

# Confianza:

Governance and Trust in Latin America and the Netherlands

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# Confianza:

## Governance and Trust in Latin America and the Netherlands

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And the need of mutual aid and support which had lately taken refuge in the narrow circle of the family, or the slum neighbours, in the village, or the secret union of workers, re-asserts itself again, even in our modern society, and claims its rights to be, as it always has been, the chief leader towards further progress  
(Peter Kropotkin 1902: 173).

[A] despot readily pardons the governed for not loving him, provided that they do not love each other  
(Alexis de Tocqueville 1835/40: 485).

There is no area of human life, anywhere, where one cannot find self-interested calculation. But neither is there anywhere one cannot find kindness or adherence to idealistic principles: the point is why one, and not the other, is posed as “objective” reality  
(David Graeber 2001: 29).

Visitors of Latin America will often hear someone saying: Don't worry, this person is “de confianza”, you can trust him! Or entering a friend's house, he or she will open the fridge, or pointing to the kitchen, tell you: You can take what you want, “estás de confianza”. Often adding the customary phrase: “Es su casa!” These phrases exclaimed in so many different ways and forms; what do they mean? What do they say about Latin American society, about its social and human relations, about the meanings of trust? In the past decades, I have often pondered these simple questions, and the complexity of their possible answers. Today looks like a good opportunity to go deeper into them.

I have always felt that confianza could well be the essence of the many examples of social networks and solidarity in the region. It not only presents a basic ingredient in Latin America's social relations which so many people like me, who have lived in Latin America, have appreciated so much. It also forms the basis for the vibrant civil society which is surely a crucial characteristic of Latin American reality.

My emphasis on solidarity and confianza flies in the face of mainstream images of Latin America's political and social reality and statistical data that stress distrust and conflict as essential elements of Latin American society. UNDP reports, LAPOP and *LatinoBarómetro*, all indicate that a majority of the Latin Americans do not trust their neighbours or political parties, and even less so their government, the justice system and public authorities (Lagos 1997; Cleary and Stokes 2006). To give just one, often used example: The question, “Do you trust your fellow citizens?” is only answered affirmatively by approximately 20 per cent of all Latin Americans today. In the Netherlands this was around 65 per cent in 2012 (World Value Survey). Dammert (2012) calls these levels of distrust, “niveles de emergencia”.

There are several explanations for this lack of “basic trust”. First, we can mention the legacy of the military dictatorships which created, in the words of Koonings and

Kruijt (1999), “societies of fear”. These societies experienced an “assault on basic trust” (Robben 2000), which systematically undermined social and political networks and led to situations of social fear where people “were too terrorized to look each other in the face” (Feitlowitz 1998: 192). With the advent of democracy, the incapacity of national governments to solve social problems and corruption led to a continuation of distrust in the state and state institutions. This lack of trust was reinforced by the high rate of criminality in the region. In 2008 it was calculated that 200 million Latin Americans were the victim of some kind of crime. Its homicide rates are among the highest in the world (Díaz & Meller 2012: 13) and Latin American citizens mention insecurity in all surveys as the largest social problem they encounter (Dammert 2012).

This situation is sometimes called a “syndrome of low trust” which many observers see as a crucial indicator of the region’s woes: political instability, clientelism, personalism, and ultimately, crime and corruption (Jamison 2011). This is not a panorama that provokes a lot of optimism. The only positive outcome of these surveys that we can hold on to is the fact that still in 2017 between 70 and 80 per cent of the Latin American population were of the opinion that democracy was the best political system for the region (Lagos 1997; Corporación LatinoBarómetro, 2017). But these percentages are also going down in a situation where there is a growing appetite for authoritarian solutions among the Latin American populations.

In this lecture I hope to show that this dark picture does not tell the complete story. We should also look at the importance of solidarity and trust relations on a daily level in Latin American society. I would say that this focus is essential for understanding social processes on a local scale. It will also allow us to better understand the dynamics of Latin American society and local incursions in wider political and cultural processes. In this way it contributes in interesting ways to present-day views on the importance of bottom-up social networks for democracy and sustainable development. This is not an easy endeavour – it seems that in Latin America it is easier to describe the dark side than the multifarious signs of hope – and I realize that in this lecture, I can only scratch the surface of a complex issue. Let me start by providing you with a short historical vignette from my own fieldwork.

Meet Maria, a poor peasant woman in one of the rural areas of the Dominican Republic! She has five children. Her husband had worked as a sharecropper (*medianero*) all his life until he received a small piece of land during one of the projects of Reforma Agraria. Although he was in many ways a patriarch and did not let Maria learn to drive his small motorcycle, Modesto loved his wife and five daughters. They were in many ways what people in the countryside call “gente sana”. Maria worked on the land, but more than anything she took care of the house, the cooking and the children. She was reliable and responsible. She loved plants and always had some flowers in the few square meters in front of her

small house. But she also could be tough when necessary, sometimes more so than Modesto.

Maria was a trusted person in the *callejón* towards the hills where the villagers lived. At the end of the week you could see one or two men timidly knocking her door, doing some small talk through the open window, and then a bit awkwardly giving her some money. They were mostly men who lived alone. They knew their own weakness with the weekend nearing and, to protect themselves, gave her the money they did not want to spend on their drinking sprees. Maria kept the money until they wanted it back; but always after the weekend.... There was never a problem with these arrangements: Maria was “de confianza”, the only thing necessary.

### ***Confianza***

The first challenge in this English language lecture is the translation of the term, *confianza*.<sup>1</sup> Trying to understand the cultural or historical meanings of the word, we are confronted with multiple, often contrasting interpretations with their nuances and local meanings. Can the Spanish form *confianza* not simply be translated by the English term “trust” which has already been discussed so extensively in literature? Or should we use “faith” or the term “confidence” which is sometimes used and is through its double meaning, more ambiguous? Of course, there are multiple connections, but by translating we run the risk of losing some of the cultural-specific meanings of the term.

The English term “trust” is mainly understood as a macro-social indicator for the relation between people and their (state) institutions. It is closely connected to the idea of social capital, which often with statistical data tries to quantify the strength of the relations between people and their institutions. Politically, it is seen as an indicator of the democratic relation within society; in economic terms, trust between citizens is seen as diminishing the political and economic transaction costs. An author like Fukuyama (1995: 16) argues that trust lowers transaction costs: “trust acts like a lubricant that makes any group or organization run more effectively”. Luhmann (1973: 25) suggests that it diminishes the complexity of the world by creating a suggestion of a more certain and secure future (“Kontinuitätserwartungen”).

The notion of trust has certainly been useful in analysing societies and the general feelings of confidence in their societies. Nevertheless, the data used in these analyses often have a large level of aggregation. More problematic is that they are strongly fomented by the idea that all cultures have a similar understanding of fairness, democracy and justice and that they do not allow for a more culturally specific understanding of these and similar concepts. And finally, it remains unclear how to measure trust and where it comes from. Often the participation in (voluntary) civic

organizations is presented as a proxy for levels of trust, but this easily amounts to a tautological analysis where trust and civic engagement are each other's explanation.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of *confianza* is useful to counter some of these problems. In the first place, it is a term used by people themselves to characterize concrete and often long-lasting personal relations in Latin American society. Secondly, it allows for a culturally specific understanding of interpersonal relations that includes moral standards of fairness and equality. Basically, *confianza* refers to the relations between two individuals or sometimes, between individuals and a group of people which have been forged over time and because of their moral significance may acquire an almost sacred meaning. In their analysis of Latina migrants in the US, Fitts and McClure (2015: 296) simply define it as "a Latin@ cultural construct that signifies a complex relationship of commitment and trust". These relations are based on reciprocity, trust and respect. Larissa Lomnitz suggests that *confianza* is not a situation, but a feeling towards another person. These feelings are constructed on four basic elements.

First, *confianza* is not so much about words, but about doing. *Confianza* has to be performed, demonstrated and put into practice to make it sustainable. It is about being there for someone else in difficult times: politically, socially or personally. This is not a superfluous observation because much political science research on trust is based on what people say they (will) do; not on what they really do! This connects to what Appiah (2010: xi) writes in his recent book *The Honor Code*: "Morality [...] is ultimately practical: though it matters morally what we think and feel, morality is, at its heart, about what we do".

This means, secondly, that *confianza* can best (or only?) be constructed in real-life, close day-to-day contact. Larissa Lomnitz (1977: 196) observes that although not a sufficient precondition for reciprocity, physical closeness is a vital component of *confianza* relations. This is also how I understand Arturo Escobar's (2008) emphasis on place when he analyses the ways people are connected in Colombia's Pacific coast. People can only create sustainable *confianza* relations if they share the same environment and share a sense of place. Although social media can create friendship and trust among people who do not share the same space, I would say that they are usually unable to create or sustain longer-term *confianza* relations without spatial proximity.<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on the physical closeness thus qualifies current ideas about virtual networks as the future for social movement activity.

Thirdly, *confianza* relations are in principle voluntary. People choose who they trust within the context and constraints of their daily lives. In the organization of neighbourhoods or natural resource management, for instance, people are bound by a mutual dependence which is crucial for their lives and livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> Emotional ties between family members are proverbially strong in Latin America. They often imply strong life-long loyalties and *confianza*, which used to be essential in Latin America's



society. Nevertheless, in the context of present-day urbanization and migration they do not always have the same practical significance anymore.<sup>5</sup> Relations with your neighbours are often more intense than far-away family relations, in which these elements of daily closeness and the possibility of daily interaction are absent. In the public sphere, therefore, neighbourhood and work relations are often more significant than family relations. The voluntary nature of these *confianza* relations implies that they are never self-evident and should be confirmed regularly over time.

This leads to a fourth point: *confianza* relations are always the result of a historical process of interaction. This is true for all trust relations, also for instance in business or institutions, but in the case of *confianza* it mostly concerns long-standing relations on a personal level, between individuals or groups of individuals who shape this relationship over time. *Confianza* does not simply exist; it is constructed over time in which trust, reciprocity and respect are confirmed time and again.<sup>6</sup> This process takes place in the house or the neighbourhood, but also in political activism, the working place or even the office! *Confianza* relations, once they exist, can sustain themselves over long periods of time, long distances and even generations. *Confianza* can also be passed on to someone else. You welcome a relative that comes recommended by a trusted friend of yours, in the same way as you would treat your friend. It is clear, however, that your trust in this relative is shallower and more fragile than your relation with your friend.

*Confianza* relations are usually in one way or another connected to shared interests. This is why reciprocity is often mentioned as a core element of *confianza*. This is especially true in more traditional village communities where people know each other and, because of the nature of agricultural labour needs, rely on each other's support. Agrarian society is full of institutional arrangements which imply reciprocity and define collective forms of cooperation. Following Elster we can see these mechanisms as a result of a certain predictability of social life and the resulting existence of habitual rules and social norms (Misztal 1996: 63). In my dissertation on tobacco producers in the Dominican Republic (1995) I stressed the need for cooperation in labour intensive tasks such as harvesting tobacco. If you helped out your neighbours, you expected that they would help you later. In these contexts, *confianza* is strongly connected to reciprocity and mutual aid; it is a functional answer to scarcity of labour, lack of technology and/or unpredictable circumstances. Boelens (personal communication) notes that the reciprocity in Andean rural communities is more compulsive and can hardly be called voluntary. They are based on mutual dependence and intrinsic (harsh context-driven) "obligations" to work as a collective. He calls this "contractual reciprocity". In my own fieldwork in the Dominican Republic, the reciprocity in the *juntas de vecinos* was much less contractual and depended on the interpersonal relations of the peasant families. This difference draws attention to

the cultural and local differences in the practical and symbolic meanings of *confianza* relations.

The focus on reciprocity connects to De Tocqueville's famous idea of "self-interest well understood". People collaborate and trust each other because they understand that it is in their shared interest. In her book on women entrepreneurship in poor neighbourhoods in Lima, Annelou Ypeij (2000: 75) presents "Letitia" who tells her: "If they ask me for help, I give it. If they say: come and help me, I help them. [...] Why? To make me popular so that they will help me when I have nothing." Coleman (1988) compares this kind of relations as the collecting of credit slips. By working for the community or helping other people, you acquire credit slips which you can cash in later, when you need it.<sup>7</sup> There is certainly this instrumental side to interpersonal support, but I would not want to simplify these relations and portray them as a narrow pursuit of individual interests. The essence of humanity is the human need and capacity to relate socially (Cladis 2009: 384-5). We need other people, but we need them in complex and often multiple ways. *Confianza* also refers to an emotional and moral relationship which involves more than material interests and is imbued by loyalty, friendship and respect. It is also a matter of reputation; of being seen as a reliable person. Not for nothing, the above-mentioned Letitia adds: "I make sure that I am respected".

In most treatises on morality such as, for instance, Peter Kropotkin's (1902, 1922) classic defence of human capability to mutual aid, the morality of human beings stands central. This morality explains human capacity for sympathy and altruism. In the case of *confianza*, we also see this capacity, but we also see something else. *Confianza* implies trust in someone else's morality and willingness to treat you with respect and, when necessary, to help you. Individuals can feel more or less sure about their own morality, but *confianza* requires confidence in the morality of another person. It means that you trust someone and do not fear treason or deceit from that person.<sup>8</sup>

*Confianza* relations are thus the ultimate sign that human beings are not only prepared to transcend their own interests and to actively act on behalf of other people, but also to trust other people to do the same for them. This active attitude can range from people taking care of their sick friends, or their children, sitting with them when they are love-sick or depressed, loaning them money or cooking them soup when it is necessary. It means that you believe and support them, but also that you can contradict them and "speak up your mind". It is thus not only about surviving or reciprocity, it is about friendship and sharing sorrow and happiness. Andreoni mentions the "warm glow" which people experience when they contribute resources that help others more than they help themselves (cited by Orstrom 2010: 160).

To conclude this section, in this lecture I take as point of departure a general interpretation of *confianza* as a direct, voluntary and unmediated personal relation

that people choose. It means in its broadest understanding that people trust each other out of their free will and that no other, economic, political or social interests stands or will stand between them. It implies reciprocity and trust, but also involves elements of morality and intimacy. *Confianza* creates a more or less autonomous moral universe, where “societal” rules or values, based on the market or political power relations, do not count, or count differently.

Analytically *confianza* relations thus mean two different things. On the one hand, it is the separate universe between friends and groups of friends who love or trust each other in the private sphere. On the other, it refers to the social trust that people have developed, usually because they live or work closely together and share certain interests. In real life these relations may often coincide, but their social consequences are different. Where friendships normally remain invisible and private, the social networks as a result of *confianza* exist in the public sphere. We could say that they create something that we can call a community, a dynamic cohesive force based on “forms of collective experience in which individuals with plural identities find ways to agree and end up, maybe, forging something like a common identity, without this aspect being a principal and priority goal” (Bourdeaux and Flippo, quoted in: Clarke et al. 2014: 109). This resonates with Boelens (2015a: 296) when he discusses the foundations of communities in the Andes, not as a result of a presumed “organic solidarity”, but as the result of a historic process “from below and from within”, “[t]hrough marriages, kinship, *compadrazgo* and friendship relations as well as through interfamily/intercommunity exchange”. These collective identities provide the foundation of networks of solidarity and social movements in Latin America.

In the rest of this lecture, I will focus mainly on this second analytical category, but we should not forget the first level that is often connected to and blended with the more social and political expressions of *confianza*. I will argue that *confianza* relations deserve more attention as the basic building blocks of Latin American society. These building blocks may lead to networks of solidarity and social movements, which maintain spaces of autonomy, create alternative economies, but at the same time also address the state. The concept therefore allows us to connect the lived experience of conviviality and *confianza* with institutional structures and political and economic developments on a macro-level. The connection can have different forms. It may be the informal glue that holds things together in the absence of strong institutions, but in other circumstances it may amount to defending rights and claims. In final instance, it suggests that the historical dynamism of Latin American society originates in the concrete daily social relations of its people.

### *Confianza and local networks*

I assume that everyone in this aula can accept the value of trust in human relations. And intuitively, we all believe that a society with more trust will be a better society.

But how can we connect the very personal *confianza* relations that I just described to a more societal level? To do so, we can lean – although not fully depend – on a whole range of political theory. I already mentioned the work on associations and associational behaviour based by De Tocqueville. In his analysis of US society in the nineteenth century he recognized that “self-interest well understood” was the basis of trust relations and the precursor of participation and civic engagement (Tocqueville 1835/40: 500-3; also: Uslaner, 2000/1: 576). His approach suggested a direct relation between day-to-day personal relations and the political and legal organization of wider society. People who were voluntarily working together in associations, whether they were cultural, social or political, glued society together and could protect the system against “despotic rulers” which De Tocqueville saw as the potential undesirable outcome of democracy. The main challenge of the US system which he considered far more democratic than his own “aristocratic” France was: “What resistance can be offered to tyranny in a country where each individual is weak and where the citizens are not united by any common interest?” (Tocqueville 1835/40: 91). In his eyes, the cooperation of individual citizens who voluntarily collaborated in associations provided the answer. On the one hand, these associations produced civic engagement and commitment to society, and on the other, they were the instrument that would be able to stop despotic centralization by the state. In a way, it is surprising that this book which was more than anything an intelligent and very lengthy comparison between France and the US, has maintained its attraction among political scientists. His analytical solution for the tension between individualism and society is one of the reasons. It could also be his optimism about resolving this tension. De Tocqueville draws attention to the moral universe of US citizens and their individual responsibility for the public good. His confidence in the potential of people cooperatively working together has maintained its appeal up to today.

De Tocqueville’s ideas have influenced a whole range of theories which tried to understand civic engagement and its consequences for democracy. Argentine historian Carlos Forment (2003) has tried to apply his ideas on Latin America. Although his argument is not completely convincing, his emphasis on voluntary associations in Latin American history is appealing. Just as Maarten Prak (2018) recently did for Europe, he tries to demonstrate that social and political dynamics in early modern Latin America were the result of a plethora of associations that were constructed on the lowest level of society. From a slightly different perspective James Sanders (2014) sees “republican modernity” as the essence of nineteenth-century Latin America when popular classes fought for democracy against imperial powers and aristocratic elites. Basically, these historians suggest that Latin American society constructed itself from the bottom up, on the basis of the social relations of its people in their daily context. Using the words of Partha Chatterjee (2004: 57) through

cooperation on a local scale they managed “to give to the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community”.

This focus on the importance of local politics in Latin America has been especially productive in political anthropology. It has produced the social movement literature which is such an outstanding part of Latin American social sciences (Salman & Assies 2007; Alvarez et al. 1998). Ton Salman has repeatedly drawn attention to the importance of daily forms of political behaviour and citizenship (see for instance Salman 2004). The publications of Javier Auyero are another example of this productive analysis of politics from the bottom up. I share their plea for a more profound understanding of how Latin American citizens see and use concepts like rights and citizenship in their concrete daily lives.<sup>9</sup> I am convinced that if we want to understand the reality of institutions, like states, social movements or even labour unions and business interests, we should look at this daily reality, *la cotidianidad*, in which people shape their lives. In doing so, however, we should take local logics as point of departure and avoid a priori assumptions on the importance of state and market in this reality.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, it is important to realize that *confianza* relations do not only exist among people of one social class (“people like ourselves”: Uslaner 570). Although always precarious and full of ambiguity, *confianza* can exist between people belonging to different classes or social status. This can lead to exploitation and the reproduction of existing power relations, but it can also be instrumental in reinforcing local networks and creating empowerment and new social movements. The exploitative consequences of trust relations between individuals and groups with different social backgrounds have been widely studied in Latin America. *Compadrazgo* and patron-client relations have been presented as the vital elements of Latin America’s inequality, both in rural and urban settings. In the past decades, these relations have been studied extensively. We have come to understand these relations as ambiguous fields of negotiation, inequality and loyalty. Auyero (2009: 55ff), for instance, has drawn attention to the symbolic and, I would say, moral dimensions of the unequal *confianza* relations in a poor Argentine neighbourhood. Clientelist relations are framed, by both parties, in terms of love, gratitude, admiration and recognition. Auyero (2009: 68) writes: “In daily workings of patronage what matters most are not short-term quid-pro-quo exchanges but diffuse, long-term reciprocity, based on the embedding of the machine operators (brokers and, through them, patrons) in poor people’s everyday lives”. These personalist relations between political leaders and their clients often amount to what is called “pork and barrel” politics. Wil Pansters (2009: 18-19) sees the unequal relations of reciprocity as the crucial element of Latin America’s informal order. Focusing on the unequal power relations in Latin America, he stresses that the strong links between powerholders and “their” followers reproduce inequality, corruption and exploitation.

However, these unequal relations may also be helpful in building or reinforcing networks which try to solve situations of poverty and insecurity or change existing relations of inequality and oppression. In my own fieldwork I found that peasants tried to sell their tobacco to the buyers they really trusted. The process of production and marketing of tobacco was such an intricate endeavour with risks both for the producers and the local merchants, that all parties involved very much valued long-time relations of trust (Baud 1995: 43-6). Similar relations existed between Ecuadorian hacendados and “their” peasants. Andrés Guerrero (1991: 33) sees these often intimate, but strongly hierarchical relations as examples of “reciprocidad desigual”. Scott’s (1976) use of the concept of “moral economy” also suggests that ideas of fairness and justice exist in these unequal relations. Priests often played an important role in rural and urban communities because they possessed a position of trust. Sometimes also members of the urban middle class are involved in these kinds of relations. Steve Striffler tells the story of a Quito lawyer Lautaro Gordillo who supported plantation workers in south Ecuador to obtain land from the United Fruit Company in the late 1950s. His mostly unremunerated activities were key to the success of this local worker/peasant movement. His fearless confrontations with the Company took on “heroic proportions in the narratives of the peasants” (Striffler 2002: 87ff).

There is no doubt that all *confianza* relations carry some form of ambiguity and tension, but those between different classes or cultures do so even stronger. Many authors will consider them as part of a governmentality project or simply as a ploy to continue the oppression of poor people and inequality in general. This may be too simple because it ignores the strong moral meaning these relations can have. What to think of the Ecuadorian hacendado who paid the education of his son’s best friend, a son of an indigenous colono? In my own research I noticed the influence of Jesuit education of poor boys who later became some of the most important social movement leaders of the Dominican Republic (Baud 2001: 30). I would say that every anthropologist would consider certain relations with key informants as trust relations. These examples do not absolve us of understanding and possibly ending structural inequalities, but we cannot ignore the moral significance of these *confianza* relations. They may not change the world, but they can change the lives of people in a local setting.

This is not the place to go deeper into this theme but I would like to draw attention to two things. First, the respect and reputation that people build in their daily environment often are unwittingly the elements which allow them to become brokers with wider society. This can take many different forms. Sometimes it will resemble classic forms of clientelism and *compadrazgo*, but these *gente de confianza* can also become community leaders, popular intellectuals or political representatives. Or key informers for visiting anthropologists! In the words of Chatterjee (2004:

66): “[T]hey mediate between domains that are differentiated by deep and historically entrenched inequalities of power. They mediate between those who govern and those who are governed”. In one of the most inspiring projects of my career, Rosanne Rutten and I tried to understand the ambiguous but important position of these “people in between”, whom we called “popular intellectuals”. On the basis of their reputation and local knowledge, they managed to link everyday practices to wider societal issues (Baud and Rutten 2004).

Secondly, it suggests that the capitalist market and relations of inequality present different practices and meanings in different social contexts. Neoliberal and materialist theories want us to believe that we are all egoistic animals and that human society is “the war of each against all...” as Kropotkin echoes Thomas Hobbes, but – as I learned from my late father-in-law – capitalism needs trust and cooperation like any other societal activity.

In one of her later articles, Elinor Ostrom, who built her career on universalist models, observed that these models often fail to convincingly connect individual engagement and collective action. She concluded that rational choice or self-interest are insufficient to explain human behaviour. Human actions are determined by “rules of the thumb” that have been learned over time, including norms and notions of fairness (Ostrom 2010: 160-1). She suggested to recognize “the complex linkages among variables at multiple levels that together affect individual reputations, trust, and reciprocity as these, in turn, affect levels of cooperation and joint benefits” (164). The analysis of *confianza* relations should thus not only try to understand their political and/or economic logic, but also their moral significance. Maria, whose story I told in the beginning, did not need to cash in her “credit slips”. The *confianza* relation she had with other villagers did not need to be practically compensated. Even stronger: by foregoing reciprocal benefits, she showed that she was not only trustworthy but also was prepared to transcend her own private interests and care for the public good.

This also has an aesthetic side. I have always considered the attention to the public space, such as for instance the flowers planted by Maria, as a small, but meaningful symbol of caring for the public space. There have been moments that I was reminded of Huizinga’s masterful *Homo Ludens* (1950) with its emphasis on the joy of playing, without purpose or interest. This connection ventures far from my theme but sometimes I have felt that we as social scientists have deprived the Latin American people, and especially the poor, of their right of feelings and actions “without meaning”; their right to do things just because they are morally good, enjoyable or beautiful!

### *The darker side of confianza*

Before letting ourselves be carried away by my optimistic musings on the potential of confianza relations, it is necessary to have a look at some of its darker elements. The opposite of confianza is *desconfianza*, and although I have dismissed some of the more pessimistic views on Latin American distrust in the beginning of this lecture, there is no doubt that lack of trust is certainly an element of Latin America's social reality. Trust relations and networks of confianza may turn into exclusionary or even criminal organizations.

In private situations, confianza can be considered a personal decision that does not do harm to anyone. However, as soon as it becomes an element of collective action, this may change. The internal trust relations of a certain group may then expand at the expense of those who are not within the boundaries of these trust relations and who therefore become outsiders. This has been one of the great challenges in processes of commoning. Networks of solidarity may (unwittingly) become closed to outsiders and therefore potentially lead to social and economic exclusion. However, we should not exaggerate this potential of exclusion. Most social movements can – certainly initially – be considered inclusionary organizations, which in principle do not purposefully exclude anyone. The same is true for commons which may turn inwards and only work in the interest of its members, but also often remain open organizations working for the common good.

Another challenge is the maintenance of confianza in the public space. Most initiatives of collective action and social movements sooner or later have to involve themselves in political action if they want their voices to be heard. When local networks enter the public arena, often in cooperation with other networks, they run the risk of losing part of their original transparency and weakening their confianza relations. And even when they do not want to be involved in politics, political partisanship often imposes itself when political parties or individual politicians try to obtain some control over them. The literature gives many examples of the processes of fragmentation and the evolving distrust this often implies. Rumours about leaders having sold out the movement or receiving bribes are part and parcel of social movement activity. While Lazar (2008) sees these rumours partly as a means to keep these leaders in check, they also demonstrate the potential fragility of confianza relations, especially when they are scaled up and enter the realm of national society.

In some societies, confianza and interpersonal trust are simply in short supply. In a seminal study in 1958, Edward Banfield and his wife coined the term “amoral familism” for confianza relations in Italy which worked to insulate local societies from change. Although this study is extremely pessimistic and in many ways orientalist, it has set the tone for village ethnographies which stressed the nefarious consequences of closed, anti-social local cultures.



In recent decades this perspective has been extended to the research on poor neighbourhoods and gangs. In the wake of the influential work on the “culture of poverty” by Oscar Lewis – *The Children of Sánchez* was one of the first academic books on Latin America I read! –, these situations have frequently been associated with urban poverty and anomie. Although the idea of a cultural deficiency has generally been rejected, many social scientists have tried to understand the consequences of poverty, crime and state neglect on Latin American urban populations. Javier Auyero and Maria Berti, for instance, provide a powerful account of what it is like to live under the constant threat of violence. They argue that violence is a “routine way of dealing with everyday life issues inside and outside the home” (Auyero & Berti 2015: 19) in poor and marginalized communities in Argentina. They observe that even the strategies to navigate this violence and to protect family members are often imbued with violence. The glimmers of hope in these extremely violent circumstances come from incipient organizations of local women who as “mothers” take to the streets to ask for more protection (Auyero & Berti 2015: 156-60).

Many poor Latin American neighbourhoods are also dominated by gangs and criminal organizations. These groups are involved in criminal activities and use “trust” to maintain the internal cohesion and protection of gang members. It is used to close them off from the outside world and to exclude and often repress others. Although they will use the same Spanish word, I would argue that this trust is very different from the *confianza* as I have described it here. It lacks the voluntary nature which I have mentioned as a key element of the term. In addition, it is not directed toward the public good and is exclusionary from the outset. Interestingly, however, the explanations for the emergence of gangs in many ways resemble the explanations that can be given for the existence of *confianza*: recognition, mutual support and the appropriation of public space (Savenije 2009: 26ff).

Gangs are initially often embedded in local society and function as some kind of protecting “patrons” of the neighbourhood. In his research on gangs in Managua, Dennis Rodgers (2006b) demonstrated how this benevolent nature of gang behaviour tends to disappear over time. In these circumstances the “trust” that is prerequisite for the survival of illegal armed actors in Latin American cities creates insecurity and fear among the other inhabitants leading to the loss of *confianza* relations among them. Rodgers (2006a: 271) quotes “don Sergio” who observed in 1997: “Nobody does anything for anybody anymore, nobody cares if their neighbour is robbed, nobody does anything for the common good. [...] It’s the law of the jungle here; we’re eating one another, as they say in the Bible....” It is clear that increasing crime and insecurity, may lead to a loss of trust relations and a deepening of unequal and violent gender relations. We have already seen how, in the cases of Argentina and Chile, similar psychological and social alienation occurred during their military dictatorships. In these difficult circumstances interpersonal relations become

closed and insulated but at the same time people become more dependent on *confianza* than ever. Although they tend to hide these relations, they become crucial for survival. Someone like Don Sergio will create and even depend more on intimate *confianza* relations exactly because of the insecurity and the constant threat of criminal violence. People rarely suffer alone!<sup>11</sup>

This section makes clear that understandings of *confianza* in Latin America are necessarily normative. I do not see an easy way out of this. It is not for nothing that this lecture strongly leans on authors who have integrated a normative position in their work. I do not necessarily believe in the kindness of humans, but I strongly believe that most people have a desire for a stable and secure life in a social context. They may think differently about many things, but the majority would rather cooperate and solve conflicts amicably than not. It is with this in mind that I now turn to the social, collective expressions of *confianza* relations.

### **Confianza and social mobilization in Latin America**

Latin America is a region with a strong tradition of local organizations and social movements through *juntas de vecinos*, neighbourhood committees, *mingas*, Catholic base communities, *asambleas*, indigenous authorities and women's groups (Lazar 2008: 62). If we try to assess the wider significance of *confianza* relations in Latin America, I would hold that they form the core both of the day-to-day resilience of the Latin American population and of the social movements that are so characteristic of Latin American politics and society.

Contemporary urban society presents many examples of cooperation and reciprocal arrangements. If we understand Latin American cities as granular, rhizomic constellations of multiple sub-societies – connected, but ostensibly separate – we realize that the personal, day-to-day relations of *confianza* are just as important in the urban settings as they are in agrarian circumstances. Larissa Lomnitz has shown how these networks of cooperation blossom in the context of a megacity like Ciudad de Mexico. She showed how the urban poor try to solve their problems of insecurity and precariousness by creating and confiding in personal relations. Kinship, *compadrazgo*, and friendship are the resources they use for this purpose (Lomnitz 1977: 208). They are the basis of reciprocity and mutual aid. Her focus is on the survival strategies of urban poor, but there is ample evidence that there is much more to it. As these networks of solidarity, as I like to call them, create urban “communities”, they also lay the foundation for many more activities.

In her insightful study of local politics in El Alto, Bolivia, Sian Lazar (2008: 62) talks about “urban communalism”. She observes how local groups “construct collective and relational senses of self among their members”:

Rather than being based purely on a straightforward exchange of participation in the group in return for benefits or rights, these identities are built through ritualized and embodied practices, gossip and suspicion, and the development of notions of reciprocity, authority, hierarchy, and obligation (Lazar 2008: 4).

Her book shows how *confianza* relations are the basis of the organization of the neighbourhood (*vecindad*) and what she calls “active citizenship”. “While neoliberal policies are based upon the creation of individual citizens responsible for their own welfare, this active citizenship outside of the state does rely upon collective groupings” (Lazar 2008: 70). Emerging in local settings, these activities are instrumental in the emergence of movements that transcend the local. In Latin America they often led to civil society action and social movements which solved social and economic problems, sometimes connected to issues of identity, or demands for the state to solve them. As Lazar (2008: 205) writes for Bolivia: “[P]eople experience their citizenship as mediated by a set of nested affiliations, from kinship or occupational groups up”.

The back-and-forth mutual constitution of quotidian activity and institutional change is a very interesting issue. This relation explains the political and social vitality of Latin American society and the ways Latin American populations have confronted the dramatic social, political and economic changes that they have experienced. Sometimes these networks are class based, as in all kinds of union activities. In other instances, they transcend class differences, for example in voluntary associations, religious networks or networks based on geography or ethnicity. Cultural networks such as brass bands, capoeira or hip-hop groups often also acquire new social meanings in present-day Latin America.

Societal change often depends very heavily on these pre-existing trust-based networks and associations. And where the state is not capable of bringing about change or providing services, these networks provide day-to-day solutions. In situations of authoritarian dictatorships, they often present the only means by which people can defend their rights or construe alternative, more democratic structures of governance. In the following I will give four examples of how expressions of *confianza* relations are influencing social and political developments in Latin America.

### *Participatory budgeting*

Participatory budgeting (*orçamento participativo*) is a local practice of public deliberation on budget issues in Brazil. It was introduced in the southern city of Porto Alegre by the governing Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in 1989 and expanded to more than 300 Brazilian cities in 2008. Silva and Cleuren (2009: 11) explain the demand for more participation by pointing at the frustration among citizens about “traditional clientelistic practices of local oligarchies, the strong corruption existing within the public and municipal apparatus, and the lack of transparency in the use of

central government and municipal funds”. In this sense, participatory budgeting is a good case to look at the interface between local networks and the state.

The programme basically consists of the delegation of sovereignty by the state (most often mayors) to civic assemblies in which every citizen can participate and decide on budget issues. In principle, the assemblies govern themselves but the rules which govern the process set limits on particularist demands and in a way institutionalize participation (Avritzer 2002: 155; Wampler 2015: chapters 4 and 5). The practices of participation and deliberation are defined by the participants themselves and can be changed and adapted regularly. In Porto Alegre, it led to a dramatic democratization of political practices and to new and successful forms of participatory accountability (Avritzer 2002; Koonings 2009). This innovation was so successful that it spread throughout Latin America and elsewhere – it was also adopted in Europe and even the Netherlands – but its outcome was not a success everywhere.

Avritzer shows that previous to the programme there had been a notable proliferation of voluntary associations in Brazil after the return of democracy. Based on local structures of cohesion, these associations expressed demands for organizational autonomy and used their private experiences to express their demands. Among other things, this implied that a large number of women had active roles in these associations and were sometimes directly leading them. These pre-existing networks were crucial for the participatory budgeting and decentralized procedures in general. Avritzer (2002: 152) concludes: “[T]he feasibility of a form of broadened participation depended on those actors who already shared a tradition of local assemblies at the regional level”. As one of the consequences of PB, he mentions that citizens are more knowledgeable and informed about projects and therefore are better able to monitor their implementation. He views this “participatory accountability” as an important element of the process of deepening democracy (Avritzer 2002: 155-56; 2017).

The success of these innovations with participatory politics thus depended on the relations of *confianza* among local participants on the one hand, and, on the other, the seriousness of state authorities to actually relinquish power and to accept local demands and decisions of these local councils. Most research in participatory democracy acknowledges that this last condition is the most complicated, especially if you consider the goal of participatory budgeting, as many do, to democratize the state and to deepen pre-existing democratic practices and implement inclusionary politics (Avritzer 2017: 72; Montambeault 2016; Wampler 2015).

There is no doubt that state support for participatory practices has dwindled in Brazil in the later PT years. Certainly, after the party lost power in Porto Alegre in 2004, the programme of participatory budgeting was significantly weakened (Koonings 2009: 220ff). But the challenges extended beyond the change of political

guards; it came down to the vested interests of state institutions (and their employees), which often lost their commitment to deliberative practices and saw participation more as an obstacle than an opportunity. Avritzer (2017: 73) observes that participation overtime has become an instrument for reproducing state dominance. He calls this the “governance of transparency” which works more to confirm institutional dominance than that it fosters more democratic relations. It is the challenge of participatory institutional innovation to maintain its recognition of grassroots structures of *confianza* and participation.

Avritzer (2017) and others (Wampler 2015; Montambeault 2016) have asked why some of the more promising examples of participatory budgeting eventually ended up as failures. Basically, they identify two main factors: first and foremost, they conclude that the success of participatory budgeting depends on existing structures of deliberation and trust. Secondly, these authors agree that the sustainability of participatory budgeting and participatory practices, in general, depend on the willingness of authorities to take the process seriously and to, concretely, relinquish some of its authority (see Abers 2000; Koonings 2009).

### *The struggle for memory and justice in Argentina*

During the period of authoritarian regimes in the 1970s to 80s, social movements had to develop their own spaces of articulation. Possibly the most famous example of this process were the *Madres* of the Plaza de Mayo, who confronted the Argentine military in the search for their missing children. They became famous for different reasons. First and foremost, their courage to stand up as mothers against a murderous regime that made any form of public protest life-threatening appealed to wide global audiences. They were women who managed to forge their basically private grief into a collective movement. In that process, they managed to build a network of trust among women who had not known each other beforehand. In her classic study, Guzman Bouvard (1994: 73) stresses how the strength of the movement came “from mutual support and companionship”, almost as in an “extended family” (12). The *Madres* also are a good example of the gendered nature of many new social movements and the way in which women created and occupied new gendered spaces.

At the same time, many smaller initiatives occurred outside the view of the outsider where neighbourhood organizations (*comunidades barriales*) used different forms of expression to defend themselves such as street protests, marches, petitions, etc. Jelin (1995: 111-2) observes that these protests were normally the result of pre-existing forms of trust and organization, but because of their localized forms, they have become silenced in history writing. This may warn researchers to privilege some movements over others, just because they are more vocal or better represent-

ed in the public domain. It draws attention to the frequent “invisibility” of these confianza-based grassroots organizations.

In a way the Madres demonstrate that confianza relations can be constructed among perfect strangers.<sup>12</sup> This shows that in extreme circumstances, like repression, war or natural disasters, new trust relations can emerge quickly (Cladis 2008: 383). They give us a glimpse about the ways in which new trust relations can be constructed. When circumstances change rapidly or new circumstances occur, people who have not been cooperating before may find themselves united around a common cause. The reverse is also true. After the end of the military dictatorship in 1983, clear differences between the Madres came to the fore, which ultimately led to a division into two organizations. This break up and the previously close alliance between the most vocal group headed by Hebe de Bonafini and the Peronist party under the Kirchner governments also illustrate the danger of political co-optation of these kinds of movements (see also: De Waardt & Ypeij 2017).

Based on their historical reputation, the Madres continued to be an important voice in the struggle for human rights in Argentina, but their privileged access to the public domain and institutional links to the state prevented other groups from being seen and heard. A consequence was the emergence of a multitude of other movements resulting from other networks that often also allowed younger generations to let themselves be heard in alternative ways. HIJOS, the organization of children of the victims of the dictatorship, for instance, organized *escraches*, the public shaming of perpetrators. This was certainly not meant as a critique of the Madres, but it demonstrated the emergence of a new generation of networks. In her analysis of what she called the “memory struggle” in Argentina, Saskia van Drunen (2010: 105) quotes “Juan” who says: “[I]t was about occupying public space. [...] But not only going, as historically used to happen, to denounce in front of the palaces of power, but to occupy territories like the neighbourhoods and political places....” Her analysis demonstrates the different conviviality and approach of the younger generations who criticized the vertical features of the traditional political practices. The members of HIJOS had known each other for many years and shared a feeling of confianza that rejected hierarchy and traditional forms of party politics. They favoured more democratic forms of decision-making and tried to maintain an internal structure that was based on horizontal relations and consensus (Van Drunen 2010: 121). In this way, their movement was based on new networks of confianza that created new forms of social movement activism.

### *Colombian communities in war and peace*

In his recent book, Oliver Kaplan (2017) presented an interesting analysis of the ways rural communities have tried to survive in the ongoing violence and conflict in Colombia. In a study that uses statistical as well as ethnographic data, he tries to

understand the differences in resilience to violence across communities. Basically, his answer is that social cohesion affords civilians better chances to overcome fear and implement collective strategies for protection (Kaplan 2017: 9). He shows that existing trust relations in communities and a widely shared desire for some form of autonomy improved the community's resilience in the midst of multiple armed groups. The existence of intensive and institutionalized forms of cooperation among individuals prevented armed groups from exploiting divisions and empowered civilians in crucial ways. The collective solidarity among the villagers provided crucial support to the community leaders and allowed them to speak out and act in extremely complex circumstances (Kaplan 2017: 40-1).

Where Scott's famously stressed the invisible and silent nature of the "weapons of the weak", Kaplan shows that in the violent context of Colombia, the weak sometimes took a clear stand and resorted to open collective action. He recounts a story that many villagers shared with him. In 2002 a group of FARC guerrillas in Bituima tried to force the village to provision them with food and water. When they threatened to kill a woman who refused because she wanted to protect her son who had nearly been killed by the army, the villagers stood up: "If you're going to kill her, you'll have to kill us all". In the face of this collective attitude, the commander and his guerrillas backed off and left the village. Kaplan notices that the narrative of this event played an important role in the continuing cohesion of the village. The inhabitants saw that they were capable of facing and dealing with such a situation together. One person told him: "We felt that we could defend ourselves" (Kaplan 2017: 252).

Similar processes have been described in San Carlos, Antioquia, where the Comisión Nacional de Memoria Histórica meticulously documented the ongoing violence in the region. Although the violence threatened to destroy the "tejido social y moral" of local society (Sánchez: 2011 244ff), people used their social networks to protect themselves and create new *confianza* relations. A man explained how these new networks of friendship and *confianza* came into being: Many groups of friends existed; indeed, almost everyone came together at night to sleep in one house or another." (Sánchez 2011: 294).<sup>13</sup> Sometimes similar collective actions as in Bituima occurred. In the company of the local priest, inhabitants accompanied a woman who tried to get her son back from the paramilitary (Sánchez 2011: 321). After the violence in the region had ended, women confronted ex-combatants who were demobilized under an agreement with the government. They found strength in their shared grief to confront these people who were responsible for the loss of their loved ones. This case has become famous, because these women did not have any ulterior or juridical motives. They wanted to demonstrate how their grief had not destroyed their relations de *confianza*, presenting their demands almost as a symbol of another possible world. The report observes:

The new trajectories and forms of organization [...] suggest the diverse forms by which the inhabitants defined their civic and political tasks and their condition as victims with rights. They did so with an idea of citizenship based on the recognition of other people's sorrow that was strengthened by the construction of spaces for participation, recognition and reconciliation in the midst of the war and transition. (Sánchez 2011: 324).<sup>14</sup>

In his analysis of this process of rebuilding *confianza* in post-conflict circumstances, Gonzalo Sánchez (2018) stresses the importance of political and institutional changes, such as the new Colombian Constitution of 1991, newly emerging NGOs, support of the Church and urban *marchas* for peace in the late 1990s. He concludes, however, that despite these institutional and national developments, local societies themselves have had to find their own answers to the trauma and alienation which were the result of violence. In this respect the activities of the women of San Carlos who tried to rebuild the social networks of their society are crucial. This becomes clear in the consequences of their mobilization as described in the report of the Commission: "These actions allowed them to handle the insecurity and fear and to reconstruct networks and solidarities. In this way, by reconquering spaces, they reduced the space for destructive impulses and the omnipresence of war in the environment in which they lived..." (Sánchez 2011: 354).<sup>15</sup> *Confianza* in the Colombian post-conflict context thus facilitated the active creation of new spaces of conviviality and cooperation.

### *Peruvian neighbourhood associations*

It is no coincidence that Latin American urban neighbourhoods often became places with strong networks and movements. Holston points to the paradoxical situation in which state repression not only tends to create isolation and alienation, but also the development of spheres of independence, precisely in these marginal, repressed spaces (Holston 2008: 238-9). In this context, the organization of women in Lima, as studied by my colleague Annelou Ypeij and my former PhD student Jelke Boesten, provide interesting clues.

Many of the poorest neighbourhoods of Lima were the result of land invasions by waves of migrants from the 1950s onwards. Lima is basically located in a flat desert region. Land was therefore easily accessible, but the circumstances in which these new neighbourhoods came into existence were very difficult. Usually a large number of families, which were connected through rural networks, occupied a piece of land in the unpopulated outskirts of the city. These occupations were very intensive collective endeavours from the beginning. People were really building a new life with their bare hands under extremely difficult and insecure conditions. In one of the first serious studies about one of these neighbourhoods, coordinated by Carlos



Degregori (1986), these squatters were called “conquistadores de un nuevo mundo”.

There was no doubt that collective labour and mutual aid were important elements in these land invasions. As soon as the invasion was completed, the new inhabitants started to organize the neighbourhood and distribute communal tasks, such as digging ditches for drainage, building some kind of infrastructure, etc. Another important task was to bargain with the municipal authorities and to look for basic services such as public transport and water provisioning (also Ypeij 2000: 29ff). While the men took charge of the more public tasks, women were responsible for the daily routine of these neighbourhood organizations. They met to discuss issues of health, food and bringing up children. In the 1980s this led to an explosive growth of women’s organizations, *Clubes de madres*, which basically provided collective solutions for family-connected challenges. The most important result was the organization of communal kitchens (*comedores populares*), which not only provided food for the neighbourhood population but also solved issues of health and hygiene.

These activities fostered intense networks of mutual aid and assistance among the women. Ypeij uses the idea of a solidarity economy to describe these relations which were social *and* economic.<sup>16</sup> Helping out is a crucial element in cash-poor neighbourhoods: giving small loans or credit, sharing your space with others, taking care of the children, and so forth. So much has the idea of communal kitchens taken hold in contemporary Peruvian society that it is difficult to find social movements or women’s organizations which do not also include some form of collective cooking (Ypeij, personal communication). In many ways, we can see the communal kitchens as networks of mutual aid and solidarity. Ypeij (2000: 32) quotes “María” saying:

The communal kitchen is not just for cooking, but to have contact with others too, to share one another’s problems. [...] The communal kitchens have provided us with a space where we can reflect, a space for friendship, a space for sharing problems.

In a way, we may therefore unceremoniously paraphrase Virginia Woolf and consider these kitchens as collective “spaces of one’s own”.

At the same time, this also points at some of the tensions apparent in these women’s organizations. Where Ypeij tends to stress the *confianza*, mutual aid and social capital fostered by these women’s organizations, Boesten also draws attention to the internal struggles, distrust and competition in the neighbourhoods and draws attention to the danger of co-optation and manipulation by state institutions and national and international organizations. I would say that they both make valid points. Together they confirm the importance of *confianza* relations for women and women’s organizations; and at the same time they point at its challenges.

In the first place, it is clear that the women organized in those spaces that were traditionally reserved for women, house chores, taking care for the children, cooking food, etc. It is not difficult to see that these women's organization in many ways reproduced existing patterns of unequal gender relations. Secondly, while these organizations create new forms of *confianza* and solidarity among their members, they sometimes enter into competition with similar organizations which are competing for the same funds and resources (Boesten 2009: 47). This leads to a third challenge, highlighted by Boesten and which is certainly not exclusive for Peruvian women's organizations. In many ways, these organizations are fulfilling tasks which should be the responsibility of the state. By taking care of the distribution of food and resources, they collectively assuage the most extreme expressions of poverty. And all this, without pay or compensation! The famous *vaso de leche* programme is an example of this process in which thousands of women are engaged in the distribution of milk to school children.

In the same process of doing work for the authorities, organizations and networks run the risk of being co-opted and manipulated by the state or political interest groups. After the fall of Fujimori in 2000, many women's organizations were caught in the web of political clientelism. Boesten (2009: 64) remarks, however, that we should not judge too easily, because outside support had always been essential for these organizations and many organizations were never founded to solve the problems of poverty in Peru, but were simply solutions found by particular women and their networks.

The analysis of the ways poor women in the *pueblos jóvenes* have organized themselves in circumstances of extreme poverty and inequality thus helps us to understand the importance of networks of solidarity, but it also warns against romanticized celebrations of female solidarity and autonomy. It demonstrates the power of community activities, but at the same time points at internal divisions and the danger of co-optation by the state.

### **Analysing *confianza* relations**

So, what do these short examples teach us about the societal importance of interpersonal *confianza* relations? Of course, while admitting to the necessity for more profound analysis, I would still like to point out a number of conclusions. I have presented the cases above in a more or less random order in order to avoid the suggestion that we are dealing with a straight line from more "traditional" community action, transferred from rural communities to urban neighbourhoods as in Lima, to more sophisticated state-connected projects of civic participation as in participatory budgeting. The point I want to make is that *confianza* relations have impact on *all* collective action.

Looking at the wider consequences of these cases I see three main fields of interest. On the one hand, clear differences exist in relation to the state. I would argue that direct confrontation with the state, thanks to democracy and the end of blunt authoritarianism, is less frequent in contemporary Latin America. Most associations and social movements come into existence outside state control, but despite their oppositional rhetoric, they normally look for footholds in the state apparatus to have their demands be heard. Sometimes they work, in more or less intensive fashion, together with state authorities. Although this may lead to (temporary) successes, it may also lead to fissures in *confianza* relations outside of their local day-to-day settings.

A second field which some of these cases highlight is the economic consequences of these day-to-day relations. We have seen that reciprocity often is the basis of *confianza* relations and that they help poor people to cope with changing circumstances. In present-day Latin America this takes place in a situation where the capitalist market economy is dominant. What does this mean for the economic place of these networks of solidarity and their insertion in the market economy?

Thirdly, *confianza* relations in general and their connection to social movement activity are strongly gendered. In some ways, and perhaps exaggerating somewhat, we see that *confianza* as an idea and practice is often strongly female-driven.

We will have a shorter, more conceptual look at these fields before connecting these fields to the debates on the commons, which in many ways encapsulates my analysis of *confianza* in Latin America.

### *Politics of autonomy and citizenship*

In an often-quoted sentence, Bryan Roberts (1996: 39) has observed that: “Social movements in Latin America are the most visible signs of the struggle to define and redefine citizenship”. They have replaced traditional actors, like political parties and religious associations, and forced themselves onto the public eye. They were firmly grounded in existing communities and historical forms of association (Avritzer 2017: 25) and built on existing networks of solidarity based on long-lasting *confianza* relations. We have seen how they started as networks and sometimes became “movements”. Movements consist of groups of people that use their networks of *confianza* to express themselves while often being unsure about the concrete outcome or goals. We should take in the real meaning of the word *movement*. As voluntary and spontaneous networks, people *move* fluidly within them, often with different perspectives, backgrounds and motives, many dropping in and out in an uncontrolled process. These movements could be short-lived. Sometimes they developed into more established social and political organizations, sometimes in the form of NGOs, possibly financed by outside donors.

In 1985 our recently deceased CEDLA colleague David Slater edited a seminal book that draws attention to new social movements which emerged after the democratization in Latin America. In one of the essays, Tilman Evers (1985: 42) observed that these movements did not so much look for resource mobilization but instead for other forms of accomplishments, often related to meaning and identity and, I would add, for some kind of reproduction of *confianza* relations. He wrote:

Political power as a central category of social science is too limiting a conception for an understanding of new social movements; their potential is mainly not one of power, but of renewing socio-cultural and socio-psychic patterns of everyday social relations, penetrating the microstructure of society.

In daily practice it is difficult to distinguish these different objectives of social action which often simultaneously imply demands for redistribution, recognition and participation.

Today this importance of identity for civil society organizations has generally been accepted. It opened a whole new field of study into the different ways in which groups of people organized and asserted their identity and rights (Alvarez et al. 1998). They often did not look for changing the system but were looking for recognition and the solution of concrete problems and the improvement of their daily lives. It is not a coincidence that wider society often only learns about them when they appropriate public space with occupations, marches, sit-ins or meetings. Rutgerd Boelens (2015a: 296) has drawn attention to the “invisibility” of these networks. They exist, more or less, outside of the view of formal institutions and structures. “As rootstocks, they horizontally connect underground and produce shoots above and roots below – difficult to understand outside officialdom and power groups”. In the same vein, Rebecca Solnit (2016: xiii) uses the metaphor of mushrooms.

Among researchers on social networks and movements, consensus exists that some kind of “autonomy” is a crucial prerequisite of successful movements although it is not always clear what autonomy means exactly in complex, institutionalized society. De Waard and Ypeij (2017), following Holston (2008), observe that social movements politically expand the “spaces of democracy” and economically develop alternative, more inclusive forms of economic interaction. In general, their success depends on their capacity to stay aloof of political partisanship.<sup>17</sup> This is one of the most critical and complex challenges faced by Latin American social networks. Leadership is crucially important here. Leaders are under constant pressure from different political actors and they constantly run the risk of their organizations and networks being split up over differences of opinion about strategy and (political) direction. Their capacity to navigate these pressures and maintain the confidence of their members determines the fate of themselves as leaders and the organizations they are responsible for.

The communities in Colombia analysed by Kaplan can be seen as examples of such a successful balancing act where, for a long time, leaders and their communities managed to avoid taking sides in a highly polarized situation. The break-up of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo presents a contrasting example of a process where a more or less apolitical human rights organization broke up over political differences. A dramatic example of a leader taking a “wrong” decision is presented by José Lutzenberger, one of the figureheads of the Brazilian environmental movement. He accepted an invitation from then president Collor in 1990 to become secretary of the environment. This generated so much polarized debate that it severely fragmented and weakened the movement and fatally undermined his own political position (Hochstetler & Keck 2007: 105, 114-5). Social movement research is full of these kinds of examples, on local as well as on national scales.

This may point to some interesting conclusions. If autonomy is crucial for social movements, this implies that in one way or another they have to transcend existing political oppositions. They may be unable to fully avoid political clientelism and co-optation (Auyero & Benzecry 2016), but they will try to remain independent of specific political allegiances. The moment and manner in which social networks negotiate and integrate their demands with the authorities is thus an extremely sensitive issue, because losing autonomy is almost always part of these processes.

### *Solidarity in a capitalist world*

This leads to a second important issue. *Confianza* is often about money, credit, debt; and so are the ruptures of relations of *confianza*! It is common knowledge that families often break up because of unpaid debts or conflict about inheritances. This might lead to the wrong conclusion that today’s *confianza* relations are firmly embedded in capitalist relations of production. Following Polanyi, who asked questions about the inevitable dominance of the market economy in rural societies, many anthropologists have tried to understand the specific meaning of monetary transactions in local conditions. Much has been written about this in what we used to call “subsistence economies” where a scarcity of money led to all kinds of reciprocal transactions in which money was almost non-existent. The debate around this topic was heavily influenced by the ideas of Karl Polanyi. He stated that “man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships” (Polanyi 1944: 46) and suggested that economic relations in daily life can acquire meanings that are quite different from the capitalist market economy. He distinguishes three of these forms: redistributive, reciprocal and household based. His ideas were used later (and criticized) by David Graeber (2001), who suggested that market principles are not a necessary prerequisite of today’s capitalist world. Every network or society has the potential to create its own forms of economic transactions. In a special issue that we edited (Baud et al. 2019), we suggest that we should distinguish different forms in which

capitalism takes form in Latin America. Consequently, we can talk about “capitalismS”.

If confianza is so important in local social and economic relations, how does this then affect people’s views on money and market? Ypeij uses the term solidarity economy, suggesting that economic transactions in poor Peruvian neighbourhoods are not so much determined by rules of the market, but much more by elements of reciprocity, trust and necessity. In many ways, she echoes Viviana Zelizer’s now famous book, *The Social Meaning of Money* (1994). Zelizer demonstrated that money is not the “impersonal instrument” and “very essence of our rationalizing modern civilization” that destroys interpersonal ties. It is important, instead, to understand the ways “people have reshaped their commercial transactions” and “incorporated money into personalized webs of friendship and family relations....” (Zelizer 1994: 2). People also use money to forge and reinforce social ties.

In a recent study of a poor neighbourhood in Buenos Aires, Ariel Wilkes (2018) continues this line of thought and talks about the “moral power of money” in which she sees it as “a moral accounting unit”. Building on E.P. Thompson’s idea of a “moral economy”, later revived by James Scott (1976), she suggests that economic transactions always imply moral issues. This echoes the famous observation of Marcel Mauss (1967: 63): “Things have values which are emotional as well as material; indeed in some cases these values are entirely emotional. Our morality is not solely commercial”. Wilkes distinguishes different meanings of monetary transactions in the day-to-day relations in the neighbourhood. To give an easily understood example: “Earned” money has a totally different meaning than “political money” which is the result of clientelism or political corruption. The first is a source of pride and visibility, where the second is a source of rumours and envy; it is often hidden and spent as quickly as possible.<sup>18</sup> Another example, many of you will recognize, is the specific meaning of money received as heritage from a beloved person. Many people will use this money in a “special” way to honour the memory of the deceased!

In his classic study *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, Michael Taussig (1980) demonstrates how sudden wealth provokes rejection and suspicion in communities. He also analysed the envy and suspicion among Colombian villagers when migrants returned for Semana Santa ostensibly showing off their newly acquired wealth (Taussig 1978: 104-140). We could say that sudden, unaccounted for wealth may rupture the structures of confianza in communities.

Confianza does not exist outside the market economy; it is often right in the middle! Most shopkeepers constantly work with “virtual” money because their clients live on credit: *op de pof* in Dutch, *fiado* in Argentina. As Wilkes (2018:61) observes: “They could not elude fiado if they wanted to maintain their ranking in the neighbourhood and have their business succeed”. These continuous debt-relations require sharp social skills on the part of the shop owner, in which business acumen

is often combined with a social responsibility vis-à-vis their clients. Safeguarded money, money saved over a long period of time, may be admired and valued, but it may turn against the owner if he or she foregoes social obligations.

In his monumental analysis of the “Civil Sphere” Jeffrey Alexander (2006: 43) draws attention to “the critical role of social solidarity”. In his analysis of the role of the market, he follows Albert Hirschman in his analysis of the cohesive potential of the capitalist market and its initial social, “civilizing” qualities. “Le doux commerce” was initially seen as the antithesis to aristocratic privileges and conducive to produce qualities associated with civic engagement and democratic participation (Alexander 2006: 26). We have lost this beneficial perspective on global capitalism today, symbolized as it is by large corporate enterprises, flash capital and global inequality, but we should not lose sight of these social and civic elements of the market on local levels. This could also help us understand the different meanings of the market in daily settings. Gregory Christopher (1982: 36) writes: “Gift economies tend to personify objects. Commodity economies, like our own, do the opposite: they tend to treat human beings, or at least, aspects of human beings, like objects”. This may be too simple a binary, but it draws attention to the variety of meanings of capital up to today.

Elements of reciprocity are thus reproduced in the economic transactions among trusted people and social networks. In their illuminating book on broccoli cultivation by Maya producers in Guatemala, Ted Fischer and Peter Benson (2006: 75) identify “local models of fairness and equality” which, in their view, limit market competition. They observe: “Most of the Maya farmers express a strong preference for cooperative behaviour while also recognizing the realities of market competition”. They suggest that capitalism as a global system does not necessarily have a uniform dominance over the ways people live, and that people constantly adapt and create their own economic moralities (see also Alexander 2006: 35). This should not sound too strange to many of us who are critical of capitalist inequality and other elements of global capitalism, but who, in daily life, participate in the capitalist market. We use money and participate in the market but try to do so in humane and socially sensitive ways and try to resist the worst expressions of the system to honour relations of *confianza*, friendship and social responsibility.<sup>19</sup>

### *Gender and confianza*

*Confianza* is strongly gendered and often remains in the female domain. Many of the strongest networks of *confianza* are clearly dominated by women. Traditionally, women have been responsible for the social, care-giving tasks in Latin American society, often connected to their “motherhood” (Davids 2017). The well-studied examples of rotating credit organizations, called the *san* in the Dominican Republic or *pandero* and *canaston* in Cuzco are almost exclusively the domain of women

(Baud, 1995; Steel 2008: 105-109; Nes 2011). In urban contexts women were relegated to the private spaces of the house. According to the Brazilian anthropologist, Roberto DaMatta (1991), intimacy and *confiança* only existed in the house, whereas in the public domain, on the “street”, individualism and clientelism prevented most forms of real trust.

It is therefore tempting to connect the dominance of women in *confianza* relations and social networks to traditional gender differences. In this perspective, the important role of women in networks of solidarity and social movements is based on their “female” roles as mothers and caretakers. This may be too simple, but it may help to explain the importance of women in networks of solidarity in Latin America despite a rapidly changing society. Auyero and Berti (2015: 144) see a continuation of a “gendered division of labour” “in which women, rather than men, are tasked with caring for others’ needs”. At the same time their activism in networks and movements is also changing the social position and the subjectivities of women. By using local networks of *confianza* as a basis for their public activities, they are able to conquer new spaces in the public arena. Drogus and Stewart-Gambino (2005: 189) observe that the activist experience “tends to change [women] in ways that lead to continued personal activism and work for social change”. In the past decades, women have become recognized leaders and public figures in all Latin American countries. This demonstrates how difficult it is to generalize about Latin American gender relations which have evolved historically, but also show enormous differences across region, class and ethnicity.

What does this imply for the situation of men in Latin America? Masculinity in Latin America is a notoriously complex topic, especially in connection to another elusive concept like *confianza*. Male friendships are often more tenuous and competitive and often imply both competition with other men and some form of male dominance over women. There is so much patriarchy, *machismo* and repression in Latin America that just for that reason some of you may question my emphasis on *confianza*. The statistics of domestic violence are gruesome in many Latin American countries. In situations of political or criminal violence, they become even worse as the examples of Peru and Guatemala show (Boesten 2010, McIlwaine and Moser, 2001). Surveys show that in many countries more – and often much more – than 50 per cent of the women has been the victim of domestic violence. McIlwaine and Moser (2001: 973) observe that for this reason, trust among family members has been very limited in Guatemala. At the same time, it has reinforced female *confianza* relations which can form a buffer against this domestic violence.

However, I do believe that there is more to Latin American masculinity than violence and oppression. Male behaviour can be rude and oppressive but it can also be generous and responsible. We can go back to the famous honour – shame complex presented by British anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers to understand this contrast.



This complex has been considered the basis of the proverbial male-domination in Mediterranean societies. Pitt-Rivers (1965) presents the classic macho man as someone who wishes “to excel over others” and to humble women and conquer them into a state of shame and subservience. *Confianza* in these circumstances is firmly linked to female oppression and forms of patron-client relations. But Pitt-Rivers also presents the other side of this cultural arrangement. Male honour is also based on trustworthiness and respect. His oath of loyalty to his family or his clan is “sacred”; a term that Pitt-Rivers uses with vehemence (1965: 34/35). And here we can see the link with the term “*confianza*”. A man who has given his word, can be trusted. “[T]he obligation to deal honestly is, in fact, a personal one. You owe honesty in defined situations, as loyalty to a particular person. To persons with whom you have or wish to form ties, to kin, friends, or to employers, particularly if they are also godparents” (Pitt-Rivers 1965: 59). It is interesting that this idea of honour as an important force for societal change has been taken up by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book, *The Honor Code* (2010), where he demonstrates how important the idea of “honour” is to explain why societies change their moral views.

The complex relation between dominance and responsibility can also be observed in the Latin American situation. However, it is the object of strong differences of opinion. I have had many discussions about the *tiguere*, the young man who is the symbol of assertive masculinity in the Dominican Republic (Krohn-Hansen 1996). Are they only the irresponsible and often violent machos? I don’t think so. They are men imposing themselves on the world, always present, aggressive sometimes, often funny, but behind the veneer of irresponsible manliness, also caring and trustworthy. Even in her very difficult prison research in Nicaragua, Julienne Weegels (2018) found examples of responsible and even trustworthy male behaviour.

The topic of masculinity in a rapidly changing Latin American society is thus a fascinating and important theme for our understanding of *confianza* relations. Are male violence and male chauvinism the norm, or can we see ambiguities and changes? In this context, Matthew Gutmann’s book, *The Meanings of Macho*, was an important turnaround. He tried to understand the nuances in the discourses on masculinity in Mexico and the differences between rhetoric and practice. In the process he observed “multiple expressions of male gender identities” in urban Mexico (1996: 21). They are fathers, husbands, friends and, in other circumstances, drunks, machos and violators. They go to work and are disciplined in schools and military barracks, but they occasionally want to break free. That explains their obsession with sports. In the words of Eduardo Archetti (1996: 51): “The masculine ideal of football is the masculinity of those who never stop being children”. But he also observes how masculinity has changed in modern Latin American society. “Moral attitudes based on understanding, loyalty and lack of extreme passion replace the primitive reactions based on masculine bravery, vengeance and extreme courage” (Archetti 1999: 156).

There is thus no doubt that gender relations have changed and that they have created new forms of *confianza*. We can observe a certain paradox in the fact that women create their own space of trust and empowerment around typical feminine chores. Feminist anthropology is still divided about the analysis of this paradox. Should we consider it a female strategy to protect a separate space? Or is it a symbol of female “complicity” and silent reproduction of existing relations of oppression and gender inequality? I would say that we should steer clear from these simple dichotomies. Gender relations are so complex, with their multiple dimensions of emotion, collaboration and power that they can only be understood as situated, historic process in which male-female relations continuously undergo change.

Our analysis of *confianza* relations and social networks demonstrates (or at least suggests) that the activities of women are crucial in understanding and explaining these changes. They are very gradually changing the environment of male chauvinism and domestic violence. Gutmann (1996: 24) concludes: “where changes in male identities and actions occurred in Mexico City, women have often played an initiating role”. The interaction between men and women increasingly takes place not only in the family sphere, but also, and even more so, in the context of the networks I have discussed above. In discussing gender relations in these networks, Lazar (2008: 204) writes: “One often gets the impression that the collective is attempting to draw out the characteristics which some Western feminists see as the “feminine” (social/collective) aspects of its members’ selves against their more “masculine” (individual) impulses”. So, while on the one hand, gender inequality and domestic violence seem to undermine *confianza* and trust in Latin America society, networks of solidarity and social movements could also be spaces where gradual changes towards more equal gender relations may take root.

### *Confianza and the commons*

When I started my academic career, I used the work of Goran Hyden (1980) on the uncaptured peasantries in Africa. He explained how the economic resilience and specific logic of these peasant populations prevented a moderately enlightened president like Nyerere to fully control them. I now see that I then underestimated an important element in this debate around what Hyden called “the economy of affection”. It was not so much that the Tanzanian peasant families did not want to participate in the modernizing plans of the state, but that they cherished and protected certain social systems that they considered more important. They fought for a certain social, cultural and economic space that they wanted to govern according to their own, common rules.

What I have presented here directly connects to this debate. Most people cherish and defend the things they value most. Although some financial means and security are among the most cherished among these things, social networks based on trust

and *confianza* are not far behind. People cherish and defend these networks not only because they undergird these other elements like income and security, but also because sociality is a crucial element of humanness. As social actors they know the importance of working together, engaging in collective action and creating collective space and resources. Societies constantly see new initiatives where people come together to collectively solve a problem, create a common space or engage in a common project.

Today, this collective appropriation of resources is often designated as “commoning”. In her seminal work, Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom tried to understand the possibilities of cooperation (or “collective action”) of people to address common problems or manage common resources. She rejected pessimist views about the impossibility of sustainable cooperation by Garret Hardin who envisioned a “tragedy of the commons” where common resources would be depleted and destroyed because of the egoistic, “free riding” behaviour of their members. Instead, she tried to understand how and why people work together and are constantly creating new forms of collectivity. On the basis of that analysis, she then developed a famous model of regulations (“design principles”) which would help to avoid such a tragedy and enable the successful management of common resources.<sup>20</sup>

Today these principles are criticized as being too institutional and rigid. And, as we saw, even Ostrom herself realized, later in life, the complex challenges of understanding collective behaviour beyond institutions and self-interest. Nevertheless, her work and the theoretical debates that were its result are very useful when we try to understand interpersonal relations of *confianza* which not only are at the core of human lives but are also central to practices of commoning.

I would like to use the ideas of the commons and commoning to have a last close look at *confianza* as a basic building block of solidarity and collective activity. The major part of the commons literature focuses on the behaviour of people when they have to manage existing common pool resources. However, I think it is important to understand how they (try to) create them. This is the essence of commoning as a process which brings back this dynamic element in the debate. If people feel like they are the “owner” or even the creator of commons, if they feel it is their choice to be part of a collective project, if their choice to be part of that project is based on *confianza*, the tragedy may turn into an opportunity. Rules are always necessary, but rules that you “own”, that you have devised yourself, are part of the process of commoning and do not feel imposed. The freedom to choose – connected again to the voluntary and autonomous nature of the endeavour – may well be the secret of commoning, as an unmediated collective project. As discussed before, we should not exaggerate the freedom to choose. No one is completely free in his or her capacity to meet or interact with other people, even less so if you are poor, but people do normally have the freedom to decide whom they trust!

Ida Susser (2017: 1-2) defines commoning in general terms as “a grassroots project to build a new form of consensus that highlights the importance of sharing, economic security, and horizontalism across thresholds of difference”. She notices that participants often refuse specific political goals and would rather see themselves as transforming social relations from the bottom up. This is a warning not to read too much politics into these processes or to always view commoning as counter-hegemonic, anti-capitalist projects (see Velicu & García-López 2018: 5-7). Most processes of commoning derive from interpersonal *confianza* relations on a local scale. They create autonomous spaces and foster networks of solidarity which may remain under the radar in a more or less conscious strategy of invisibilization. It can be argued that commoning in modern, institutionalized society eventually amounts to a political process, however. Commoning projects are often forced onto the streets to acquire support or to defend their autonomy.

This leads to a last important issue, hotly debated in debates on the commons. How can networks of solidarity and collective action sustain themselves over time without suffering fragmentation, conflict or free-riding? This is especially important in the context of my lecture, because when groups and networks grow, *confianza* relations based on direct personal contact lose their power and possibly the initial inspiration. The direct relations between individuals disappear and thereby the self-evident existence of trust. Coming to decisions will become more difficult. In such a situation the need for rules and regulations may increase and thereby the transaction costs. People will potentially become less engaged with the objectives and obligations, and the risk of “free-riding” will increase (see for instance Ostrom 2010: 157).

Free-riding, the use of benefits of group membership without contributing to them, forms a fatal danger for any network, especially after the initial stage of collective enthusiasm. The solutions for this potential danger offered by the literature are diverse, ranging from strong and accountable leadership, open democratic procedures, to representational equality – especially in terms of gender – and stronger institutional regulation. Equally important is the need for maintaining face-to-face communication, in this way emulating the basic structures of *confianza* relations. It is impossible here to go into this debate, but it makes clear that it is imperative to better understand these processes of commoning and especially their transformation over time.

### *Towards a conclusion*

In the foregoing I have tried to convince you of the importance of *confianza* as a concept and practice in Latin American society. *Confianza* is both a practice and a moral universe which is present everywhere in Latin American society, sometimes openly and socially visible, sometimes almost in hiding and closed off. Where injus-

tice, poverty and violence are so extremely visible, social scientists have tended to ignore these *confianza* relations. I have tried to show how *confianza* relations may deserve more attention, as they are the basic building blocks of Latin American society. These building blocks may lead to networks of solidarity and social movements, which maintain spaces of autonomy, create alternative economies, but at the same time also address the state. We cannot understand societal change and institutional innovation in Latin America without taking them into account. These *confianza* networks exist in a certain tension with institutions because they have their own logic and objectives, but their existence is crucial to both society and institutions. It would be good if institutions would take these networks seriously, but at the same time there is a definite danger of their co-optation and manipulation once this does happen. The experience of participatory budgeting gives some clues to this ambiguous connection (Avritzer 2017), but we need to more explicitly look into this relation than I have been able to do here.

One of the most complex issues in my perspective is its normative implications. We can easily accept that security, loyalty, and solidarity are positive outcomes. It is also easy to condemn some networks that can be considered outright antisocial, promoting violence, racism or social or sexual repression. However, if we dig deeper, we will always discover moral categories and norms that are less clear-cut. Not every network will think the same about sexual rights or market behaviour. I would say that it is necessary to accept this diversity. Social scientists could well benefit from emulating the pragmatism of these networks and try to understand how they are constituted and why their members participate voluntarily. These kinds of queries are even more necessary in these complex political times, both in Latin America and in Europe.

My focus on *confianza* may seem counter-intuitive in this period of political and economic crisis, social and economic insecurity and urban violence, but I would argue that it only demonstrates the need for this perspective. It dramatically draws attention to, and partially explains, the resilience and agency of the Latin American populations which have found their own ways to cope and to develop not only their families, but also their communities and societies. It is no coincidence that a writer like Arturo Escobar (2008: 74) looks for interpretations that liberate “the economic imaginary *from its sole reliance* on the languages of capital, individuals, markets, and the like”. I emphasized “*from its sole reliance*” because it allows us to see and value smaller and larger attempts to create alternative social and economic logics without having to judge them on their potential to change the entire global market system. Escobar (2008: 101ff) suggests that we should accept the economic diversity where groups of producers or entrepreneurs apply different logics as to the division of labour, the appropriation of surplus and the gendered organization of production as meaningful adaptations to capitalist relations of production. In her analysis of

women-led communities in Asia and the Pacific, Katherine Gibson (2002) points to their ability to foster alternative logics. Verónica Gago (2015) did the same for Argentinean markets using the term “*pragmática popular*” for the multifarious ways men and women invent social and economic practices. My PhD students found similar examples of individuals and groups carving out alternative capitalisms in Ecuador. We may follow Gibson’s (2002: 76-77) conclusions that “while each [of these examples] could be seen as small and insignificant interventions in the face of capitalist globalization”, these projects are exciting and significant examples of the existence of alternative logics, within, but different from, capitalist globalization itself.<sup>21</sup>

Confianza may thus be seen as a proxy for community and solidarity that exist side by side, beyond or opposed to the state or the market. It is a necessary concept in understanding how Latin Americans act in private and public spaces. It explains the struggle for autonomy and recognition that has been the objective of most social movements in the region in the past decades. It also allows us to look at day-to-day resilience among Latin American populations and the ways they build their lives, find alternatives and construct alternative processes of development

### **Confianza and trust in the Netherlands**

These examples may look like exotic far-away, *ver van je bed* issues to those of you who do not work on Latin America (and for some of the latter as well!), but I would like to use the last part of my lecture to suggest that this is not the case. Many of the ideas I have presented to you in this lecture also have a bearing on Dutch society. Or at least that is what I think, based on my experiences as director of CEDLA and as primary caretaker for my mother, and from the experiences of friends trying to do their work in today’s Dutch society as a psychologist, civil servant or artist. Many of the ideas presented here are directly relevant for our own societies. They ask crucial questions about the way we have organized our society and, especially, our (state) institutions. It becomes increasingly clear that we have created a society where institutional distrust is not only frustrating professionals who try to do their work, but is also creating systems of control that make it inefficient, expensive and unpleasant.

In this lecture I quoted David Graeber for his ideas on value. I became acquainted with him and his ideas during the occupation of the Maagdenhuis three years ago where I spent some cherished moments together with, sadly, my now deceased colleague Mario Rutten. This shows that – and not only for me! – the protests against the organization of our university and the occupation of the Maagdenhuis were not only a political, but also an intellectual experience that blended with friendship and trust.

In his book, *The Utopia of Rules*, Graeber observes how neoliberal-inspired “de-regulation” in our societies normally leads to more regulations, rules and paper-

work. This implies increasing distrust in workers and professionals who are constantly asked for their credentials. He writes: “While these measures are touted – as are all bureaucratic measures – as a way of creating fair, impersonal mechanisms in fields previously dominated by insider knowledge and social connections, the effect is often the opposite” (Graeber 2015: 23). In many ways, he echoes the work by Rutgerd Boelens on technocratic water management in Latin America. In his inaugural lecture, Boelens (2015b) demonstrated how technocrats tend to see the world from a utopian tower where they develop views and create models which dramatically transform the lives and works of people below. The bureaucracies that govern our institutions also often have a similar logic based on three crucial elements.

First, bureaucracies constantly create more mechanisms of control and regulation, ostensibly to improve efficiency and transparency, but which, in the majority of the cases, lead to more paperwork and less trust.<sup>22</sup> We have all read about professionals in the health sector who dedicate around 40 per cent of their time to account for their work and explain how they adhere to a multitude of rules. Secondly, bureaucracies create a financial culture of incomprehensibility. In her terrific and terrifying book on *Weapons of Math Destruction*, Cathy O’Neil (2016) shows how big data systems that govern most modern institutions today, apart from reinforcing inequality and creating (new) forms of racism, also create “opaque and invisible models” which, through a kind of “secret sauce”, prevent most people from understanding their logic and consequences. The problem is that these algorithms acquire a life of their own. They determine in incomprehensible ways the fate of many people. O’Neil (2016: 29) notes that transparency is crucial and that real transparency requires trust in employees and professionals. She concludes that we need to impose human values on these systems, even at the cost of efficiency (2016: 207). Graeber would say that this is the only way to *bring back* efficiency and trust in organizations!

The third element, an element that, unfortunately, we all can recognize, is complicity. Most people in our present-day universities emotionally and intellectually know that there are many things that cannot and should not be measured in financial or market terms (see for instance: Nussbaum 2010; Ordine 2017). But most of us are, at the same time, in one way or another actively participating in this same system. We do all kinds of administrative tasks, participate in endless evaluations and comply with all kinds of rules and regulations. This collaboration goes from high to low in the organization. All academics today are subject to the market orientation that the current academic system asks from us. We endlessly submit and adapt research proposals that try to respond to requirements that are often unclear and will be evaluated in obscure ways. We look at impact factors and ISI qualifications before we submit an article. We join the demand for more publications by increasing our “production” (sic!) in any way possible.

At the same time, we are faced with demands to do unpaid work as referees for funding organizations or academic journals. We normally take on this work out of collegial solidarity and academic commitment. If we would demand payment for these academic services, we would only let ourselves to be drawn further into the market structures of academia. This creates an unsolvable dilemma as became clear in the e-mail debate following the announcement of one of our colleagues that she was no longer prepared to do this kind of work.

The organization of the university and most of our activities are couched in market terms and financial logic (see for instance: Bal et al. 2014). Not only does this have negative consequences for the quality of our teaching, it also increasingly creates obstacles to inter-collegial collaboration between departments, faculties and universities. In addition, it makes daily proceedings unnecessarily cumbersome and inefficient, often draining the energy and inspiration of enthusiastic professionals. Out of professional responsibility most of us do all we can to keep the university functioning in the best way possible. The work is done on the level of smaller groups of professionals, like departments, where small teams often function on the basis of some kind of *confianza* relations. They accept taking on work which they are not obliged to do; fill in for sick colleagues; help out with sudden problems.<sup>23</sup> Some manage to “play the system” to maintain and protect cherished enclaves of research and teaching. Undoubtedly, there is also conservatism and free-riding which exacerbates the burden of others, but most work double shifts and try to keep all the balls in the air. This situation, not to forget, is also true for most of our important national institutions, the care system, the police. Everywhere professionals try to do their work in the best way possible, but they often have to do so *in spite of* organizational structures and resisting the constant distrust of assurance companies, financial controllers or managers.

My awareness of these mechanisms has certainly been fed by CEDLA’s integration into the Faculty of the Humanities of this university. Overall this process has been very pleasant, and the reception of our colleagues extremely warm and welcoming. Nevertheless, it was not enough to prevent a certain culture shock. At CEDLA the lines were short and decisions were transparent and quick. A general atmosphere of collegiality and *confianza* resulted in efficient and personal solutions for administrative issues. With that history, the bureaucracy, hierarchy and slowness of the University of Amsterdam has made us whimper many times. So many rules and regulations, so many people who have to agree with a certain course of action, so much time lost in explaining again or asking permission! Again, this does not take anything away from the hospitality and collegiality of our colleagues, but we have often felt like ethnographers, doing participant observation trying to understand the customs and rituals of this ostensibly rational bureaucracy. The members of this tribe know these rules exactly and have partly internalized their logic. When I once sug-



gested a small change in the curriculum, my colleagues laughed and to my amazement said, “that will certainly take three or four years”. I know that ethnographers have to adapt and try to understand local customs, but I have difficulty seeing the efficiency of such a system.

Of course, I am not alone in pointing this out. The protests of *WO-in-Actie*, Rethink UvA and Humanities Rally speak clearly to the broadly felt frustration about the situation in academic institutions. Nevertheless, we seem to be unable to change this pernicious development. The most excruciating thing in this situation is that almost all participants seem to acknowledge the problem. In a newspaper interview early this year, our own rector, Karen Maex, expressed her admiration for the creativity and excellence of the university staff, adding: “You should not cripple them by an improper focus on profit”.<sup>24</sup> In the same article the rector of the Utrecht University observed: “We have a ‘low-trust’ regime, a culture of distrust and increasing bureaucracy”.<sup>25</sup> How reasonable and true this sounds in the context of my lecture! But how difficult it apparently is to turn the system around....

Appiah (2010: 194) has used “honour” as a central concept in understanding the powerful motivation of professionals who feel proud of their work, ranging from laying brick for public streets, to caring for other people or teaching students. They do this work because they feel proud of it and because it allows them to dedicate their skills and talents to the public good. The *confianza* networks that people resort to in their private and professional life embody Appiah’s honour. They feed pride in the work and energy of their members. What they need is autonomy and recognition. They need to be trusted for what they can and will do. With the replacement of honour for monetary incentives, modern Dutch institutions are in the process of destroying the dedication of many professionals.

If the university is serious about participation, transparency and accountability, it should be prepared to really trust its staff and relegate some of its decision-making power. No one will deny that university authorities are dependent on financial means and the consequent regulation coming from the central state, but university authorities could take their own responsibility. What happened after the “student revolt” and occupation of the Maagdenhuis does not give much hope for the future. There are some *mea culpas*, some new committees, a few new faces, but all in all, most of its personnel does not have the feeling that things have really changed. In his study of democratic participation and institutional innovation in Brazilian municipalities Avritzer (2017: 10) notes:

[I]nnovation stands in tension with the political system in at least two ways: in cases of bottom-up innovation it diminishes power-holders’ decision-making capacity on budget issues; in cases of participatory accountability it diminishes government control on policy orientation. Thus, democratic innovation has an

element of deepening citizens' control over policy and budgeting, which reduces the control of the political system over them.

If university authorities are serious about reform, they should face and accept these consequences. They could for instance implement serious forms of participatory budgeting following the Latin American example. This would imply both real democratic participation in designing the university budget and in scaling down decision-making on budgets to, for instance, the level of departments. They should also create more human and organizational diversity within the university. They could also create more common, "locally" governed spaces in the university, such as the "Common Room" the anthropology department used to have or department-run classrooms. The university needs spaces like the neighbourhood basketball playground described by Alex van Stipriaan (2000) in his analysis of multiculturalism in the Netherlands. Research by Sandström and Massida also shows the crucial importance of common spaces for the creation of engagement and cooperation (Sandström et al. 2017 and Adriana Laura Massida, CEDLA lecture 18 May 2018).

I have talked about *confianza* and trust today. I have shown that the major part of the literature is concerned about how trust can help democratic institutions. Concluding my quick analysis of the Dutch situation, I would like to turn this around. Institutions need to have more trust in their professionals, their staff (this is also the message in: WRR 2012). They should give them more recognition, more autonomy and trust in the *confianza* networks of collaboration and collegiality which form the basis of every institution! The utopia of rules longs for commensuration, homogeneous rules and uniformity. *Confianza* relations stress heterogeneity, diversity, dialogue and adaptation.<sup>26</sup> I would therefore say that we have to stand up for our *confianza* relations and fight for more recognition and autonomy in the institutions and organizations we work in.

This lecture is born out of my experience and friendships in Latin America. Many of these friends are in one way or another active in all kinds of social and political networks. They are convinced that this work is necessary in the insecure and volatile society in which they live. Their relentless activity in these unpaid endeavours has always impressed me. Evenings occupied, marches prepared, money spent; all for the good cause. At the same time, I realized that these activities were more than what they stood for theoretically; they were ways in which networks of friendship and conviviality were created. They represented the civil responsibility and cohesion of the Tocquevillian associations, and at the same time they were social gatherings full of friendship and fun. Long drawn-out dinners, parties and personal help were an essential part of these networks. We see this far less in the Netherlands. This has to do with culture, forms of modernity and individualism, and a less politically oriented civil society. It also has to do with the importance of work and the fact that many of us dedicate a large part of our lives to our places of work. There, people work to-

gether, depend on each other, exchange experiences, make plans together for work-related or social activities. A much larger part of Dutch conviviality and *confianza* takes place in the workplace. This lecture is partly motivated by my conviction that universities, factories and caretaking homes, for example, would be better and more pleasant places to work in if they would make use of the professionalism, but also the creativity and energy of these networks.

### *Acknowledgments*

When someone has worked in academia as long as I have, he unavoidably accumulates an enormous social and intellectual debt. Academic writing and research may at times seem to be quite solitary, but in essence it is one of the most social professions one can have. I have told my students many times that academics are in constant dialogue and conversation with each other concerning their books and articles, their presentations and critiques, and last but not least, their collegiality and friendship. Many of the ideas I have just presented were in one way or another developed during these dialogues.

I know that this kind of lecture tends to be quite long and cumbersome, and that, when the personal thank-yous and acknowledgments finally begin, everyone wakes up again. But I have to apologize. I am not going to mention all the people to whom I am indebted. I hope they already know how important they have been and still are. I am not going to mention my colleagues and PhD students by name who have taught me so many wonderful things, nor my friends, children, or even my wife. They all know – or should be aware by now – of their importance in my life. In many ways, in giving this lecture I have tried to better understand the importance and meaning of their friendship and support.

I have worked so many years at CEDLA that I cannot imagine a life without this fantastic Centre. It is an amazingly warm, inspiring and collegial space that embodies everything that an intellectual community should be. I could not have wished for a better place to work. The CEDLA library is a fantastic treasure, as I realized again in preparing this lecture. In my sombre moments when I think about the current disdain for books and libraries, I think about it as a relic from better times and pray for its survival.<sup>27</sup>

Isaiah Berlin made the famous division between the “hedgehog” and the “fox”. The hedgehog has one coherent idea, and knows everything about this one issue; the fox “pursues many ends” and knows something about many issues, often unrelated and contradictory. I have always considered myself belonging to the second category. Like a fox I have done all kinds of things and enjoyed almost every minute of it. I have enjoyed the combination – and the contradiction – of being an academic

and the director of CEDLA. It has been a privilege to have been able to involve myself in so many different things. This lecture has in many ways been an attempt to address the issues that both my personas have had to deal with. During many of my conversations with university administrators about the future of CEDLA, I had James Scott's terrific book *Seeing like a State* on my table. It was an attempt to connect the two worlds in which I lived and worked. It may be symbolic that none of my interlocutors ever noticed it!

All of you who know me will have recognized bits and pieces of my intellectual and academic but also my private life in today's lecture. It may seem that I haven't looked back, but I have. I've tried to hide it somewhat, because someone dear to me has explicitly forbidden me to talk about farewell or *afscheid*.

I began working at CEDLA and the UvA in 2000 on the eve of one of the worst economic crises in Latin America, when in Argentina the population was so fed up with its political elite that they shouted "Que se vayan todos!" Looking back, the crisis of 2001 in many respects meant the end of years of stagnation and destruction under the aegis of the Washington Consensus. In the years that followed, Latin America became the region of hope. It bustled with activity, dynamism and incentives for change. We saw indigenous empowerment, economic growth, attention for human rights, creative industries in many urban settings, new, more democratic and participatory constitutions, conditional cash transfers, peace agreements in Colombia, and recently the powerful voice of Latin American women in "ni una menos" or "vivas nos queremos". Problems remained, but compared to the rest of the world, they seemed to be fewer and lighter. I count myself lucky to have worked at CEDLA during these years and to have been able to live and analyse this remarkable this period.

Today, the panorama is less rosy. Young vibrant presidents have turned out to be Machiavellian power politicians, sometimes using indiscriminate violence against their own population. Political polarization is on the rise again, democracy is often only a thin veneer for all kinds of *politiquería*, corruption and incompetence. Who would have thought just a decade ago that Latin America would face a humanitarian crisis where Venezuelan and Central American civilians are massively fleeing their countries? Or that the majority of the Brazilian electorate would vote for an extremist right-wing presidential candidate?

What is it that makes Latin America follow such a convoluted trajectory? Swinging back and forth between hope and despair? These are pressing questions that can only be answered on the basis of sound academic research. Today, I did not want to focus on this distraught panorama; I wanted to show, or at least suggest, how Latin Americans cope with these circumstances; how they construe their social networks and give concrete meaning to their lives on a local and daily level. We find distrust, free-riding, and corruption everywhere, but I believe that a focus on trust, *confianza*

and networks of solidarity in the region can make us understand the resilience of the region's societies and give us hope, even in the darkest of times.

### Notes

1. Or the Portuguese word *confiança* which has the same meanings in Brazil.
2. Uslaner (2000/1: 575) observes that all surveys point out that "trust is not important for most forms of civic engagement".
3. See Irene Arends' exciting research on digital youth practices in Chile. Let's see if she will prove me wrong in her dissertation!
4. Partha Chatterjee (2004: 57-58) observes that squatting populations in India, with people coming from far-away places, build communities on the basis of what could be called a feeling of pseudo-kinship. He quotes a member of an association of inhabitants saying: "We are all a single family. We don't distinguish between [different people]. We have no other place to build our homes".
5. Migration literature on the Caribbean and Central America often uses the term "transnational families" to indicate the continuing financial and emotional relations between far-away family members. There are indications that the material and practical relations tend to diminish within a few years. Although certainly connected to this material aspect, social and emotional attachments seem to be more enduring. For an older overview, see: Baud 1994.
6. This has been the weakness of many of the simulation games used to understand human behavior and "rational choice". Ostrom (2010: 160) writes: "After experiencing repeated benefits from their own and other people's cooperative actions, individuals may resolve that they should always initiate cooperation in the future".
7. I see a historical logic in the fact that here, in my valedictory lecture, I refer to the work of James Coleman, whose work was introduced to me by my first PhD student. See Harmsen 1999.
8. There is, of course, another side to these relations. Nothing is as hurtful for human relations as a breach of trust; and nothing is as difficult to heal. As the Dutch proverb goes: "Vertrouwen komt te voet, en vertrekt te paard". Once betrayed, *confianza* may never come back and may turn into long-term feuds, even lasting for generations.
9. In Dutch this is called the "alledaagse leefomgeving" by the WRR (2012: 13).
10. In this text I stay away from the debate on governmentality (see Li 2007). I am all too aware of the structures of domination and hegemony in societies, but I believe that this debate often closes our eyes to the little (and big) steps that people can take to change their (and the) world.
11. One of the statistically focused articles on trust that I have distanced myself from in this lecture nevertheless reaches a similar conclusion when it concludes that there is no robust evidence for the reduction of "horizontal trust in friends and business partners" as a result of crime: Corbacho et al. 2015: 410.
12. In a weird and concocted way, the emergence of these bonds among Argentine women who had been mentally captured by the military resembles the shipmate bonds among slaves described so poignantly by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of an African-American Culture* (1976).

- 13 “Habían sí muchos grupos de amigos, pues inclusive yo creo que casi todo el mundo se reunía para dormir en una casa, dormir en otra...”
- 14 “Las nuevas trayectorias y formas organizativas [...] sugieren las diversas formas en que los pobladores definieron su quehacer cívico y político, y su condición de víctimas con derechos, desde una noción de ciudadanía anclada en el reconocimiento del dolor del otro y que se fortalece en la creación de espacios para la participación, el reconocimiento y la reconciliación en medio de la guerra y en momentos transicionales.”
- 15 “[E]stas acciones permitieron manejar la incertidumbre y el miedo y recrear los tejidos de relaciones y solidaridades. De este modo, al rehabilitar espacios, se le fue quitando espacio al impulso destructor y a la presencia omnipresente de la guerra en el entorno vivido...”
16. Gibson (2002: 77) uses the term “community economies”. She writes: “In a community economy the material well-being of people and the sustainability of the community are priority objectives”.
17. Montambeault (2016: 83-86) draws attention to the danger of this process of “political capture” in the case of participatory budgeting. She writes: The control exercised by political parties and their associated social organizations over citizen participation [...] mostly serve to channel citizen mobilization in a controlled environment allowing the elected representatives to avoid popular discontentment and pursue with their political agenda” (85).
18. See also the magnificent introduction to Manuel Scorza’s, *Redoble por Rancas* (Lima: Monte Avila, 1977; also translated to Dutch) where the large landowner and *patron* of an Andean village, don Montenegro, inadvertently loses a *sol* (Peruvian currency of very little value) on the main square during his daily stroll. The whole village is terrified. Everyone knows about the coin, but it is touched by no one, until, exactly a year later, doctor Montenegro, to the relief of everyone, finds the coin himself and puts it in his pocket. Scorza notes: “La provincia suspiró!”
19. This conclusion echoes Rebecca Solnit (2016: xv) when she writes: “Most of us would say, if asked, that we live in a capitalist society, but vast amounts of how we live our everyday lives – our interactions with and commitments to family lives, friendships, avocations, membership in social, spiritual, and political organizations – are in essence noncapitalist or even anticapitalist, full of things we do for free, out of love, and on principle”.
20. This was the famous “page 90” of her book *Governing the Commons*. See Ostrom, 2008: 18.
21. The full citation is: “While each could be seen as small and insignificant interventions in the face of capitalist globalization, seen through the lens of a diverse economy these projects are exciting and significant attempts to develop the unique specificity of non-capitalist places”.
22. Graeber (2015: 41-2) writes: “[T]he culture of evaluation is if anything even more pervasive in the hyper-credentialed world of the professionalized classes, where audit culture reigns, and nothing is real that cannot be quantified, tabulated, or entered into some interface or quarterly report”.
23. Here I have a more optimistic view than Bal et al. (2014). Although I agree that individualism and competition is stimulated by the system, I believe that many of us try to resist this tendency, and sometimes we succeed.
24. “Waarom scripties drie keer nakijken?”, *NRC* 6 February 2018. The original quote is: “Die (de wetenschappelijke staf, MB) zijn ambitieus en gedreven. Dat is belangrijk voor de creativiteit en excellentie in onderwijs en onderzoek. Dat mag je niet fnuiken door een oneigenlijk rendementsdenken”.
25. “Wij hebben een *lowtrust*-regime, een cultuur van wantrouwen en oplopende bureaucratie”.

26. In conversations with my friend Jeroen, we have often discussed the contrast between Calvinist and Burgundian – Latin – cultural values. This lecture may in many ways also be seen as a commentary on these contrasting logics. Where in Latin culture clientelism and personalism often create social and political problems that Calvinist culture abhors, they also allow for more personal relationships and trust which are too little appreciated in a “Calvinist” world.
27. A former Dutch Minister of Culture (sic!) was openly proud about his destruction of spaces of cultural and artistic expression (among which was the famous Dutch library of the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam!). Alas, this is not just a Dutch phenomenon. We can see it happening everywhere in Europe (Ordine 2013: 114-118).

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