

Lights for human development for Pamplona's youth community

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Finalist Flor de Maria Callali Pimentel during the Final Jury
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Sol lucet omnibus! The sun shines on everyone! This Latin phrase is perhaps part of the leitmotiv that gave impetus to the student project entitled “The youth of Pamplona: protagonists of change”, the aim of which was to empower and develop the youth of my community, which found itself in a critical situation of social anomie. The project was born out of a modest idea I had, which blossomed within the confines of my Faculty of Law at Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM) (The Main National University of Saint Mark) in Lima, Peru. That Latin phrase with which I began made me think initially that part of the problems of my community - Pamplona Baja, hidden away and forgotten in the suburbs of Lima, in the district of San Juan de Miraflores (SJM) - could be solved by using as a source of good, creative ideas the young people of Pamplona which we always imbue with a better future for ourselves and our families. For this, I believe that the sun shines on everyone with the same light whether it is on a modest farm in Costa Rica or the built-up streets of Buenos Aires. I remember the words of Paulo Coelho when he said that if a person had a clear view of their objective throughout their life, the entire universe would conspire to ensure that they reached this objective. I have always had an interest in taking part in the development of my community; of always being part of the solution and not just unflinchingly contemplating the problems that faced it. Like the philosopher, John Dewey, I see citizens as social agents of change within a “Creative Democracy”, i.e. that to give them the solution to the problem of our surroundings you have to be aware of our role as protagonists within society, as agents of change and assuming democracy as a way of life. The sun of hope was, at that time, the engine that drove the energy of the young, who assumed, with maturity, the reins of their own destiny. We are aware of the criticism that is encountered in a sizeable section of the Peruvian population. According to the figures from the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas e Informática (National Institute of Statistics and IT) (INEI), 54% of Peruvian families are experiencing economic poverty. As the famous Peruvian historian, Pablo Macera, states, this poverty is the Gordian knot that poses such problems for the development of the people, and that leads to some outbreaks of violence. As has also been seen in the recent final report from the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación Nacional (The Commission of Truth and National Reconciliation) (CVR), terrorist violence, over a twenty year period (1980-2000), was able to expand rapidly in

the poorest communities in the country. According to the philosopher and President of the historic CVR, Salomón Lerner Febres, the terrorist action has become more accentuated in various areas of the capital and, with great destructive force, in the outlying districts of Lima. San Juan de Miraflores (SJM) was perhaps the district hardest hit by the terrorist madness. The sociologist, Julio Cotler, says that terrorism has found the most vulnerable sections to be a most fertile breeding ground. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Pamplona Baja always demonstrate that they have confidence in the work carried out by the forces of law and order for the pacification of the country. This community's residents have managed to set up a system of crime prevention, which involves the efforts of the Policía Nacional del Perú (National Peruvian Police) (PNP) and the good will of all residents in the face of the terrorist threat.

In spite of the good omens of Professor Samuel Huntington who demonstrates that the so-called "democratising wave" meant that, in Latin America, democratic governments were taking root, which could put a brake on terrorist violence, there are, for example in Peru, complex problems of poverty, which we will not be able to resolve in the near future. This is the task facing us as students, as Professor Mario Bunge states; we have to use scientific research to find a solution to our society's problems.

Well then, the former terrorist violence generated, in one section of the population, an explosion of behaviour streaked with social anomie. This type of behaviour leads to social paroxysm and is most evident in the vertiginous increase in the number of gangs roaming around, similar to the fearsome Central American "maras". Year after year, hundreds of young people were added to the long list of those marauding the streets of Lima. They are young people with no real expectations of a decent life; chained to the violence of the past, with insufficient education and the economic poverty that besets their homes, they decide to take to the streets, according to the sociologist Aníbal Quijano, in search of social recognition. This recognition is obtained through delinquent behaviour, a determinant element of which is extreme poverty and unrestricted violence. In the recent Electoral Forum "Prioridades para Lima Sur" (The Priorities for the South of Lima), it was reported that the population of San Juan de Miraflores (SJM) is the largest in south Lima, with a total of 364,748 inhabitants. The statistics from this Forum also showed that over 40% of the population of SJM were aged between 18 and 35, i.e. a

significant amount of young people. It is these people who need, as a matter of urgency, area of participation that will enable them to access the employment opportunities and, thus, improve their quality of life. Statistics from INEI also provide us other important data: that the unemployment rate in SJM is at 10%. We consider that this statistical data is very worrying for our community. We also know that, according to the information from the Policía Nacional del Perú (PNP), there are larger numbers of gangs of youths in the poorest areas of the community of Pamplona. In Pamplona Baja, for example, there is a total of three gangs with a significant number of members that, daily, commit all kinds of crimes, ranging from attacks on people to attacks against public and private property. This desolate outlook motivated your servant and a group of law students to set up a social project that targets the inclusion into the democratic system of the expectations and proposals of the youth of Pamplona. As secretary of the organisation of the Centro Federado de Derecho (Federated Centre of Law) of the UNMSM, and as a member of the community of Pamplona Baja, I suggested to the board of the afore-mentioned student body the possibility of carrying out a social project that would allow us to have more real contract with the young population of Pamplona. To persuade them of the merits of my project, I reminded my friends on the university board that the illustrious Luis Alberto, from San Marco, had said around fifty years ago that the university was not an island cut off from the problems of its society. This, based on the principle of the social extension of university work, convinced a majority of the board to approve my proposal, and so was born the project entitled “The youth of Pamplona: protagonists of change”. We decided to form working groups immediately, to look at our plan of action. As secretary of the organisation, I succeeded in contacting an NGO, with a recognised mission, which allowed me to strengthen the links with the young people of my community thanks to very vital information from government institutions dedicated to social services. The Council of SJM informed us that 40% of its population had no drinking water supply, 41% had no drainage and 20% no electricity. These moving statistics gave me the motivation to speed up the mechanisms of dialogue between our working group and the young people of Pamplona, especially with those who had fallen into the clutches of the underworld and the gangs. For this reason, the Club de Madres de Pamplona Baja (Mothers’ Club of Lower Pamplona) allowed us to use its small hall, which at the time

served as a communal dining canteen, where we could discuss our project, the final objective of which was a frank and sincere coming-together of our working group and the various young people of the district. Thanks to the information from the committee of the Club de Madres, we were able to reach the conclusion that the majority of young gang-members had lunch within the confines of the aforementioned club. According to the 2000 National Survey of the Social and Economic District Infrastructure, in the SJM district, there was a total of 250 communal canteens that provided meals for 15,000 beneficiaries on a daily basis. Of these, over half were in the community of Pamplona. We should remember that the task of providing social assistance to the city's poorest communities is taken over by both the State and multilateral finance organisations. Since 1997, there has been a great deal of commitment to meet the needs of the poor, thanks to the Second Generation of Structural Reform, which was compiled and efficiently directed by economists of world standing. This short digression gives us cause to mention the fact that we, as university students and part of our society's "think tank" are under an obligation to use our energies and our ideas for the good and wellbeing of the poorest sections of our society. Then, we knew that we had a perfect opportunity for dialogue with the lads who were part of the dangerous gangs. We used the hall of the Club de Madres. We then decided to compile the informative material we would use to initiate chats with these young people. The information materials were made up of three-fold leaflets and separate sheets with figures, real-life people, caricatures and colours to make the information accessible to its target audience. These materials, very plain in format, would allow us to ensure that the information would be received sympathetically, i.e., to paraphrase Habermas, that for a "communicative action" to take place, the contents of these materials would have to have a direct connection to the environment of the would-be interlocutors in such a way that the information is valid to both sets of players in the communicative process. The lads recognised this new knowledge, which would be acquired through the informative materials and the chats with the working group, as valid and sustainable knowledge of everyday life, as bolstering their expectations of a free life, and as full of democracy. Using these leaflets and print-outs, we succeeded in disseminating, in a straightforward way, information about with civil rights, such as the right to vote and the right to privacy and property. We also tackled themes such as the

State and its main institutions. We discussed how to create a micro-company, paying taxes, and other topics related to the promotion of self-employment. Penal law was an obvious subject. The aim was to make the young people aware of the importance of knowledge, and the exercising of their main rights in society. This would ensure that they felt part of a Legal State capable of recognising their potential. Professor Norberto Bobbio is very clear when he states that the capacity for democratic participation of each citizen greatly depends on the free and transparent spaces that are opened up to disengage the innate capacities favouring the defence of the democratic system, such as dialogue and tolerance. We also took on board Douglass North's idea that we had to transmit to the lads the legal information that would have a real bearing on their lives. This would add much more weight to government instructions and would consolidate even further the Social and Democratic Status of Law. The "institutionalisation" that North proposes is evidenced in our country by a process of on-going political maturity. This process guarantees development and economic growth from the influx of private investment in the different sectors of the national economy whether in the primary, manufacturing or service sectors. With the rules of the game clear, it is evident that, from the modest youth of Pamplona to the most recognised businessman in the country, everyone assumed ownership of the entire democratic dialogue processes that, in the end, would facilitate decision-making by a consensus of the various wills and desires for the good of the country's further development.

I must now declare that, for the first time, the young people showed themselves reluctant to chat with the working groups. Some of the lads from Pamplona, when they came to lunch, decided to withdraw, hoping that no-one would start chatting to them. However, by means of a continuous and intense dialogue, we succeeded, despite all the gangs' leaders, in persuading them to listen to some of our chats about self-esteem, family planning and crimes against sexual freedom. Our project continued at a slow, firm pace. Thanks to the persuasive communication I kept up with the leaders of the main gangs such as "the babies", "the north band" and "the assassins", we were able to set up a sort of beachhead within the territory of these "underground" groups. Koki, for example, is one of the ex-leaders of the now extinct "north band", for over a year now he has abandoned the streets and is now working with us as a volunteer in the most deprived

areas of Pamplona. Koki had a very hard childhood; his mother and father died when he was eight, and the street became his “raison d’être”. He was addicted to drugs, alcohol and sex. On his nineteenth birthday he was locked up in Luriganchu prison for aggravated robbery. On his release, he felt rejected by society because he was an ex-convict and, therefore, did not waste a second in returning to a life of crime. According to what he told us, he became a symbol for all his friends since his stay in prison granted him certain “respect”. For him, the “north band” was his only real family. The interesting thing about Koki was discovering, during the course of several chats we had during 2004, his hidden passion for song. He was fascinated by the idea of signing one day in a vast hall, and, why not, in a stadium filled with thousands of people, just like one of his favourite singers, the great José Feliciano. In the employment activity and artistic expression workshop, thanks to the teaching of some music students from my alma mater, Koki could learn to play the guitar and, then, begin to study song. Just like Koki, other lads such as Johnny, Pedro, Raúl, Juan Carlos, Jimmy and many more started to develop their intelligence and skills. The college was full of former failures and delinquents. However, in our small workshop, we can report that the dynamism and profitability of the so-called multiple intelligences are not alien to young people with limited economic resources.

We must stress that our work took place from the start of 2004 to the end of 2005 and, furthermore, this university work was an excellent sight for those living near the place, to such an extent that the lads from the workshop were able to get temporary jobs as a result of this valiant work, in bakeries, gardens and craftsmen’s workshops. We succeeded in persuading some neighbours who ran interesting micro-businesses by giving temporary jobs to those lads who took part in the democratic and social experience of our project. We consider that it was a very difficult project to realise, especially because of the initial costs in terms of the informative material. Thanks to the supporting activities and the funds raised, such as the “polladas” and “anticuchadas”, we succeeded in gathering together enough money to cover our initial expenses. In addition, after the Centro Federado de Derecho of the UNMSM had set up the partnerships necessary for students from other faculties to take part in our project, the objective was to ensure that the sum of our forces achieved the desired project results. We must also thank the unselfish

assistance from the people of Pamplona who showed themselves to be very receptive to the work carried out by the volunteers taking part in the project: “The youth of Pamplona: protagonists of change”. The sincere help afforded by an NGO enabled us to access a significant amount of information without which we would not have been able to succeed in our project. It is also certain that not all the gangs in Pamplona have disappeared. Perhaps, our modest result is to have played a part in the disbanding of the self-styled “north band” gang. However, we believe that the work has to continue. The dialogue and work with the boys in the area cannot stop. We also believe that the way to solve the problem of youth violence is to generate in the young, as Karl Popper would say, the feeling of being immersed in an “open society” where our greatest enemies must be delinquency and economic poverty. Young people will always have dreams; we hardly ever lose hope. For this, the role of the State must be as a guide to shore up democratic practices, and to grant young people more areas of political and business participation. This work must be achieved with the support of civil society, and, in particular, with the help of private enterprise, which, as stated by Professor Hayek, is the conductor of general wellbeing. The current figures from the Town Council of San Juan de Miraflores (SJM) reveal that it is the micro-businesses and small businesses, the leaders of the Peruvian economy, that are the ones giving the most opportunities for progress and improvement of the quality of life to the great majority of young people in Pamplona. Finally, I can address the concerns of the World Bank when they ask me what I have done to solve the problems of my community. I reply with a simple statement: I have tried, with the help of my companions, to escape from our university cloister, to bring the light of wisdom to shine even on the cobbled, winding paths of the youth of Pamplona so that the sun shines on everyone!