

## Building Communities: Personalized Relationships in Late Capitalism

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**Abstract.** The article tracks the use of the idea of “community” in the context of a multinational corporation. With the community at the intersection of personal and impersonal relationships, of market economy and gift economy, of instrumental rationality and value-based rationality, this article is trying to describe the powers at play for a particular configuration of these elements in the attempt of the company to better control the consumers.

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## Introduction

In anthropology, unlike sociology, the concept of community has not been a major topic of analysis.<sup>1</sup> That does not mean that this concept is not present or even treated in the anthropological literature. In fact the concept of community is a widely used term in the social sciences, and anthropology makes no exception here. But with many definitions in use, its significance is rather vague. Among the many definitions proposed on this subject, traditionally three explanations have emerged on the origin and perpetuation of a community: the common interest of the members, the same space of living or a common social structure.<sup>2</sup> For anthropology, especially, there is a more or less explicit methodological concern, because the community is recognized as the primary social unit of analysis. All the anthropologists have the heavy burden of methodologically circumscribing their field of study to some kind of community, which is considered as the structural unit of social life.<sup>3</sup> More so, the main characteristics which traditionally define the discipline of anthropology have led to particular assumptions circulating around this topic. The historical precursors of this concept originated in the distinction introduced by Tönnies between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which refers to two kinds of social relationships, made visible after the changes produced by modernity. At the time when Tönnies made these distinctions, he was referring on one hand to the personal interactions which are present in a small community, especially a peasant one, and on the other hand to the impersonal interactions which define the burgeoning

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<sup>1</sup> H. James Birk, ed., *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (London: Sage Publication, 2006), 538.

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

industrial society. The idea is still compelling in the social sciences in the broad criticism of modernity, western world or the market. In evolutionary vein, this idea claims that there is a transition, not without regret, from community relationships which are “moral, sentimental, localized, particular, intimate, ascribed, enduring, conventional, consistent, and based on intrinsic attachments (to blood, soil, heritage, and language)” to societal relations who are “artificial, contractual, interested, partial, ego-focused, specialized, superficial, inconsistent, fluid, short-term and impersonal”.<sup>1</sup> According to these authors, the forecast offered by this perspective does not seem to have a correspondence in reality, being invalidated by the proliferation of references about communities in the contemporary world.<sup>2</sup> Considering these two precursor concepts, new concepts have been developed in the social sciences. We may speak today about communities of interests, of circumstances, of purpose, of action and of practices. But these new concepts are less concerned with the dichotomy between a peasant society and an industrial one, although in some cases evaluative assumption between them could be made,<sup>3</sup> but rather with the new developments traced in the industrial societies.

If at present it seems that the communities are neither so self-contained<sup>4</sup> nor geographically tied to particular places, they are instead defined increasingly more in identity terms. This means having the feeling that you belong to a religion, nationality, ethnic group, sharing some identity features with some people and rejecting others. From this perspective, belonging to a community is the effect of negotiating and imagining symbolic boundaries between individuals and between groups.<sup>5</sup>

The human need to belong to a larger group than the kinship, friendship and neighbourhood groups, but to a smaller group than an alienating society is the reason given for the propensity of anthropologists to take them as their favourite object of analyses:

“Whether that community is defined in terms of locality, ethnicity, religion, occupation, recreation, special interest, even humanity, people maintain the idea that it is this milieu which is most essentially ‘theirs’, and that they are prepared to assert their ownership and membership, vocally and aggressively, in the face of opposing ideas and groups (cf. Anderson 1983).”<sup>6</sup>

Unlike the communities routinely studied by anthropologists, many still geographically bounded and invested with some kind of organic and spontaneous structure and authenticity, the community I am going to talk about here was formed by a multinational company as part of a sales and marketing strategy.

My fieldwork, which by location and subject presents itself as sociological, but in its approach is rather an anthropological one, was done over a few periods which varied in the number of months and the frequency of participation in the massage and is

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *Dictionary of Sociology* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 72.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

<sup>6</sup> Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 64.

continuing as this article is being written as part of my PhD thesis.<sup>1</sup> The research method used was the ethnographical one, assuming the accomplishment of interviews with members and employees of the massage centre and using participant observation, as a member but also as a student, being able to take notes, conduct interviews, having access to some internal documents, but not being able to observe directly the interaction between the employees and their work behind the scenes.

### **Organizational and structural context**

The company, which is present on the market in more than 70 countries and has more than 3000 sales and demonstration centres in the entire world, has met with real success in Romania. What makes this business exceptional at a first glance is the fact that it offers free health care services, indefinitely and without special access conditions in order to convince the beneficiaries to buy the devices which are used in these centres.

Thus the community formed by the company shows some special features. In its broadest form, the community could be defined as the intermittent but constant interactions between potential clients and the company's staff, by and large in the daily presentations and demonstrations held at the centre. What makes the community to be relatively knit, interactive and sustainable on the long run, unlike other brand communities, is the presupposed necessity of indefinite and intense use of the devices which are presented as the indispensable part of a healthier lifestyle. The demonstrations of the products are not just ends in themselves, design for an individual buy, but an interrupted means to build relationships capable of generating directly or indirectly a potential and future buy. The prospect of future sales, even after a sale is realized, makes the permanent contact with the client an objective. Even so, the community thus constituted has its own limits, the long-term absenteeism and the turnover rate being quite large. On the other hand, the members share a series of relatively homogenous practices and beliefs, which are transmitted and constantly constituted by the employees in the daily presentations and demonstrations of products. These interrelated and relatively systematic practices and beliefs about the body and about the functioning of the devices builds a consensus about the apparently complementary aims of the actors involved. The hegemony produced by the company comes to accommodate some of the interests and aspirations of customers with the imperative objective of making a profit.

For the salvation of their clients, the company offers the solution of consuming free health care services or buying the marketed medical devices. Without forcing a sale, employees try with great performance skills and persuasive narratives to convince the customers about the importance of health and to raise awareness of the need to take personal action in the search of health. The type of knowledge expressed here about the risks of disease and the nature of the human body makes health a leading and ultimate objective but also an impossible one to reach. To consume in order to prevent the risks and to diminish the consequences of constant aging and deteriorating body is a permanent quest for an almost reached salvation in the face of disease and pain. The concept of amelioration and not the concept of healing is the key word in the daily

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<sup>1</sup> Beneficiary of the "Doctoral Scholarships for a Sustainable Society" project, co-financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund, Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources and Development 2007–2013.

presentations of staff. The company is not very different from other public and private actors of the wellness trend that make a “virtue” and a “secular path of salvation” from the avoidance of pain and disease.<sup>1</sup> If the discourse about the salvation and hope in a better world remained a feature of millenarian religious movements and had lost the legitimacy in the case of political organizations, what is really relevant is how it has also become an essential component of capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

With a few notable differences, the business is closely related with the direct sales industry (DS). DS organizations and in particular the subset of multi-level marketing organizations (MLM) have enjoyed a greater concern in the research literature, being closely studied in anthropology and sociology of religion<sup>3,4</sup> but also in economic anthropology and sociology.<sup>5,6</sup> Thus, according to a minimalist definition, but generally accepted by everyone in the literature and the industry, DS means “the sale of a consumer product or service, person-to-person, away from a fixed retail location”.<sup>7</sup> Two important differences in the activity of the company in relation to a wider definition raise some questions about the state of belonging to the DS (I propose just a membership in theoretical terms because, to my knowledge, the company is not affiliated to any DS association and does not recognize itself by such a label) but ultimately I believe that the DS industry serves at least in comparative analysis. A first difference is the fact that the company’s salesmen are employees and not multi-level or single-level distributors, as are in overwhelming proportion in the DS, the only few exceptions being represented by Electrolux and Just Group.<sup>8</sup> Leaving aside the fact that unlike the DS, there exist costs related to personnel, other economic benefits that characterize this industry are present: the lack of competition with other products in retail stores, the elimination of intermediaries and the low cost for advertising.<sup>9</sup> The other noticeable difference is that the access to the business is made through an expensive franchise, given that the DS is recognized as being quite easily accessible by small entrepreneurs.<sup>10</sup> These features of

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen, *An Anthropology of Biomedicine* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 385.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Millennial Capitalism: First Thought on a Second Coming” in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>3</sup> David G. Bromley, “Quasi-Religious Corporations. A new integration of religion and capitalism?”, *Religion and the Transformations of Capitalism: Comparative approaches*, ed. Richard H. Roberts in the Taylor & Francis e-Library (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Peter S. Cahn, *Sales and Direct Faith in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Ara Wilson, “The Empire of Direct Sales and the Making of Thai Entrepreneurs”, *Critique of Anthropology* 19 (1999).

<sup>6</sup> John Bone, *The Hard Sell: An Ethnographic Study of the Direct Selling Industry* (Farnham: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2006)

<sup>7</sup> Direct Selling Association, “What is Direct Selling?”, <http://www.directselling411.com/about-direct-selling/> accessed July 15, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Peterson and Thomas R. Wotruba, “What is Direct Selling? – Definition, Perspectives, and Research Agenda”, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 16 (1996), 4.

<sup>9</sup> David G. Bromley, “Quasi-Religious Corporations”, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 19.

DS have made the main object of attention in the social sciences to be the distributors, which, coming generally from the working class and the lower middle<sup>1</sup> class, are especially motivated by the promise of a future material prosperity. If the distributors are in part the consumers of their own products, which is also true in the case of the company's employees, the organization of the company I am talking about makes the problem of consumption more central and visible. If in the discourse maintained by the company, the idea of a financial, professional and age diversity of the clients is supported, in fact the members come in an overwhelming manner among the working-class pensioners. The purpose here is not to achieve financial prosperity, but wellbeing, particularly regarding health. Unlike the DS orientation to the lower middle class by promoting entrepreneurialism,<sup>2</sup> in this case there is a relatively recent trend of millennial capitalism towards more disadvantaged layers of society.

The innovations that occurred in time led to several sales methods in DS industry: from the itinerant distributors from which the industry derives its developments to the modern innovation of party-plan sales, face to face demonstrations or sales through the internet. If in general the point of selling is taking place in the home or workplace of the potential client in order to personalize the moment of selling and therefore to manipulate the social norms and expectations, the use of a centre makes no difference in this respect. More than the use of beliefs, values, norms and social expectations, as a mark of DS, I estimate that the company succeeds to control even more the social and cultural terms of interaction. At the same time with building the community, the company builds its own frame of interaction. The most similar practices that could inspire such innovation are the rarer motivational meetings between distributors.

The individual sales units represented by the health care centres are interested in the establishment of large consumer communities. In the attempt to attract new members to the centre, the company proposes first of all a moral drive: to care about your fellows in pain. The mentioning of the necessity of gaining a profit through the sales is just an underlying theme to the idea that a sale could make possible the continuation of the free health care services. In exceptional cases, under the pretext of some contests, some of the members become ambassadors, which means that they are being rewarded with modest prizes depending on the number of persons brought to the centre.

### **A capitalist-based community**

We will see in the following pages how the idea of community in this context is at the intersection of personal and impersonal relationships, of market economy and gift economy or, in Weberian terms, of instrumental rationality and value-based rationality. With this I am not suggesting that there is such a middle way, but I want to describe the powers at play for a particular configuration of these elements in the attempt of the company to better control the consumers or more generally to show how the idea of community in the context of a late capitalism organization can be understood.

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<sup>1</sup> Merl Storr, *Latex and Lingerie: Shopping for Pleasure at Ann Summers Parties* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Peter S. Cahn, "Consuming Class: Multilevel Marketers in Neoliberal Mexico", *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2008), 446.



**Teodora Cosman, *Hunters in the Snow I***  
50cm x 70cm, acrylic, gouache on tissue, 2013/2014

The existence of these centres makes the communities thus developed be composed on the basis of geographical proximity. The fieldwork allowed me to witness the change of headquarters after many years after launching the business in Romania. Due to market saturation, an explanation offered by one of the employees, the headquarters set in a working class neighbourhood in southern Bucharest was moved to a working class neighbourhood in the north of the capital. Based on my observation, except for a few people who for various reasons have continued to attend the new centre despite the inconvenience, probably for the great majority the change meant the abandonment of the free services or moving towards other communities, belonging to closer free healthcare centres. In spite of some local loyalties, of class and age homogeneity, of the few relatives, acquaintances, the relatively few contacts and friendships made here, and the general sense of sociability, the community has little resemblance to a *Gemainschaft*. More important in this regard seems to be the relationship each customer has with the employees and the company representatives.

Besides this local aspect of community, belonging to it also means to be linked to the global. Thus the multinational coverage of the company, a claim accompanied quite often with pictures of various centres worldwide, points to a larger community with the same problems, aspirations and medical achievements. The presence of foreigners in the centre, in general the company's officials, is a reminder of the global nature of this community. Even more so, a national festival held for at least two years in the largest hall in Bucharest, which brought together thousands of members from all the centres in the country, helps to imagine the national and global community to which they belong.

Although it comes from a different context of analysis, Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities is useful in understanding the way in which disparate people come to define themselves as belonging to the same community by reference to common symbols or an apparently shared history, knowledge and particular feature. In the present case, at different times most of them will represent themselves in this context by adherence to a set of values, attitudes and practices imposed by the company. Most of the members who know enough about the context to be able to meet the employees' expectations recommend themselves, not without a dramatic tone, by the company's name.

The family is one of the most present themes when employees and members talk about themselves. Since the first day you enter the centre, you are invited to consider that you have entered into a family or at least a group of friends. If in the DS organizations, and especially in the MLM ones, the relationships between distributors are sometimes translated as relationships between daughters or sons and mothers, placing the head of the family on top of the hierarchy ladder<sup>1</sup> in the pyramid structure of these organizations; however, in this case, due to the age gap between employees and members, the relationship can be described in reverse. The employees placed themselves in the role of potential sons and nephews of the elders in the healthcare centre, even when their age could raise questions about the factual possibility.

Another way to suggest the membership to this family is through the frequent mention of a few exceptional cases of actual kinship relationships between staff or entrepreneurs. First of all, the marriage between two of the employees, which culminated in the birth of a child, is attributed to some favourable conjuncture made possible by the company. This frequently repeated episode seems that is trying to suggest that this kind of close relationship is possible as well between members and between members and employees. The fact that the daughter of Bucharest centre's former director has opened a centre in Pitești and the current director's brother had several such centres all across the country is in part presented not in relation with their welfare, but with a special kind of personal business.

From another perspective, almost always with implied smiles and laughter, the relaxed atmosphere from the centre is interpreted as the consequence of the closed and even intimate relationships between some members. There is a practice which is held regularly by the company and demonstrates, from a consumer perspective, the close relationship between employees and members. Every person who has ever been registered to one of the centres is congratulated by a phone call on his birthday and name day whether he is absent, has abandoned this practice altogether or has purchased any of the devices. If the celebrated person is in the centre that day, all the persons in the room shall sing "Happy Birthday". Accompanied by applause, kisses, hugs, the moment is often an emotional one for the birthday person, who often returns the gesture by offering candies. Knowing the names and the birthdates of members, offering them attention, often at a relatively intimate and physical level, seems to place these actions in sharp contrast with those you find in the practice of biomedicine. A recurrent theme for the employers and the members, this outspoken criticism against biomedicine is expressed in clear reference to the practices just mentioned.

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<sup>1</sup> Merl Storr, *Latex and Lingerie*, 10.

The company's attention is reflected also on the members' families. Being at the end of their journey, the members are expected to purchase the devices in order to bequeath them to their children and grandchildren or for helping another member of the family, which, suffering even more than the consumer, would not be able to reach health. If the company's activity resembles so well that of a cult, which may cast doubt on a part of family members, the company puts a considerable effort into bringing them into the health centre, perhaps in the hope that systematic explanations offered by employees will reduce their fears or will convince them about the benefits of personal use. Perhaps in an attempt to earn the trust of the clients, the company had imposed the rule that the devices, which are quite expensive in relation to the average wage in Romania, cannot be bought without the agreement of the entire family. Although probably not an iron rule, it is enough to understand the company's need to control any inconvenience and build and maintain long-lasting personal relationships with the potential clients.

The following excerpt from an interview with one of the members of the centre, in a slightly ironic way, not a former worker but a former agent of propaganda in the communist regime, is relevant to the present topic:

Sure, the gratuity is one thing. This is the company's strategy, certainly not as a kind of pity, I do not know how, but because there is an advertising and they live by selling the devices and because of that they had benefits, that otherwise would not have had. But it is a combination, a special combination of financial interest with these works of mercy for so many people who are here. For this, I said that the "(name of company) family" is an understatement. It is more a kind of community, than a simpler family.

Therefore the recognized interest of the company is harmonized with the common interest of the members to access free health services. In other cases, as is the case of the South Korean director for Romania, perhaps the most institutionally charismatic figure in the company, the company loses all the features of a business. He is not presented as a manager, but as a father figure, always concerned with the care of the members. In Gramscian terms, the company has realized a hegemony, obtaining the consent for the commercial objectives of the company by incorporating an ideology in the fabric of daily lived social relations of friendship and family.

Constant references to their families are also made by the employees. In part, it is possible that the frequent discussions about their families come from the need to ease their daily performances. The talks about family and friends provide a handy material to construct meaning around usual themes proposed by the company. On the other hand, such discussions about relatively personal issues probably have the benefit of increasing confidence among clients. Sharing such personal details is seen as the basis of personal relationships between employees and customers. In fact, all these personalized relationships within the commercial transaction are supported by also ideologically referring to all the customers as "guests". In order to handle daily the number and intensity of such personal relationships, the employees take part in the weekly and monthly meetings and trainings organized by the company. When asked in interviews



what they believe is the most important quality that an employee should have, I was surprised to see that most of them answered, vaguely and too romantic, that this would be the love of people. This means that, following the economic and egalitarian ideals stated by the company which puts in principle all the possible clients on the same footing, the employees are often forced to indiscriminately show their love for all. A former employee of the company had described with excitement her experience in front of undesirable, old, smelly, unattractive bodies as a form of personal development. She tells how she was urged by the Korean director at a training to hug and kiss every member of the health care centre and how that experience had lowered her mental barriers and transformed her in a more loving being.

### **Some theoretical considerations**

How can one explain the attempts to make the economic transactions more personal? DSO is a special case in this regard. In Biggart's classic study dedicated to these organizations, inspired by the ideal types of social order proposed by Weber, she placed them among the charismatic ones. This is compared with most of the other organizations which would base their activities on a legal-rational social order, meaning that they are based on impersonal relationships governed by rules.<sup>1</sup> Thus unlike the latter organization, which would use in general just an instrumental rationality, based on impersonal calculations in the conduct of business, DSO was considered as integrating instrumental rationality with value-based rationality.<sup>2,3</sup> For Bromley, DSOs are quasi-religious organizations that emerged in response to the tension between "contractually ordered public sphere (state and economy) and the conveniently ordered private sphere (family and religion)".<sup>4</sup> Their popularity seems to be due to the alternative they offer in relation with bureaucratic and impersonal organizations<sup>5,6</sup> with the continuous disenchantment of the world, as Weber would say. In medical anthropology, although the argument is one made by many actors, including those from alternative medicine, the idea of disenchantment was transformed into a general critique of the open gap between biomedicine interested in objective causes and links and the subjective worlds of the patients they treat.

In fact, Biggart's work and perhaps especially some hazy fragments, as is the following quote, had led to a couple of legitimate interpretations about the relations between the two kinds of rationalities: "The rise of direct selling and the development of "less rational" forms of organizational control in the firm may signal that we have reached the limits of rationality. Paradoxically, less rational controls may be economically more rational".<sup>7</sup> Thus, in my opinion, Srivastava comes with a rather abrupt interpretation of Biggart, considering, by selecting a series of quotes and ignoring

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<sup>1</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 129–133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Cheris Shun-Ching Chan, "Reenchantment of the Workplace: The Interplay of Religiosity and Rationality", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 45 (2001): 68.

<sup>4</sup> David G. Bromley, "Quasi-Religious Corporations", 154.

<sup>5</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cheris Shun-Ching Chan, "Reenchantment of the Workplace", 49.

<sup>7</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 15.

others, that Biggart believes that DSO is based on a value-based rationality.<sup>1</sup> Chan seems to ignore the quotation marks from Biggart's quote because, although criticizing her, in the end Chan takes on a similar view, according to which the "instrumental rationality incorporates and appropriates value rationality"<sup>2</sup>. For Biggart, "the metaphorical family"<sup>3</sup> is a specific phenomenon of DSO through which economic relationships overlap with personal relationships. The fact that "pecuniary self-interest and affective interest are indistinguishable"<sup>4</sup> in the industry seems to mean for Biggart that creating personalized relationships represents the means by which some economic ends are met.

Lan extends Biggart's stance, affirming that strategies whereby distributors are "personalizing and familiarizing networks" are not just economic calculations. The personal anxieties caused by the tension between making money and making friends<sup>5</sup> make a necessity for the DSO's employees to believe in what they sell in order to manage their emotions.

If this seems to be the situation in the Fordist period, the distance between DSO and other types of organizations has shrunk considerably. DSO may still be considered a peak in using social relationships, beliefs and social norms, but in fact many other companies have appropriated increasingly more such practices.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, the development of the new labour management and of the service sector in the last decades continues the model proposed by DSOs.

Polany, which is also linked to Weber's work, was a source of inspiration in literature for describing how economic activities are bound with the larger cultural and social sphere through the concept of embeddedness. What is interesting in Biggart's use of the formula "less rational" is that it seems to betray the inheritance of the concept of embeddedness. The main thesis of Polany was that the rational and impersonal market relationships which, at the time he wrote, tended to capture areas which until then were under social regimes, therefore embedded, would confront a natural reaction of rejection from those exposed to them and they would never repeat. Polany was wrong in his prevision, the market relationships gaining an even greater scale in the neoliberal period. If the natural reaction of rejection of market rationality can be a good intuition, Polany overlooked the fact that the market can deliberately sustain a form of embeddedness in order to build consent. Although Biggart sees the personal relationships that flourish in DSOs as a response to economic rationalization described by Weber and Polany, her personal account of DSOs is trying to describe this less theorized reality: "Why should a "less rational" form of organization, one that creates and manipulates social bonds, grow precisely when a market mentality seems to be spreading inexorably throughout the developed world? This study suggests that neither market factors nor social factors alone

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<sup>1</sup> Sanjay Srivastava, "'Revolution forever': Consumerism and object lessons for the urban poor", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 44 (2010): 108.

<sup>2</sup> Cheris Shun-Ching Chan, "Reenchantment of the Workplace: The Interplay of Religiosity and Rationality", 68.

<sup>3</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> Pei-Chia Lan, "Networking Capitalism: Network Construction and Control Effects in Direct Selling", *The Sociological Quarterly* 43 (2002): 180.

<sup>6</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 171.

can answer this question. It is the interaction of economic and social conditions, of pecuniary and cultural orientations, that produced and sustains the direct selling industry. Economic action is pursued through social networks and social beliefs, not in their absence”.<sup>1</sup> In my point of view, her position has one flaw, emphasized in his later work<sup>2</sup>, of sustaining the use of social relations in the economic processes in the name of an uncritical concept of embeddedness.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, I appreciate that the concept of community needs a closer look in anthropology. If the community is the primary social unit of analysis in the discipline, with good reasons, it is also important to be mindful about its transformations and how it is used in the contemporary world. Eric Hobsbawm has made a more general argument about this reality when he considered that in a global and fragmented world, there is an increased tendency of interested political actors to artificially build communities.<sup>3</sup> If the market and bureaucratic processes in the healthcare system, in our case, seem to have an effect of alienation towards the patients, other marketplace actors are trying to overcome this drawback by constructing more meaningful social relations in the name of profit. Is the commercialization of relations and culture as of form of embeddedness the normative answer to the questions raised by Polany?

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<sup>1</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart, Richard P. Castanias, “Collateralized Social Relations: The Social in Economic Calculation”, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60 (2001): 495.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Globalization, Democracy and Terrorism* (London: Little, Brown, 2007), 93.