

Interview with Silo appeared in "Primera Plana"¹

This suspect is called Silo

For the activists of the Communist Party, Silo is a CIA agent; for the integrates of the Argentine liberal right, an obscure guru with a tendency towards the seditious and immoral. For the "Montos" (short for Montoneros: Argentine extremist organization/nationalistic left) Silo was an enemy; for the nationalistic groups, a dissolvent of our youth, probably funded by the Trilateral (ref. to Trilateral Commission-American power group) or something similar. For the Church, Silo is a heretic; and for many, many common and ordinary, honest and laborious people he is a leader whose mission - semi-religious, odd, extravagant - would be, basically, to sow the division in the Argentine people. Finally, Lopez Bega (Social Welfare Minister during Mrs Peron presidency) banned and persecuted Silo, the process got satisfied by reducing him to silence.

For Primera Plana, Silo is a character registered in the minds of hundreds of thousands of persons - here in Argentina, and in many other places more - who granted his last interview more than 13 years ago (to the disappeared magazine 2001). Therefore, a strange man worth the while listening to.

The Silo in question is a very tall man from Mendoza -1.86 metres: hence the nickname - named Mario Rodriguez Cobo. He is now 45 years, is married since 10 and is the father of two boys, of one and three years.

His first public appearance was not much common, rather showy in its details; the 4th of May 1969 - in front of half a thousand cold numb followers and some foreign journalists - he delivered a harangue in Punta de Vacas, inhospitable location in the mountain chain. This harangue had a title: The Healing of Suffering. The convulsive environments of those years did not take it very seriously, and Primera Plana dedicated a caustic article to it.

Nevertheless, upon that harangue, Silo and his adherents built - along 14 years - an organization called The Community, that today has adherents in 42 countries, so dissimilar and distant as USA, Hong Kong, Israel, Singapore, Iceland, Senegal, Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia. Summarizing: The Community is one of the few Argentine products with acceptance in the world.

As part of the preparations for this interview, PP (Primera Plana) made three local journalists join The Community and also investigated its literature.

In special two books of Silo: *The Internal Landscape* and *The Inner Look*. The Community has its symbols - a triangle inside the circle, or the little finger, forefinger and ring finger rises as a summary of the motto Peace, Force and Joy - its locales, its meetings and its texts of preparation and study.

Silo lives with his family in a simple and comfortable house in Chacras de Coria, a suburb of the capital city of Mendoza. He speaks with a profound voice in the Spanish way: "Heritage from my parents", according to what he says. He laughs frequently and, though he earns his living by growing the grapevine, he does not drink wine, something that his fellow province inhabitants would not see with "good eyes".

He received PP in his house and the chat - divided into two parts - got extended for more than 12 hours. What follows is a resume of this long conversation.

- How did this begin?

- How did this begin...! With meetings. And some works of study. Works that we were doing with some friends, here in Argentina. Already the first symptoms of the ideological dispute had been produced. The invasion to Hungary. And the terrible commotion in the ideas that this produced.

Imagine. At that time, already in little works written with some friends regarding what had happened after the 1914 War, we saw that thought was sterile: conditioned by the show. Already in 1929, Heidegger could not continue and had only left the outline of his phenomenological ontology, which is the theory of being. He did not deal with time anymore. The particular theory of relativity had been launched in 1915-17 (since the general one was launched in 1905). And the great scientific thinking gets stagnant. What was happening in Philosophy was happening in Science. What was happening in painting after the attempts of Dada, the surrealist attempts? What was happening in literature? A phenomenal blockade was produced. The thought of Occident was stuck. And it began to happen, this phenomenon that occurred throughout history and in other civilizations: the syncretism. It begun the syncretism of different forms which ideologically are

¹ (First Page, a magazine published in Argentina (November 10, Year 1, Second epoch - July 1 to 7, 1983)

(COVER) Exclusive Interview. Silo. The unknown story of a polemic character. (This accompanies a full-cover photograph of Silo gesturing our Peace, Force and Joy).

A non-traditional Argentine exportation. (This accompanies photographs of public acts in Europe, 1981)

(CONTENTS) In this issue, a famous though mysterious Argentine- above all known by his nickname: Silo - occupies the cover. Certainly, it is not a whim: even though Silo conceded his last interview in our country more than 13 years ago, his ideas nowadays impassion thousands and thousands of young people in all the geography of the world. From page 19 onwards the reader will find a resume of 12 hours of conversation between the man from Mendoza and a journalist from Primera Plana.

INTERVIEW. (Photograph of Silo) Silo discoursing in Bombay (India) in April, 1981. What he stares at is the symbol of the organization he founded, called The Community.

incompatible. However, all this nonsense was beginning and one was meeting on the street a Freudian Marxist, a Catholic Marxist, a Catholic Existentialist.

The development of ideas, the well-structured thoughts, the good posings... nothing. Only strength and the dollar were going to change the world. But, in which direction was the world going to change?

The centres of power were consolidating themselves. Where did we live? In the peripheral areas. And the peripheral areas were controlled by the centres of power. Not any substantial modification could exist in the peripheral areas as long as it was not decided in the centres of power that those modifications were convenient. This became very clear for us in the decade of the 60s. A rather pessimistic thesis.

- There were however, serious and concrete attempts. Movements of liberation and resistance to domination...

- Imagine. What happened with Blanco in Mesa Pelada? What with the Tupamaros, further on, in Uruguay? What happened with the MLI of Venezuela? Finally, with all the violent movements, and the others? What happened to Peronism - even though later it would have other opportunities? What about the peasant leagues of Chico Juliao, in the Brazilian North-East? It was very much clear that there could not be substantial modifications.

When the Cuban affair appeared, - which was put forth in terms of a liberation war and all that of guerrilla and the rest- from our point of view it was only a jump of orbit. It was all about passing from one orbit to another to a more advantageous form. But, in practice, it was seen that the centres get consolidated and the liberation movements get weakened.

What was happening at that time with the will of the people? It was contradicted by the events. By the events. More than the appeals to the will of the people, the events were those that contradicted it. I don't believe we were that mistaken when we said that a modification towards dependence would not be permitted.

And in the meanwhile, the epoch of the youth explosions begin. It is true that the class struggle, and that the ideologies and all that... but a new phenomenon begun to appear: the generational dialectics.

The young people in different parts of the world were agitated and -well- the agitation was big. But, you see how little consistency those youthful rebellions had. Which finished as they finished in a sort of inconsistent anarchism. "L'imagination au pouvoir" (Imagination to power). Imagine: the slogan is a nice one, but inconsistent. Imagine. The variations that were taken at that time! Those that this generation which wanted to express itself in some way took. The groups in Berkeley, the French groups that derived to the violent movements, the bomb, the petard, all that. Others towards drug, after Uncle Huxley, Aldous Huxley: towards mescaline, there went another group. Another one ended up in the diffuse mysticism, following gurus and strange things.

So then: some committed suicide through drug and others through the machine-gun in a final act of will for modifying the society they hated. And the others, those who searched for a way out in mysticism, I don't know whether to consider them as suicides, but it gives me the impression that they did not find it either.

- I am interested in the variation, or the path, that you were trodding at that time.

- In 1969, we spoke in that famous harangue - The Healing Of Suffering - and we introduced a way of thinking and we outlined a sort of methodology, even though very light, propounding non-violence.

- Pardon. For which motive did you choose a location in the mountain, Punta de Vacas, 160 kilometres away from Mendoza city, if you intended to read out a social and non-violent proposal?

- It was not a very much free choice. Ongania was ruling and we were forbidden to gather in the city. After that harangue, other three were impeded or prohibited. One in Yala, Jujuy, another one in Cordoba city and the third one in Plaza. Once (Eleven Square) of Buenos Aires.

It was in 1969 and not only were we proposing non-violence, we were also anticipating that a conflict of generations was beginning. Some mass media replied with things such as this: "Why you come to speak of pacifism in the most pacific country of the world", or, "Go to Vietnam", or, "Who is the unearthly one who talks of pacifism where nothing happens?" You see, another one of the errors that were committed with us. Because violent events were starting to happen at the time we were speaking. But this is another story. We should come back a little in time. Yes?

- Yes. To the process you were living and how you were evolving intellectually.

- Let's come back, then, to the beginnings of the 60's. We knew the climate (atmosphere) that was breathed in the decade of the 60s. We knew very well what had happened in the decade of the 50s and towards which this was deriving. And we went on arriving at the conclusion that none of the proposals that were presented at that moment were satisfactory. From no point of view, neither for the social liberation nor for the individual liberation. By that time we were very clear that even the so-called counterculture was part of the system. In such a way that the proposals of the counterculture were equally rejectable for us... And we said: "We are going to make our proposal."

By the end of '66 we had already achieved to systematize all our vision about pain and suffering.

Pain has a physical base and this is why we recognize it in hunger, thirst and all bodily injury. And only the advancement of science will make it recede. The case of suffering is mental. We recognize it in tension, in frustration, resentment and in every mental injury. We proposed the agreement with oneself, the elimination of the contradiction, in order to surpass it. The contradiction of a system of opposed forces.

Situations in which the individual finds himself compelled to resolve between powers that oppose each other and, if he cannot, suffering arises. To solve the contradiction.. this he will do upon finding a meaning of life that enables one to feel, think and act in the same direction, the act of unity in front of the contradictory act.

Of course, the situations of mental suffering also act upon the physical pain and vice versa. And that the surpassing of contradiction is not enough in order to remain free. There is a complex interaction between the social level and the individual level. And the influence of a meaning of life. But these are factors that influence, not determine. We are not mechanists.

Well. We had arrived at this point and we were going to hammer on this nail. And we were going to hammer on this nail up to the infinite. The nail that pain and suffering are the problems of the human being. And that everything that creates pain and suffering in the human being... That is bad! And that everything that makes pain and suffering be surpassed... That is good!! Some discovery!! This synthesis seemed important to us.

- Does a stage end?

- Another stage begins! In this epoch we went to different places to explain to people who had formed some sort of study groups with us, we went to explain some of the conclusions which we had arrived at.

There did not exist a precisely coordinated or centralized organization. There was a group of instructors who launched themselves to give their teaching and who occasionally had contact between themselves. But there was no official literature, there was no publishing through editors, there was not... a printed note that could be given. There were different groups which arose and where this confusion is produced, that later had been sufficiently publicized.

- There also The Community arises?

- No, no. Much later. We have not yet arrived at 1969. The Community comes much later. When it was already so spectacular this "let 1000 flowers bloom", it was so spectacular the form that this sort of movement, with different groups and so strange things, was taking place that, in 1975, is when it is decided to give it an official word, a unifying one, certain forms. This happens in the '75 and gets expressed in the '76.

- Was there any line of thinking common to all these groups till the formation of The Community?

- Several. The Non-violence as regards methodology. So then any accusation that comes from the violent sectors and from similar things to any of our groups... does not function. This was the line common to everyone. And it is the strongest.

Another one: a certain anarchism, a thing a bit acritic. Very little respect for the system in general. This is another common line. Of course, it is another type of anarchism. It is neither Bakunin nor Kropotkin. The possibility that suffering can be surpassed. And the human freedom. The existence of the human freedom. We were saying the opposite to those who sustained a natural order. We said that the natural must be humanized and that this humanization of the world makes man a creator of meaning, of direction, of transformation, if this meaning is a liberator from the supposedly natural conditions of pain and suffering, what is truly human is what goes beyond the natural: it is your project, your future, your son, your breeze, your sunrise, your tempest, your wrath, and your caress. It is your fear and your tremor for a future, for a new human being free from pain and suffering.

- Up to a certain point there is a noticeable coincidence with Existentialism.

- Only that Existentialism ended up badly when it closed the future. The postwar phenomenon of the Existentialism. Do you remember?... Juliette Greco, all that thing of Existentialism... ended up in nothingness. And it ended up on The Nausea. Ended up in the meaninglessness. It was a tragedy. Very intelligent, very brilliant, very much bright in their thought. They closed all the doors and windows to the future. There was an enormous point of divergence there. We believed in the opening of the future of the human being and in his possibilities of change. It seemed to us that Existentialism was left behind. In this (point) that there is no meaning in the world, there it is a break.

The meaning

- We tightly relate the problem of meaning with the study of faith. In the human consciousness there are more possibilities to be explored than those we can experience daily. We discovered that in the measure that the consciousness was given a direction, this consciousness would be converted into a mobilizing factor... in a force, almost as electricity. And with this force, this faith... it depends... you could plug the fingers in the socket and start a fan, a heater, a pulmotor. Different apparatuses.

This is why faith, taking one direction or another, could be highly constructive, or it could create great catastrophes. To the problem of faith it is added, then, the problem of the objective. You may have faith and, therefore, a tremendous force. But, in which direction is this faith oriented?

- Are we not once again evading reality, imagining the future and forgetting the present? I suffer today. Tomorrow will be tomorrow.

- It is true. Nevertheless, you suffer today for what you have lived, for what you live and for what you believe you will live. This is the point: what do I believe is going to happen. According to what I believe is going to happen, the tomorrow may be. And this gets complicated because, what happens with this? Does it

remain in the individual consciousness or goes beyond it? It so seems that it goes beyond and that these phenomena get extended to the social consciousness.

What happens if a great multitude believes that the future of that country, of that multitude, goes in a certain direction? Is it not that the centres of power, the powers as they are called, have had a strong interest in making determined populations believe that they do not have possibilities of liberation? That there is a superiority that has to be respected? It is very interesting, this of "believing" and of "make believe". What happens when it is believed with faith? What happens when it is believed without faith? There it is a whole game of mental situations that affect not only the destiny of individuals but also the destiny of peoples.

"Sirs, take out of your minds this of liberation, because such a thing is not possible", seemed to say the ideologists of domination. Here is another important point: What happens with faith? With the idea of the future. It seems to us to see that the phenomena that were happening in the individuals were also happening in the peoples: faith was weakening, thought was becoming lethargic, violence was strengthening, social phenomena were taking place.

- There are some interesting contacts with other doctrines that analyze domination. However, you find that there is an oppressing will and you dedicate your efforts to find a meaning to life. As a liberation method it does mean to be very effective. It could be objected that the meaning of life, today, should be that of removing oppression from above ourselves. And not to distract the attention running after matters of faith and belief...

Nevertheless, we believe that it is so. You will see why. If we say that the human being does not have a "nature", that there is nothing natural which compels him to accept pain and suffering as a part of his life, we can neither say that he is a human being just because of having been born with two legs, two hands and a head. A human being is social experience, is freedom and is future. Therefore, the human being gets humanized or dehumanized in his transit towards the future. There are actions which are more human than others. There are situations apparently incomprehensible where a human being acts like an animal...

Thus this of the humanness is not the humanness given once and for ever. Dear friend: You are always working in the field of liberty; and according to your choice in one way or another, you humanize or you dehumanize yourself. Which are the actions that humanize the human being? Those that contribute to alleviate pain and suffering in others. We did not fall in the trap of individualism and the continuous reversion to oneself.

There was no possibility of humanization but in the world. And in no way the world was humanized. And it even gave the impression that, on occasions, it receded and got dehumanized. This was the point: one had to go to the human acts. But, it was not the same to launch oneself towards a determined behaviour just for the sake of it, than to do it towards a justified behaviour. Towards a moral, I can do many things out of indignation, equity, a sense of justice, whatever you want; but I have to justify myself. Then, we said that : Unity increases life, contradiction diminishes life. Contradiction in the source of social and individual suffering. And, what happens in the social field? There is contradiction of classes, there is contradiction of opulence and misery, there is contradiction of oppressors and oppressed... aha. This is inhuman. This makes the humanness of the human being recede..

But then, what are you saying?, you would ask me. Are you telling that the scheme of established classes should be surpassed..? Absolutely yes!

- Through an analysis of the contradictions?

- If there are contradictions in a society, there are also contradictions in the individuals. But not only as a reflection, as the ancient ideologists would like. But because there is somebody who chooses, who opts for this contradiction to remain. A statement that may seem simplistic but that it achieves an enormous development and to be made precise in many aspects.

The moral

- Thus we have (the themes of) faith, future, suffering, the contradictory acts, the unitive acts, the growing humanization and the dehumanization. And, not only the fact of having been born as brothers. All of this, already at that epoch, was clear for us.

- We just talked about moral. Is there a distinct moral in your teachings? In all the texts of The Community that we knew before this interview it became usual to find resonances of cultures and religions. According to the knowledge of he who reads them there appear similitudes with Christianity, with Buddhism, and with references from cultures distant both geographically and intellectually. Can we speak of a moral synthesis, perhaps?

- It is true that these resonances exist. In every place The Community reaches, these resonances were felt.

There existed a moral, no doubt. There is a moral. The peoples have a moral. But,.. why? Thought was stagnant and nobody responded. We could not believe that (moral) was good just by itself; because somebody told it. We had to fundament it.

"And well... for reasons of living together", some said. "Because, were there not a moral, any disaster would happen". Well, But it is not enough for us to say: we agree on certain rules and already the things

function (well).

Ah! It has to do with the functioning of the human being. Then moral has to be justified. And not fulfill it because somebody says so nor because it occurred to someone. What is sin? For instance. Why is such behaviour sinful? What is right? What is wrong? Who says so? And... if you have faith in a being an immoral one? Why a moral should exist? For example: some religions consider some sex subjects as immoral. In other religions those are treated the other way around. It is spectacular!! Then, where is morality?

Morality has to be justified and it has to be explained why certain conducts should exist and not others. Of course, you will tell me; How to study this problem, with all the other problems the world lives in? Why should we start studying morality?" Well, let us not go so quickly. To fundament Morality is to fundament the direction of actions. So then, what is your idea about what is good, what is bad, what has to be done, what has not to be done? Morality is what dictates it to you. But then, be it a justified moral, we should know why this is yes and this other not...

- Well, we have talked about history, ideas and moral. Can we now talk about organizations? About The Community?

The Community! Yes, of course, let us talk about The Community. Look, I will explain it to you: The Community is a moral force in motion. So it has been defined. In no way is it a (political) party or a religion. And, in practice, there are people from everywhere. There are lots of atheists, and there are people who are not. And there are politicians. People with political tendencies and others who are activists. And the objective of all these people is to humanize the earth. That is to say, to place themselves in a direction of activity in the world. It is not any thing.

For example: Are you a politician and you participate in The Community? Stupendous! But he works in his party in the sense of humanization. He could tell me: "I am fed up with my party because they are immoral and they do this and that". No. This explanation is not good. Because if you produce a void in your party, you contribute to this disaster. It does not matter that in your party there are problems, it does not matter that there is corruption. If you choose by vocation and by liking and because so your feeling is and because you believe things go that way... go ahead strongly with your party. And work for the moralization of your party. This is a clear case of direction in the human activities.

To humanize the earth is also to humanize those who have influence and decision upon others, so that they listen to the voice of those who need to surpass pain and suffering.

- How are the structures of The Community?

- The structures? Of course, are they democratic? Is there a level on top?

Are they horizontal? How does one climb? What are the mechanics?.. This is what you want to know, isn't it?

Here, one has to start with the following basis. Our structures are not those which rule, suppose, the destiny of a country. For example: I am a citizen and I want my country to go in one direction and not in another. It is not possible that I should be submitted to a system where there is no participation. Is it not true? It is not the case in which I could choose another situation. And say, suppose: Now I am going to be Uruguayan, or Swedish, or Russian. No... I am Argentinian.

But it so happens that there are also ... clubs. There is one club of bowls, another of chess... If I don't like chess, I do not become a member. I do not know whether you notice the difference of option. It is enormous. And if I like chess I abide by the rules of the game and the statutes of the club.

- And how does he who wants to reach (belong to) the directing committee of this club go about?

- Now, what happens when someone wants to carry out tasks, or studies, or has new interests? The Community operates with a very interesting mechanism: the work. It is not the mechanism of discussion or statements... but work. You do things in the direction of The Community's activities? You participate. You do not do things? Then, you do not participate. This is the neuralgic point.

Why is this done? Ha... we have seen much water pass under the bridge... I mean: see what happens in other cases. There the youth is, the activists, they go, they stick posters, they exert themselves, they give sleeping hours, working hours, with a tremendous idealism. They put energy into it, they work, work like madmen... and then? There appears, suppose, a delegate whom nobody knows. Someone who sneaked through the transom (skylight), the one who does the fixings... or some relative.

This does not exist with us. Here there are no possibilities of sneaking in if one does not do things.

- I follow. But, which is the work to be carried out?

- The work, already, specific, begins when one meets a person and invites him to attend a meeting of The Community, and it is this: "we live in world of violence. Yes or not?" "No", he says. Well, "Good evening. There is no things more to talk. Clear, isn't it?" "Yes", he says. "Do you think that something can be done against violence or, at least, to go on gaining some ground before violence?" "Er... I think that something could be done", the subject says. "Well" - he is answered- "We propose to work against social violence and against the violence that you also have in your interior". This is the work of The Community. To work in order to dismantle the social violence and the bomb of internal violence. This is the statement. Do you participate in the functions of The Community? Of the cultural activities of The Community? Then you are carrying out a common task that unfaillingly will become a force of social mobilization for non-violence.

- There is a clear proposal of political participation in what we talked. However, in 1973, you formed the

United Front of the Youth, a party that achieved national status, and you promoted the counter-vote. A clear proposal of political non-participation.

- It is true. It was an attempt to warn about what was happening. We saw that a mini-explosion- of those we call psychosocial - was happening, those we already talked about in this interview, without a precise orientation.

We attempted to warn of the violent generational struggle and this is why we launched the counter-vote. This was a general warning. Politics were never looked down. Quite the contrary.

Till this moment, The Community has been engaged in cultural activities. But in a given moment, with certainty, it will promote the gathering of one million signatures in favour of the voluntary military service (as opposite to compulsory). This is a social attitude. Or it will gather a good amount of signatures so that certain subjects which are taboo get unearthed and discussed in the National Congress. Should there be divorce in Argentina or not? Should there be abortion or should it not? And there should be no silence regarding this because it is a delicate matter. If it is a delicate matter, the more the reason to discuss it! The more the reason to discuss it! Who has to discuss it? The Congress. Well, you see that we expect to have social participation.

- What is your position and occupation in the structure of The Community?

- I am the founder. And at present I am engaged in deepening our studies. We are trying to compile an analysis on the symptoms of violence in different spheres of the human activity. A sort of cartography of violence. Perhaps it will be ready in the beginning of next year.

- Can you give a balance of the work of The Community?

- I rather prefer an observation. Look: if we are mistaken, then everything is all right, because humanity goes on the right path. But if we are right, it may be convenient that, as a minimum, those who manage society listen to us. Our worst enemy is violence expressed as prejudice.

- This chat has been very ample. Can you synthesize your proposal in few words?

- It is a new path towards liberty.

Luis Fontana