

**Dissertation Title:**       **Martin Buber and the I-Thou Inter-subjective  
Community: A Critique**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

This dissertation on Martin Buber and the *I-Thou* Inter-subjective Community is a critique on Buber's concept of relational communities. The emerging glocal ( global, local)culture is founded on power. Settling disputes seems to be through wars rather than through dialogue as we have witnessed recently by the Lebanon-Israeli conflict. Martin Buber proposes a new foundation for building communities, namely mutual respect, relationship and dialogue. Being a Jewish thinker he constructed his theory on the Torah (Jewish Bible) which begins with the words "In the beginning Yahweh (God) created heaven and earth." In creation God is reaching out in relationship to the universe and man. Buber renders the quotation as "In the beginning was relation." Besides, God created Adam meaning an earthling, who became a man through relationship with Eve, another human. It is the beginning of relational communities.

The question asked in this research is, "Can the *I-Thou* relationship theory proposed by Martin Buber reduce the glocal (global, local) conflicts between human beings and promote a more humane community on our planet earth?" The thesis proposed is "The Inter-subjective dialogical communities as visualized by Martin Buber, in spite of its limitations, can ensure more harmonious relational human communities on our planet." To achieve this goal the following steps were made by the researcher.

- Society and Community : A Philosophical Perspective.
- *I-Thou* inter-subjective community as visualized by Martin Buber and
- Critique of the *I-Thou* Inter-subjective Community.

Today's emerging global communities are fragmented because its foundation is individualism and power. To prevent a global conflagration and to ensure a harmonious community we need to build intra and inter-relationships on respecting the uniqueness of each individual, community and nation and thus galvanizing the divided communities into a relational world community.

Society can be seen as a mechanism or organism Buber understanding of society is organic than mechanism. Man become a person only through organic community. Where man becomes fully human only through interrelationships. This relationship is the foundation for forming communities.

Jean Luc Nancy speaks of modern man's cry for the restoration of transparent, small scale interrelational communities that liberates man from alienation he experiences today. Nancy's analysis of Western (as well as in non-western) societies show a longing for an "original community" which is built on relationship. Buber's *I-Thou* relational community is the answer to modern man's cry.

Buber in his theory of relationship considers that there are two primary types of relationship, the *I-Thou* and *I-It*. In the *I-It* relationship one relates to the world around both man and nature as objects for attaining power. This is where our globalized capitalistic ideology is heading for. Each one is suspicious and afraid of the other and builds up armament to protect himself from the fear of the other, resulting in conflicts between man and man, between communities and communities, and between nations and nations. The *I-Thou* relationship begins in respect for every individual and enters into dialogue with him leading to communion and mutual understanding. This attitude of

*I-Thou* extends to all of creation where man finds the face of the Eternal Thou inviting him for communion. Communion with the world of man and nature is communion with the Eternal Thou.

The process of building relationships begins with the invitation of the *I*, the subject, calling the other another *I*. The other is free to reject or to respond to the call. Once the call is heard and responded, an encounter begins leading to dialogue and communion. When responded the *I* become mutually a Thou to one another. At the start the community is dyadic which relates with other individuals and becomes *I-We* relationship. In *I-Thou* relationship there is no third person, to be a third person means to be a He or She not a Thou.

The invitation of the *I* of the other begins in dialogue. Dialogue for Buber is another term for relationship. Dialogue can have different styles. It can be either monologue or disguised monologue where the individual communicates only his own ideas and no genuine dialogue. It is a one-way traffic. Buber also speaks of inauthentic (technical) dialogue which creates a periphery relationship of usefulness. Genuine or authentic dialogues are spontaneous. The partner is open to dialogue and the other initially reluctant suddenly opens up and a genuine dialogue begins. In authentic dialogue each individual takes the other's perspective and opens up to one another. Here communication is honest and unreserved.

Inter-subjective communities are built on *I-We* relationships and nourished by genuine dialogue. Speaking of community Buber focuses on the "between-ness," the relationship that exists between the people in dialogue. Relationship is a new reality and it is this relationship that binds people together in forming a community. In this relationship is the presence of the Eternal Thou, for God is relationship. When the *I* meet the Thou, a relation sprouts between them whereby each becomes persons. This relationship is kept

burning through dialogue. This in time develops into fully matured relationships and such relationships spread to others forming communities. The quality of life in a community or society will depend on the strength of the *I-Thou* relationship within that community. It is continuous dialogue that holds a community together and sustains its continued creativity.

