This is the essence of family functionality; the function performed by the family for society, which, at same time, I repeat, humanizes each of its members, and socializes us as a whole.

A family that performs the functions that society expects of it, is a family preparing for socialization, living generational equity, which transmits culture and creates a certain social channel or control among its members.

There is a book called "The Great Disruption", written after several years of analysis, studies of crime rates, and family situations, which demonstrates that when something strongly affects the synchronic and diachronic link in the family, the results are rising crime rates, proving, together with other studies, the importance of functionality in families for functionality in society.

One element that is relevant to locate is the way this synchrony, this solidarity between parents in the couple, has to adapt in their relationship of solidarity with

their children, whether born in the family or adopted; it has to acquire elements of balance, according to the historical moment and social context, so there must be a greater balance, a rearrangement between the masculine and the feminine role to make a family.

We should not go from one extreme to the other, because this has dramatic results. Just think of Ciudad Juarez and the young “sicarios”, or drug cartel thugs, which is something terrible. First they had no father, either because he had migrated or was absent, and then they were left motherless because there are policies that define that women are only hired with awful working hours, then the child had a terrible time because he had no father, and then worse, because he had no mother. When we see the type of education we are giving them at the government level, at municipal or state levels, we see schools are very poor and we ought to be making a great effort and taking steps to arrange such a problem. Usually, when there is a problem, the first thing they do is kick the kid out of school. He is then deprived of his father, his mother and his school. And in places where we find the greatest concentration of population there are only two high schools, not enough for the large demand of young people who should be at school at their age, and there is a huge offer in youth gangs associated with organized crime. In a place where there are two high schools, there are more than 380 youth gangs providing thugs to the large cartels fighting for the site. Family is weakened and society feels the consequences.

This leads us to reflect on the migrant family. We can say that family networks not only constitute social networks at a national level, but also real transnational networks. Such transnational networks are not international relations. They are relations among communities of very concrete people which transcend borders. International migrations, on the contrary, as atomized flows, are not transnational. On the other hand, transnational migrations create cultural bonds, community spaces for an encounter with the communities of origin because their base is family. Part of the family stays behind, another part leaves, and those who go to that community of origin bring back elements from their destination, they maintain the bond.

The real community transnational bond, then, is family, which by striving to overcome physical and cultural distances, often painful and costly, creates multi-

local spaces and communities. Observe how in a globalized world, marked by uncertainty, financial, social and legal insecurity, families and migrant networks try to find a way to carry the social, political and economic position they have attained in one context to another: by linking communities. In this sense we can understand how migratory networks tend to intensify the flow and geographic extent of their destination communities.

Transnational families with members in different nations, maintain their communication and solidarity through an emotional unity that allows them to protect their own identity, origin, by living bi-national cultures, that is, transnational realities creating hybrid cultures.

Family identity overcomes the distances in time and space, and migrating families demonstrate the strength of this bond beyond borders and difficulties. Migrating families teach us a lesson in humanization, solidarity in full globalization. If somebody thinks this is no big deal, let us just look at the fact that demonstrates the migrant family bond, the “remesas” or remittances. Speaking only of Mexico, we should point out that our country held the third place in such an income, only below India and China, and above countries such as Philippines, France, Spain, Germany and Poland.

In 2007, in the total uptake of remittances worldwide, our country accounted for 7.1%; meaning that in 2008 the total flow of these revenues was estimated at 61.267 million dollars.

So far this year, from January to August, remittances reflected in the act of solidarity from a part of the family in one country to the other part of the family in another country, in the specific case of Mexico, sum up to 14.692 million dollars. Let us go beyond the economic impact. We do realize it is important for economic and monetary finances not only at a national but at an international, level, but we must look further.

This phenomenon of great relevance reveals the importance of the family as it maintains, renews and recreates bonds between people and communities that transcend borders, beyond the family core, and creates social networks that link

communities in multiple ways: cultural, social, political , economic, which is also reflected in a thousand and one ways: festive, religious, sports, politics, etc.

Thus we come across the anthropological reality with which we began: the human being as a being of encounter, as an intertwining of spaces. This is the reality from where we come, where we develop and where we fulfill our ambitions. Therefore, this human being, who is a being of encounter, is naturally projected in this first and dear natural institution of the family, which generates true social cohesion that involves great human and social capital, worthy of being taken into account, supported and cared for.