



Year 3, No 8, June 2016

Enrique del Risco, *Old and New Adventures of the Revolutionary Racism* / Marlene Azor, *The Privilege of Being Visible* / Matt Leighninger, *What We Learned and Didn't Learn from Public Engagement on Race Issues* / Yusimí Rodríguez, *After Obama* / José Hugo Fernández, *AFROMÁS: A Cuban LGBTI'S Own Voice* / Leonardo Calvo, *The Commitment of All, for the Good of All* / Angie E. Campos y Jorge R. Ramírez, *Afro-Peruvian Women* / Norberto Pablo Cirio, *Contribution to the Studies on Photographs of Afro-Argentines: The Rita Lucía Montero's Collection* / Omer Freixa, *Massar Ba's Case: Africa in Argentina* / Fisayo Lanre O., *Identity Issues in Nigeria* / Martin Palouš, *Cuba in 2015: A Perspective from Central Europe* / José Daniel Ferrer, *A Visit, a Speech, and an Unforgettable Meeting* / Iris Ruiz, *Necessary Art for Teenagers* / Fernando Palacio, *The Civil Society: A Key Factor for Democracy* / Boris González, *#Otro18 in Defense of the Law* / Manuel Cuesta Morúa, *#Otro18: A Strategic Proposal Underway*



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IDENTIDADES



IDENTIDADES is a publication of the *Plataforma de Integración Cubana* [Platform for Cuban Integration], a non-profit, non-partisan organization whose goal is to advocate for the rights of Afrodescendants and other alternative groups in Cuba, promote their empowerment as citizens and support their active role in political reform via the practice of Deliberative Democracy, and also contribute to the recovery of the history of their participation in the creation and development of the Cuban nation and its culture. It aspires to discuss the difficulties faced by Afro-descendants and all discriminated people in today's Cuba, and propose actions for confronting the problem and facilitating communication about it worldwide.

It is open to people anywhere in the world interested in the topic who can offer their experiences and discuss a subject so important for Cuba and all other countries that received the African Diaspora, or where minorities are discriminated by those in power.

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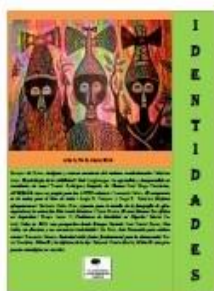
ISSN: 2373-151



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Cover Illustration: David D`Omni

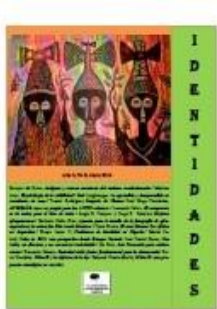
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This issue of *Identities* is marked by the visit of President Obama to Cuba and the 50th Anniversary of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), but the issues of race, class and gender keep on being the focus of our work. Focused in the lasting impact of racial policies by the so-called Cuban Revolution, the Cuban writer and U.S. Professor (University of New York) Enrique del Risco analyzes the "Old and new adventures of revolutionary racism."



This essay reveals that "a revolutionary racism", well-differentiated from the traditional racism, hides behind the 1962 official declaration that racial discrimination was eliminated. While traditional racism preserves and justifies inequalities, the revolutionary racism liquidates all obvious racist manifestations and also prohibits all criticism of racial discrimination or race except the folkloric references. Such version of racism is part of the dictatorial rule over the whole society. In another substantial essay, Dr. Marlene Azor (Metropolitan Autonomous University in Mexico) points out "the privilege of invisibility" as strategy of the Cuban government against the demands for recognition by

the population of African descent. Any attempt to overcome the silences and historical exclusions is branded as a risk to "national unity" and the open national debate on racial discrimination is always postponed with the excuse of keeping that unity. This strategy is clearly applied to the Cuban baseball athletes who jump towards the professional leagues. They are mostly of African descent and have no choice but to emigrate to a third country in order to pursue a career in the Major League Baseball (MLB). The article "Slavers in Full Count", by Jose Hugo Fernandez, uses the analogy with the three balls and two strikes count to describe the situation faced by the Cuban government after the Obama administration authorized direct hiring of Cubans in the U.S. So a key expectation of the Cuban regime seems to fade: acting as broker between the Cuban baseball players and the MLB clubs in order to take the lion's share of the contracts, as the Cuban government does with those who, under official permission, go to play in non-U.S. professional leagues. In the context of social classes, Oleydis Luis Machado offers another punctual analysis of discrimination, centered on concrete sociological research in the municipality of Antilla, a northern city of the Cuban East. Machado found that not only deep prejudices survive against the equality of gender and race, but also no actions are taken by the local government to mitigate them and to solve the problems arising from this situation. For realizing it, the author emphasizes that it would be enough to experience how uncomfortable is for people of color to share the public transportation system designed to bring the workers to the various tourist centers in the territory. From the same municipality comes the piece

of Marthadela Tamayo about how an open conversation on discrimination is postponed. On a journey of reflection against discrimination conducted by the Citizens Committee for Racial Integration (CIR), it was clearly demonstrated that even the recent congress of the Communist Party sidestepped the need for a national action plan against racism, as the CIR has been demanding along with other citizen platforms, such as the Brotherhood of Negritude and The Racial Unity Alliance. In view of the obvious manifestations and racist attitudes of the ruling class, as well as of the manifestations of institutional racism in certain spaces and the discriminatory bias against people of African descent in some regions of the country, the historian and political scientist Leonardo Calvo proposes that overcoming them should be a "commitment of all for the good of all." This is the title of his piece intending to emphasize that, as demonstrated by the independent anti-racist movement, bringing together the citizens from all social backgrounds is crucial for pursuing equality and both the historical and social justice. It should be an effort by both the whites and the blacks committed to the ideal of a fully integrated nation, free of privileges and exclusions." In such an effort, the LGBTI community of African descent has a role to play. From it has emerged the organization AfroMás, regarded by the writer and journalist José Hugo Fernández as "the voice" of that community, because it is certainly a non-exclusive organization, but it focused on empowering the LGBTI community of African descendants. AfroMás facilitates the defense of their rights and tries to encourage the rest of the society to leave behind the intolerance and the discrimination, because it is necessary not only to advance as individuals, but also to develop the country. The road ahead is neither short nor smooth, and the jour-

ney won't be a cakewalk for AfroMás, as the author asserts, but the organization has consolidated its position in Cuba and has just carried its message about the role race, poverty and social class beyond the national boundaries, since some of its members recently took part in a multidisciplinary workshop on medical care of AIDS, under the sponsorship of the Platform for Cuban Integration, along with representatives of the Institute Blacks AIDS (Los Angeles, California), the Health Department of Broward County (Florida) and other US institutions. Given that the problems of race and class are global, we have included the special section "The look of the Other" for allowing people from another socio-geographic contexts to share with us their experiences related to common issues. Thusly we have the deep reflection by the Vice President for Public Participation Public Agenda, Matt Leighninger, on social learning (and unlearning) about race. Starting from the 1990's race riots in major the US cities, Leighninger runs through the historic trail of how the Americans learned to discuss issues of race and became able to move from words to action in social conflicts. Instead of just setting an arena where everyone would be equally treated by teachers, judges, directors, officials, and so on, the communities began to build public arenas where the social actors openly acknowledge their differences and agree to continuously cooperate on an equal footing. The lesson drawn by Leighninger is one of paramount importance for democratic governance worldwide: improving the citizen's participation in public debates and increasing the intercultural understanding are complementary tasks. In the unfinished business of the debate about race, the public participation presupposes recognizing the differences and appreciating all cultures so that the various experiences with discrimination and prejudice can be

discussed with the main purpose of ensuring that they won't be happen again. Such a strategy is exemplary for solving problematic conflicts as the triple exclusion of Afro-Peruvian women because of gender, class and ethnicity. The issue is presented by Peruvian maestrandos Angie Edell Campos and Jorge Rafael Ramirez, who are studying in Brazil. In Peru multiple bloods, cultures, languages, and colors converge, but the Afro-Peruvian population is invisible and the situation of Afro-Peruvian women is worse: they are objectified and remain at the lowest level of the social scale. Also invisible is the black population in Argentina, as the anthropologist Norberto Pablo Cirio shows in his contributions on the Rita Montero Lucia [1928-2013] collection of photos. He thoroughly researched the photographic legacy of the mentioned singer and actress, who was an Afro-Argentinian of the so-called colonial trunk, *id est*: descendant of enslaved Africans, and also reveals that this social group is one of the most invisible and least understood in Argentina, as a result of the certificate of biological and cultural death was issued during the second half of the nineteenth century in the vain attempt to whitewash the country and to attract more European immigrants. Photography is a compelling evidence of the continued presence of African descendants in the Argentinean culture, but Cirio also demonstrates that this social group is fighting for their visibility and for a better position in both the national history (from where they were virtually excluded) and the present state of affairs. Along with those of the colonial trunk, the Afro-Argentinean include the sub-Saharan African immigrants who arrived in the early twentieth century and keep on entering the country nowadays. A shocking vision of this social group comes from the Africanist historian Omer Freixa in his rigorous analysis of

the Massar Ba's case. This renowned activist of Senegalese origin died in Buenos Aires on March 8, 2016. There are many clues to suspect he was murdered, but the investigation has been delayed and Freixa states that this case calls into question the alleged tolerance toward immigrants in Argentina. It also puts on the table that oblivion prevails over both memory and justice in regard of the sub-Saharan diaspora. Precisely one of the figures of such diaspora, MD Fisayo Lanre O., a Nigerian living in the UK, gives a testimony of identity problems in his home country related to tribal origin and religion. Half a century of independence has not been enough for gathering the tribes, shaping the national identity, and promoting the unity in a country where one of six Africans live. Dr. Lanre O. stresses that they are divided firstly by tribal lines (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbos) and then by religious creeds (the Northerners are mainly Muslims and the southern regions are predominantly Christian). However, if Nigerians would be able to overcome such sociocultural differences, the nation would have much to gain and the national identity would be strengthened in order to give full meaning to the expression often heard when a Nigerian excels anywhere: "Proudly Naija". This section is proud to publish the collaboration "Cuba in 2015: A Perspective from Central Europe," by Martin Palouš, former US ambassador. UU. (2001-2005) and former permanent representative to the UN (2006-2011) of the Czech Republic. The author notes that, despite the stubborn resistance of the Cuban government, the spirit of civic initiative is awakening among the Cuban democratic opposition. Thus, both the United States and the European Union can and must open up spaces for cooperation and coordination in the dialogue on human rights with the Cuban government, as well as for more assistance and political support to the

brave Cuban democrats in their continuing effort to finally break with the last remnants of the Berlin Wall. In this regard it should be emphasized the impact of President Obama's visit to Cuba. He delivered an electrifying speech on the opportunities for the Cuban people and held a very productive meeting with several dissidents. One of them, Jose Daniel Ferrer, leader of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UN-PACU), summarized the historical sequence of events in the testimonial piece "A visit, a Speech, and an Unforgettable Meeting," which we are offering in this edition to the readers. Likewise Jorge Luis Costa describes, in "A Cuba for Obama," how the government mobilized resources and even carried out police operations to momentary keep up appearances with well paved streets, colorfully painted facades, and no homeless at sight. Meanwhile Leonardo Calvo analyzes the racist offense and dangerous demagoguery in the saga of despair and rampant concern among the Cuban authorities unleashed by Obama's presence and messages. For Calvo, a racist offense published in a Havanan newspaper was not an isolated incident, since visitors to Cuba will be in danger of facing such offenses until the full implementation of the public debate on racial issues, history, identity, and inequality. That danger will vanish only when Cubans do not tolerate in silence even an injustice against the most unknown or anonymous young African descent, always threatened by street police arbitrariness; when Afro-descendants do recover their civic and public voice to reaffirm their identity and rights; when legal mechanisms are activated to effectively defend them against any manifestation of discrimination. In this perspective, Yusimí Rodríguez asserts that, "After Obama," the state of affairs remains almost unchanged in Cuba. The government keeps the people as prisoner of the past

according to its interested version of history, as patient of the present socio-economic and sociopolitical ills, and as a deceived believer of the future, with promises on the verge of madness. The latter is evident in Fidel Castro's reflection on "The brother Obama." Its closing statement reads thus: Cuba does not need anything from the United States, because the Cuba people has all the resources needed to develop the country with the own efforts. The author simply contrasts this statement with a question usually heard in the streets: Why have we lived then so many years in precarious situation? This precariousness is seen in all spheres of the social life and Luis Oleidy Machado brings an illustrative example: the government is determined to show the world that Cuba is a cultured country, while actually Cubans do not have access to many cultural manifestations." In "Cultural Opening in Cuba: An Outstanding Issue," the author emphasizes that the Communist Party is hostile to—even and does not understand—the issues of freedom of expression, assembly and association. Cuba must be culturally open to the world, but it should be without anyone the others what to do or say. An independent cultural movement is described by Iris Ruiz on the basis of the work done by Arte Estudio in the suburb of Alamar, east of Havana, where the lack of state attention increases the risk factors among adolescents. To mitigate the risk, Arte Estudio made a research on the needs and interests of education and training in the community and took the initiative of a workshop of creative drawing with teenagers, focused on such themes like respect in interpersonal relationships, violence, and discrimination because of gender and race, as well as on the better ways to resolve conflicts. Thus the art opened a promissory space to bring parents and children together around educational contents and healthy recreation. In contrast,

Nonardo Perea describes the sharp decline in a very peculiar artistic field: the impersonation, which presupposes to study a character in detail in order to master his or her gestures, and to perfectly embody him or her. It was actually the case at the time when repression was harder, but today, despite greater tolerance by the authorities, most of the shows runs without the artistic quality that the public deserves. Perea adds that the artistic impersonation must deal with the many shortcomings of the country, but they are not an obstacle to give everything on stage in order to be respected as an artist within such unexplored cultural world. Also too little explored, but currently in transition, is the world revealed by José Clemente Gascon in "The Cultural Marginality or the Culture of Marginality in the Cuban Plastic Arts. After long decades of rejection by the elites of both the high culture and the State, marginality has become overnight and attractive and tolerated subculture thanks to the interest and curiosity of foreign collectors. The marginal cultural practices, with their genuine indigenous art forms and oddities, were disqualified by the status quo because they continuously express—within alternative spaces—the irreverence, dissatisfactions, disagreements, and shortcomings of the so-dubbed urban peripheries. In the perspective of Gascon, the peculiarity of these practices consists in that they are artistically genuine expressions without consent, approval or approval of the official culture. Our incursion in the art closes with the interviews to the graphic artist Juan Carlos Briñas, by Veronica Vega, and the writer Lazaro Andres, by Nonardo Perea. Briñas regrets not having been born "in a country with rights." After being in serious trouble for his rejection of the military service and his work as a cartoonist for the dissident media Hablemos Press, Briñas went into exile in Suriname, where he works as a

service employee in a hotel and hopes to create conditions for working as illustrator and starting to paint. Meanwhile Lazaro Andres gives the inner perspective of a creator grappling with the realities of the Cuban literature, from the overwhelming mercantilism of the International Book Fair, with almost nothing to do with the authors or their readers, passing through the fact that many authors, especially the most important, do not reside in Cuba anymore, until the publication of works that literally do not have much value, but are rewarded in literary contests. Lazaro Andres lives in Santa Clara, at the center of the island, and considers that although the territorial publishing system makes known many writers within the country, the runs of printing books are too short, and the press neither reviews nor comments the works. With virtually nonexistent books and critics, the authors turn invisible. Invisibility is an evil that afflicts the entire Cuban society, and historian Manuel Cuesta Morua warns us that it also happens with the citizens in the political system. The author raises that re-modernizing the State is an urgent task, since the citizen, along with all their natural rights, becomes invisible under the rubble of a triple collapse (institutional, economic and labor) that prevents to relocate Cuba in the circuit of the modern States. The institutional communication between the State and its citizens collapses especially because the only legal party, the Communist Party, is acting in its sole discretion even without adhering to the constitutional rules; the economic collapse occurs through the reinvention of a production model designed to fall into underdevelopment; and that model provokes the collapse in the workplaces, because it relies on the "structurally slave labor" condemned by the United Nations. Thus, for Cuesta Morua "re-modernizing the State it is not only an ethical duty, but also a

socially aesthetic demand. Armando Soler ventures into the dysfunctional Cuban State apparatus by contrasting "Militarism versus civil society." He explores the Cuban military from the colonial times to the present day in order to show that the subordination of the civilians to the military caused a devastating effect on society as a whole. It quashed the independence and rights of citizens, overstated the role of the armed forces, and reinforced their sense of superiority and preponderance, which leads to consider the rest of the population at their disposal. This population is braving difficult conditions, from the hardships of the mere survival, as described Rudicel Batista in his note on "Streets Fighters," to the helplessness in the face of tragic events as the collapse of the house, which Marcia Cairo brings in an interview with the affected couple of "Homeless Octogenarians." And those times of hardship and tribulation encourage the reflection "On Spiritual Identity", provided by Ivonne Lascaiba from the Christian perspective with emphasis in the belief that if we seek the Kingdom of God, all the things will be added. This issue of our magazine closes with the papers presented by Cuban activists at the panel "Cuba: representative democratization," organized by the undersigned as President of the Platform for Cuban Integration during the XXXIV International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). Fernando Palacio Mogar (Solidarity Cuban Liberal Party) shows in "Civil Society: A Key Factor for Democracy," how the diversity of groups and opinions does not weaken, but enables the citizenship to find viable solutions to the problems of the country, starting with the daily hardship for bringing food to the table. As the lack of diversity in the ruling elite does not lead to the absence of conflict, the diversity of civil society does not lead to perpetual conflict either. On the

contrary, the commitment to diversity implies that transparency and dialogue can definitely result in a kind of confidence among Cubans that prevails over the current secrecy and undermining confrontations generated by suspicion and fear. Palacio Mogar refers, as clear example of this confidence, the Project # Otro18, which brings together more than twenty civil society groups in order to take the first steps in the exercise of deliberative democracy from the civic perspectives and within the legal framework. In this sense, the paper "# Otro18 and the Defense of Law," by historian Boris Gonzalez Arenas, deals with the mobilization of the citizens towards political changes, following the declared intention of General Raul Castro to quit as Head of State and Government in 2018. The campaign # Otro18 assumes that this window of opportunity is open to bring about changes toward a genuine democratic system, instead of the changes proposed by the Castroite nomenclature, which is determined to retain power. The campaign strategy is to deploy, before a maximal radical agenda of constitutional reform, a minimal agenda that starts from the existing legal order to show its deficits and the need for more substantial reforms. The key to success lies in achieving the active and massive participation of the citizens. Gonzalez Arenas masterfully summarizes the reason that encourages such a strategy: it is preferable to build a legal culture on the basis of a crumbling State than as a result of a social explosion. The leader of Project # Otro18, Manuel Cuesta Morua, dedicates his paper to elaborate on this strategic proposal in two key directions: defining the general contents of the civic conversation on electoral system and laws of associations and political parties, and progressively building up alliances between political organizations, civil society and social actors.

Otro18 seeks to reform at least three articles of the Socialist Constitution (1976) reformed in 2003: Article 3, which has to do with the exercise of sovereignty; Article 5, about the hegemonic and implicit superiority of the Communist Party; and Article 137, which deprives the citizens of their right to reform the constitutional order. The minimal agenda proposes a series of reforms to the electoral system that meets three basic demands: the plurality of the Cuban political society, the competitiveness of the political system, and the direct election of the President.

Otro18 promotes independent candidates for the upcoming elections as part of the peaceful opposition plan by the Table of Unity for Democratic Action (MUAD).

In this context of political action, # Otro18 has an additional strategy and campaign against violence, on the basis of the Zero Violence Project, which is being developed by various groups, mainly of women, in Cuban civil society. This eighth edition of our magazine intends to do its bit in such constructive works for all Cubans, but especially for those belonging to the most disinherited sectors as a result of discrimination on grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation, and income level.

Dr. Juan Antonio Alvarado Ramos
Editor-in-Chief

Old and new adventures of the revolutionary racism

Enrique del Risco

Writer

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Before the heat of the economy and the statistics—in the midst of the conversion of Castroism to the capitalist faith—end up drowning the already muted cries of the ideology, we should agree on one thing: few regimes like the inaugurated on January 1st, 1959, although frustrated in the essentials of economics, have made fashionable so many products of the spirit: from the beards and long hairs of their heroes to the image of its Guerilla Holiness captured by Korda and disseminated by Feltrinelli; from sport to educational achievements, though it was enough to put a microphone in front of an athlete to begin to cast doubt on the effectiveness of the education system. Among all these products only a few have had such a lasting impact on the universal consciousness—let's remember that I'm writing from a hipster era, where the beards have returned without the long hairs—than the so-called racial policy of the Cuban Revolution. It matters little that—as noted by Sir Hugh Thomas—the programmatic text of the early Castroism (*History Will Absolve Me*, 1954) contain neither the slightest allusion to the racial issue nor the word "black", not even as part of the color spectrum. Or that at the dawn of that Revolution nothing announced that the racial issue would become a leitmo-

tif during the early years of revolutionary power. Seen from a distance, it is understood. It wouldn't be entirely consistent that a white son of a Spanish immigrant called a revolution on behalf of racial equality against a mestizo ruler—black in the stricter U.S. racial profiling—who more harm than good had carried out a discreet racial policy and suffered discrimination in his own flesh, as the official version has been insisting until today, by the Cuban bourgeoisie, even after having come to power. A few days after the triumph of the revolution, the very Fidel Castro said to an American journalist that the "matter of color" in Cuba "*did not exist in the same way as it did in the U.S.; there was some racial discrimination in Cuba but far less; the revolution would help eliminate these remaining prejudices*"¹.

Let's abstain from belaboring other statements by the leader of the Revolution about the same time, which insisted with persuasive vehemence on his non-communist political affiliation. Just a couple of months later, in March 1959, he called for a campaign with the slogan: "Job opportunities for all Cubans, without discrimination based on race or sex; let's put an end to racial discrimination in the workplace."² Whether there was too little or too much racism in Cuba before 1959, for the Revolution

(or Fidel Castro, if there is any difference) it would be enough to declare in less than three years, on February 4, 1962, that "the discrimination based on race or sex" was suppressed.³ And the entire humankind, always in need of happy endings, seemed to believe it. After that, the silence.⁴ It would be a version of the facts.

The other version

Rather than suppressing racism, the Cuban Revolution revolutionized it. It generated, so to speak, a revolutionary racism. While traditional racism makes every effort to preserve and justify the social, economic and political inequalities, the "revolutionary" racism would endeavor to eliminate any obvious way of discrimination in order to prohibit then any criticism of racial discrimination and any reference to race, except the folkloric ones. This is recognized by Professor Alejandro de la Fuente: "Just as the overtly racist acts were judged as counterrevolutionary, any attempt to publicly discuss the limitations of Cuban integration was also considered as a work of the enemy."⁵ And so it was. All "black" associations were closed along with the "white" associations. The automatic and unmitigated repression against black intellectuals who criticized the racial politics of the Revolution, such as Walterio Carbonell and Carlos Moore, was not exactly an incentive to create more or less autonomous associations on racial basis. Nothing happened in those years, which suggests that an Independent Party of Color like the one founded in 1908 and massacred in 1912 would have triggered a different reaction by the revolutionary government in comparison with the violent reaction by the government presided by General José Miguel Gómez (1858-1921). Thus, the "minorities" discriminated until then had no choice but to delegate their ability to claim in the "revolutionary" avant-garde and to rely upon its kindness and its degree of

empathy with their problems. Although the revolutionary racism did not share the public discourse of traditional racism on the manifest minority's inferiority, the latter would concur with the former in assuming that such minorities could not and should not decide for themselves what to do at their own pace and convenience. Despite public declarations of equality, the Revolution seemed to implicitly suggest that such minorities were decidedly inept in matters of autonomy and social self-consciousness. It may be objected, not without reason, that such view of the revolutionary racism was characterized by the recognition of autonomy and social self-awareness only to the aforementioned revolutionary avant-garde and to nobody else. In regard of the freedoms of expression, association and criticism, all the components of the so-dubbed masses are also limited by the punctilious suspicion of that avant-garde. Thusly we arrive to the point that the Cuban regime exercises coercion and repression in an indiscriminate and equalitarian manner. Such equality in repression would be true if the Afro-Cuban population wouldn't have been carrying the extra burden of having to thank the Cuban Revolution for its infinite generosity, as if restoring inalienable rights would have been an act of pure justice, but an exaggerated concession; as if this sector of the population was deemed inferior at heart. From such an undeserved equality granted by the Revolution, the latter will require not only the absolute assignment of the ability to express and to defend the particular claims of that population, but also tireless devotion and eternal gratitude. Here is where the revolutionary racism, unlike the traditional one, does make a distinction between black people: the distinction between useful and unpardonable blacks. Useful like all the black figures that after a demonstrated obedience, are displayed in a manner

more symbolic than real as legitimate representatives of the Revolution, for instance: the late Commander Juan Almeida, at the dawn of the Revolution, and the current President of the Parliament, Esteban Lazo, in the present times of endless agony. The unpardonable blacks are those like the dissident Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who treacherously attempted to harm the image of the Revolution by dying in prison after more than eighty days of hunger strike in 2010. He was so unpardonable that despite the recognition by international organizations as prisoner of conscience, he was branded both in life and posthumously as a "common criminal."⁶

In the memories of his stay (1964-84) in Cuban prisons, the late writer Jorge Valls asserted: "Blacks were subjected to a particularly bad treatment. 'You, black, said the jailer, how could you rebel against a revolution that is making you a human being?' The blacks always ended up receiving more punches and bayonet pricks than the others."⁷

The cardinal distinction

If anything distinguishes the revolutionary racism from its traditional variant, it's the pragmatism. Ignoring the rights of a human group does not mean giving up in trying to use them for benefits beyond the simple economic return. Exploiting the symbolic value of certain concessions does not guarantee equality, but so it's quite effectively simulated. And the Revolution, such an entity that functions as a nickname of some Castro, is not only responsible for granting the dignity of the black population, but also the only guarantee to keep it.

Thus, in the early hours of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel Castro signed a statement calling to fight the invaders who "are coming to take away the dignity from the black men and women after having been restored by the Revolution [while] we fight to keep the supreme dignity of the human being for all".⁸ During the interrogation of the

captured blacks invaders, Castro questioned the ideals of those who fought "against a revolution that has established social equality and given black people the right to education, the right to work, the right to go to a beach and the right to grow up in a free country, without being hated or discriminated."⁹

Such an epidermal and rhetorical confrontation against racism also served to contrast the egalitarianism of the nascent Cuban Revolution against the American nation that was still struggling with racial segregation in the South. Castro allowed himself to speak sympathetically about "the semi-enslaved U.S. blacks"¹⁰ in order to emphasize the difference. Any conflict between race and nation was solved with two sentences: one by Jose Martí and the other by Antonio Maceo. Dissected in a seminal essay by Enrique Patterson¹¹, the Martí's sentence reads like this: "In Cuba there is no fear of a race war. Man is more than white, more than mulatto, more than black." It was contracted by the political routine to "a Cuban is more than white, more than mulatto, more than black." Maceo's sentence reads as follows: "Whoever tries to seize Cuba will gather the dust of its soil soaked in blood, if not perish in the fight" (the politicians changed "appropriate" to "seize"). It does not even mention the issue of race. The only sentence by Maceo currently present in the Cuban political repertoire made it clear that the main concern of the most important national hero of African descent was the danger of foreign intervention. The Cuban racism should be resolved then by the Cubans themselves and, as it is well-known, being a Cuban means more than being white or black, more than ...

As time goes by

The accumulation of social problems of all kinds in the contemporary Cuban society—including the merger of remnants of traditional racism with the

praxis of the revolutionary racism— did not diminish the idea that any criticism had its origin in the CIA headquarters. If in the present living conditions of Afro-Cubans show no signs of improving, the local Ministry of Truth will always worsen the past as a last resort. While in January 1959 the "question of color" did not exist for Castro "in the same way as in the United States" and there hardly was "certain racial discrimination" and "remaining prejudices" that the revolution would eliminate without difficulty, the official digital encyclopedia *Ecured* notes nowadays, despite all the evidences to the contrary, that "in the Havana of the 1950s, the university studies were practically closed to blacks and mestizos". It also states "politics was a business of the whites" and that "only political party in which blacks could develop their leadership qualities was the Socialist People's Party [Communist]." Thus some details like Fulgencio Batista becoming president being neither blond nor communist were simply ignored. In the past managed by *Ecured*, black men worked in agriculture, construction, trade and crafts, while women worked as housemaids [sic]. The police was mainly composed of whites, like the armed forces, especially the officers. Apparently the difficulty to transform Benny Moré and Celia Cruz in Caucasians forces to slip that music was "the only sector that maintained the existing tradition since the eighteenth century with broad participation of blacks and mestizos."¹² But Celia Cruz was a certified schoolteacher before becoming a professional singer, so this would be another tall tale by the "worms" in Miami, as it would be her entire career.¹³ While the Cuban past is not difficult to modify, the present of the Afro-Americans complicates this idyllic and baronial view of the Castro racism. Partly because the images of German shepherd dogs attacking black protesters

seems a bit old-fashioned; partly because the current situation cannot be summarized with the deaths of African Americans at the hands of the police, as the Cuban press promptly informs. Despite the efforts of the efficient Castro propaganda machine, it is more difficult to transform the outside world than the Cuban past in order to convince the captive Cuban audience that the entire U.S. black male population is doomed to work in agriculture, construction, trade and crafts, while the females have only the job option of being maids if they don't possess musical talent. Watching Hollywood productions for decades has served to find out that being black in America is not incompatible with being a lawyer, judge, police chief, or actor. If Cubans pay attention to the news, they will also realize that being black is not incompatible with the post of Secretary of State and even, occasionally, of President.

Obama's visit

And precisely the two-day visit of the U.S. President Barack Obama to the "first socialist territory in America" has put the revolutionary racism against the ropes. At the same time, as it happens with a cornered boxer, the visit forced it to do its best. Trying to recover from the symbolic barrage of Obama's visit —"the fall of the imaginaries", as Yessenia Selier coined it¹⁴ — both the Cuban government and press sought to reopen the trenches against an "enemy" deployed in all its imperial humility. Against the imperialist cunning to choose a son of a Kenyan black man as its representative, Cuban President Raul Castro could hardly oppose the replacement of his grandson as usual companion by the somewhat ghostly Esteban Lazo and Salvador Valdes Mesa, especially if we compare such a maneuver with the active interlocation between Obama and black personalities during his meeting with Cuban representatives of the opposition and the civil

society. The official response to the visit —branded by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez as an "attack on our history, our culture and our symbols"— was the apotheosis of the revolutionary racism. And precisely the founder of that racism and a black journalist gave the most outrageous answers. Fidel Castro warned against the "more honeyed words" of the African American President's speech to the Cuban people. They came loaded with poison: "It is assumed that each of us was on the brink of a heart attack upon hearing these words." Castro did not hide his favorable expectations: "Somehow I wanted that Obama's behavior would be correct. His humble origins and his natural intelligence were evident."¹⁵ It draws attention to Castro's insistence on Obama's intellect, as if it entails some contradiction. He had said earlier: "Undoubtedly, Obama is intelligent, well-educated, and a good communicator; he made many people think he emulated Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King."¹⁶ These expectations lead the founder of the only Cuban dynasty to hold some kind of misconduct against Obama. And immediately it leads Castro to invoke Mandela when he was "a prisoner for life and had become a giant in the struggle for human dignity." In his article "Brother Obama," the old dictator became delirious, but did not distract himself from his main goal: to warn that Obama — however far he may be from the old prophecies about the imperialist enemy: that white and obese mister with a bag full of money— is anyway this very enemy in the flesh: "No one should be under any illusion (...) We don't need any gift from the empire." And Castro dips again into the talismanic phrase by "the glorious black leader Antonio Maceo". Taking by dictation "whomever attempts to conquer Cuba will only gather the dust of her soil soaked in blood, if not perish in the fight," the

clerk reinforced so Castro's new call to behead symbolically the old enemy.

Far more diaphanous was Elias Argudín, a black reporter from the newspaper *Tribuna de La Habana*, who wrote that Obama "chose to criticize and suggest, with subtleties, in a veiled, yet unmistakable incitement to rebellion and disorder, without caring about being in someone else's home. There is no doubt, Obama went too far. I cannot but tell him, in the Virulo style: "But Negro, are you Swedish?"¹⁷ It is worth recalling the origin of the phrase, which was also the title of the article and generated so much criticism that the author was compelled to retract somehow or other. It was uttered in an old humorous skit from the early 1980s, in which a black man was trying to enter with a Swedish passport to an exclusive Cuban shop for diplomatic personnel and other foreigners. He was stopped at the door with that phrase. The latter originated in the conditions of the particular Cuban apartheid, which prevented the vast majority of Cubans from having access to services and facilities reserved for foreigners and certain privileged Cubans. Since then it has been used to remember, with some insulting jocularity, both to Cubans in general and to black people in particular, the limits resulting from their condition. In the new context, the phrase seems to be designed to remind the U.S. President what he could not do in his situation as either a black person or as a guest, however presidential he could be. The revolutionary racism was evidenced by the emphasis in certain expectations associated to the race of the incumbent U.S. President. Hence the visceral reaction of the official media to his visit and especially to his speech in defense of the democratic values. Being black, American democracy is not up to Obama, even if Martin Luther King Jr. started his anti-racist crusade with a call to "apply our [U.S.] citizenship in its

full meaning.”¹⁸ Although Cuban journalists and officials who attacked the U.S. President should know that Obama became president with the popular vote in a country that they have been demonizing for decades, they could not hide their surprise when Obama stood for the essential American values. Somehow they were expecting from him the same devotion they expect from the black population on the island, because the revolutionary racism —like any other one— consists in liking the skin color with certain attitude. In this case, they expected at least some complicity of Obama on behalf of the alleged advantages granted by the Revolution to the black race. Both the stupor and the viciousness of the attacks in the official Cuban press went beyond the mere political antagonism. They denote a poorly controlled rage toward a phenomenon that is not fully understood, because it was never understood: that blacks were not grateful for the sleepless efforts done by the Revolution to turn them into human beings. This revolutionary racism patronizes those rendering obedience and brutally represses those who do not. Such racism should not be a surprise for anyone, because it was always there. It always relied, like any other variant of racism, on failing to recognize a particular group on an equal footing. We do not notice it better now because the aged revolutionary avant-garde altered the standard. What has changed is actually the world around it in almost six decades of Castro power. Nothing like the presence of the first black American president in Havana accentuated the contrast and the absurd anachronism represented by octogenarians still pretending to be liberators. Now the revolutionary racism must take a step forward in its evolution facing the new challenges without losing their own notion of essential superiority. For example, it could adapt the old phrase

by Martí: "The imperialist enemy is more than white, more than mulatto, more than black.”¹⁹ Thusly the revolutionary racism could remind us that, beyond its atavism and superstition, the "revolutionary" variant of racism is primarily part of a system of domination over the entire society.

Notes:

1-Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998, 1120.

2-Castro, Fidel. "Speech delivered on 22 March 1959".

<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1959/esp/f220359e.html>

3-Castro, Fidel. "Second Declaration of Havana".

<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1962/esp/f040262e.html>

4- The scholar Alejandro de la Fuente asserts in a fundamental text on racial issues in Cuba: "The initial campaign against discrimination declined after 1962, leading to a growing public silence around the issue except to highlight the success of Cuba in this area." Cf.: Fuente, Alejandro de la. *A nation for all. Race, inequality and politics in Cuba. 1900-2000*. Madrid: Editorial Hummingbird, 2000, 383.

5-*Ibidem*

6-See "Report by the UNEAC and the AHS to the intellectuals and artists in the world"

(<http://mesaredonda.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2010/03/16/a-los-intelectuales-y-artistas-del-mundo-pronunciamiento-de-la-uneac-y-la-ahs/>) or the article "For whom death is useful?", by Enrique Ubieta

(<http://www.cubadebate.cu/opinion/2010/02/26/orlando-zapata-tamayo-la-muerte-util-de-la-contrarrevolucion/#.VxpGTDArIdU>)

7-Valls, Jorge. *Twenty and forty days*. Madrid: Encuentro, 1988, 51.

8- "The press released by Fidel on April 16 and 17, 1961":

<https://verbielara.wordpress.com/2009/0>

[4/16/los-comunicados-de-fidel-entre-los-dias-15-y-19-de-abril-de-1961/](#)
 9-Playa Giron: *Defeat of imperialism*. Havana: Ediciones R, 1962, 457. The question about the presence of black soldiers in the invading troops, posed by Castro and his supporters, has its inverse symmetry. After the failed attack to the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953, “*Batista’s soldiers openly said that it was a disgrace to follow a white such as Castro against a mestizo such as Batista. When Captain Yañes [sic] came on Castro hiding sleep in a bohío, it will be recalled that the soldier who found them cried: ‘Son blancos’*”. Thomas, Hugh. *Op. cit.*, 1122.
 10-Castro, Fidel. "Speech delivered on 22 March 1959".
<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f190561e.html>
 11 Patterson, Enrique. "Cuba: discourses about identity," *Encuentro*, No 2, 1996, 49-67.
 12, http://www.ecured.cu/Discriminaci%C3%B3n_racial_en_Cuba
 13-Muñoz Usain, Alfredo. "The Cuban press dismisses the icon of the anti-Castro,"
http://www.elperiodicodearagon.com/noticias/escenarios/prensa-cubana-despide-icono-anticastristas_68044.html
 14-Selier, Yesenia. "Obama and the fall of the imaginaries"
http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1459548754_21390.html

15-Castro, Fidel. "Brother Obama".
<http://www.granma.cu/reflexiones-fidel/2016-03-28/el-hermano-obama-28-03-2016-01-03-16>
 16-Castro, Fidel. "The summit of the guayabera".
<http://www.cubadebate.cu/reflexiones-fidel/2012/04/13/la-cumbre-de-las-guayaberas/#.VxpoTzArIdU>
 17-The article was removed from the network, but it left many references in a variety of websites, for example: "Smack in Cuba by Article against Obama"
["http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/?2016/03/30./56fc146122601dcd088b4640.html](http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/?2016/03/30./56fc146122601dcd088b4640.html)
 18-<http://www.blackpast.org/1955-martin-luther-king-jr-montgomery-bus-boycott>
 19 During a Summit of the Americas (Cartagena de Indias, April 2012), the official newspaper *Granma* published a cartoon of Obama dressed in guayabera and a vaguely Andean character saying: "The empire, although dressed in silk, empire remains!" It paraphrased the saying of "Monkey, even dressed in silk, monkey remains".
<http://www.granma.cu/granmad/seccion-es/opinion-grafica/lapiz361.html>

*The Privilege of Being Visible*¹

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Facing demands for both the recognition and the overcoming of historic silences and exclusions concerning the problem of racial discrimination, the Cuban government's strategy seems to be subordinating the interests and claims of the African descendants to "national unity" and postponing an open national debate because it would imply many risks that could fracture such unit. By homogenizing the population in their ethnic constitution (Cuban / Cuban-mestizo) and turning the inequalities invisible, the strategy also shows the unwillingness to deal with the necessary public policies in order to solve the social, economic and political inequalities of the African descendants. The Cuban government discursively recognizes diversity and differences², but they are not recognized de facto. Additionally, it remains reluctant to implement affirmative actions to provide solutions. On May 25, 2014, and March 20, 2015, the TV program "Round Table" gave two illustrative examples³ of how only a single approach on racial discrimination is privileged. Both broadcasts were exceptional in the national television, since such an issue has neither more dissemination spaces nor substantive advances in its formulations. In the first program, the host Arleen Rodriguez reiterated a question to a panel of experts panel: how to refer to blacks and whites without discrimination. One panelist said that "they come from Africa", but nobody dared to define the proper way to name a black person. Even more interesting was that, in the following program, the same host repeated the ques-

tion about how would be the politically correct term for blacks, and a panelist answered: "Call them person." The reluctance to refer to Afro-Cubans on the basis of their cultural and geographical origin is an official line for controlling the lexicon and making the differences invisible. The term Afro-Cuban and Afro-American is still perceived by the pro-government intellectuals and government officials as foreigner-centered and divisive. Both the panelists in the studio and those consulted by phone belonged to state research centers and were subordinated to the official line, represented by the Commission "José Antonio Aponte", linked to the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC). In the first program, journalist Pedro de la Hoz mentioned that he was told about pockets of racial discrimination in tourism and emerging business, but he also stated that no data was available to him and thusly he couldn't confirm the assertion. In the second program, he alluded again to racial discrimination in hiring within the tourism sector and in private restaurants. It is well-known that Afro-Cubans use to be employed as janitors, door-men, porters and security guards, and they often have no representation in management positions and even in the reception desks. The TV program did not analyze that the State has different schemes for the direct and / or shared management regarding the tourism sector. Thus, there is some kind of institutional racism that violates the very law of the land. Such racism remains intentionally invisible. Moreover,

the program did not analyze the possible actions to penalize racism in private restaurants because of the same violation of the Cuban laws. The center of debate are the subjective and cultural issues on racial discrimination, inherited from the Spanish colonization, and the prejudices that linger in the minds of the population. In the second program, the head of the Commission Aponte, Heriberto Feraudy, explained that he had met with the First Vice President, Miguel Diaz-Canel, and asked him to create a National Observatory on racial discrimination. He said Diaz-Canel did not agree and proposed instead a monthly meeting with the commission in order to know its ongoing programs. Feraudy said that programs to combat racial discrimination are aimed to three sectors: education, family, and media. Later he added that the issue should be officially taken because the debate could not be left in subversive hands. He referred that other associations are devoted to the problem, but they were discussing it "lepe-lepe". This term was emphasized with a gesture and it was not well understood by the host, who translated it as "cathartic discussion." Feraudy repeated: "Cathartic discussion". The impact of the second program can be analyzed through the eyes of an Afro-Cuban journalist who addressed⁴ four cardinal points:

1. The experts called

"[The] 'intellectuals' Heriberto Feraudy and Jesus Guanche (President and member of the Commission Aponte, respectively), Rodrigo Espino (Head of the Research Institute Juan Marinello), and José Luis Estrada (Editor of the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*), staged for 60 minutes a performance that they insisted in calling it debate, but was actually a juggling act to decide how to refer to blacks without using the inherited colonial racist language, as the five conspirators consented." The journalist writes 'intellectuals' because he believes

they are officials who support the governmental policy on the issues in their respective institutions. Thus, they are not free and because of that not true intellectuals. In order to point out the exclusions at the TV program, he added: "There was not a single invitation for those who, during the last 15 years, set a starting point, have been more than activists, thinkers, and promoters of spaces, controversial criteria and abundant literature on race and gender. To mention just three examples, the TV program did not call intellectuals like Tomas Fernandez Robaina, Victor Fowler, or Roberto Zurbano."

2. Lack of Afro-Cuban representation in the Central Committee of the Communist Party (PCC)

"The formula is simple. If we the blacks carry the burden of the worst cumulative social disadvantages, according to the shared opinion of those sitting around the table at the TV studio, it is not difficult to conclude that blacks will find it hard to have any access to political power for transforming their socio-economic realities, *id est*: the same chapter continues."

3. The exclusion of all other associations and activists

"It was the climax of a kidnapping operation to sell the Commission Aponte as a paradigm for activating academic chairs and pedagogical action plans in order to ventilate the issue of racism... Since Diaz-Canel would be personally responsible [according to Feraudy] to monitor the Commission Aponte's action plans every month, including an educational program within the content frame of the Ministry of Higher Education, it is crystal clear that autonomous critical thinking will be excluded." It draws attention that the Commission Aponte has the privilege of appearing as the only valid organization in the country to address the issue, meanwhile other organizations like the Brotherhood of Negritude and the Citizens Commit-

tee for Racial Integration are turned into invisible entities, as well as the hip hop movement, devoted to raise the problem of racial discrimination in the communities. The official line only recognizes the need for cultural change. The social inequalities suffered by the Afro-Cubans, accumulated in the previous years and aggravated since the 90s, were left invisible and without analysis aimed to concrete actions.

4. The autonomy of the anti-racist movement

"The alleged unseparated dialogue—in the words of Arleen Rodriguez—that was served at the Round Table, does not deserve even to be extended beyond the meaning of conclusive evidence that the State itself controls everything and will not allow to give, while its view the world endures, an inch of its monopoly over the public spaces."

In conclusion

The reforms in development are widening the gap between the most favored individuals and groups and those becoming the losers because of the change: the urban and rural workers, the families without remittances as income source, women, blacks and mestizos, the elderly, the inland population. This situation forces to redefine and re-evaluate such issues as racial discrimination, to accept the testimony of those who suffer and complain, and to support the redress of grievances.

Notes

1- The text is part of a larger and forthcoming work done with Armando Chaguaceda. We wish to share it with the readership of *Identidades*. The terms visibility and invisibility are taken from the Indian subaltern studies on colonial nationalist historiography (Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, Duke University Press, 1999).

2-See the document "National Party Conference", January 2012, in tabloid format.

3-Both TV programs can be viewed on You Tube under the same title: "Racism on the Table"

4-Jorge Enrique Rodriguez, "The Round Table kidnaps the blacks", *Diario de Cuba* [Madrid], March 21, 2015.

Slavers in full count (three balls, two strikes)

José Hugo Fernandez

Writer and journalist

Cuban resident in the United States

Ironical smiles, mockery, and exclamations in all shades of rejection have erupted among the Cuban population after the release of a photo that shows professional baseball player Yasiel Puig shaking hands with Antonio Castro, son of Fidel Castro currently in charge of Cuban baseball. It was no wonder. Until a few days before they visited Cuba last December, Puig and other Cuban MLB (Major League Baseball) players were disqualified by the regime as defectors and traitors. Their names had been erased from the social map and posting their images was censored as if it were pornography. By a miracle of devious dictatorial malice, those compatriots reunited with their families and were greeted and cheered again by a crowd of their fans, after having been condemned to political exile, without being political animals, like so many other Cubans in more than half a century. In true bankruptcy, plunged into irreversible crisis, with no future in the long run, supported only by some foreign accomplices, the Castro dictatorship seems to have paid attention once again on black Cubans as a bastion for aiding the regime both economically and politically. Thus, it didn't cost anything to stop rejecting profes-

sional baseball and to cast aside dogma and inquisition in order to negotiate with the MLB in the context of the approaches to the imperialist enemy seeking dollars. If there was any doubt about the ideological inconsistency and the essentially racist and anti-human nature of the scheme, it was cleared up by this grotesque vaudeville. If someone, either naive or an ally, did not believe in the neo-slave system, the evidence is at hand. The regime always took advantage of the helplessness and goodwill of our people, especially our black people, giving back only crumbs and more dependency. Now it is exploring the mechanisms to sell our players to the enemy, like cigars or sugar cane, provided it would be pocketing the lion's share. In the same way, the regime took over all our land and our industries to turn them into unproductive businesses and finally into ruins. Its totalitarian power was used to devastate our cultural and socioeconomic structures, and it included our national sport and even its players, under the pretext of releasing them from capitalist exploitation. After destroying everything, the regime ended up by negotiating with the demonized exploiters for its fixed benefit. These negotiations are the

stronghold of the slavers nowadays. Let's hope it will be the last one. For decades our great baseball players were subjected to the dictatorial power. Their talents and physical abilities were exploited while they were living in poverty. The regime treated them like racehorses or fighting cocks. They were allowed to travel abroad only in official delegations and even so, under strict surveillance by the political police. The last straw was that they never had the opportunity to receive feedback with the latest techniques and advances in their own sport, which would have favored the approach at least in theory, to the model and advantages of the MLB. Obviously, the masters of the slave labor force were terrified facing the prospect that their slaves may learn to judge and choose for themselves. However, as it often happens, times went by and an eagle flew over the sea. So one day, forced by circumstances, the slavers were left with no choice but to partially open the gates of the barracons. And it was enough for the slaves to start to run away in mass. Conservative estimates indicate that more than a hundred of our best players have escaped from the island with the aspiration of gaining access to the MLB. The frivolous saying is that the eagerness to flee to the United States has been signed only by the desire to win millions. Indeed, such a motivation seems to be sufficiently justified and even commendable, especially because our baseball players are people with exceptional natural gifts, but they do suffer from lack of opportunities, caught between a needy present and a future of destitution, while their families are mired in poverty. An open secret contained in

statistics related to the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education, and Recreation (INDER) and the Cuban Baseball Federation reveals that 95% of our players are blacks or mestizos who belong to the most disadvantaged social class. Thus, questioning their interest in earning the wages that their professional value deserves not only conveys an indolent and small-minded attitude, but also an absurdity. It is well known that this interest is not the only cause of the massive escape. It is rather a booster conditioned by the impasse in our national sport due to the chronic indolence, arrogance and ineptitude of the ruling class in regards to Cuban baseball. According to conservative data, which both the official commentators and nomenclature no longer even bother to hide, Cuba is 30 years back with respect to the technical level of the baseball played in the MLB. Slowly but surely, as the powers that be use to say, the national sport has been losing its prestige and its rich tradition due to a fatal drift that has lasted for years and is unprecedented in Cuban history. From a worldwide recognition, the powerful Cuban baseball has declined into a poorly organized and worst managed sport. The baseball fields are cattle ranches where bureaucrats and political leaders pasture. They decide everything and exercise command and control putting forward personal interests, not those of the sport. The absolute absence of democracy within a baseball team, where everything must be analyzed and discussed by all the members, has eroded the confidence of the players in their capricious leadership. It opened an unbridgeable gap between the interests of one another. Some say that somewhat

the hastily flight of ballplayers outward explains why the national teams are losing today in international events. Actually there is a reciprocal correspondence between cause and effect. The players are disappointed facing the general setback suffered by Cuban baseball, while the constant losses increased because fewer and fewer players remain competitive. Amid this uncontrollable vicious circle, the authorities are unable to prevent that both athletes and their fans find out what's going on. Any news about how well those who fled are doing spreads like wildfire. In the social gatherings, people used to discuss in detail the national

series, but now the outstanding issue is the performance and earnings of the escapees as millionaire players in the MLB. The number of attendees to baseball games at any stadium and of those who follow them on television or radio are decreasing in an alarming scale every year. It's outrageous that Obama's visit to Havana was the only incentive for the authorities to repair the Latin-American Stadium, the emblem of Cuban baseball in the main capital and the venue of their main contests in the country. For a long time, the ceilings and the stands remained in total disaster.



The Latin American Stadium

Due to a progressive deterioration, the electric board confused the attendees instead of informing them. Many deficiencies in the ground surface not only hindered the smooth running of the game, but also exposed the players to accidents. The entire drainage was bad

... Anyway, for over 40 years or more, undaunted sports officials paid no attention to the gradual collapse of the stadium, built in 1946, remodeled in the 1970s, and since then abandoned to their fate. Meanwhile, both athletes and fans do not stop to ask where the gov-

ernment allocates the substantial earnings provided by hundreds of players, coaches, trainers and baseball specialists who are hired from abroad through state contracts. One possible answer could be inferred from the public statement made by one of the greatest players and captains of our national team, Antonio Pacheco, at the sports show "*Al duro y sin guante*" [Hardball without glove] (*Radio and TV Martí*): "The Cuban baseball is led by a mafia headed by Antonio Castro". Because of that, Cuban authorities abusively and arbitrarily stripped Pacheco from his well-deserved titles of Cuban Sporting Glory and Illustrious Son of Santiago de Cuba. However, Pacheco is not the only one who thinks so. Other outstanding players have expressed the same issue and it is the saying most heard among the fans, who increasingly open and massively also point out that the white mafia led by a son of Fidel Castro allowed access to very few black cronies, seen as traitors to their socio-racial group and people. How could it be otherwise? Precisely this white mafia boss is in charge of all negotiations with the MLB and was trying to be recognized as a mediator in the process of recruiting Cuban baseball players. For months, fears were gravitating about the MLB falling into temptation, given the rich quarry represented by Cuban baseball, but *The New York Times* has published a story that could put the slave mafia in in the awkward full count of three balls and two strikes: the mafia is in trouble. Now the baseball players residing in Cuba are entitled to enter in personal contracts with MLB clubs. This action was taken into force on March 16 and it's part of the authoriza-

tions recently signed by President Obama not only in regards to the baseball players, but of all the Cuban citizens, who do not need any more a middleman to work in and collect salaries from US companies. Before this new regulation, the embargo imposed on the regime demanded that our players should be established outside Cuba in order to be hired by an MLB club. Thusly, they were forced to flee, often by risking his own life in the attempt to evade the surveillance by the political police. That also encouraged the slave-owning head of the Cuban baseball to start negotiations with MLB. He raised hopes of managing the direct sales of players from Cuba to the U.S. through a less complex and less expensive mechanism. These sales would become another millionaire source of foreign exchange for a regime that thrives at the expense of the talent and efforts of its defenseless subjects. Will the white mafia sit still with folded arms after an executive action that practically leaves them out of the game? They still can by means of dictatorial laws and regulations, decide what the Cuban baseball players can do or cannot do at any time, including with whom to play and how much they can charge for it. The answer goes without saying: the mafia bosses will do something in order to grab a good portion of the benefits. In full count of 3&2, many of the most striking home runs have been connected. It is true that these slavers are not good hitters, they never were, but they are still favored by the fact that they are the exclusive owners of the baseball fields, the balls and the bats, the players and the game rules.

Analysis of race and gender discrimination within social classes

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Antilla, Holguin, Cuba

The history of social struggles in our country, which I would call the death row from the aborigines, passing through the African slaves to the mulattos in the nineteenth century to the black people in the first half of the twentieth century, and so on until "the revolutionary triumph" (1959), shows how the prejudices against race and gender equality prevail along with hatred towards the idea that people of non-white skin can stand out in society. Cuba is signatory of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963), the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952) and other international treaties that are not fulfilled to the letter. The struggle to fully realize these rights is still insufficient, as several surveys reveal in the municipality of Antilla. They clearly demonstrate the lack of concrete action by the government to cure the ills of society, which are a bit more acute in this region. The surveys were part of a study centered on women (70% of the sample) because of their condition as the weaker gender with fewer employment options and more violence against them, among other

issues. More than 75% of them were from 20 to 35 years old and the race correlation was 55% blacks, 30% whites and 15% mestizos. The response on violence against women was 100% affirmative and covered a broad spectrum from domestic violence (being abused by husband, brother, father, child or other household member) to violence in the workplace (being mistreated by bosses, fellow workers or any other person in the work environment). Another qualitative feature was the discrimination based on sexual orientation, which has been dragging a longstanding controversy after the witch hunt in the early years of the Castro era, when a campaign was proposed to eradicate homosexuality and because of that, a lot of pain was brought to the Cuban people. In this regard the positive responses reached 90%, since there are still women who are stigmatized in their workplace or neighborhood because they are not heterosexual. Not less important is the very color of the skin among the factors of discrimination. It generated more than 95% of positive responses on the topic of racism on the work place and even promo-

tional images of products. White-skinned people take the jobs with more benefits in the hard currency market, such as store-dependents, hotel receptionists or managers; they are also the largest group among the owners of private businesses, the hosts of TV or radio shows, the officers in management or administrative positions ... The dark-skinned, in contrast, are mainly employed as clean-up workers, cooks, teaching assistants, maids, caretakers... In the town of Antilla there is a high percentage of people of color working in secondary positions of the sector of public health, education, trade, textile manufacturing, and others. The gap between men and women in the economy is complemented with the differences in the political hierarchy. While the stated policy is to have more young people, between 35 and 48 years old, as well as more blacks and women in positions of political leadership, in Antilla it's not the case. The territory is led by men and only 4 black people (3 men and 1 woman) are members of the Municipal Party Committee. Among the delegates to the Municipal Assembly of the People's Power, over 85% are men and only 15% are blacks. The men surveyed admitted that the situation is real and so they are actually the main responsible of the social harms brought by more than 50 years of Communist rule. The Holguin province has more than one million inhabitants. Women outnumber men and white-skinned people make up more than 70% of the population. Since it is the area of highest rate of racism in the country, the disdain prevails. What has the government done to solve this social problem? Nothing. There are not campaigns to

fight for racial equality or to encourage to report the cases of physical and verbal violence suffered by dark-skinned people, especially those of low income and low level of education, who even take the option of knocking on doors or begging in the streets in order to survive. Most of them are black, but even people of color with some level of economic welfare, because they could overcome the circumstances and move forward, are poorly served and even abused as customer because of the color of their skin and their class origin. The features of racism are more pronounced in women than in men. 70% of respondents manifested disparagingly about blacks and refused to accept social low-income people in their relationship circle. There is also a huge disproportion of blacks in the prison population. Another very controversial and complicated issue is the discrimination because of political orientation. The campaigns against dissenters generate a permanent state of anxiety. Everyone fears that he or she could be arrested at any time by agents of the State Security. No wonder many of the survey respondents were against the socialist system and 100% referred to the lack of freedoms of expression and assembly. Some of them argued that they have been discriminated, questioned, and even threatened with expulsion from their workplace. In the case of women, it turns a burning issue. Apart from the violence of any kind, whether verbal or physical, against the women defending human rights, they have to face the manipulation of their family members by the police. The latter tries to coerce and divide the family, blaming these women for the negative impacts of their politi-

cal stand. In rural areas, 60% of women do not have good living conditions, but they are in a little more familiar environment. The nuclear family is relative larger (4 or 5 per household) than in the city. However, a high degree of ignorance prevails in the mindset about the social and legal systems. Rural women must make their way through blood and fire, with a deeper feeling of not being protected in comparison with the woman in the city. So it was easier for the former to leave behind the ideas of social and economic benefits ensured by the State.

Leaders of opposition parties in Holguin have echoed these problems. Their constant complaints are being showed in the photographic evidences of the unfortunate daily life in Holguin. In order to realize the disdain against people of color in the public means of transportation, for example, you only need to ride in a bus that carries employees from one to another of the various tourist resorts in the territory. The Holguin population carries the harsh punishment of living with the cross placed on its shoulder by dictators born in this territory. They share the outmost responsibility.

An Urgent Dialogue is postponed

Marthadela Tamayo González

Project *Nuevo País*

Antilla, Holguin, Cuba

Much has been accomplished since the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 2001). Many states have enacted new laws and established new institutions for promoting and protecting human rights, while civil society organizations devoted to fight racism are more active and visible. However, there are still many pending issues. This was the message delivered by the U.N. Secretary General Ban Kim Moon on the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination. It was read by Juan Antonio Madrazo Luna, National Coordinator of the Citizens Committee for Racial Integration (CIR), on March 24, 2016, at the CIR headquarters in order to open the journey of citizen reflection against discrimination. Various papers were presented: *The Experience in Workshops on African Descent and Human Rights in Colombia*, by Oleydis Luis Machado (CIR); *Human Rights and Civil Society*, by independent journalist Boris Gonzalez Arenas; *#Otro 18: inclusion of minorities*, by Manuel Cuesta Morúa. The seventh issue of the magazine *Identities* and the book *A Nation for All: Race and Inequality in Cuba*, by Alejandro de la

Fuente, were also presented. Madrazo Luna explained the challenges of the social project run by the CIR, especially for empowering and educating the communities through knowledge management. He made a reference to how important was the visit to Cuba by President Barack Obama for the cultural identity and racial integration in Cuba, because Obama symbolizes, despite the really existing racism in the US, the modernizing and integrating trends that impose decency in the field of politics and send the strong message that we are definitely all the same. Beyond the immediate political and historical meaning, the visit was a cultural symbol telling us that The Others can stop being mere exotic subordinates. It is still not the case in Cuba, despite of being a laboratory of multiple interbreeding. Racism embraces us all and it is very well accommodated in our social and political imagination. There is neither a political will of the authorities to encourage the debate in the public sphere nor the minimal preventive rules from the educational standpoint. Talking about racism is not easy. It is one of the most uncomfortable issues and a self-evident reality in everyday experience. Anti-black racism is one of the most visible legacies of slavery, but the civil

society has the moral obligation to live up a structured conversation on this issue every day and in every possible space. Racism remains as a social punishment and there are many stories of lives marked by such a pain. The State keeps on losing opportunities for discussing the topic in the public sphere. It also ignores the recommendations from March 2011 by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Through the lens power, it becomes further away the possibility of being radical before the urgency to publicly discuss something that can help define the immediate future of the Cuban society in a very hostile environment marked by inequalities, where the black population continues to be the most vulnerable sector. Both the National Conference of the Communist Party (28-29 January 2012) as its VII Congress (16-19 April 2016) side-stepped the demands of the civil society regarding the need of a national action plan against racism, which is a common proposal for various citizen platforms, including CIR, the Negritude Brotherhood, the Afro Cuban Collective, and the Racial Unity Alliance. The CIR civic activism is placing the racial issues in the public sphere and it opens thusly the possibility of reinvigorating the struggle for integration. We must show and prove that skin pigmentation is not, by nature, a cause for denying the social, economic and political progress of both men and women disinherited by history and society.

The facilitators' networks must strengthen the communities through a participatory pedagogy, and also must be able to translate, interpret, recognize, understand and manage the situations of racism. The dialogue is not only urgent. It must be also systematic, as both racism and discrimination are elements of violence rooted in Cuban society. In both the private and the public spheres, the masks of miscegenation and affection never cease to remind people of African descent that they are black. The building of stereotypes and prejudices is part of the logistics for operating racism as an armored unit of silence and intolerance. Along with the traps of poverty and inequality, the technology of demobilization marks the lives of many people. Among them, the African descendants bear the brunt.

The Commitment of All, for the Good of All

The 7th issue of the magazine *Identities* brought the interesting text "Ending white supremacy in myself," by the American social activist Lauren Stuparitz, who provides a thorough assessment of the socio-psychological keys that have historical-

ly marked the race relations in the U.S., especially the references, patterns, and perceptions that have sustained the persistent racist mentality of many white people beyond the undeniable legal, institutional and social developments in the recent decades.



Many realities had to be faced within the dynamic and segregationist structures and ways in the U.S., but they are not very much correlated with the inter-racial relationships in Cuba, especially with the very unique characteristics of diversity and social life throughout our history. The enormous demographic weight of Africans and their descendants since the colonial era, the decisive role played by the Afro descendants in all economic areas and in all political confrontations, as well as in the cultural process of nation-building, make Cuba different from most countries of the Western Hemisphere, where generally the Afro descendants are a minority or have been territorially, culturally and socially cornered, and even excluded and even turned into invisible population segments. Nevertheless, there are important elements identified by Stuparitz that have clear and permanent impact in Cuban society, where the hegemonic and supremacist power has kept African descents in conditions of inferiority and always away from the access to powers, privileges and recognition regardless of historical eras or junctures, and political colors. The author accurately notes the notable absence of clear references to the oldest structures and racist practices in texts and curricula nowadays. It will seem very familiar for Cubans such a statement like "What I received was a disinformation teaching me neither to speak nor to ask nor to address more seriously or deeper that issue. Thus, since I can remember, white silence has been nourishing my desire to unlearn racism and white supremacy." Precisely this has been one of the burdens or shortcomings historically suffered in Cuba. Although the Cuban Penal Law

punishes both the crime of Apartheid and the offenses against the equality, here are no effective preventive or punitive mechanism against racial discrimination. In addition, the very issue is off the public agenda, lacking of rigorous intellectual and academic discussion and carrying the burden of a very meager African descent representation in the symbolic, corporate, and commercial imaginaries. The historical and sociological particularities in Cuba predetermine that racism is not characterized by violent confrontation, unless at specific and limited circumstances such as the execution of national hero José Antonio Aponte and his fellow sufferers (1812), the bloody repression of the so-called conspiracy *La Escalera* [The Ladder] (1844), the slaughter of members of the Independent Party of Color (PIC) and innocent people (1912) or the judicial murder of three young African descendants (2003) who hijacked a passenger ferry without fatal consequences. In such cases, power exercises the most cruel and racist violence allegedly in order to avert the risks to the integrity of the supremacist and exclusive hegemony. Racism and discrimination are mostly exercised through exclusion, contempt and social inequality, always tempered by denying merits, spaces, and opportunities to the African descendants. However, as Stuparitz rightly explained, it is precisely in the mind and mentalities where most of these images and racist references have become entrenched and more difficult to remove. Together with the absence of a debate on the issue and the lack of civic and public voice of African descendants to defend their interests and values, the normalization

of patterns and racist criteria is the main obstacle in Cuba to achieve the integration and the equality promised so many times in political speeches and always broken in everyday life. The American author also asserted awareness and humanist sensibility are the ideal weapon to promote equality in law practical by embracing criteria and assessments designed to fight the persistent racist mentality, silences and concealments that distort history. She made high-value considerations about the importance of awareness and participation of whites in the multiracial societies with a slave past and a vocation of modernity. In the long and difficult struggle for equality and justice, she recalled how important was the involvement of white people in the anti-racist movements of the U.S. and South Africa, where institutionalized segregation lasted too much. She posed a question that implies a transcendental concept: "Why is it so difficult to recognize that both the trauma and terror of racism and its manifestations and violence hurt not only African Americans and people of color? Racism is a worldwide aggression. It also hurts me as a white person." The present and future are seriously compromised by the inequalities and polarization that still persist and place Cubans of African descent in a serious situation emerging from the new socio-economic correlations. For Cuba it is essential and crucial that all citizens without exception take part in the struggle for building racial equality and respect for diversity and identities as principles that provide the meaning of life and irreplaceable means to achieve personal growth and social harmony. This is important because the racist

mentality has been standardized in the references and visions of the majority, to the extreme that even the very victims of racism often reproduce these patterns and are incapable of perceiving the daily manifestations of discrimination in all social areas. The history provides unequivocal lessons. Over a hundred years ago, one of the costly mistakes of the PCI leaders was abstaining from popularizing that white people were also among the militancy and from appointing some of them to prominent posts in order to avoid the accusation of racism. The latter was widely used to justify the disproportionate repression and we can hear such an accusation even today in the ruling academic spaces. Our society is obliged to direct its inevitable fight against racism from the perspective of racial integration. Together with the self-esteem, identity and self-recognition of the African descendants, the racial integration must transform the long common history of all Cubans in another one of balanced coexistence and equal opportunities. For such a purpose, we need to activate all educational, intellectual and propagandistic mechanisms to add white Cubans with greater sensitivity and commitment to the recovery of historical truth, the public debate and active fight against the manifestations of racism and inequality. Unfortunately, besides the obvious manifestations and racist attitudes of the Cuban rulers, some kind of institutional racism remain in certain areas of the society along with a deplorable discriminatory bias against African descendants in some regions of the country. José Martí, known as the Apostle of the Independence and named so after the African American patriot

Rafael Serra, said the ideal of a free Cuba was a union with all and for the good of all. However, it will be an unfulfilled dream while discrimination and inequality exclude or marginalize a segment of society that contributed so much to the nation building. In recent years, the Cuban independent anti-racist movement has brought together citizens from all backgrounds and origins in order to demonstrate that the struggle for equality and historical and social justice is an effort by both white and blacks Cuban committed to the ideal of a nation fully integrated and free of privileges and exclusions.

AFRO-MÁS: A Cuban LGBTI'S own voice

José Hugo Fernandez

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The Fraternity Park in Havana has become a very special meeting place for gays of African descent, while white gays usually meet in El Café, a more chic spot on the premises of the National Theatre in El Vedado neighborhood, quite close to the Revolution Square. Both groups voluntarily come to the ghetto as a remedy to feel somehow a little farther away from to homophobia surrounding them, but it

also has established two categories within their own exclusion, because of the social distances imposed by racial and class prejudices. Certainly these are not the only places where our fellow LGBTI people go to socialize, but none of the other spots illustrates so explicitly the *summum* of the historical aberrations that regrows like a badly healed cancer in the cell tissue of Cuban society.



AfroMás: First Forum "The Cuban LGBTI with their own voice"

Racism, homophobia and the remnants from class division are three evil factors that have always hampered the insertion of Cuba into the advanced civilization. They are powerfully renewed nowadays, supported by one of the worst economic, political, and socio-cultural crisis in our history. The more it is disguised and the less we want to see it, the more severe is the socio-cultural deterioration. It may be the worst aspect of the crisis, since it renders us incapable to properly address the other structural problems. Without a united country beyond the prejudices, resentments, disaffections, and mistrusts that now are rampant among our citizens, it is hardly conceivable not only a prosperous, democratic, and modern future, but not even a present with guarantees for living in peace and harmony. It then becomes urgent that our civil society gets organized and take the responsibility for empowering all the citizens from their grassroots, especially poor and marginalized people. Nobody can do for the ordinary Cubans what they can achieve by themselves and joined together in order to promote their own efforts and initiatives. That's why the emergence of organizations like Afro-Más deserves unanimous approval, trust, and support. Without being exclusive, Afro-Más More specifically intends to empower the LGBTI community of African descent by providing the keys to defend their rights and also by trying to raise awareness among the rest of the people about the compelling reasons to leave behind the remnants of

intolerance and discrimination for making progress not only as individuals in the moral and spiritual aspect, but also in the comprehensive development of the country, which would provide a net benefit for all. Afro-Más was created in August 2015. Just in a few months its work is already showing unequivocally revealing results. Afro-Más emerged from the poorest strata of the Cuban society and depends only in the efforts of people committed to the sense of justice and social equality without political militancy, without the aegis of official institutions, and without making-profit purposes. The projects of this organization are based on a strong commitment to the universally recognized human values. Afro-Más also adheres to the law. It's contrary to all forms of violence. Every action is aimed to seek both mechanisms and opportunities in order to promote the due respect for the diversity of opinions, preferences, and social practices. In the first stage of its activities we find a marked interest in organizing the LGBTI community of African descent in Havana and other regions of the country with the purpose of fostering conditions for the exchange of opinions and experiences. Moreover, Afro-Más provides guidance on how to identify basic needs and how to comply with the social duties. Both the legal tools available in Cuba and the institutional and legal proceedings in the contemporary world are also main goals of its plans of analysis and public discussion.



Children's activity

In such a sense it's a magnificent indication that the bulk of its activities focuses in the poorest suburbs and urban areas. It's not a coincidence that they are inhabited mainly by blacks and mestizos. The children seem to be a particular zone of attention, as we can appreciate through Afro-Más' activities in the peripheral community La Perla and in the Fraternity shelter in the remote municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, but also in the downtown area of Old Havana. At the same time, Afro-Más has been organizing workshops and forums for the benefit of the LGBTI people, not only of African descent, but with special emphasis on the drama they are suffering because of a triple discrimination: on grounds of their sexual preferences, on grounds of the pigmentation of their skin, and on grounds of belonging to the social strata with fewer resources and greater disadvantages. All this causes that some other people,

including many LGBTI whites, are always looking over their shoulders, raising suspicions, and even fearing the LGBTI people of African descent. Afro-Más is managing itself with a firm hand as an organization capable of entering in alliances not only with diverse LGBTI communities, but also with bodies of the civil society. In such a task stands out the forum "The Cuban LGBTI people with their own voice". At this event were present leaders and activists from Havana and from the inland provinces of Pinar del Rio, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, and Matanzas. Thus, Afro-Más' sphere of influence became national, despite its few months of difficult task. The renewing force of its activism has earned the recognition by outstanding peaceful fighters for the rights of Afro-descendants and for the ideas progress and democracy, as the historian, political scientist, and essayist Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman for the political

party Arco Progresista and Coordinator of the Platform New Country *. There is neither a short way nor a flat path for Afro-Más. Its journey won't definitively be a walk in a park. The legacy of racial discrimination stemming from slavery has finally dropped its veil to show its ugly and retrograde face after being concealed by the powers that be for a long time. And we know that among the first line of victims nobody has suffered as much as the LGBTI community of African descent. Currently Afro-Más can only count on its own upright programs and its great human resources, along with the alliances forged with other activist groups and the still incipient awareness of those to whom its activism is aimed.

Afro-Más will need to strengthen ties with international organizations devoted to defend the LGBTI communities and with all those who are struggling to conquer more civilized spaces where no power can prevail over the respect for social justice and human rights. This project can and should become a new window open to the world in order to show the huge difficulties of carrying out its mission in the complex circumstances of our country, and to bear witness of the fact that such difficulties do not incline the Cubans to give up on the eve. Thanks to Afro-Más, the gap opens up and the commitment is established. The rest is a matter of time.

* See the editorial of the previous issue of this very magazine.

What we learned – and didn’t learn – from public engagement on issues of race

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Public Agenda

United States

In the last two years, incidents in the United States and other parts of the world have reminded us that issues of race and difference are critical to how we educate children, ensure public safety, and achieve democratic governance. In an era of #BlackLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter, the need for public dialogue on race has emerged once again as an obvious public priority. To better understand this challenge and opportunity, we should look back at previous attempts at public engagement on race, to identify what we learned, what we achieved, and what we were unable to achieve. In the United States, race has played a key role in the development of public engagement practices, not just on issues of difference but in engagement on education, policing, immigration, health, budgeting, and many other public priorities. Race was arguably the most common focus of public participation in the 1990s, and those processes had impacts on hiring practices, economic development deci-

sions, and school redistricting plans. But while those efforts to engage citizens on questions of race, had many worthwhile outcomes, and helped write the playbook of effective participation practices, they did not produce structural changes in how public institutions function. In other words, while they seem to have affected the decisions made by public officials, school superintendents, and police chiefs, and strengthened relationships between citizens and their public servants, they don’t seem to have had lasting effects on the ways that local governments, school systems, and police departments make decisions or interact with the public.

How we learned to talk about race in the 1990s

In tracing the evolution of public engagement, one important turning point was the series of race-related civil disturbances that exploded in major American cities in the mid-1990s. The turmoil surrounding Rodney King, and

then O.J. Simpson, revealed a yawning chasm between the racial perceptions of whites and people of color. The sudden sense that we were divided as a nation, and the violent results of that division, spurred a wide array of local leaders to make race relations an immediate priority. Elected officials across the country realized that, while they might address racism and race relations through their work in areas like economic development or housing discrimination, they also had to deal directly with the race-related perceptions, biases and beliefs of their constituents. This kind of public outreach had rarely been done before; most communities lacked venues for people of diverse backgrounds to talk to each other about race or any other issue. Many different kinds of local leaders began looking for ways to involve people in productive discussions on race. They hoped that these efforts could help to overcome community divisions and prevent public debates from being dominated by extreme voices. A wave of local public engagement efforts swept the nation, involving hundreds and sometimes thousands of citizens in forums, trainings, workshops and small-group dialogues. Human

relations commissioners, YWCA directors, heads of interfaith groups, elected officials, and other leaders began creating opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to talk about race. These projects mushroomed virtually overnight, involving hundreds and sometimes thousands of citizens in forums, trainings, workshops, and small-group discussions. By the end of 2002, large-scale intergroup dialogue programs had been initiated in 266 communities in 46 states. As these organizers experimented with different kinds of meeting formats and recruitment methods, they discovered tactics that were also being pioneered in fields like education, planning, and crime prevention. Like most of these public issues, race affects people at a personal, emotional level. To allow participants to share their experiences in a productive way, local organizers gravitated toward strategies that emphasized small-group discussions, either on their own or as breakout groups within larger forums or workshops. Organizers either realized from the beginning, or learned by trial and error, that these small-group sessions would function more effectively if they included four main components:

- 1- Having an impartial facilitator was critical. Many organizers felt that if the facilitators tried to “educate” the participants or direct the group toward a particular conclusion, the dialogue would backfire. They found that facilitators could be successful if they remained impartial: giving everyone a chance to speak, helping the group manage the allotted time, helping the group use discussion materials, and trying to manage conflicts within the group.
- 2- Allowing groups to set their own ground rules was important. When the participants in a small group set their own norms for the discussion, they were more likely to abide by the rules, and the sessions tended to be more civil and productive. Participants typically proposed rules about not interrupting others, maintaining confidentiality, and keeping an open mind.
- 3- People valued the opportunity to compare personal experiences. Encouraging participants to talk about their cultural backgrounds and experiences with racism turned out to be a critical way to begin the discussions. It defused some of the

tension, allowed participants to get to know each other better, and helped people see how our policy opinions are often based on our personal experiences. This initial conversation also established a level of trust within the group.

- 4- Using a written guide to help structure the sessions proved beneficial. Groups tended to be more effective when they followed a guide that provided discussion questions, background information on the issue, and suggestions for managing the sessions. Some of the guides also presented viewpoints that mirrored the main arguments being made about race; these views were intended to present a sampling of the ideological spectrum, so that participants could analyze different ideas and options and relate them to their own experiences. These guides were sometimes written by local organizers but more frequently supplied by national organizations specializing in race dialogues or public deliberation.

None of these techniques for successful small-group discussions were entirely new. They had been used, in one combination or another, by dialogue efforts and organizations well before the 1990s; in fact, they can be traced back to the civil rights movement fifty years ago, the Chautauqua adult education methodology of a century ago, and other precedents in other eras. And just as some organizers were employing these techniques to address race, other leaders were using them on other issues. But the dynamics of race as an issue, along with the sheer scale of public engagement on race in the 1990s, meant that these tactics were reinforced and disseminated more than ever before; they set the template for public engagement at the beginning of the 21st Century.

How we learned to move from talk to action, on race and other issues

There was another key realization that emerged from this work: holding a few small-group dialogues would not be enough. In order to make sufficient progress on any of these issues, it was clear that large numbers of people, and many different kinds of people, had to be participating in the discussions. The best way to fight racism, boost volun-

teerism, or develop trust between citizens and government was to involve a critical mass of citizens in the effort. Local organizers also learned that no single group or organization would be able to recruit the large numbers and different kinds of people that would make the project credible. Outreach through the media or by public officials would help to legitimize the effort, but citizens would be much more likely to participate if they were approached by someone they already knew. The only way to accomplish this kind of large-scale, one-on-one recruitment was to reach out to all kinds of community organizations—businesses, churches, neighborhood associations, clubs, and other kinds of groups—and ask the leaders of those organizations to recruit their own members. Together with the small-group discussion techniques, these recruitment tactics became key ingredients of public engagement. Organizations with missions that focused explicitly on race, such as the National Conference for Community and Justice, the YWCA of the USA, and state and national associations of human rights workers, began to popularize and promote these strategies, as did civic groups like the Study Circles Resource

Center (since renamed Everyday Democracy), the National League of Cities, the League of Women Voters, America Speaks, Public Agenda, the Kettering Foundation, and the National Civic League. These recruitment tactics seemed to demonstrate an old and recurring phenomenon: if you want to mobilize citizens, you have to make them feel that they are part of something larger than themselves. Asking people to join a fascinating small-group dialogue usually isn't enough to tempt them. To persuade them to spend some of their free time this way, organizers had to show citizens that high-profile leaders had "bought in" to the idea, that many different organizations were involved, and that taking part would give them a real opportunity to effect change. Citizens needed to know that their small-group discussion would be one of many—one small part of a community capable of solving its problems. Just as they learned how to recruit large numbers of people and involve them in productive meetings, local leaders also learned how to help those citizens achieve tangible changes in their communities. For some organizers working on issues of race, action planning didn't seem important at first; some of them saw racism as mainly an interpersonal challenge, and they felt that creating civil, educational discussions would be sufficient. But in the small-group sessions, it became clear that talk was not enough. Participants wanted to see changes happen, and they didn't always expect — or trust — government to put their ideas into practice. To help people move from dialogue to action, some organizers began holding large-group events for all the participants after the

small-group sessions had ended. They used names like "action forum" to describe these meetings, which were designed to categorize and prioritize the enormous variety of ideas that emerged in the small-group meetings, match promising ideas with sets of people willing to work on them, and highlight action efforts that were already underway. The forums followed different formats in different places: in some communities they looked like volunteer fairs, while in others they resembled old-fashioned political conventions, but most of them succeeded in attracting public officials and other decision-makers and giving participants a chance to connect with other problem-solving allies. At some of these concluding forums, local leaders launched new task forces or committees to take on action ideas that were popular in the small-group discussions. Many of these new citizen groups foundered once the enthusiasm of the forum had worn off and the group members had begun to feel isolated and powerless again, but organizers realized that they could overcome some of these challenges. In some cases, they recruited people with professional expertise and authority to assist the groups (for example, police officers for a task force devoted to crime prevention). In others, they worked to get media coverage of the task forces. Other, more basic techniques were also successful, such as simply checking in with task force leaders periodically, or holding a subsequent forum several months later at which task forces reported on their progress. One particularly successful task force emerged from a civic experiment on issues of race in Fort Myers in 1997. Over 600

people were involved in the project. In the small-group dialogues, participants had talked about the fact that one low-income neighborhood had no grocery store, forcing residents to shop for food at convenience stores. A task force set up at the action forum began working with the city, the county, a local supermarket chain, and a minority business development organization to explore the idea of a new grocery store. The task force members, several of whom had business expertise, conducted a market survey and drafted a financing plan. They found that the city and the minority business development group were arguing about how to spend their Community Development Block Grant funds. The task force helped to settle the dispute and promote the shopping center idea as a way to provide job oppor-

tunities and basic services for low-income citizens. Two years later, the Dunbar Shopping Center was built. As these programs proliferated, local leaders realized the importance of involving rank-and-file public employees in the small-group discussions. When teachers, police officers, social workers, or city planners were in the room, the solution ideas developed by the group were usually more informed and more influential. Action efforts were more likely to succeed because they were backed by stronger citizen-government relationships.

Challenging assumptions about race

As these processes proliferated during the 1990s and early 2000s, they seemed to be challenging three basic assumptions about race:

- 1- The participants in these processes were questioning the notion that racism is just an easily identifiable, individual sin – that we are all either racists or non-racists. When people take a closer look, they usually begin to see racism as a blurry spectrum, a series of individual and institutional biases that get progressively more inaccurate and damaging. Rodney King's question, "Can't we all just get along?," was a basic plea for tolerance, but once citizens begin to talk about race, they usually go much farther than that, addressing complex issues of institutional racism as well as simpler forms of prejudice.
- 2- Participants were examining the belief that we should learn to tolerate, compensate for, and eventually ignore the cultural differences between us. Citizens cherish their cultures and traditions, and want to hold on to them. As they begin to recognize just how diverse their communities are, they often acknowledge that these differences will probably always affect how people interact with each other. Diversity is both a strength and a challenge: sometimes you celebrate diversity, sometimes you have to deal with it, but the challenge is how to do those things effectively, not how you can make differences disappear.
- 3- People were testing the assumption that a "level playing field," where every individual has a uniform opportunity at happiness and success, is the best outcome we can hope for. In its place, their actions seem to suggest a field where the players are equal but different, and the focus is on helping them work together.

As communities delved deeper into issues of race, and began to make some progress, their motivations for address-

ing cultural difference were transformed. Initially, race was a mandate for dialogue and personal growth: the

first impulse behind these efforts may have been to inoculate people against racism, so they could be purged of bias once and for all. But as people began to realize the complexity of the issues, and the increasing diversity of their communities, they began to see this as valuable, ongoing work. Instead of settling for a level playing field, where everyone would be treated uniformly by teachers, judges, principals, and police, communities began trying to build arenas where the players acknowledged differences openly, cooperated continually, and recognized each other as equals. In so doing, citizens and local leaders began to see race as a mandate for democratic governance. “There is a kind of natural progression here,” says Roger Stancil, city manager of Fayetteville, North Carolina. “When you get different kinds of people talking to each other, they figure out they have interests in common and they start to act on them. They realize that they won’t always agree, but they want to help each other anyway, and they begin to see how important it is that everyone is at the table.”

Changing the table?

But while the efforts to engage citizens on race may have brought more people to the table, they may not have changed the table itself. That is, the tactics of successful small-group processes, proactive network-based recruitment, and collaborative action were not incorporated into the way that official public meetings are structured, or even the way that crime watch groups and neighborhood associations operate. Those productive engagement tactics are still used, perhaps more than ever, but they occur almost entirely within the context

of temporary projects that focus on a crisis or controversial policy decision. In her essay, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” Carole Pateman argues that most examples of public participation today “leave intact the conventional institutional structures and political meaning of ‘democracy.’” They do not, in her words, “democratize democracy.” In the absence of these more systemic changes, for most American cities the benefits of public engagement on race may have been meaningful but temporary. Certainly the fraying of police-community relations, the evidence of racial profiling by officers, and the persistence of race-based achievement gaps in student test scores do not demonstrate great progress in our efforts to build more cohesive and equitable communities. As we consider how we might move forward, in the United States and in other countries, we should bear in mind the natural link between engagement *and* race, as well as the unfinished business of engagement *on* race. In order to bring people together on all kinds of issues, you have to acknowledge the differences between people, affirm that all cultures and groups are valued, and give people a sense that their past experiences with discrimination and bias will be rectified, or at least not repeated. In turn, it is difficult to make progress on issues of race without bringing a diverse array of people to the table. The two enterprises, improving engagement and increasing intercultural understanding, complement and probably require one another. Meanwhile, people trying to engage citizens, on race or any other issue, should be thinking about the long term and not just the decision or crisis of the

moment. How should people be engaged in public decision-making and problem-solving, in both official and informal settings? How should citizens and public servants interact, on a daily basis? How might those interactions reduce discrimination, celebrate diversity, and correct inequalities? What kind of democracy do we want?

Afro-Peruvian Women

Untold Stories of the Peruvian History

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*Capeadora [female bullfighter], watercolor by Pancho Fierro (1809-1879)
Juanita Brena, Conchita Cintron's predecessor, was a major attraction, along with
his brother Pedro Brena, on the nineteenth century posters in Acho*

History and Afro-Peruvian women

The reflection on the place of the Afro-Peruvian women in their country and their invisible participation in the nation building requires the analysis of three main variables: gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The history of Peru does not show all the historical scenes of the African population, much less with regard to women. The history of the black population is summarized in the chapter "Slavery in Peru," which has a maximum of two sessions (two hours each) in schools. The first researches on Afro-Peruvian population addressed issues such as agriculture and

slavery, functions and everyday life of the slaves in the plantations of the coast, and interethnic relations, marriages, violence between masters and slaves, and the social conditions. The major research work was done by Carlos Alberto Romero (1904), Arturo Jiménez Borja (1939), Roberto Mac-Lean and Estenós (1947, 1948) and especially Fernando Romero (1935 to 1994). In the 1980s, the pioneer Christine Hünefeldt started researching the African slave women. Since 1528 Africans slaves began to arrive in Perú. One third were women. The bulk came from the West Coast of Africa, around the rivers of Guinea.

*"After the establishment of the Viceroyalty and due to the significant demographic decline of the indigenous population, the Spaniards resorted to massive importation of slaves, especially for agricultural work at the coast; however, a significant number of them were used for domestic work. Thus, about half of the blacks brought to Peru lived in Lima around 1550."*¹

The coexistence between Indian, Spanish and African populations affected the rapid development and growth of cultural and racial miscegenation throughout the colonial period. The society was structured on the basis of ethnicity. For Hünefeldt², the everyday life of slave women in the colony takes place in three dimensions: as domestic servants, as day laborer on the street with residence in the house of their masters, and as salaried woman living outside. In the late eighteenth century, slave women could be found working outside and being monitored by their masters, who subjected them to contribute with fixed amount of their wages. Slave women could have access to handicrafts mainly developed by "subjects of caste", whether free or slaves. The salaried slave woman was frequent, but with lesser wage than in the case of men. The former usually did housework. These efforts led to the situation that mulattoes, black, *zambas* and others, whether free or slaves, were seen closely related

to everyday life with their owners and often made it possible to have half-breed descendants. Domestically it also led to conflict situations, especially in the relationships with sexual component derived from the very presence of young slaves under the same roof of the master. According to the colonial discourse, the "caste" women had no qualms about committing shameful actions. This contributed to spread the imaginary that assigned to color women some kind of unrestrictive sexuality, associated even to immorality. Such actions should be seen as mechanisms that the women of "caste" used to gain the benefits of freedom granted by their masters. The Spanish Crown was again the local custom of interethnic marriages. The Catholic Church respected the freedom of choice of the couple at least until the Pragmatic Sanction of 1776. However, it never saw with good eyes the connection between Indians and Blacks. The fear of such a mix was latent even in the "Spanish Republic".

Whether slaves or free, black women were not allowed by law to use gold, silk robes and beads. They were bought and sold by the Church, the State, and individuals. Freedom of black slaves was achieved by decision of the master (non-cash transaction), gracious manumission, self-purchase, services to the State, or ruling of the courts. Frederick Bowser³ says that black women generally incurred in crimes of cohabitation or “concubinage”, homicide, filicide, theft, and witchcraft. The punishments were flogging, imprisonment, and even death. They were also target of much internal violence from the bickering between them to the mistreatment by their masters to the abuse by their husbands. In this case, they ended up being slaves of slaves. Slave families repeated the violence’s parameters prevailing in society. According to Marcel Velásquez⁴, the powers were articulated in the relations of legal, social, ethnic and gender domination. Therefore, the enslaved black women should have occupied the last social stratum and

were unable to control or to modify this situation. However, they were crucial agents in the fight for independence by expanding the areas of action, building the domestic networks of female power, and helping to implement the new social, ethnic and symbolic order in the post/colonial society.

Portraits of heroism

The abolition of slavery (1854) by decree of President Ramon Castilla is the official historical precedent. However, historical references show that a large number of enslaved men and women were freed before due to the extra work they performed. At the end of slavery, a historical gap occurred in research, educational books and academic reports. The official history has given little space and credibility to African descendants, as if they had disappeared after slavery was abolished. However, the detailed investigations show that certain women of African descent contributed so much to the development and sovereignty of Peru.

- Micaela Bastidas Puyucahua was a national hero and martyr of the independence as chief adviser and wife of Tupac Amaru. Shortly before her execution, she expressed its clear independence political position: "For the freedom of my people I have given up everything. I am not going to see my children flourish."

Tupac Amaru revolted on November 4, 1780. After the capture and execution of Corregidor Arriaga, Micaela formed armies, wrote proclamations, and helped Tupac Amaru to govern the chiefdoms of Surimana, Pampamarca, and Tungasuca. He was taken prisoner and quartered on 18 May 1781. On the same day, Micaela was hanged in Cusco. Her body was dragged on the street and quartered.

The illustrations in textbooks depicted her with indigenous features, but it has been found that she was daughter of Manuel Bastidas, a freedman of African descent, and the indigenous woman Josefa Puyucahua. Actually she was derisively called "Micaela the Zamba".

- Catalina Buendía de Pecho was an Afro-Peruvian peasant who became a hero during the Pacific War. When the Chilean invaded Peru, the Ica people showed their rebellion facing the enemy with rudimentary weapons. The invaders had enormous military and logistic superiority. Jaime Uribe Rocha⁵ relates: "She barricaded herself with the troops on the hill of Los Molinos, roughly 12 kilometers north of the city of Ica, and offered a courageous and epic resistance against the Chilean invaders, never equaled in the history of Peru."

Firstly the defense was successful, but the resistance was overshadowed by the betrayal of a Chinese citizen. Defeated in the battle, Catalina resorted to a ruse suicide: poisoning the invaders with a beverage known as chicha. To avoid the suspicions, she was imperturbable and serene while drinking the chicha, actually mixed with poisonous fruit, and said with haughty voice to the Chilean: "Sirs, that's for your glory." She drank it calmly, wiped the peak, and handed the vessel to the enemy soldiers.

- Maria Elena Moyano Delgado was a community and feminist leader assassinated by the terrorist group Shining Path. On February 15, 1992, she was shot to death and then was declared "Mother Courage". She is the latest Afro-Peruvian woman declared a National Heroine⁶ by resolution of the Congress on May 23, 2002. In 1983 she founded the Mothers Club Micaela Bastidas and two years later, the Popular Federation of Women at El Salvador Village. In 1987 she received the Prince of Asturias Award together with Mayor Michael Azcueta. She became Lieutenant Mayor and worked on campaigns for empowering, providing a glass of milk daily, and setting up charity canteens through self-management.

- Victoria Eugenia Santa Cruz Gamarra died at age 91 after becoming the Afro-Peruvian heroine in art. She was composer, choreographer, and designer. As daughter of writer and playwright Nicomedes Santa Cruz Aparicio and Victoria Gamarra, she grew up in a family closely linked to painting and was also a great dancer of the Peruvian dances *zamacueca* and *marinera*. She took part in the First Latin American Television Seminar and Festival (1970), organized by the Catholic University of Chile. She received the award for Best Folklorist, and the following year she was invited to the Festival of Cali, where she made everyone feel that black roots did not belong to one country, but to many. In 1973 she was appointed as director of the National Ensemble of Folklore at the National Institute of Culture (Spanish acronym INC).

Final Thoughts

Peru is a country of mixed ethnic origins, cultures, languages, and colors. Sometimes it provides a sense of pride; occasionally it's also seen as a common feature in Latin America, but sometimes it turns out problematic from the general perspective. Afro-descendants in Peru are known as ethnic and / or cultural minority. Anyway, they are among the most vulnerable social groups. And whenever you want to delve into their peculiarities, you will find the unpleasantness of having no proper answer to questions like what is their history, how many they are, how to identify what needs and opportunities they have, what their priorities are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and especially in what situation the Afro-Peruvian women are. In regard to the latter aspect, we can say that they are involved in a triple

exclusion: by gender, class and ethnicity. And there is one fourth factor: the generational exclusion that affects the youngest. While the Afro-Peruvian population is invisible, the situation of Afro-Peruvian women is worse: they are objectified and remain at the lowest level of the social scale. It's not only self-evident their invisibility in the history and contributions to the development of the country. We face also the issue of how their historical references would strengthen the identity of the Afro-Peruvian women. This question is followed by others like what impact can the consequences of slavery still have and why the lack of historical records on Afro-Peruvian women remains irrelevant to the development of national identity. After the slavery was "abolished" 160 years ago, only minor issues were resolved and a few short steps

were taken for the benefit and visibility of the Afro-Peruvian population. There are not enough sources that document its presence, contributions, and the magnitude of their problems and needs. Moreover, the public policies are proposed neither from a multiculturalism approach nor from a gender and ethnic perspective.

Notes:

- 1- Buthurburu Del Busto, José Antonio, *A Brief History of Black Peru*. Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso, 2001, 24.
- 2- Hünefeldt, Christine, *Women: Slavery, Emotions and Freedom*. 1800-1854, Lima: IEP, 1988. Working Paper No. 4
- 3- Bowser, Frederick, *African Slaves in Colonial Peru*. Mexico: XXI Century 1997.

4-Velasquez, Marcel: "Women are less black: The case of female slaves in the nineteenth century Lima", in *The Spell of Images. Social Status, Gender and Ethnicity in Peruvian History*, Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru, 2000. 5-https:

//reportperu.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/heroina-de-ebano-de-la-guerra-con-chile-1879-1883/

6-Elvia Castillo Duque, *Contributions of the African Descendants. The Hidden History of Latin America*, iUniversity, 2013.

A contribution to the photographic study of Afro-Argentines: The Collection of Rita Lucia Montero

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One of the pillars of the Argentinian imaginary emphasizes the whiteness of the population and culture. This allowed us to differentiate ourselves from the mixed identity as common denominator of America, while approaching advantageously to the European powers, considered a model worth to imitate. We differ from other American countries for not having population of sub-Saharan origin, and we neither recognize it as constitutive and fundamental part of the nation nor give it the place and merit it deserves. Even today the Afro-Argentines of colonial tree—those descendants of African slaves in what is now the national territory—are one of the most invisible and less understood social groups, as a result of the so-called "certificate of biological and cultural death", which was as quickly as forcefully issued in the second half of the nineteenth century (CIRIO 2008). This "certificate" asserts that Afro-Argentines disappeared due to four basic reasons: its massive participation in the wars of independence (1806-1825) and from Paraguay (1864-1870), the yellow fever that devastated Buenos Aires in 1871 and, as a result of the wars, the disproportion of more black women than men, whose miscegenation with whites led to an increasing bleaching of their offspring and so the color palette of the Argentine phenotype tended toward whiteness. Following this pattern, the biological disappearance of

Afro-Argentines was correlative to their cultural disappearance, since none of their cultural standards seemed to survive or to have a social impact. While the four reasons given are true, they fail to explain why actually a considerable sector of our population of African descent (STUBBS and REYES 2006) recognizes itself as such and maintain their own cultural practices. Currently the descendants of enslaved Africans (who call themselves "the colonial tree" in order to differentiate from African immigrants who started to arrive in the twentieth century) are fighting for their visibility by promoting the public debate about their presence. They have raised the need to revisit the national historiography, from which they are virtually excluded, as well as to better position themselves in the present and to ensure that the State meets their demands. Researchers concerned with the subject are producing new knowledge for better understanding of the matter. Among the many shortcomings in this field of study there is a shortage of document repositories as base of the investigations. In a joint effort between Afro-Argentines and the researchers not only involved in producing this knowledge, but committed to the fight for historical reparation, new documentaries roads have been opened. I'm bringing up my personnel transit through one of them.

Historical photography

Several inputs from or linked to photography have been appearing during more than twenty years of research on the Afro-Argentinian culture through fieldwork and review of archives at the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and several locations in the provinces of Corrientes, Chaco, Santa Fe, Entre Rios and Buenos Aires. Following the proposal of historian Peter Burke (2001), I tried to incorporate this sources in my writings not only in their passive role of ornaments or, at best, in order to reinforce the argumentation, but rather as a pivot to generate knowledge sui generis. In that vein I analyzed (CIRIO 2007c) the Afro-Argentinian music through thirty-seven iconographic pieces. Here I will focus on the documented photographic collection of Rita Lucia Montero, an Afro-Argentinean singer of jazz and tango who also excelled as actress in cinema, television, and theater. Among his assets he owned more than five hundred photos. Thanks to the trust built during our friendship, I could scan and study 520 photos comprising an extended period (1875-2013) and reflecting both her private life (like portraits and family events) and her artistic career (like performances and tours). I will present an overview of this collection and analyze five exemplary pieces with the dual aim to account for the richness of this heritage and to raise awareness of the importance of photography as source for studying the Afro-

Argentiniens. The task is essentially descriptive and leaves open to future work the application of theoretical approaches.

Biographical sketch of Rita Lucia Montero

She was born on May 4, 1928, as the youngest of five siblings in a traditional Afro-Argentinean working middle class family residing in the Palermo neighborhood. By the thread of inherited memories of their elders, she knew they descended from African slaves imported to Buenos Aires by Admiral Guillermo Brown in the mid nineteenth century. She actually belonged to the fourth generation of Afro-Argentiniens of the colonial tree. In the book written at four hands by her and me (MONTERO and CIRIO 2012), we included her family tree as a separate broadsheet. Her interest in the stage originated just in primary school. He joined the First Argentinian Children's Theatre Company, under the management of Angelina Pagano. In 1939 she made her debut in *La venganza de las mariposas* [Revenge of the Butterflies], by Carolina Adela Alió, in the movie theater General Belgrano. By then her father's uncle Vicente Alvarez, an artistic representative who provided black actors and actresses to the entertainment world in Buenos Aires, brought her to the world of movies. He debuted as an extra in *Juvenilia* (Augusto Cesar Vatteone, 1943) and kept on working as supporting actress in nine films:

- *Pampa Bárbara* (Lucas Demare and Hugo Fregonese, 1945)
- *Romance Musical* (Ernesto Arancibia, 1946)
- *María de los Angeles* (Ernesto Arancibia, 1948)
- *La muerte camina en la lluvia* (Carlos Hugo Christensen, 1948)
- *¿Por qué mintió la cigüeña?* (Carlos Hugo Christensen, 1949)
- *Escuela de campeones* (Ralph Pappier, 1950)
- *Sangre negra* (Pierre Chenal, 1951)
- *¡Adiós problemas!* (Kurt Land, 1955)
- *Tierra de los padres: Fatherland* (Nicolas Prividera, 2011).

She was the protagonist of the motion picture *El grito sagrado* (Luis César Amadori, 1954) and also played roles in:

- The comedy *Sangre negra* (Richard Wright and Paul Green, 1945), under the artistic direction of Narciso Ibáñez Menta, at The National Theater
- The comedy *Mi querida Ruth* (Norman Krasna, 1946), directed by Antonio Cunill Cabanellas, at the Empire Theatre (1946)
- The musical comedy *En un viejo patio porteño* (1950), created and directed by Enrique Telemaco Susini, at The Ariel Theatre
- The popular heroic play *Pasión y muerte de Silverio Leguizamón* (Bernardo Canal Feijóo, 1983), under the artistic direction of José María Paolantonio, in the Municipal Theater General San Martín

In parallel with her start as film actress, she began her singing career, firstly as an amateur and then as professional. She studied with Italian opera singer Maria Naftri and cultivated jazz, tango and melodic and tropical music. His presentation circuits were linked to the nightlife in Buenos Aires by that time: café-concerts, confectioneries, *boîtes*, theaters, clubs, American bars, live performances during film intervals, and occasionally, cabarets. As it was becoming popular, she worked on TV as a singer and dancer. She performed at several venues in the province of Buenos Aires and others of the country's interior: Chubut, Córdoba, Mendoza, Neuquén, Salta, San Juan, Santa Fe and Tucumán. He also performed abroad in scenarios of Montevideo (1957 and 1976), Santiago de Chile (1957, 1959 and 1963), Lima (1964), Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo (1973). She recorded three 78 rpm records in Buenos Aires with Bernardo Noriega and his Grand Orchestra (*Opus* 1955), Carlos Garcia and his Orchestra (RCA Victor, 1960), and Pagua and his Band Set (RCA Victor, 1961). Her CD *Tangos de piel morena* (2003) includes seven plays accompanied on the piano by John Pugliano. After retiring from the show business, in the middle of the year 1989, she was admitted as resident at Casa del Teatro, where she lived until late 2012. Then she was transferred to

the Geriatric Center Avellaneda (Province of Buenos Aires), where he died on June 25, 2013.

Sociocultural context

Among other denominations, the Afro-Argentines in Buenos Aires call themselves "class" or "race" in order to differentiate themselves from the white people, dubbed as *chongos*. According to the social, cultural and economic levels (not necessarily taken together), there are internal differences that generate at least two categories: "*negro usted*" and "*negro che*". The former are the minority enjoying some achievements at the cost of having ignored its African identity by studying and working in the same labor and intellectual areas where whites are promoted. The others are the majority belonging to medium-low and low social classes, with little or no education and working mostly in low-skilled jobs as employees in the private sector. Culturally the "*negro che*" managed to preserve the memory of their elders through cultural practices, above all their traditional music, since the performative experience gives meaning and articulates the communication with the ancestral over world. In this logic, Rita is qualified as member of the "*negro usted*" community. Although she did not hold a high economic position, his family lineage, career, manners, and social circuits made her an exponent of

the upper class in the Afro- Argentinean context. In the show business of Buenos Aires, many other African descendants of the colonial tree were acting, singing and dancing, but Rita became a paradigmatic figure.

The collection of Rita Lucia Montero

The interviews with her started in 2003 in order to research both her career and the social life of the Afro-Argentines in Buenos Aires. When we started to write a book together in 2005, she began to give me valuable documents: notes, newspaper clips about his performances, correspondence, musical scores and photographs. Unlike the usual path to rebuild a life by wandering at random through libraries and other public or private repositories, a significant documentary corpus was readily available to pave the way. Her photographic collection has more than five hundred pieces, in general well preserved. Approximately 5% are duplications. Just over a third of the photos are stuck on three albums with black cardboard sheets separated by wax paper. Unfortunately, the adhesive abundantly used prevented almost entirely to study their backs. It also generated roughening surfaces that make the scanning more difficult. The remaining two thirds are loose photographs. Only 23 retained its negative (or are only negative) of acetate (20) or glass (3). Rita died after finishing this article and his collection continued to increase with contemporary and old photographs brought by relatives and friends, but it had previously decreased because she gave many photos away. At my insistence, for example, she donated 18 pieces (1 glass negative, 4 envelopes to store negatives, and 13 photo) in December 2010 to the Photo Library Division "Benito Panunzi" at the National Library (Buenos Aires). Most of his collection corresponds to the golden period of his career: the 1950s

and the 1960s. Both the covered period (about 138 years), the oldest date (ca. 1875) and the number of photos (520) set a great documental body on a well-known person giving testimony about one of the less researched groups in the country: the Afro-Argentines. Thus, this collection has exceptional features and is a unique and privileged case study subject to various analyzes. To this end I offer the following order:

According to its content

Family: They are personal pieces usually taken by amateurs, family and community Afro-Argentinean context. They account for about 20% of the collection and its quality is variable. Occasions: Taken in various private and public social contexts: relatives and friends at their homes or during holidays, parties, walks and wakes.

Legal documents: Many personal and family's documents, including her photographs in registration card as a variety artist and her father's enlistment card of. Other photographs in card format were never used in documents.

Artistic life: Virtually all aspects of her career are photographically reflected. These pictures constitute the main body of the collection (ca. 80%) with very good quality.

In Argentina: Photos taken at different stages for singing and acting, both in Buenos Aires and inside the country, for example, Mendoza, Rosario and San Juan.

Abroad: Rita did three tours to Chile, two tours to Uruguay, one to Brazil, and one to Perú, but sadly she retained only some photographs of Chile and Perú. Her tours were badly and poorly photographed. During her stays she gave many good photos to reporters for advertising purposes.

Colleagues: Many national and foreign artists gave Rita their own photographs or their photomechanical reproductions, usually dedicated and autographed, for instance, Oscar Aleman, Frances Taylor

(Katherine Dunham Dance Company), Louis Armstrong, the Francini-Pontier duo, American boxer Archie Moore, George Samuel "Sammy" Davis, Jr... There are also photographs of Rita with artists and foreign personalities visiting Buenos Aires, like Nicolas Guillen, The Harlem Globetrotters, and Mary Katherine Dunham.

According to the photographer

Amateurs: Photos occasionally taken by anyone in any circumstance for ad hoc reasons. They form about 30% of the corpus and generally have acceptable quality.

Professionals: Taken by photographers in studio or in family or scenic contexts, for example, during the shooting of her films and or in her national and international tours. They are about 70% of the corpus and its quality is excellent. This includes photographs of her elders, who are the oldest in the collection.

Identified photographers: Rita was portrayed by four studios in Buenos Aires: A. Castro, Annemarie Heinrich, Henry and Olga Kegahl Maša (wife of Kegahl). There are also works done by casual photographers during her performances: M. Diaz M. and David (both from Santiago de Chile), Luisito and Felix, as well as some given by colleagues like the Afro-Argentinian musician and jazz composer Oscar Aleman, taken by Sivul Wilenski. Some photos of her relatives were made by Leidi and ROVIDA (Montevideo), José Stanchina, Andrade, Maitos, Erivan and Universal (the last three from Mar del Plata). In most cases the authorship was easily determined since the photos are signed or stamped in the front or in the back. A few photographers were also identified by Rita.

Unidentified photographers: Many photographs taken by professionals are not signed and the authors could not be identified, above all in the casual photographers of their performances

(including plays and films) and of her participation in events. It happens also in the cases of photographs of their elders taken in studio or in natural setting.

Five case studies

For the purpose of the research I chose five pieces: two in family context, two of the career. and one imaginary reconstruction of a lost photograph.

Photo 1. Taken by Leidi and ROVIDA in studio (Montevideo, 1875). It is a copy in albumen paper cut with scissors and pasted on a rigid cardboard holder in satin with blue edges. It is in Victoria format (112 x 75 mm), something not very common according to a personal communication of Abel Alexander. The photo itself does not occupy the entire space of the albumen paper, but a rectangle of 104 x 70 mm, with its top in semicircular arch. On the back Rita wrote with pen "July". A blurred oval stamp in blue ink reads thus: 21 Calle del Cerro 21: Te [...]gran[...]: Montevideo. It is the full-length portrait of the Afro-Argentine sailor Julio Cabot, the uncle of Rita's mother. In the cap you can barely read the ship's name: [ALM] IRANTE [...]. The Afro-Argentinian newspaper *La Broma* reported he died in Buenos Aires and his wake was held on August 21, 1882. During a personal interview with Rita on September 3, 2006, in Buenos Aires, she said that Cabot told stories about "the disastrous war of Paraguay, which they had to lose because they didn't know the jungle and the heat was exasperating". The sailor's eyes were retouched by the photographer and the year was set approximately by Alexander, who argues that the decoration with rocks in *papier maché* was some kind of European innovation that the photographic studios in River Plate did not adopt before 1875.

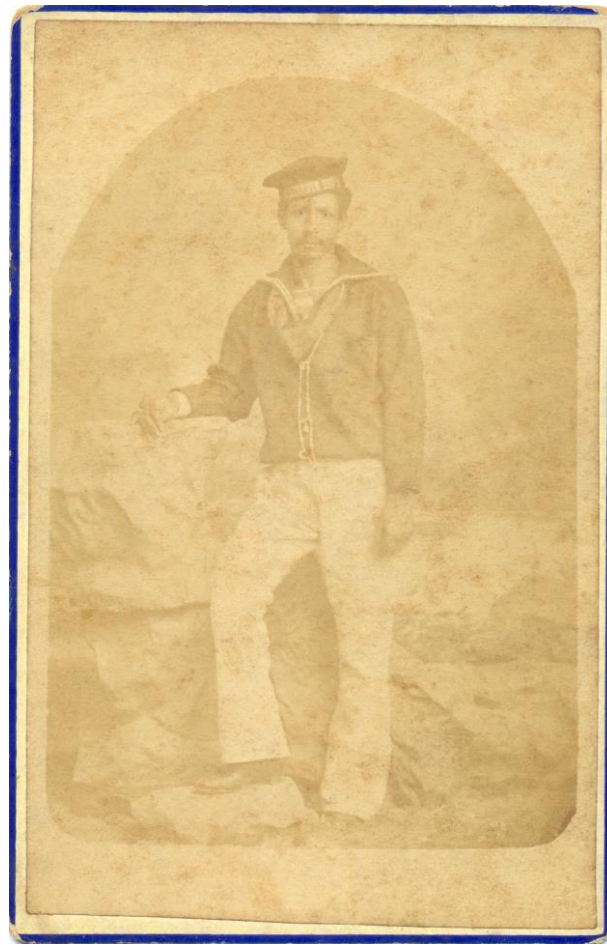


Photo 2. Taken by an unidentified photographer (Buenos Aires, 1936) on photo paper Ridax (89 x 63 mm), in black and white, with a white frame of 5 mm and scalloped edges. On the back it is written in pencil "7" and the location is the inner courtyard of a house where the girl Rita lived: Avenida del Tejar (today Ricardo Balbin) 2646, in the Coghlan neighborhood. The property had another entry by Carlos Freire Street 2633 and consisted of two houses, both rented, in which the Montero and Gyenge families lived.

The latter were a marriage of Hungarian Jews with a daughter (Magda) of the same age as Rita's. Both Rita and her father (Miguel Montero Severo) are looking at the camera together with the mother and daughter of the neighboring family in a cross display that produces a subtle aesthetic balance of shadows and light by the black-white polarization in pairs. Note that Rita is the only one not smiling; she confessed that she did not like this photo because the Gyenge family was not exactly good neighbors.



Photo 3. On the eve of the celebration (1954) for the establishment of the first Argentinian government (May 25, 1810), the film director Luis Cesar Amadori premiered his film *El grito sagrado* [The sacred cry], his most important work and one of the most outstanding of the Argentinian cinema. The title and the release date is inferred from the fact that the film deals with the Argentina independence in strict concordance with the epic-moralizing approach of the great productions by that the time to the national history in order to inspire courage, patriotism and sense of belonging to the spectators. The plot demanded that blacks acted in several scenes and Rita played his most

prominent role since *Pampa Bárbara* (1945). This photo is attributed to Francis Boeniger, commissioned photographer of the film, and the number in the lower right corner indicates the location in the photographic sequence. It was taken during the scene of a public sale of slaves. On the platform, a black dressed in the European style puts in auction the couple formed by Rita and Luis Medina Castro, an Afro-Argentinian actor of Cape Verdean origin.



Photo 4. Here Rita Montero appears in the final greeting by the company of burlesque theater, with the decorated background of the last frame (Rio de Janeiro Carnival) of the piece *Naked 64*. The wet seal of the photographer on the back reads in part: "[...] and Atelier: Pedro Lozano 3027: TE 50-0908. The photo (Buenos Aires, 1964) is in black and white (24.2 x 16.7 mm), stuck with glue on the album and fastened with gold tips cornerbacks. Rita was not specialized in burlesque theater, but she

acted in several works of this genre during the 1960s. The premiere of *Naked 64*, by Julio Porter, Angel Cortese and Leo Carter, took place at The Maipo Theater just in 1964. The collection has three photos of Rita's performance there. According to the playbill, Rita was one of the first characters along with Vicente Rubio, Alfredo Barbieri (an Afro-Argentinian of the colonial tree), Gloria Montes and Zulma Faiad.



Photo 5. Through the oral memory of Rita we could get information about lost or destroyed photographs that fosters the imaginary reconstruction, for example, of a photo of her paternal grandfather Sergio Pantoja Montero. The photo got lost during the successive moves and deaths of Rita's relatives. Sergio died in 1928, approximately at age 70, and Rita recalled that he worked for the Western Railway of Buenos Aires, the first of its kind in the country, after it was bought in 1890 by the English company The Buenos Aires Western Railway Limited. He achieved such confidence and appreciation inside the company that the English officials brought him as butler in their transoceanic vacations. He traveled three or four times to Europe and Japan.

Those trips probably occurred around 1900. Rita did not know him (she was born the same year Sergio died), but heard the comments in the family and could see a photograph of the grandfather Sergio in a "luxury home" in Japan. There were numerous monkeys wandering around and her grandfather would have explained this anomalous animal presence with the remark: "In Japan, the houses are not cared by dogs, as here, but by monkeys that could kill anyone".

Conclusion

The collection of photographs of Lucy Rita Montero is part of the Afro-Argentinian studies as a relevant and unique document repository.

In addition to the number of pieces (520), the broad period (about 138 years) covered by them, the variety of the Argentinian and foreign locations where they were taken, and their social contexts, the collection is focused on the Afro-Argentinian question, a field of research where no many pictures are available. This collection opens suggestive research paths since, as an anthropologist, I believe that photographs are pivots for generating *sui generis* knowledge, not only for playing decorative and complementary roles in the writings, as they are commonly used in the production of scientific knowledge. The potential of this collection lies also in its questioning force to rectify certain knowledge that so far has been taken for certain, for example, that the Afro-Argentiniens have disappeared along with their culture.

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The Massar Ba's case

Africa in Argentina

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The death of the renowned Senegalese activist Massar Ba in Buenos Aires calls into question the Argentina's alleged tolerance toward

immigrants. It is not the first case, but forgetting uses to prevail over remembering nowadays and prevents to seek justice for the sub-Saharan diaspora.



Massar Ba

Massar Ba, 44, was found badly hurt at the intersection of the streets Mexico and San José early on Monday 7 March 2016. He was taken to the Hospital Ramos Mejia and died the next day in the afternoon, as a result of severe loss blood. The judicial investigation remains secretive, but it could be another violent episode of institutional racism. Although there are no witnesses, securi-

ty cameras could provide important data. Notwithstanding, after more than two months of the fact, the case remains unsolved. If it was actually a murder, as it's certain for almost everybody interested in the case, no justice has been done. Senegal does not have an embassy in Argentina and the special envoy sent by this African republic has been not been received until now by the local

authorities. The Senegalese community in Buenos Aires has the suspicion that the murder is derived from the reaction against Ba's record in the defense of the rights of minorities, particularly his Senegalese compatriots. Ba had already marched with several sub-Saharan African street vendors, who were evicted by police from several areas of Buenos Aires where informal sale and retail take place, as in the Buenos Aires' zone of Once Neighborhood. He also became an active leader in the Senegalese association Daira. Although he was not devoted to street selling, he was among the group that helped street vendors in their disputes with the authorities. His death caused consternation and repudiation among several organizations, including the Association of Senegalese Residents in Argentina (ARSA), which was rejected as plaintiff by the judge in charge of the case, since the Federal Police and Prosecutor have not shown so far their desire to find out the facts. The history of previous discrimination and exclusion raises concern and fear that the inquiry would not take through the right avenues given that the victim is an African. It is ironic somehow that Ba died on the International Women's Day, devoted to mutual respect and the end of violence. In high contrast, 98 women were victims of violent deaths in 2015 only in the province of Buenos Aires. It could also be noted a sort of veiled racism in the media, because in the first 48 hours barely a dozen alternative media, mostly Senegalese, reported the murder of Ba. Just on Friday, March 11th, the bad news was echoed by the first graphic Argentine mass media. Other began to replicate it on Saturday. While there is no place for African

descent on TV, as the advertising spaces can show, there is neither for ordinary citizens. Violence is not only physical but also symbolic.

Profile and career

Like many of his Senegalese compatriots seeking a better future, Ba arrived in Argentina by 1995, when the flow of sub-Saharan immigration —mainly from Senegal and Nigeria, but also from Congo, Cameroon and Guinea— was not so intense. Ba was a polyglot, well educated person, who had gone through the cloisters of the University of Dakar, his hometown and Senegalese capital. Here studied the brilliant scholar Cheikh Anta Diop (the university bears his name), who demonstrated the African origin of Egyptian civilization against the stunned, disbelieving, and arrogant Eurocentric Europe and its Academies. Ba did not finish his career and planned to do it in Argentina. He attended the Faculty of Arts at the University of Buenos Aires, in the late 90s, when the recession started to hit hard at the gates of the country. Despite Ba's potential and culture, he had to live as many immigrants who arrive with little or nothing. Ba got employments in various local luxury hotels to earn a minimum income. In parallel he became interested in improving the living conditions of his compatriots, who were arriving at an increasing rate. At the beginning he helped the families to get a place to live. In recognition of his work, he was elected later Director of the House of Africa in Argentina. This institution was founded in August 1995 with the primary purpose of guiding and helping sub-Saharan Africans. In partnership with the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenopho-

bia and Racism (INADI), also created in 1995, the House of Africa started by processing cases of discrimination and moved on to disseminate the African culture from its multiple point of view in a country where two millions of people of African descent live, according to estimates by activists, although in the latest National Census (2010) only 150 thousand persons recognized themselves as such. Ba was invited to a TV

show after becoming the spokesman of the street vendors who, because of evictions, came into conflict with security forces. A similar fate befell Ba. Due to an increase in the rent, he must leave the place where he had been living. Many in the Senegalese community face such a precarious situation. Most are employed in the informal economy and often subjected to police abuse.



Street vendors' protest in 2014

African communities

Many Senegalese entered Argentina, like other sub-Saharan Africans, looking for job. After the thousands of slaves who forcibly came through the first half of the nineteenth century, and the diaspora of willing migrants, especially from the Cape Verdean archipelago, arriving the last decades of the same century, the third wave occurred in the early 90s of the twentieth century. Some African migrants acquired the

status of refugees, because they came from countries in conflict, but the former French colony of Senegal was not among them. Typically, the bulk of the migrants came because of globalization, regional imbalances, climate change and unsatisfactory living conditions. Africa is rich in resources, but also the poorest region of the entire planet. In 2010 it was estimated that an African and an Asian reached Argentina every day. The reception improved since the

removal (in 2004) of the restrictions imposed by the so-called Videla Law (No. 22.439), a remnant of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). A new and more flexible law came into force in 2010, but acquiring residence continues to be a mess for many migrants outside the Mercosur area. Before the 1990s Senegal had no connection with Argentina, but the restrictions on immigration in the North re-directed to certain countries of the South, such as Brazil and Argentina, the flows of migrants who failed to enter Europe or the United States. Thus, Argentina already has the largest Senegalese community throughout Latin America, with an estimated of three thousand members. They add up to more than one thousand Nigerians and other small sub-Saharan communities. The quantification is problematic due to the mobility and the underreporting of migrants. The National Census showed 1,883 in 2001 and 2,738 in 2010, i.e., a meager 0.15% of all foreigners (1,805,957). Almost three-quarters settled in the city of Buenos Aires and in the homonymous province, after arriving from neighboring countries, especially Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, with a tourist visa. Others came as refugees or in an irregular manner, whether through the porosity of the borders or as stowaways on ships. Many also came directly by plane. The majority are young men aged 20 to 40 years, many of them single or coming alone without their families, which they will gradually bring. Their occupations are diverse: from teachers, servants or store employees to dancers of African rhythms, but they are more visible on the street selling jewelry, clothing and other items such as sunglasses and

wallets. According to local survey, no Senegalese had been in prison until 2012.

Symbolic and physical violence

Argentina remains faithful to the European model of the late nineteenth century. The white version nation and the tendency to obscure the African presence are living and breathing. Thus, the recent migration validates the myth on the disappearance of African descendants. The simplistic and racist statement is that Argentina has no native blacks and, if any black at all, only foreigners, including the Africans seen daily on the streets of Buenos Aires. That's absolutely false. This social construction responds to the motivations of discursive and symbolic racism that permeates the Argentina history and became as true and indisputable as a myth. On the other hand, the presence of African immigrants is more visible from the 1990s and even more since 2000. It renewed the impetus to research the black roots of the Argentine past and their manifestations today. It is an antidote to racism, but there is much work ahead, because the elite has built a racist discourse of absolute whiteness and the racism permeates the daily life. If Massar Ba was killed because of some of the so-called racial issues, it would be another blatant case of discrimination linked to xenophobic hatred. Ba denounced police abuse and mistreatment of his compatriots on many occasions. Let's also consider that Ba's is not the first case of violent death of an African migrant in Argentina. In November 2011, a Senegalese man was killed in Puente La Noria. No media picked up the story.

On July 31, 2014, a Senegalese was insulted and beaten; his merchandise was destroyed by a manager of a building in the Buenos Aires' zone of Once Neighborhood. The victim ended with a neck brace. In 2000 Emanuele N'taka, a young Afro-Argentine, was beaten and insulted by a group of skinheads before fifty witnesses in a busy commercial area of the Belgrano Neighborhood. It is always worth to review the case of the Afro-Uruguayan José Delfín Acosta Martínez, a researcher and popularizer of the Afro-River Plate culture who was arbitrarily arrested by the Buenos Aires police on April 5, 1996. After being

beaten in the police station, he died in route to hospital Ramos Mejia, just where Ba had died weeks ago. The press reported that narcotic overdose and excess alcohol were the cause of death. The police said the victim adopted an aggressive attitude, but several inmates testified that gave cries of suffering, as if he were tortured and autopsy request presented by Uruguay and practiced in May 1998 revealed the presence of blows. In 2002 the case was brought to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) in response to the closure of the criminal case in Argentina.



Mobilization of Senegalese vendors in August 2015

In this sad inventory of multiple pressures, harassment and mistreatment of Senegalese in Buenos Aires, there are frequent intrusions in homes, threats and even theft of goods and money, as the police operation in January 2014, which dismantled 30 points of sale in the Buenos Aires' zone of the Once

Neighborhood. The street vendors, mostly Senegalese, reacted by closing the public roads. Around three hundred of them made also a remarkable protest in August 2015 against the abuses of the Metropolitan Police and local authorities.

Another violent eviction, along with seizure of goods (including money), occurred in a hotel in the Once neighborhood in early August 2015. Among the outraged Massar Ba raised his voice and many suspects it costed him his live. Whether true or not, the justice system must give the respond, but so far it is clear that there is too much to learn about tolerance and respect in Argentina.

Identity issues in Nigeria

regarding tribe and religion

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This is an overview of ethnic and religious issues in the Nigerian society from my perspective, an indigene from the South Western part of Nigeria who lived in the country for over 30 years. Nigeria is a highly diverse society in multicultural terms, with a population of about 180 million and at least a hundred tribes with ways of life essentially different from each other. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern regions of the British colony with 356,669 square miles that became present day Nigeria resulted in the coming together of various people who had hardly interacted prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Among them, the main tribes are the Hausa, the Yoruba, and the Igbo. The issue of identity is often markedly defined by two factors: the tribe first, then religion. The identity as defined by the tribe becomes much less prominent outside the shores. For example, if Nigerians meet in Europe, they tend to identify with each other more in terms of nationality than with the tribe, which is easy to understand. Religion has largely contributed to divide the Nigerian people. The northerners are mainly Muslims, as determined by the flow of the Arabs from North Africa. The European

missionaries came in by sea; hence the southern regions of the country are predominantly Christian. Traditional religions based on paying homage to various spirits and gods still persist in small groups (compared to the two main religions) across almost the entire country, especially the areas south of the Niger and Benue rivers. The indigenous religions thrive in these areas mostly because Islam penetrated society in the north more than Christianity did in the south. It is worth noting that religion doesn't particularly form an equal division of "north and south" as it is often speculated by outsiders. Relations between Christians and Muslims remain tense in many parts of the country, mostly in the Northern city of Kaduna, which has witnessed the most religious riots. Language also marked the diversity, mostly following tribal lines. Nigeria has more than 250 individual tribal languages. The dominant ones are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. English is the only common language among most of the people. Pidgin, a mixture of English and African languages, is used in ethnically mixed urban areas by people who have not had a formal education in English. For instance, "*wetin you talk*" stands for "what did you say" in Pidgin. The

cultural-tribal diversity affects many aspects of life. In most places, when a landlord is about to rent out a property to a tenant, the first question is usually: "Where is he/she from?" It's basically a check on the person's tribe and a sort of quick determination of the person's likely mode of conduct and manners. A lot of employers select their workers based on tribe because people from certain ethnic backgrounds are perceived to have some kinds of unwelcome behavior. This often makes us question the following: "It's only one Nigeria". Intertribal marriages have only slightly helped to foster unity. The Muslims from the South West are not viewed as true Muslims by the ones from the North. Therefore during the times of religious riots, a tribe also constitutes a factor that can determine safety. The North has often brought Nigeria into the news on negative matters. The world is largely aware of the menace called Boko Haram, a group that started as a small, hardly known, restless fanatic gang and grew to an internationally recognized terrorist group. This growth was largely facilitated by detrimental sociocultural factors unique to the Northern region. The societal structure of the North suffers from a sharp division in two levels: the elite few and the poor/uneducated masses, often used as tools of religious (and violent) propaganda. It's alleged that the elite ensures they stay uneducated and keep them brainwashed with backward religious ideas in order to keep all available resources to itself. The folks at the lowest level of the socioeconomic strata are mostly children and teenagers known as "Alma Jiri," who roam

the streets begging for alms. Usually a child becomes an Alma Jiri when the family is so below the striking poverty line that the essential needs, even sustenance, are not satisfied. Some children are forced to simply because they lose their parents and their relatives or guardians cannot take care of them. Most of these children become victims when their parents send them to Quranic schools outside their hometowns. A child is usually taken away from his parents, his relatives, and his home to some remote areas for the purpose of learning the recitation of Holy Qur'an. At the end of the day, the child will learn less about the Qur'an recitation than about mischievous acts. Such children are usually aggressive and violent, as they are exposed to different forms of pressure, problems, hunger and jobs that constantly demand their energy and attention. Some of them go to restaurants to wash dishes and fetch water so that they can get leftover food. They are all over the streets, very dirty, hungry and thirsty, even causing traffic hazards. These Alma Jirai are often mobilized to wreck havoc during times of political and or religious conflicts. The South West is the Yoruba region, where the co-existence of religious tolerance and peace thrives most. The inhabitants are known to be mostly non-confrontational (and viewed by certain critics as "cowards" in times of violent conflicts), but the region has its own past record of violent conflicts, e.g., the repeated communal bloody clashes between the towns Ife and Modakeke. However, the foreigners often feel more comfortable staying in the South West when visiting Nige-

ria. It is a region with a very low record of kidnappings, terrorist attacks (a relatively new phenomenon), intertribal clashes and religious conflicts. Lagos is located in the South West. It's the largest city and former capital of Nigeria, actually the first official British colony and the commercial center in Nigeria. People of all tribes and religions live there in harmony. Yorubas have some kind of balance in numbers of people adherent to Islam and to Christianity. The extent of intertribal intolerance was mostly manifested in a series of conflicts that led to civil war (1967-70). A group of army officers, mostly Igbo, tried to secede and establish a different country, Biafra, due to certain grievances and evidence of being marginalized by the federal government. The clashes resulted from a deep-rooted animosity, which persists today, and led to the deaths of many Igbos. The Igbos are almost entirely Christians. They are well known for being industrious, smart in business, and well-travelled. They can be found in most parts of the world, from the US to Germany to Hong Kong to Japan. The oil-producing region of the nation is close to the homeland of the Igbos. This region is the Niger Delta, where at least 20 different tribes live with their own languages and cultures. They do vehemently and rightly state that they are not Igbos whenever outsiders mistakenly (or purposely) address them as such. I worked a year as a medical doctor in a newly built hospital in Port-Harcourt, a major city in the South.

After being introduced to any local people, the next question was: "Doctor, where are you from?" During that year, I also overheard the grievances throwing by the tribes in the Niger Delta against each other. It appears that 50 years of Nigeria have been enough neither to bring the tribes together nor to shape the national identity nor to foster unity. One out of every six Africans is a Nigerian. Nigerians tend to turn into brilliant and accomplished professionals worldwide. On the negative side, they are also known for being cunning with many cases of fraudulent activity. Nigerian identity tends to be strong and still comes alive on many occasions. "Proudly Naija" is a frequent statement when Nigerians excel in any field or activity worldwide. "Nollywood" is the Nigerian movie industry, popular all over the African continent. The sound of Nigerian music anywhere brings warm memories of the homeland. It has often been said that among any group of Africans in the world, the Nigerians are easy to identify either from certain characteristics, mannerisms, costumes, zeal or speech. The nation has a lot to gain if its citizens can identify with each other more in spite of the sociocultural differences.

Cuba in 2015 from the Central European Perspective

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1. The New US policies

The decision of the US and Cuban Governments to re-establish the diplomatic relations between the two countries has certainly added new dynamism to the debate on Cuba. Two schools of thought are clashing here. The argument of the supporters of the new US policy towards Cuba is clear and simple: the policy of isolation practiced by the US Government in the past has not produced any positive results, so let us try something else! Regardless of how strong the will to hold power and the intense survival instincts of the Cuban totalitarian regime are, there are a growing number of new elements characterizing the current Cuban situation that are not and, by their very nature, cannot be under its control. In spite of all the efforts of the current power-holders to preserve the *status quo* the Cuban reality today is different from the past and is changing irreversibly with ever growing speed. Yoani Sanchez once said: “*Cuba se cambia*”, and nobody can stop this trend! The Government of the United States must depart in its policies towards Cuba for the basic fact that any society simply cannot remain the same forever.

The constructive engagement of the Cuban Government, the re-establishment of diplomatic relationships between Cuba and the United States and their gradually renewed economic cooperation must be perceived just as a first, but absolutely necessary, step on a journey towards the accomplishment of the ultimate goal the US Government is pursuing here. Its new Cuba policy is certainly not to serve the US “national interests” only, but to enhance – in conformity with the fundamental American values and principles- freedom and prosperity of the Cuban people! The opponents of the decision of President Obama to engage the current Cuban Government in the process of rapprochement believe to have now strong empirical evidence supporting their point of view. The new US policy is already a year old and nothing has really changed in Cuba. It has generously offered a number of concessions and nothing has been obtained in return. Raul Castro’s Government is still using its traditional methods of control and manipulation, fully endorsing the original ideological visions of Fidel and subscribing to the “revolutionary” program based on them.

The situation, in fact, has worsened for the Cuban people on the island since the “thaw” of the Cuba-US relations was announced. The level of repression used on a daily basis against the members of the awakening Cuban civil society has actually increased.¹ Raul Castro may be advancing some rational reforms in order to address the basic problems of the Cuban people struggling day after day for their subsistence, and to adjust the Cuban economy to the challenges of the international system emerging in the beginning of the 21st century. It doesn’t mean, however, at all that he is ready to get rid of the “substance” of the Cuban “socialism” being “actualized” now; that he has changed his mind and ceased to be an “unrepentant” communist. He has never made even the smallest effort to extend his economic reform agenda into the political sphere. His principal goal is still what it has always been: to preserve the leading role of the Communist party using all available means at his disposal and oversee a smooth succession of power from the aging Moncadistas² - still its principal current holders - to the “politically conscious” members of younger generations.

2. Normalization of the EU-Cuba relations

In February 2014, the Council of European Union Foreign Ministers agreed to start negotiations on a new bilateral agreement between the EU and Cuba. A diplomatic process got off the ground two months later. A declared common intention is to overcome the unproductive and outdated legacies of the past; to

adopt a new treaty which should govern the full scope of relations between the EU and Cuba (the political dialogue, cooperation, economic relations and trade) in a single agreement. It should be a standard legal instrument, similar to the treaties regulating the relations of the EU with other states of the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group, all of which, unlike Cuba, are signatories of the “Cotonou Agreement”³. As far as the character of “normalized” EU-Cuba relationships regulated by a new treaty is concerned, there is a profound difference between the expectations of the two “high contracting parties.” For the EU, the normalization of this relationship requires Cuba to finally start behaving like a “normal” ACP country; to open up its political and economic system and set itself on the way of national reconciliation: democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and economic prosperity. It implies that all general guidelines the EU has discussed internally and adopted for the various spheres of international cooperation with all other partners from the developing world (such as the “*Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy*,” adopted on 25 June 2012, for instance) are fully applicable. The revolutionary “exceptionalism” - still aggressively defended by the Cuban Government - is not to be tolerated anymore. It must be replaced unconditionally by the cooperation “in good faith”, based on the joint recognition of all basic purposes and principles of international cooperation as stipulated by the Charter of the

United Nations. Having decided to engage Cuba, the EU is not at all resigning to its principles. Human rights are to “*remain at the core of the relationship*” between the EU and Cuba - the words of Catherine Ashton, the EU “Minister of Foreign Affairs”⁴ in the spring of 2014. This recent decision to re-engage Cuba should not be understood as “*a policy change from the past*”! The EU 1996 “Common Position”⁵ still remains in force! Therefore, the only concession made here is that the EU has agreed to start this process under the existing circumstances, despite the fact that the current state of human rights in Cuba is, for sure, far from satisfactory or even acceptable. The Cuban Government perceives the normalization of the relationship between the EU and Cuba through its traditional ideological lens and gives it an entirely different meaning. Departing from the sacrosanct principle of “non-intervention into domestic affairs of sovereign states” it sticks to the claim of having free hand to handle the process of Cuban transition in its own way; to keep in power all those who have been ruling in Cuba for decades and are responsible for the current highly unsatisfactory state of affairs on the island and replace them gradually by their heirs being recruited now among loyal and “politically conscious” members of younger generations.

3. Sovereignty belongs to the Cuban People!

From the point of view of the activists of Cuban civil society the processes taking place today in the realm of international

relations can play only a secondary - just enabling and certainly not decisive - role. The principal demand of those who belong to the Cuban “parallel polis”⁶ - the mix of traditional human rights defenders, church activists, members of independent political parties of all colors from the left to the right; public intellectuals, journalists, artists or just open-minded and freedom-loving people without any specific skills or qualifications; blacks or whites, radicals or moderates - reminds us of the demands of East and Central European peoples made in the “miraculous year” of 1989. It is not just a minor improvement of the dysfunctional Cuban state. It is not just an “actualization” of Cuban “socialism.” It is the respect for inalienable human rights and freedoms of Cuban citizens! It is the re-opening of Cuban society being closed for almost six decades by the ruling regime! It is the restoration - by peaceful means and without violence - of sovereignty of the Cuban people! It is the recognition that the Cuban nation - as any other nation in the world - is endowed with “*inalienable right to alter or change the shape of its Government*”;⁷ that it is up to Cubans only - and not in the hands of any foreign power or outside player- to decide the future of their homeland! There is obviously one vital condition missing if the restoration of sovereignty of the Cuban people is to become reality and the process of democratization finally launched. It is the restitution of the Cuban “political nation” - the re-birth of a body politic in Cuba with a clear sense of purpose and

vision, a community of freedom-loving people really showing the will to replace totalitarianism with democracy! But how is such a national revival to be achieved? Here lies the main challenge for the Cuban democratic opposition. And it is not only to resist, on a daily basis, all of their repressive action from the “*ancient regime*” still in power, as some of its courageous leaders seem to believe. It is to turn itself into a power capable of opening the way for Cubans to move from their bleak presence to a better future and propose a realistic scenario on how to get out of the current stalemate. The problem is that the Cuban democratic opposition has always been highly fragmented and consisted of a number of competing factions. In spite of all sorts of calls for unification made in the past – and now again and again - it has not been able to do so. It has not yet offered a realistic program of democratic transformation acceptable for all Cubans as a viable political alternative to the current state of public matters on the island.

4. The relationship with the United States: a historical problem or a historical opportunity?

The persisting disunity within of the Cuban “parallel polis” has manifold reasons and this phenomenon certainly calls for a detailed and historically informed analysis. Such an enormous task obviously exceeds the scope of this short text. There is, however, a key external aspect contributing significantly to the current state of matters that must be reminded here: the complicated relation-

ship between Cuba and the United States which has been developing throughout the 20th century. The thing is that this relationship has always been, for obvious reasons, highly asymmetrical: on the one side the United States, the leading power of the liberal West with global responsibilities and also corresponding imperialistic ambitions and on the other side Cuba, a relatively small island country in the US neighborhood, belonging to the developing South, exposed historically to all sorts of direct or indirect forms of American influence and manipulations. And here is how Jose Marti - the “apostle” of Cuban independence and one of the founding fathers of the modern Cuban nation - articulated the basic Cuban political problem in the last decades of the 19th century, the dilemma which stands in my view as the greatest challenge for the leaders of Cuban democratic opposition today. On the one hand it is the United States - “*the land of the free and the home of the brave*” in the words of the American National Anthem - who is undoubtedly the most important strategic partner and ally of free Cuba. On the other hand, however, an independent Cuban state must vehemently resist, said Marti, to be fully “Americanized”, because its place is within the family of free Latin American nations. It should not be mentored endlessly by the United States or even subjected to the US hegemony. It must be built as “a homeland for Cubans”; their “*res publica*” resting on their own spiritual and cultural traditions and resources; a vibrant democracy

able to bring them into a better future together with other free nations, including Americans, while protecting and further cultivating their own unique Cuban identity. Those who entered Havana triumphantly in the last day of 1958 in order to form there their “revolutionary” government – in power ever since - of course, immediately started to give this fundamental Cuban *raison d’etat*, articulated by Marti, their own twisted ideological interpretation. The unrelenting anti-Americanism has quickly become one of the principal political tools in the hands of Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries, to be used indiscriminately to suppress all their - both domestic and international – enemies. It was intentionally built by them into the very foundations of the Cuban totalitarian state. All their critics could then be stigmatized as traitors and persecuted as agents of American imperialism. The defense of the Cuban Revolution against the continuing acts of aggression committed by the United States could be declared as a principal patriotic duty of all Cubans. Whoever refused to support, or at least to get his/her behavior coordinated with this official line, could be eliminated from the Cuban public life at the discretion of the ruling power and severely punished. And there is no need to add: the Cold War between the East and West which was in full swing in the moment of creation of Cuban “socialist” state, framed the designs of its founders with a highly favorable international environment and contributed decisively to its exceptional stability. In Europe,

this conflict ended more than quarter century ago, but the political regime created by the Castro brothers and their cronies in the late 1950s is still here in the 2010s, still using its old, well-tested anti-American rhetoric to remain in power. Does this new situation - at the end of 2015, when the US and Cuban Embassies function again in the national capitals and more “constructive” steps on the both sides are in the pipeline in the context of “re-engagement” - also open new opportunities for the Cuban democratic opposition? Definitely yes, but under one condition: that it is used creatively to overcome, once for all, the heavy burden of Fidel Castro’s political legacy; that the difference in opinions as far as the new US policy toward Cuba is not perceived as a *casus belli* in its ranks, as a reason for escalation of “ideological” divisions within Cuban “parallel polis”, but as a call for its unification. The dispute between the supporters and opponents of the steps taken by President Obama and his Administration - a manifestation of political pluralism that lies at the very core of American democracy; a continuing and never-ending struggle taking place on the US political scene which will only intensify in the year of presidential election 2016 – should not paralyze the possibility of dialogue among the Cuban dissidents! Exactly on the contrary, it should be used by them as an opportunity to demonstrate that in spite of all their differences, they stand united by the common goal, able not only to talk to each other, but to act “in concert”.

The most outspoken voices in the debate on Cuba in the United States have always belonged to the Cuban exiles who have arrived to US soil during more than six decades of the Castro dictatorship and have managed to create there a compact, politically influential and economically strong community - having more than two million members now and preserving a strong sense of national identity. What is their place within the Cuban democratic opposition? There is no doubt that Cuban Americans are indispensable players in this collective effort: they represent an important part of the Cuban nation, and no one serious, as far as I know, has ever proposed that as exiles they should stay out of the struggle for democracy whose center is obviously at home. On the contrary as citizens of the United States they have a special responsibility- a significant role to play in the context of the future development of the endemically asymmetrical US-Cuba relations: to participate actively in the search of a new *modus vivendi* between Cuba and the United States; to initiate a national debate looking for a balanced, realistic answer to the old question raised by Jose Marti at the very beginning of a still unfinished journey for Cuban freedom and independence. When “actualizing” Cuban socialism, the government of Raul Castro seems to be ready now to treat Cuban Americans with certain respect and not as traitors. He is even ready to welcome them as honored, valuable visitors on the island- as long as they are willing to stay out of Cuban politics and assume the

role of providers of financial assistance to their relatives living there; as long as they are ready to accept the fact that a substantive portion of their money will end up in the coffers of Cuban totalitarian state and be used as a means for its survival. On the contrary, it is the restitution of the Cuban political nation composed of free-minded and committed people from both sides of the Straits of Florida, that the Castro regime is afraid of more than anything else; that therefore should be perceived as the number one priority of Cuban Americans; that is the main reason why all of them, democrats, republicans and independents, should join forces with those who struggle for Cuban freedom on the island and become active carriers of this unifying process. But let’s be honest and realistic here: to bridge the gap between those who have had to live for the decades exposed to the “totalitarian radiation”⁸ and those who have not, is not an easy task. What is being opened here is a genuine “Pandora’s Box”, containing many unsettling questions - especially those touching upon the role of the Cuban-American exile community in the “crises” during the six decades of strained relationships between the United States and the Cuban totalitarian regime, and being systematically, and very “creatively”, used by its propagandistic machinery. What is required here is the courage to really start the process of genuine national reconciliation, to launch an inclusive national dialogue - involving Cubans of all generations living on the both sides of the Florida

Straits, including those who some politicians would like to leave behind: the former political prisoners of the communist regime. There should be no doubt that a true, undistorted record of their encounters with the Cuban recent history – the stories testifying to their patriotism and personal courage, full of suffering, but also of acts of their solidarity with all others who shared their fate - has an important place in the current process of Cuban liberation, bringing into the national debate about the Cuba's future the questions that should not be just forgotten, glossed over or treated - as some debaters seem to believe - as an old crap belonging to the history's garbage dump. Just the opposite is true. A new "social contract" among Cubans should, for sure, focus primarily on the Cuban future. But as it has been already convincingly demonstrated in many cases of countries in transition, it cannot be reached without recognition of and justice being served to what has happened in the past.

5. Encuentro Nacional Cubano (Cuban National Assembly)

At the same time when the US Secretary of State was visiting Havana to re-open the US Embassy, there was another Cuban event taking place in San Juan, Puerto Rico worth of being paid attention to: the Cuban National Assembly (Encuentro Nacional Cubano), the constituent meeting of a new platform of Cuban democratic opposition. The representatives of twenty three independent entities from Cuba and more than thirty exiled non-for-profits were in attend-

ance. The objective of the "Encuentro" was to launch the debate on the common course of action in the current rapidly changing situation. For the first time the members of non-violent democratic opposition from the island and from the outside of Cuba met in such large numbers and talked to each other with a sense of common goals putting aside their differences, mutual grievances and recriminations. They all seemed to understand that it is their unity and a feasible political program for a new Cuba in the 21st century, what should become their most powerful weapon in their political, i.e. non-violent struggle against the obsolete totalitarian regime. Thus, what could be seen at the San Juan Cuban gathering was something really unprecedented: a surprising harmony between home and exile, the reconciliation of two most influential Miami organizations – the Cuba American National Foundation and the Freedom Council. The support pronounced publicly by Diego Suarez - one of the veterans of the liberation struggle against "Castro-communism", now more than eighty years old - to Rosa Maria Paya – twenty seven years old daughter of Oswaldo Paya, whose Proyecto Varela had been heavily criticized in the Miami conservative circles in the past – has become a kind of symbolical expression of new spirit of hope and determination which has prevailed at the San Juan meeting and is hopefully in action till today. The Cuban National Assembly elected from its ranks nine members of its Coordinating Committee – five from

the island and four from the exile – and entrusted them to represent the Assembly before the world and be in charge of organization of its activities in the next six months. The Assembly accepted the strategy of non-violence and peaceful struggle and associated itself with the “Agreement for Democracy” adopted by the major Cuban oppositional groups already in 1998. The Assembly has decided to launch public campaign for the plebiscite with legally binding results demanding free, fair and pluralistic election in Cuba; to look for all the possible way how to tear down the cyber wall which is still preventing the members of internal opposition to communicate effectively among themselves and with the world. What has also been agreed on by the Assembly, were the fundamental, non-negotiable demands of Cuban democratic opposition: the release of all political prisoners; the abolishment of the Cuban laws, suppressing the fundamental rights and freedoms of Cuban citizens; the recognition of the right to freedom of expression, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and peaceful demonstration; the recognition of the right to religious freedom and free choice of occupation; the recognition of the right to create political parties equally participating in political decisions; the holding of free and fair elections monitored by international observers. It was also decided that the next Assembly will take place after six months with the basic task to discuss and adopt the National Cuban program for the 21st century. The next

Assembly will also assess the current situation of Cuba as well as the results achieved. Based on this assessment, it should come with concrete proposals concerning both its future institutional set up and its further political steps and strategies.

6. The US and the EU “engagement” of Cuba Government and the basic philosophy of “Helsinki process” that brought the end of the Cold War in Europe

In spite of all the differences between the processes of “re-engagement” of Cuban Government recently started by both the United States and the European Union there is one significant similarity here. In both cases three separate “baskets” of problems are being put on the negotiation table in the context of new relationship to be created between the parties: peace and security, economic cooperation and human rights. Both the US and the EU argue - in line with their fundamental values and principles - that the third, i.e human rights basket is an indispensable part of the whole “package.” And both the US and the EU get the same reaction from the Cuban side: the bilateral relationship can be substantively improved, its new mutually beneficial forms agreed, even the proposed dialogue about human rights is possible, but under the condition of full respect for Cuban sovereignty and non-intervention to the Cuba’s internal affairs. This argument is actually very similar to what the Western diplomats were hearing from their Eastern counterparts when the process of “détente” in

Europe was launched in the 1970s. Isn't it necessary then to draw inspiration from here in order to achieve in the today's negotiations with the communist government of Cuba the desired results? Should not the governments of the United States and the EU insist that the Cuban state must not only honor its international obligations in the area of human rights if the negotiations are to move forward in the spirit of cooperation, but stop using the concept of state sovereignty in a way which is obsolete and out of step of current international law - recognizing as its emerging norms the concepts of "democratic entitlement" and "democratic legitimacy"? Should not they insist that any progress in negotiation can be made only after Cuba accepts the notion that the state sovereignty is not absolute or unconditional, because "*Governments instituted among Men*", as American Declaration of Independence phrased it, derive *their just power from the consent of the governed*? That the state sovereignty is always secondary and contingent to the sovereignty belonging to the people? Shouldn't they insist that the independent voices of civil society must be also allowed - in an appropriate way - to participate in the process of "rapprochement" and turned into an indispensable "third" party to the agreement which will also be in charge of its implementation? When in 1975, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was signed, there were also many skeptical voices, especially in the United States, that this

deal between the East and West to secure the peaceful co-existence of states with "different social and political systems" was a victory of the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and the ultimate confirmation of the *status quo* which was established in Europe as the result of the Second World War. But just the opposite turned out to be true. The third basket of the Helsinki Accords, however, opened the space for Czechoslovak Charter 77, The Polish KOR and later Solidarnosz, for the Helsinki Committees and other similar bodies emerging first in the Soviet Union itself and later throughout the whole region. It was the Western diplomats who sought and managed to secure for these civic initiatives, sometimes after a very hard fight, at least some level of international recognition. And it was this recognition what empowered them also domestically; what not only created a kind of protective shield against the excessive persecutions of their participants, but opened the way to the miraculous year of 1989 with its wave of peaceful and democratic revolutions which changed radically the political face of the whole region. The diplomatic processes taking place around Cuba today call for exactly for the same strategy. The Cuban democratic opposition seems to be aware of it and there are multiple encouraging signs that that they are ready to step out internationally as a coherent enough and sufficiently organized body able to communicate effectively with its international partners; to present to them their own version of transition in Cuba; to comment on the

deals which are on the table and bring to the consideration of diplomats and governmental experts their own inputs. What is necessary now is the clear commitment on the side of both American and European diplomats not to “re-engage” the Cuban Government only, but to be engaged actively, creatively and in the “Helsinki spirit” with the Cuban civil society, to seriously listen to their arguments and bring into the process of negotiation with the Cuban side also their communications.

7. The Summary in Conclusion

There are several signs of hope coming out this year that in spite of stubborn resistance of Cuban Government, the “Helsinki” spirit” is waking up in the Cuban context. The negotiation between The EU and Cuba about a new bi-lateral treaty is followed closely by the European Parliament. The conference “*Quo Vadis Cuba?*” was organized in Berlin and attracted a very good attention, offering an opportunity to a representative group of Cuban democratic opposition to send out its message. The level of awareness what is at stake here is slowly rising. The trans-Atlantic dimension of the Cuban question – is there space here for some cooperation or co-ordination between the United States and the European Union in their processes of engaging of Cuban Government, for instance as far as the dialogue about human rights and assistance and political support of the Cuban democratic opposition is concerned? – is slowly getting ground and more attention. But the most of work still remains to be done – the Cuban

“parallel polis” composed of the people from the island and living in exile seems to be well aware of that and is determined more than ever to keep pushing. Let us hope that its international partners and supporter will hear this call and assist – inspired by the “Helsinki spirit” which changed Europe - the brave Cuban democrats in their continuing effort to finally tear down the last remaining “Berlin Wall”.

Notes:

1-The source of information: the regular monthly reports published by Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation of Elizardo Sanchez or another independent organization “Hablemos Press”

2-The revolutionaries accompanying young lawyer Fidel Castro in the attack against the Moncada barracks in 1953 who joined him in his mountain-based guerilla campaign started three years later.

3-So called “Cotonou Agreement” (the ACP-AC Partnership Agreement, 2000/483/EC) is a treaty between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (an organization of 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific States, including Cuba, created by the Georgetown Agreement in 1975 and having its Secretariat headquarters in Brussels) on the one side, and the European Community (now the EU) and its Member States on the other. It was signed in Cotonou, Benin, on June 23, 2000. Its main objectives are the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty and the gradual integration of African, Caribbean and Pacific States into the global economy, whilst adhering to the aims of sustainable development. It includes a strong political dimension consisting of regular political dialogue,

peace-building policies, conflict prevention and resolution and promotion of human rights, democratic principles based on the rule of law and transparent and accountable governance. Its main financial instrument is the European Development Fund. Cuba first announced its intention to sign the Cotonou Agreement by a Verbal Note of February 2, 2000, but later withdrew its petition, arguing that the EU was setting unacceptable conditions for Cuba's accession with the attempt to infringe into Cuba's "internal affairs."

4-The official title of the EU "foreign minister" is "High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission"

5-Reacting to the recent wave of gross human rights violations of human rights by the Cuba Government the EU adopted on 2 December 1996 the "Common position on Cuba" (agreed upon by the Council on the basis of Article J.2 of the Treaty on European Union) which explicitly states : "*...the objective of the EU in its relations with Cuba is to encourage a process of transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as a sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people*". It is the EU "firm wish to be Cuba's partner in the progressive and irreversible opening of the Cuban economy"⁵, but the possibility of the "full cooperation with Cuba will depend upon the improvements in human rights and political freedom..." (96/697/CFSP)

6-The term a "parallel polis" was invented in the milieu of the Czechoslovak Charter⁷⁷. Its author is Václav Benda, whose seminal essay on this topic, written in 1978, initiated an important and rich discussion. Benda's essay "The Parallel Polis" and other contributions to this debate have been published in H. Gordon SKILLING and Paul WILSON (eds.), *Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991).

7-The main demand of the campaign "Cuba Decide" endorsed by the majority of groups of democratic opposition operating inside as well as outside of the island. (<http://cubadecide.com/>)

8-The term of Havel

A Visit, a Speech, and an Unforgettable Encounter

José Daniel Ferrer

General Coordinator of the Cuban Patriotic Union (UNPACU)

Santiago de Cuba, Cuba

Since the announcement of Barack Obama's visit to our country, I thought I should be writing about it and helping the people without voice

to express their real feelings about this historic event in the social networks. And so we did.



Encounter with members of the independent civil society

We explained in our Internet accounts — and in thousands of copies of printed and audiovisuals materials aimed at the ordinary people— our position in favor of both this visit and the US president's policy towards Cuba.

In UNPACU we act according to what our conscience dictates without forgetting the deep sense of the majority of our people and the civilized world.

Just two days before Obama's arrival, I travelled to Havana. From that moment until now, I have not been able to sit down to write even a single note. Due to the visit of the US president, much press in the free world has been interested in learning about the Cuban reality, the political prisoners, the repression against the Ladies in White, and other peaceful human rights activists. The Castro regime has increased repression before, during, and after the visit, being frightened by the rising of popular discontent and public protests. This situation keeps on affecting us and keeping us busy. I had to pay attention to dozens of activists who were visiting me at our headquarters in Havana. I cannot always stay in our capital city and other provinces; very often the political police apprehend me and forcibly take me back to my hometown. On Friday 25th, I returned to Santiago de Cuba, where dozens of members, collaborators and supporters of our organization were anxiously waiting for me. They wanted to know how our meeting with the charismatic president of the most admired nation by our people had developed. I went out on Saturday, early in the morning, with dozens of UNPACU activists to demand freedom for the political prisoners and respect for the human rights. More than hundred fifty of us were arrested. Some people mistakenly believe that the repression increases with the new US policy toward the Castro's regime, but it is not true. Repression increases due to the growth of the people discontent and the pro-democracy activism. Neither

Obama's policy nor anyone else outside Cuba can put an end to the repression by the dictatorship, except through a military invasion. And the latter is not something that a decent person wants. Only the people of Cuba can wipe out the tyranny, but the US president can help us in our struggle with his visit and his policies. There is so little left to say about the visit; much has been said already. Listening to the point of views of many compatriots and also considering the worldwide impact and the moment that our country is living, I would summarize this visit as the most important and impressive that we have ever had in Cuba. For nearly a week, in a country where almost all time and energies are devoted to the struggle for life as immediate survival, many people are looking for videos on the conversation and subsequent meeting of Obama with the popular humorous character Panfilo, as well as on the meeting of the supportive President with thirteen members of the peaceful internal opposition. Many people remark the nervousness and foolishness showed by Raúl Castro after being questioned about political prisoners by a CNN reporter. Obama's popularity in Cuba, already very high, multiplied during his three days in our neighboring nation. In contrast, even the very few genuine supporters of Raúl Castro feel angry about how bad he looked. The speech lived up to what millions of Cubans are expecting. Cuban men and women are convinced that the democratization of our country is the responsibility of Cubans, but they always appreci-

ate that solidarity is vital for the people struggling for freedom. If only other politicians in Latin America, Europe and the whole free world could do something similar to what Obama did during his visit to Cuba, the courage of the Cuban people and their hopes for a better future would be far greater. A psychologist friend of mine told me: "A brilliant, constructive, and encouraging speech. He touched the heart of most of our people." The meeting that thirteen members of the independent civil society held with Obama on Tuesday 22 lasted one hour and forty-five minutes. It was a very supportive gesture of solidarity towards those who fight for a democratic, fair and prosperous Cuba. He listened to us with great respect and sincere attention; he uttered words of praise for those who suffer constant repression and harassment in the struggle for honoring all human rights. We, the guests, shared our views on his policy towards Cuba, his visit and his speech. We also expressed our gratitude for the invitation. Three of those present formulated their criticism of the process that started on December 17, 2014. The US president, with clear and warm words, explained the reasons that led him to assume his current position. Obama seemed very sincere and very knowledgeable of the Cuban reality when he said that if his current policy fails to help the Cuban people to get a better life and to achieve freedom in a few years, then he will publicly assume the failure and will plead for another way. His current policy is only fifteen months old, while the

previous one lasted more than half a century without reaching the expected results. All the guests expressed their views and made recommendations. Both President Obama and the State Secretary, John Kerry, paid close attention and wrote down notes. I did not want to be too ambitious. This friend, president of a friendly nation, has done enough for our people and their welfare. Thus, I simply asked him to do all he can—in the conversations with Castro's regime—to help Cubans to connect to Internet. I also begged Obama not to forget that, at the end of his term and just ninety miles from his country, there will be still a land needing good and supportive friends. With the help of his well-deserved prestige, he can influence others to look into Cuba in order to show solidarity with the only people under a single-party system in the Western Hemisphere. My colleagues also raised with Obama the important matter of taking the Cuban Diaspora into account, since many Cubans living abroad cannot even get to visit their home country. We talked about political prisoners and the President was given an updated list with their names. Likewise, we discussed the situation of the Afro-Cuban people and the groups marginalized because of their sexual orientation. We further talked about human rights and the repression against peaceful women and men, about the exchanges between the two nations, free elections, and the future. This meeting was an unforgettable encounter, just like his visit and his brilliant speech. The dictatorship fully understood the scope

and impact of these historic days, hence the attacks and criticisms of its spokespersons.

A Cuba for Obama

Jorge Luis Costa
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Nobody could believe it when the media announced the visit of US President Barack Obama to Cuba from March 20 to March 22. It would be the second time that an American President came to our archipelago, after Calvin Coolidge landed in Havana in January 1928. The historic event was the current talk of the people, even though the country was in a pitched battle without truce against the mosquito spreading Zika. The visit was a much stronger news than the epidemic itself and many entertained the idea that, from now on, many things would change for the better. Most of us, the Cubans, are

always extremely naive. The preparations began in order to receive the illustrious President and Nobel Peace Prize Winner (2009). As usual the buildings on the main avenues were repaired, without any benefit for most of the population. It happened, for instance, on 12th Street in El Vedado, municipality Plaza de la Revolution, where most of the buildings date back to the 1950s, when everything was built, as a popularly saying states, in accordance with all the laws. Therefore, the technical quality of these buildings is good.



The building at the corner of 12 and 21 Streets in repair

The so-called fast lines were also repaired. They are actually the main streets of the capital, as the Avenue of Mayors (Paseo) and the Avenue of the Presidents (G), the street Linea and others. It's something that always happens when an important personality visits Cuba, like Pope Francis, but this time everything went a bit beyond. However, the reality of the peripheral neighborhoods did not change. It never changes, no matter who visits the country. There was no wall or curb in the

privileged streets that did not feel the weight of masons and painters. All was done in record time, but the quality is something else. Many were true abstract works, because the main goal was not to embellish, but to mask the true reality with a little rouge. As they say in good Cuban, we have bread for today and hunger for tomorrow. Some streets were re-patched. I say so because when a street is asphalted to fill an old pothole, such a superficial repair will become a new pothole sooner or later.



Asphalting the 11 Street at the intersection with 18 Street

Many institutions also benefited, like the polyclinics under the rule of the Public Health Ministry. They were repaired even in the presence of the public. If someone was being treated for an infection at that time, his or her medical condition surely got complicated, because there was plenty of clutter

and dust. The Latin American Stadium, home of the capital's baseball team, Industriales, especially benefited because it was repaired like never before. Since the stadium is located in the midst of the municipality El Cerro, all the surroundings were repaired to deliver a good image. Hence, the American

President Obama was dubbed the delegate of Havana by the Cuban people. The delegate is the person in charge of trying to solve the problems of the residents in a particular neighborhood. Another major initiative was the massive raid against homeless people, the so-called needy, who are increasingly growing in absolute numbers. It is needless to say that most of them are of African descent, as it can be seen above all in the municipality of Old Habana, the area of greatest influx of tourists. The raid was carried out by the National Revolutionary Police (PNR) and many of the homeless ended up in the psychiatric hospital Mazorra, where a few years ago many patients died due to mistreatment, poor care, and deplorable living conditions. After having been treated during the days of the visit, these people were returned to the streets as if nothing had happened.

They continue with their daily life of misery and needs, since the government granted their right to a dignified life whenever it suits the government itself, not when they need it. But if we find homeless people in the US and elsewhere in the world, why does the government pretend that there are not such people in Cuba? As it always has been, the regime shows its double standard and duality. Obama met a clean and beautiful Cuba, without knowing that all that was mere choreography, very well orchestrated just to pretend. And we, the Cubans, are pretty advanced in the art of deceiving.

Another racial offense and the dangerous demagogy

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President Barack Obama passed through Havana (20-22 March 2016) with a plenty of charisma, solid intellectual solvency, and coherent speech. He dazzled the Cuban people and disrupted the authorities. The simple and natural communication of the Obama family with sensitive areas of the Cuban reality as interlocutor of private entrepreneurs, guest of a popular comedy show, fan in a baseball game, and customer in a private owned restaurant had an unexpected impact among the citizens who tinted the historic visit with enthusiasm and friendliness. Obama's message was full of concepts and perfectly connected with the concerns and needs of the ordinary citizens. It greatly annoyed the Cuban rulers, who couldn't find a coherent response to his oratorical masterpiece, which fostered renewed hopes among the Cubans in the street. Just after he concluded his speech at the Grand Theater of Havana, the spokesmen and officials of the regime clung to their slogans and their extremist and hindering wording in order to try to counter the impact caused by Obama. The comments and responses brought more of the same in terms of the political discourse that the majority of the Cuban people disdain and despite

of being so far away from their harsh realities and unfulfilled longings. Nevertheless, surprise! Unexpectedly the specter of racism appeared. All the political commissars and censors who carefully monitor the ideological relevance of cultural expressions couldn't prevent that the Havana weekly newspaper *Tribuna* published an article on March 27 by the Afro-Cuban journalist Elias Argudín Sánchez, who repeated the same arguments and judgments already heard about what Obama had said, but with a particular title: "Black, are you Swedish?", taken from a popular racist joke. Facing such a fact, several voices interested in the racial problems, especially from the intellectual environment, raised in protest and the journalist was forced to apologize. His article was immediately removed from the newspaper's website. However, the connotation and transcendence are much more serious than the simple anecdote. The article is not more than another episode of the saga of rampant despair and concern among the Cuban authorities due to Obama's presence and the messages he delivered to the Cuban society. The hitherto unknown journalist strikes me as a postmodern counter foreman —id est: an enslaved

or freed man serving as repressive agent against the slaves belonging to a particular plantation— used by the current supremacist power as an instrument to channel their racist resentment and powerlessness generated by its lack of convincing arguments. It is regrettable that, one hundred and thirty years after the abolition, an Afro-Cuban professional is unable to separate his political commitment from his racial self-esteem and the most genuine humanist values in order to criticize Obama as politician, and let's not even mention such an incredible offensive racist remark. It was so crass and rejected that it remains only a confirmation of the racist inconsistencies by the Cuban government. However, it is striking that this time several intellectuals, well-known for their anti-racist positions and their governmental affiliation, reacted with severe criticism against Argudín Sánchez and the weekly newspaper *Tribuna*. Both the discomfort and the concern of these intellectuals and activists due to the disrespectful treatment of President Obama draw attention, because they are so passively living all the daily atrocities suffered by the Cubans of African descent in regard of their history, dignity and rights. Those who are right now bothered by this futile and absurd insult to the American president have been living together with so many manifestations of institutionalized racism. They impassively and silently witness the acts of repression against peaceful anti-racist activists, who in several occasions have been expelled by the political police from public cultural spaces before the eyes of these undaunted pro-government intellectuals who are now so concerned about the insult

against Obama. The now annoying intellectuals unaffectedly live together with the omissions and misrepresentations of historical facts and with the degrading representations of Cubans of African descent in both cultural and media spaces. Just before the eyes of these undaunted gentlemen, the authorities have practically nullified the popular commemoration of the heroic act by members of the secret brotherhood Abakua who sacrificed themselves in November 1871 trying to rescue the innocent medical students brought by the Spanish colonialists to the firing squad. They were also still and silent — and some of them active protagonists— during the media lynching of the outstanding intellectual Roberto Zurbano because of the truths he wrote in an article published by *The New York Times*. Finally the article "Obama's visit stirs racism" reached my hands. It was written by journalist and activist Gisela Arandia, who criticized the disrespectful treatment of the renowned visitor and deplored Argudín's article as unequivocal evidence of the persistence of racism in Cuba. Arandia denounced the **"lack of elementary revolutionary ethics"** and that is precisely her first misconception. Ethics is a universal value free of political or ideological hues; ethics lies in the respect to the others, including those who are different. Adding the last name "revolutionary" means putting limits and distorting the universal sense of the term. Ethics is essentially and totally at odds with the political constraints. She assumed the unfortunate incident as positive, because it reveals that racism still exists in Cuban society, but such a remark was not necessary, since inequalities and

discrimination are so evident that even the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) made a lot of criticism and accusations against the Cuban government. And certainly the CERD rapporteur for Cuba in 2011, the prestigious Colombian jurist Pastor Elias Murillo, was the object of discrimination when he was passing through the Island as an incognito tourist. What happened in regards to the unfortunate article is not an isolated event. Given the reaction unleashed by the authorities against Obama's impact, perhaps the journalists and executives thought that it was lawful to challenge such an uncomfortable visitor even with racist derision. Nobody noticed the wrongful act and nobody deign to stop it on time, because the racist speech and slurs are so normal and tolerated in Cuba. Arandia's article was certainly uncomfortable to read because of the repeated syntax errors and internal consistency, but the key is actually that it got lost in perspective: the deplorable incident is part of a daily dynamic in Cuba, since what she insists on calling revolution does not simply coexist with racism, but generates it with so many silences, omissions and misrepresentations, in addition to measures that deepen the inequalities and social injustices. To make clear awareness of the transcendence and risks in such a racist environments, Arandia should remember that in March 2009, at the express request of the political police, she expelled the antiracist activists Juan Madrazo, Leonardo Padrón and Leonardo Calvo from a public debate held under her attention at the headquarters of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC).

And on May 20, 2012, after the arbitrary detention of five independent anti-racist leaders who wanted to participate in the commemoration of the uprising by the PIC in 1912, she publicly said that she did care neither about such an act of repression nor about the fate of the activists. She only care about protecting the position she has reached. Only when it is fully restored the debate on racial issues, history, identity and the subsisting inequalities; only when it is no longer tolerated in silence the injustice against the unknown or anonymous young people of African descent, always arbitrarily threatened in the street by the police; only when the Afro-descendants recover our civic and public voice in order to reaffirm our identity, to defend our rights and to channel our concerns; only when legal mechanisms are activated to effectively fight against any discrimination; only then the visitors could come to our country without risk of suffering another racist offense.

After Obama

Yusimí Rodríguez

Journalist

Havana, Cuba

When I learned that the Gourriel brothers had defected from the national baseball team in the Dominican Republic, I was sure it was the event of the year in Cuba. It could only be overcome by the visit of the American president, who had not been confirmed yet, and the Rolling Stones concert, which for many was still a dream. Both events hap-

pened. After more than 80 years, an American sitting president came to Cuba, and shortly after that the British Stones rolled in Havana. These two events almost overshadowed Easter. On Friday March 25, many woke up without knowing whether it was a holiday, but everyone knew that the Rolling Stones would play at the Sports City Coliseum



With the Cuban people

Obama was rated as the best mayor of Havana. "Because of his visit, more streets were repaired in one month than in the entire history," said a neighbor in a poll conducted by *Havana Times*. Obama arrived in Havana on Sunday, March 20, a day after our President

Raúl Castro said goodbye to his Venezuelan counterpart, Nicolás Maduro. As a good political ally, Castro condemned the decision of the US government to continue considering Venezuela as a security threat. If anyone thought that taking the side of our brother country

and oil supplier would endanger the renewed relations with the northern neighbor, they were wrong. Now is not the time when the Cuban government resigned from attending two Olympic Games (for many Cuban athletes, it meant losing the opportunity to participate in them) in solidarity with a political ally. Now the streets were decorated to welcome the historic enemy.

The color does not matter ... does it?

Castro and Obama held a meeting and offered a press conference that was aired on Cuban television on March 21, just the date chosen by the United Nations to commemorate the International Day against Racial Discrimination. The latter was completely ignored by the official national press. Both the Granma newspaper (Official Organ of the Communist Party of Cuba) and the TV media (except the Multi Channel Telesur) abstained from giving the slightest reference. However, it is significant that just that day the first black president of such a racist country like the United States was in Cuba. Indeed, one of the facts that the Cuban official media tried to minimize from the very beginning was the arrival of an African American to power in the United States, by stating it means nothing because black Americans continue to die at the hands of white policemen. Even so, Obama's ascent to the U.S. presidency (twice) shows that even in a racist country, if there is a democratic system (although imperfect), a black man can become president and even be re-elected. Not only African Americans and Latinos voted for him, but also many whites who saw him as an alternative. In a radio interview recently discovered by BBC and given by Martin

Luther King Jr. shortly before receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he referred to white Americans who advised him to wait for changes in the people's mind. They tried to convince him that it was better than implementing laws, since these would not change the people overnight. MLK said that perhaps he could not achieve what he wanted, but at least he could avoid being lynched with impunity. That's the law for: not for changing the minds, but for making things to work better. In the United States, an extremely racist country, the laws have made it possible for a black man to become president.

Who will they appoint or who I'm voting for

Such a reality did not pass unnoticed and we cannot avoid to compare it with ours. President Fidel Castro announced his retirement in 2018; people on the streets wonder who would be next or who will be appointed instead of who will be elected or what the candidates will give me to improve my life. Obama's reference that the people should elect their president has raised comments and reflections among Cubans; it has awakened the anaesthetized minds and Cubans begin to question at least why we can only vote for our delegate in the neighborhood and for the candidates (nominated from above) to the National Assembly. In either case we don't vote based on the candidate's plan or how he or she will vote in Parliament on certain issues that affect us. We vote based only on her or his biography. Should a U.S. President come to Cuba to call attention to an electoral system designed for indefinitely keeping a political elite in power? No. In recent years, many Cubans have been

gradually expressing their discontent and criticism to the system beyond their private circles. They are doing so on buses, bus stops, and in the endless lines to buy potatoes or eggs. The defeat of both Cristina Kirchner's party in Argentina, Chavez's party in the parliamentary elections in Venezuela, and Evo

Morales in the referendum on his reelection in Bolivia have shown that if a democracy was established in Cuba, with several parties and without the absolute control of the media by the government, the political elite could not have simply seized the power for so many decades.



His address to the Cuban People

Obama publicly expressed his view that people should directly elect their president and he did not circumvent other Cuban issues. Thusly his popularity increased among the Cuban people after being already very popular since he ran for president and above all due to his audacity to normalize relations with Cuba and to criticize the embargo. He helped to encourage the debates whether at home or in the cafes, hair salons, barber shops, and the ubiquitous lines of the everyday life. Should we take the United States as a model? Definitely

not. And not because Obama himself has acknowledged that no one should follow the model of anyone, but because history has shown that imitating foreign models can only lead to failure. The U.S. is an example that democracy does not guarantee social justice. And we must not give up on our dreams of social justice. We must not become a satellite of the United States, as we should never have been one of the Soviet Union. Our media insisted in diminishing Obama's race as a factor, but this factor is crucial, as the Citizens

Committee for Racial Integration (CIR) recognizes in its statement on the International Day against Racial Discrimination: "Despite the racism in the United States, the modernizing and integrating trends impose decency in the field of politics, and send the strong message that we are definitely all the same (...) The others may no longer be the subordinate exotics." By deciding that racism and racial discrimination had ended, the Cuban government titled itself as champion in such a struggle and muted the debate on an unresolved issue after snatching the autonomy of the Afro Cubans, turning them into debtors of the Revolution that supposedly made us "people", and ignoring both the history and the role of the African descendants in the nation-building process.

Remember ... What part of the history?

For the Cuban government it would have been easier to deal with the visit of a high-class Anglo-Saxon American president, interested in restoring relations and lifting the embargo. The latter ultimately constitutes an obstacle to the American entrepreneurs seeking to do business in Cuba. That kind of president would represent the power in the hands of the white elite, the inability of African Americans to come to power. Because it is clear that the Cuban political elite wants normal relations that allows doing business with the U.S., but need to keep a belligerence face so that Cubans do not stop seeing the US government as the enemy. That's why the Cuban government does everything possible to reject the American president. The opinions published in the press are skeptical. Those who see these new relationships as positive, call to remain vigilant, to remember the past,

against Obama's sound advice of stop being "hostages of the history". Being hostages of history prevents us for moving forward, but forgetting it condemns us to repeat it. We must forget neither the politics of ripe fruit nor the embargo, which were not implemented to encourage the Cuban people. The question is what part of the history should be remembered according to the guidance of the Cuban government. The government and the media insist on Obama's responsibility for something implemented when he was just a child. He allegedly owes an apology to the Cuban people for the hardships that the embargo has caused for decades. However, neither the former president and eternal Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, nor the current President Raúl Castro, who during the presidency of his older brother was Minister of the Armed Forces, have apologized to the Cuban people, for instance, for the Military Units to Aid Production (Spanish acronym UMAP) in which homosexuals, religious, rockers, freaks and everyone considered deviant by the government were held; for the homosexuals, religious and all who were not in favor of the Revolution expelled from universities and workplaces; for having arrogated to themselves the right to decide what type of music Cubans could hear and what type of literature they could read (as if it were the price to pay for the Literacy Campaign and the universal access to education); for the acts of repudiation against those who dissented and left the country, and against the dissidents and opponents nowadays, although they are also part of the Cuban people; for all the human rights viola-

tions already committed and still being committed, according to our own President Castro.

Now we can say: Human rights are violated in Cuba

Before Obama arrived, we knew he would meet with dissidents and speak of human rights. His Cuban counterpart would not be able to evade the issue. And he did not. During the press conference on March 21, journalist Andrea Meachung (NBC) asked about the guarantee of these rights in Cuba. Castro responded with another question: "How many countries in the world meet the 61 human rights?" He answered himself: "None. Some meet less; others more. We are within the last ones. Cuba complies with 47 human rights." Of those 47 guaranteed rights (according to him) he mentioned free public health, free and universal access to education, that every Cuban child is born in a hospital regardless of their economic status or how remote his or her family lives; health and education (again); ah, equal pay for women and men for equal work, although practically women have less access to the best paid job. It cannot be denied that Castro showed signs of goodwill. Not only by admitting that Cuba complied with 47 human rights (therefore at least 14 are violated, if we take his calculation as correct), but also expressing willingness to release, before the night was over, all Cuban political prisoners if the Cuban-American journalist who asked about them could give him a list of names. Provide such a list would have been very difficult for the journalist. In Cuba, the status of political prisoner or prisoner of conscience is not recognized. Writers and journalists Jorge Olivera and Raúl Rivero, incar-

cerated during the Black Spring (2003), told me they were imprisoned with common criminals despite the fact that they had been tried for violating Law 88 (a.k.a. Gag Law), which punishes anyone who, in the interests of a foreign state, commits an act with the intent to diminish the independence of the Cuban state or the integrity of its territory, incurring in ten to twenty years of prison or death. That law constitutes a threat to those who exercise freedom of speech and press, and it has not been repealed. In most cases, as exemplified by writer Angel Santiesteban, the official cause of trial and imprisonment is a criminal offense, but actually it is a punishment for political activism. Santiesteban was jailed for allegedly injuring the mother of his child; however, all warnings he received before being paroled were related to their links with dissidents. Officially, he was a common prisoner, but he was treated as a political prisoner without having such status granted.

Changing everything that must be changed ... so that everything remains the same

Cuban authorities are resorting now to the tactic of making short and arbitrary detentions. It would have been more productive and interesting that the journalist asked for the abuses against the Ladies in White, who tried—the very Sunday President Obama arrived in Havana—to maintain their routine of peacefully marching. Many of them were arrested together with other dissidents, as if the Cuban authorities also refused to vary their routine. Opponents and human rights activists say they are suffering temporary detentions and the reports have increased in recent months.

The statement of President Castro that Cuba does not guarantee (at least) 14 human rights seems a blatant announcement that they will continue to be violated. While Obama was delivering his speech at the Grand Theater "Alicia Alonso" in Havana, my colleague of *Havana Times*, Erasmo Calzadilla, was violently arrested along with a group of dissidents, including two women ("What I experienced after Obama's speech," *Havana Times*, March 24, 2016). On Friday 25th, Good Friday, at the concert of the *Rolling Stones*, Mick Jagger said he knew that playing or singing his music was not allowed in Cuba for many years, but that things were changing. Just three hours earlier, several Ladies in White and dissidents were arrested as they tried to attend a performance. What is changing in Cuba? That which guarantees that everything remains the same. Now Cubans can listen to the *Rolling Stones* and even read *1984* by George Orwell, which came to light in the recently concluded Book Fair, fifteen years after an acquaintance of mine lost his teaching post because he had lent this very book to a student. But still Cubans can neither disagree with nor oppose the regime, nor associate peacefully to seek to change the constitution.

"It turns out that fourteen are violated"

In the face of the people that until now were convinced that no human rights are violated and the so-called human rights activist are mercenaries working for the American government, the statement of President Castro demonstrates the legitimacy of the work done by the human rights defenders. The day after Obama's speech, I went to the

movie theater Infanta to watch "Selma" (what a coincidence, a film about Martin Luther King Jr.) and heard a woman saying that she was born before the triumph of the revolution and always believed that no human right was violated in Cuba. "It turns out that fourteen are violated," she whispered puzzled. The man next to her added: "Of course, even the Ladies in White, who are dummy, realized that." Understandably, Cubans start to wonder which rights are not respected in Cuba. However, the official media resorted to re-direct our attention to the human rights that are not enjoyed by many citizens in the rest of the world and themselves and are guaranteed by our government, mainly the universal access to health and education. But it is the first time that Cubans heard the president saying it publicly, that not all rights are protected in our country. Despite all the efforts of our government to counter Obama's influence through the media (at least five opinion pieces and one more of Fidel Castro himself), the positive effect is evident among the people in Cuba, who are still talking about him and will continue to speak positively as a topic of conversation while standing in line.

"We don't need any gift"

In a line to buy eggs, a woman behind me said she needed three cartons: "Two for me, and one to send to my family in the East. I should wrap it in newspaper pages, put it carefully into a plastic bucket, and send it by train. In the East there are no eggs at all, and when a few go on sale, the police must intervene, because people get injured and even killed. There are no potatoes either, but sending them has been prohibited." Someone jumped into the conversation:

"But the Commander in Chief said we don't need anything as gift." The woman replied: "Yes, he says that because he does not need anything; he screwed us." I keep hearing comments like that. It has been the main effect of the article "Brother Obama", written by Fidel Castro, who asserted that we don't need anything from the US since we have all the resources for developing the country through our own efforts.

People wonder: if we have the resources and do not need anything, why have we spent year after year in this precarious situation, why don't we move forward, how long must we continue to strive.

Cultural openness in Cuba: *an unfinished business*

Luis Oleiydis Reinosá
Antilla, Holguín, Cuba

The "ultimate" connoisseurs of the Cuban culture have dubbed reggaeton—a genre with more than 15 years of great achievements throughout Latin America and the Caribbean—as the pollutant of good manners and the dealer of sexual merchandise. This case is just a reference among many other things that the Ministry of Culture aims to root out. We cannot continue inculcating what suits the government just to show worldwide that Cuba is a cultured country, much less if the ordinary Cubans do not really have access to a broad spectrum of culture, since the better and greater shows take place in places where prices are not affordable. We also have limited access to good books in which most of the people are interested, no matter who writes them, whether Cubans or foreigners. There are Cuban troupes that just want to perform abroad and show no interest in visiting, for instance, the eastern part of the country, where a cultural development is needed. The films with strong social content are not shown, because they touch the Cuban reality. In many cases they are exhibited only abroad because they question the Cuban social system. The theater companies already established have achieved a phenomenal level, but their

mise en scenes are simply controlled whenever a social problem is reflected, for example economic deprivation, racial or gender discrimination, homelessness, marital conflict, political orientation or many others. The main course in Cuban cultural menu is always the music; yes, the Morpheus' music that is numbing and relaxing for so many people. It is "the pain of Lola", as they say in good Cuban, because the people clinging to the aberrations of the archaic social system simply don't like it. Now the aberrant idealism of removing the "bad" from Cuban society is in course of collision with the blessed reggaeton. Now it is more clear that everything depends on who does it. As always, the skin of the protagonist determines the consequences, either for better or worse. Even leading figures of the Cuban cinema have questioned the rhythm. They have forgotten that they were once young and under the influence of the Beatles and the hippies. Back then, many texts and sounds were revolutionaries and also brought the feeling of disagreeing with the regime. Some of the very people turning against reggaeton were also a target of the government and its cultural policies. Apparently no one remembers why Fidel Castro delivered his famous

speech *Words to the Intellectuals* (1961). Several figures of the arts raised and showed then their discontent with the management of culture and the ways of doing arts under influences contrary to their beliefs. Nobody remembers how much was done to mute the plastic artists that started to show their concerns. After so many years of continuous cultural censorship, very few artists are chosen to get benefits or programs which, in some ways, allow their criticism of the socialist system. Others are committed to the government and provide a significant amount of money from abroad, but the people are punished any way. No one can deny the quality of our artists and their works, but ... Why does it depend on the judgment of the political leadership? Why does everything have to respond to the facade that the regime wants to show the world, if cultural organizations such as the Hermanos Saíz Association (AHS) dare to defend the artists? Why some artists strive to protect the state budget and abstain from delivering the cultural performance that any citizen deserves anywhere in the country? Why one of the most prestigious film directors, Juan Carlos Cremata, is questioned, repressed and criticized only because he recreated a truth that nobody can hide anymore? Why does it become more difficult every year to deliver the artist culture to the people, due to reductions in the state budget, if the artists are increasingly paying taxes to the State? Why some of them are branded as counter-revolutionary and the bureaucracy makes all efforts to remove them from the cultural scene, if they are only artists who insist in making revolutionary changes from the progressive per-

spective of improving the quality of live the arts and through different initiatives beyond the official discourse? Why the concept "human rights" remains the government's G Spot and its contents is manipulated against the pro-democratic civil society? We would spend a lot of time trying to answer these questions, which are not comfortable for those who have spent a lifetime doing everything possible in order to keep our people alienated, away from the paths opened by technology, foreign travel, socialization with foreign visitors. They even prevent people from learning about the universal declaration and international covenants on human rights, which are also culture. The State has the duty to guarantee these rights and fulfill its obligations, but bans, detentions and violations of human dignity persist, without recognizing once and for all that such rights are not specific of any State, culture or country, but inherent to everyone in the world. A daily complaint of many artists is the abuse of power by managers and administrative officials, even in the payments. Thus, there is widespread lack of interest in works that seek to politicize culture and give a good external image of Cuban communism. Holguin has echoed the judgment of the president of the AHS provincial chapter, Yuniór García, on such unjustifiable situations. He dared to judge former dictator Fidel Castro as well as Luis Antonio Torres, First Secretary of the Communist Party in the province. This move tells us that the wall of silence is increasingly thinner. We just have to find a way to exercise the right to a social and cultural discourse in order to reach all understandable, consistent and encourag-

ing means to unmask the intentions of social exclusion hiding behind politics. It is time to sustain positive options of change in favor of the population, to make a real opening without discriminatory limitations. Even a political, constitutional opening is possible, since the greatest barrier is the hegemony of a single party. These cultural facts could transcend as the people's message, in virtue of the participation of people in the debate of common themes, as the voice of society itself.

There is no meeting or assembly on artistic culture in which the Communist Party does not discharge its hostility and misunderstanding of the main issues of freedom of expression and assembly and association, but if culture is the vanguard of the revolution, then Cuba has to open itself culturally to the world, without conditions or misgivings. It would be fascinating to show how we are, what we think and what we want, without anyone telling us what to do or say.

Workshops and competitions: Necessary Art for teens in Alamar

Iris Ruiz
Scenic Artist
Havana Cuba

Necessary Art Studios seeks to help in the enhancement of active and conscious individuals who play their roles with social responsibility and a commitment to the future of their environment. On the basis of a 2015 research paper, this year has been dedicated to hold workshops and competitions for the benefit of the children at the community of Alamar Heights who are in the stage of early or teenage youth (ages 12 to 17) according to the Code of Childhood and Youth.

Alamar

This suburb is located in the municipality of *Habana del Este* (Eastern Havana), about 7 km. from the center of the capital along the road leading to the eastern beaches. It is a sort of dormitory town, built in the 70s and 80s as the largest urban project of the Cuban government, carried out by the so-called micro brigades, i.e., groups of workers from all over the country that built the very housing units in which they would live with their families. The project was frustrated by the economic crisis after the Soviet socialist camp vanished. The budget ran out of funds and it froze the development of a city with over one hundred thousand inhabitants, who inherited a minimal and decaying infrastructure. This city does not even have a

cemetery. There were not parks, churches, hospitals, recreation centers, restaurants or theaters neither. In the 90s another government project, under the management of the Historian of Havana, Eusebio Leal, was responsible for reviving the construction of buildings in order to relocate the families that had to move from the historic center of the capital as a result of the renovation and touristic exploitation of the place. However, only a funeral home was added to the city and a park was finally concluded after its civil works were interrupted due to lack of resources. The progressive isolation of Alamar promotes violence and high rates of mortality among young people and adolescents. The territory has been declared as highly risky and there are no options for the younger generations to develop their potential for the benefit of society. Many young people are desperately seeking ways to emigrate. The mass emigration and the denial to procreate because of the lack of economic opportunities and freedoms for healthy living turned into necessity the development of alternative educational and cultural projects.

Situation

Lacking of both state attention and alternative social projects by communi-

ty leaders, Alamar Heights faces the generational isolation as a key factor of risk for teens. Within the population of almost 5,000 inhabitants—estimated on the basis of the number of communal buildings in the territory—about 1,800 are teenagers. The community has two secondary schools and a high school, but no other state or private institutions to support the cultural coexistence. There are neither places for healthy recreation nor alternative teaching opportunities. For teenagers it is very difficult to socialize with other generations or to make any kind of contribution. Adolescents are excluded from the community's social reality. As a result, the rates of youth violence, delinquency and affiliation to drugs and prostitution steadily increase. A mobile playground in early December 2015, playing music until twelve o'clock, caused three major street fights with knives between youth gangs in different areas of Alamar. Five teenagers were wounded and some equipment was broken. The authorities withdrew this amenity from the community and thusly idle time and lack of opportunities turned the young people more vulnerable. Religious groups are working in the community to provide spaces for children. Although pubescent young people are considered children by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), they need differentiated attention for the activities they prefer to share and by which they feel represented as social beings. And that's the point where no one seems to think, as if such a critical stage wouldn't be important for shaping the personality through learning, confirmation and strengthening of ethical, aesthetic and civic values.

The new communications technologies

Here we have a very important means in the socialization of young adolescents, but the purchasing power of the community is typically low and these technologies are expensive. Moreover, it is difficult to have access. The community only has a Computing Youth Club, where young people do not use to go because the lack of resources is almost absolute and the Internet services are provided at unaffordable prices. In 2015, 231 adolescents from the high school July 26 were surveyed. Only 10 (4.3%) used the so-called Community Network, an initiative carried out by young people in the neighborhoods. Its legal status is not determined yet, but it is conveniently allowed by the state organs. 57.1% (132 teens) recognized the advantages of social networks: making new contacts and relationships, sharing photos, improving communications, opening to the world and learning about other cultures and ways of thinking. Another situation was clear at the school. The research work by teams are led by those with computer and printer at home rather than by those who have the proper skills and knowledge in regard of the subject. This creates discomfort and, far from stimulating the research, it entails disappointment. Hence the families are dealing with conflicts and contradictions generated by educational and social structures designed for young people from the perspective of bad policies.

The project

Working with a focus group from the high school July 26, we proceed to survey, review and analyze different documentary sources of the education system, as well as publications of the

Center for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS). It allowed us to realize the education and training needs and interests of the adolescents in the community. In January we started with a workshop on creative drawing by the facilitator Joel Martinez with 18 teenagers. The workshop was specifically oriented to recreational education through thematic expression regarding the respect in the interpersonal relation-

ships, violence and gender and race discrimination, and the ways to solve interpersonal conflicts. Teens learned new techniques using different materials for their work, which give more expressive force. At the end there was a contest between the participants with their respective works. Everyone was excited and a key factor was moving the event from the community to a rented space in El Vedado.



The workshop in full swing

Most of the works dealt —in very different ways— with the violence and how it manifests itself in daily life. One of the girls had lost her father due to cancer less than a year ago. She performed her job as a postcard of love for her mother, who is in the terminal stage of the same disease. While this child saw violence manifested in the very processes of illness and death, others tried to show their best feelings through hearts, musical notes, warm and soft colors... Other reflected oppression, violence and discrimination through the national symbols such as the Cuban flag or the name of Cuba, in drawings with

bars and ships at sea. Thusly they showed their dissatisfaction with the social environment and the few opportunities for their future. The workshop demonstrated that the techniques of creative work serve to express oneself without censorship. After evaluating the works, the jury presided by Joel selected the best drawings in quality and content. They were rewarded on the basis of composition, tension and rhythm, which are the determining factors in the sense of time, format, style, message and use of color. While the jury was deliberating, the guys enjoyed a cultural moment with Saman-

ta, a 12 year-old pianist, percussionist and singer. She performed some piano

pieces and sang allegorical themes.



Samanta and her audience

Soft drinks, fruit cocktail, salted snacks, cookies and sweets were distributed. The parents helped by preparing cocktails and the buffet. Their integration into the project was one of the most beautiful achievements. Three awards and a mention were granted. The first prize was a 16-gigabyte flash memory, an almanac of 2016, an adventure book

for young people, a pen and a key ring; the second prize was a memory of 8 GB, an almanac, a book and a pen; the third prize consist of a 4 GB memory stick, an almanac, a book and a pen. The holder of the mention was provided with an almanac, a book, a pen and a key.



The winners of prize and mention

The award was celebrated with applause and laughter, great joy, photos and music, until the bus came to pick them up. Everyone was very satisfied with the event, since they have never had the

opportunity to participate in a space where parents and children organically came together without being embarrassed or feeling pressured, but healthily sharing and having fun.

Is the impersonation a kind of art in Cuba?

Nonardo Perea
Havana Cuba

I was just 18 years when a gay person brought me for the first time to a house where impersonation was secretly and illegally performed. Before reaching the venue at the Capri neighborhood, in the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, my companion gave me instructions on what to say, with special emphasis on impersonating the singer and actress Mirtha Medina. To be frank, I had already gone to some of her

concerts and she looked excellent, but wasn't my favorite. Eventually I discovered that the interest of my companion was to make the things more difficult around one of the hosts, who despite having black skin and being too old, impersonated the white-skinned Medina. He shared his life with the other host, who had chosen to impersonate mestizo singer Fara María.



At first I did not understand impersonation and it seemed laughable to me to enter a world where everything was virtually a farce. The shows were on Saturdays and Sundays; the house was crowded with gay people coming just to see and enjoy. What they admired the

most were the costumes, because no one sang with his voice, but mimicked the songs played in a Russian tape recorder. Without hardly realizing it, I ended up a good day inside an improvised dressing room, with neither clothes nor shoes of good quality to wear, learning how to

apply my makeup, because it was very clear to me from the start that I could not look like a clown. Everything outside this sort of clubhouse was wonderful, but inside the story was different: clothes scattered everywhere and cigarette butts on the floor ready to burn the soles of the feet. Among those who boasted of good makeup, good clothes and false nails, I sat on the edge of the bed without using even a cosmetic base, with only my eyes outlined in black and my lips in shades of red. I was already the Material Girl: Madonna. I have chosen her for my representations, which were running for more than a decade. Despite my shortcomings, I always got applause from the audience. Patio artists like Annia Linares or Marucha, were played masterfully by the well-known impersonator “Imperio”. From this environment arose

Lola, an excellent comedian who does not live in Cuba anymore, as well as others who have died of AIDS or are still working at places recently created for homosexuals. These were difficult times for impersonation in Cuba. We had often to run out of the house due to police raids. Nowadays, doing a show with transvestites does not astonishes either the police or anyone else. Obviously the times have changed, but in favor of the arts. Before, the impersonator fully embodied a character and studied him or her from head to toe in order to master all of his or her gestures. The most special thing was the magic to achieve the almost perfect personification, but it does not really happen nowadays, although the rivalries, jealousies and other miseries of this less explored world, continue running.



Performance “Where is the taxi?” by Nonardo Perea

Today the shows are not interesting and only some transvestites strive to make themselves a good reputation. Voice dubbing remains the hard core, but very few impersonators do a decent job with their own voices. And it prevails a total ignorance of what happens in other parts of the world. In that sense Cubans have not evolved; on the contrary and as the revolution itself, we have turned so static and lost the ability to reinvent ourselves as artists, which is actually what a professional must feel and want to be: a true creator of art. It is not enough to get a pair of heels and a glamorous dress to take the stage banging themselves in the chest. Art should not become mere entertainment, but a display of talent, and most of the transvestites do not have talent, but only courage to stand in front of an audience, get a little hysterical and dub a song from the times of Columbus discovering America. I have not attended a show since a year ago. I got bored of the same, and I feel that the public is given more of a circus than a quality performance. However, it recently surprised me that the popular and informal weekly package of TV shows included the first chapters of a Chilean production: *The Switch*, a competitive reality show of impersonations that somehow serves even to change the perception of the viewers who reject this kind of creative art.

The program opens their minds and manages to make them understand that behind every one of the impersonators stands a human being who feels and, above all, needs to be understood and accepted with all his or her differences. The impersonators imitate artists, perform short plays, recreate movie scenes... They should know how to do their own makeup, choose their costumes, sing with their own voice and improve their attitudes in the course of the show. As always, there are rivalries, poison, criticism of the less graceful or more frivolous, but all in all *The Switch* is a funny program that entertains and makes me realize how badly we do impersonations in Cuba. Our impersonations have many shortcomings, but there is no obstacle for giving everything on stage and do what you really should do in order to be respected. Because not everyone has the gift of being a qualified artist, but many people are confused and also confuse others while giving shows that the public does not deserve. Ultimately impersonators work for their audience.

The Marginal Culture or the Culture of Marginality in the Cuban Visual Arts

José Clemente Martínez Gascon

Teacher, artist and art critic

Resident in Cuba

"The human spirit floats on the land where men lived, and we breathe it".

Jose Martí

Although the concept of marginality has various sociological approaches, the marginal individuals and groups continue acting and living in conditions of survival, which force them to perform actions against the established codes and standards. These actions are expressions of countercultures, subaltern cultures or subcultures. They are the tangible expression of dissatisfaction with expectations. The marginality was widely rejected by the bodies of the high culture and its elite —specialists, academics, and other professionals in the institutional sphere— but it turned into attractive and tolerated social manifestation

overnight, as it was demanded by the interest and curiosity of foreign collectors, especially European, with preferences for certain atypical cultural practices, genuine indigenous art and or oddities by people who were disqualified as social subjects in the past. The alternative art spaces (underground) addresses issues or topics that irreverently manifest the dissatisfactions, divergences and deprivations of the subjects who inhabit the so-called urban peripheries. The peculiarity of their practices is the artistic genuine expression without consent, approval or authorization by the mechanisms of the official culture.



Abikú – Installation by Santiago Rodríguez Olazabal

The marginal artist develops his creative work without any contact with the established artistic institutions. His or her motivation is simply the pleasure of performing with original techniques and unusual materials. They reflect extreme mental states, unique idiosyncrasies or elaborated fantasy worlds. In the religious and artistic practices nowadays we can find points of encounter between rituals and the artistic discourse, not anymore as the stereotypical vision of folklore, but as an integral part of the contemporary art languages. Thusly there are spaces where these artists participate with sovereign independence, as subjects of multiple cultural concerns, even esoteric. They engage in the exchange of ideas and personal or collective projects within their lifeworld. The

official culture insists on imposing values that actually crumble in the praxis, and on avoiding that such spaces gain access to promotion and dissemination. One of the recurring themes in the marginal art is the Afro-Cuban syncretic worldview with all its derivations. Another trends in the so-dubbed poor art (*Povera*) flows between folklore and new technologies. The evident counterpoint between the scientific worldview and the Afro-Cuban rites, deities, and legends is still a controversial ideological component of the national *ajiaco*. The conceptual disputes have often led to situations in which the creative artist had to divert his or her works to follow the paths imposed by the cultural policy.



Bernardo Sarría, artist and worshiper

The syncretic religious practices of Afro-Cuban origin, which were branded as retrogressive by the scientific thinking in the past, show a constant present in the discourse of Cuban art. The perspectives assumed by women like Magdalena Campos, Martha Maria Perez and Belkis Ayon have moved the veil of gender controversy at the center of “the black issue” in parallel with the discrimination of women. The project known as the Maniac Art Museum (MAM) was

developed between 2012 and 2014 as an autonomous space of visual arts. In addition to financially support artists and curators, MAM is a traveling museum and it disseminates the kind of artistic works that define and differentiate expressive forces and themes with plenty of emotional, fragile, troubled, prohibited or secluded issues, which includes Spiritism, witchcraft and dangerous minds.



Maniac Art Museum, located in 106 Línea Street, Havana

This approach to Spiritism and *Eggun*, to the Yoruba religion and its many issues, as well as to other religious currents, foster that such an art acquires value even as totem, emblem, talisman or religious instrument. Such an art also holds another spiritual value, neither religious nor aesthetic. It is a sort of "something else" that certain works display by sending messages from the unknown and the incomprehensible world. They impact and startle whenever we come in front of the art piece. In our superficial, skeptical, and de-spiritualized environment, finding such works is a real privilege, but the big problem is that only society can diagnose the ability, enterprising spirit and development of their creators.

Everything outside of the socially designed track is excluded, dismissed as uncontrolled or socially inappropriate. The modern society and its bodies are continuously applying methods for signaling the artistic references that are not guided by the usual categories, but it is impossible to marginalize the independent conscience that walks free in the spiritual realm, with no strings attached, in order to free the spirit.

"I would have liked to be born in a country with rights"

Veronica Vega

Writer

Havana, Cuba

Juan Carlos Briñas is a vocational cartoonist and illustrator who worked as caricaturist in the dissident media Talk Press.

Tell me about your childhood.

I was born in San Leopoldo, a very marginal neighborhood at Central Havana. My childhood was more or less normal until my parents divorced. I was seven and it was very traumatic for me and my brother. At first we lived with my mother, but she had no patience with us. So we went to live with our father, who proved to be much better prepared to deal with us. Although he played both roles, a mother is always needed and I felt her absence for many years.

How did drawing appear in your life?

I drew like most kids, but I discovered that it was much more than a game for me. It became my way of expression and communication. In 1981 I saw *Voltus V*, an animated popular manga for my generation, and I felt I wanted to do something like it. I started visiting the ICAIC animation studios and I was lucky enough to see how the movie *Vampires in Havana* was done. Then another event turned my life around: I borrowed a Japanese comic book, very thick, with great stories and great dynamism. That's when I realized I did not want to be an animator, but a cartoonist.

Did you find a way to insert yourself into that world from a professional perspective?

No, we were a group of teenagers empirically drawing. We helped each other, but we didn't have anyone who directed us and no place to go to seek for guidance.

I know your way of life completely changed after being recruited for military service...

It was a horrible experience. I was not the typical boy playing baseball in the street. I secluded myself at home to draw; that was my world and I was trying to tell many stories through comics. Suddenly my life completely changed. I couldn't do what I liked and it was a violent break from everything I dreamed about. I could never adapt myself to such a system where everything is forced under duress. From the very beginning of the Previous Military Preparation I started to flee. I was caught and sent to an Intensive Training Center, which is a small prison. I was sent cut grass with a machete, but I really didn't know how to do it; so, by accident, I got a cut on one foot. Of course, I was not the only misfit. It is not a secret that young people used to cause injuries to themselves in order to get away from the military. In the hospital, I met one who had intentionally shot himself at the metatarsal.

Before being called to military service, have you had a defined political thought?

No, but then I realized that something was wrong. I could never understand why they imposed a military and political preparation that brought out the worst of me towards violence. I became very rebellious, with an attitude of "I do not accept, I do not accept". Because of disobedience, I was sentenced to prison and sent to the West Disciplinary Center at Ganuza. The military prison is a way of destroying the soldier in the short term.

Was your rebellion beyond the mere rejection to cooperate with military preparedness?

I was saturated with all of that, to the extent that I disappeared for days. The officers went to look for me at home and they even sent the military police to bring me back.

How did your father react?

I was very scared because he started seeing a young rebel in me and I had never been such a boy. My father was never rebellious with this government. He worked in the Cuban Fishing Fleet, was the head of the National Association for Innovation and Rationalization (ANIR) in Old Havana, and even a member of the Communist Party. However, he never tried to influence me ideologically, because his feelings towards his family were above politics.

What were the consequences of having been in military prison? Were you stigmatized because of that in your working life?

Not at all, but it meant an unconscious break with the government. I say unconscious because it was something I had not yet thought of.

Have you ever felt discriminated because of your humble origin or your race?

There is something instilled in us since childhood: people have to interact with

people of their same status. As a child and even as a teenager I wasn't very aware of that, but I found myself many times being stopped by the police and asked for my identification without having committed any crime, just because I was of African descent. The police even took me once to the precinct simply because I was talking to a foreigner, who did not say that I was bothering him. In Cuba, racism is something much deeper. You can feel discriminated on the street and by government organizations; I found racists even among the members of civil society groups who care about civil rights.

When did you start making cartoons with political intent?

There was a definitive event: I saw a march of Ladies in White in Paseo del Prado. They were demanding freedom for political prisoners. A year later, I did a comic strip titled "Claims" and it was published on the Internet by *Talk Press*.

Have you gotten in trouble because of your illustrations in dissident media?

Yes, the authorities have spoken to me and I was arrested at Central Park because I was carrying political cartoons, which were seized.

Do you think that there are possibilities of generating some kind of unity of purpose and action despite the division between the opposition projects?

The division among dissidents is nothing new. In times of Martí there were also divisions and since then, mankind has not changed much. The division is the vision that the government wants to spread about the opposition and it is part of its strategy for preventing recognition beyond the current levels.

Do you feel professionally fulfilled?

No. I wanted to make comics and I'm working as a cartoonist and illustrator. The Cuban cartoonist are like Cinderella, because it is an art designed for countries with a market economy. We don't have a comic industry here and therefore such art is not developed; it barely survives. While these conditions do not change, the only hope is to insert the cartoon into an alternative project with enough power to be developed.

I believe that the problem of alternative art is not so much to create projects rather to sustain them.

I agree with you, because sometimes difficulties arise within the same projects and they collapse. There is also a lack of solidarity. Those who manage to enter in a market niche do not give hints to anyone else. Such a lack of solidarity has to do with the "anthropological damage" in Cuba. Before 1959, for example, the values of the Christian religion spread with the simple principle of loving your neighbor. Now people are complaining that the children do not respect their parents, but what would have happened instead if the government itself taught us not to respect different ideas?

Are you confident about a future in Cuba, or are you mentally plotting your future abroad?

I imagine that a very positive change will happen for us, the underdogs, but I don't know how or when. I would also like to travel and experience other realities that may help me understand mine a little more. I have not had that experience. On the other hand, my situation here is very difficult. My house is in a 114 years old building two blocks from the Malecón. There was a collapse and the firefighters had to come to the rescue. My room was in the worst state, but only the eaves fell on the hall. Otherwise, I would not be telling the story.

It is true that the revolution provided houses for the people, although they had to pay for them, but my family received its house in poor condition, as the documents show, and when we asked to move to another one in better conditions or to get State resources in order to repair it, but nothing was granted. We stopped paying and only if that debt is paid off you can be approved for a capital repair of the roof. Thus, we're trying to raise the money to pay it off and see how we can rescue our house, in which we were born and want to live.

If you could change anything in the past, what would you change?

I would have liked to be born in a country with rights. That's all. We see foreigners as gods, but they are simply people who come from countries where the citizens' rights are respected. They earn wages to live, they can challenge the government's policies without being discredited, and they may travel at the expenses of their own labor. I would have liked that normal life. To extend my desires to the present, I would like for Cuba to be a democratic country with freedom of expression, where people are not attacked because they think differently and where mutual understanding and respect are possible.

Juan Carlos Briñas immigrated a few months ago to Suriname, where he works in room service at a hotel and is creating conditions to start painting and illustrating. He agreed to answer these additional questions by email.

What were you expecting to find in exile and what did you find?

Human rights. Now I feel that I can walk freely without any obtuse law enforcement agent asking me for identification with no reason; I am being treated like a human being without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

I am seeking the right to a decent salary instead of getting paid with devalued currency, and I can travel the world and even settle in another country without any problems. It would be an endless list: everything I did not have a right to have in Cuba.

Are you updated about the changes happening in Cuba?

I read the news on the Internet. They are different views, but it is not like being there.

What do you think about Obama's visit and the concert by the Rolling Stones?

I think Obama's visit was OK, but I wonder if it's not a waste of time trying to talk with chronic deaf. I see the *Rolling Stones* concert as the start —and hopefully ongoing— of the exchange between world famous artists and the suffering Cuban people.

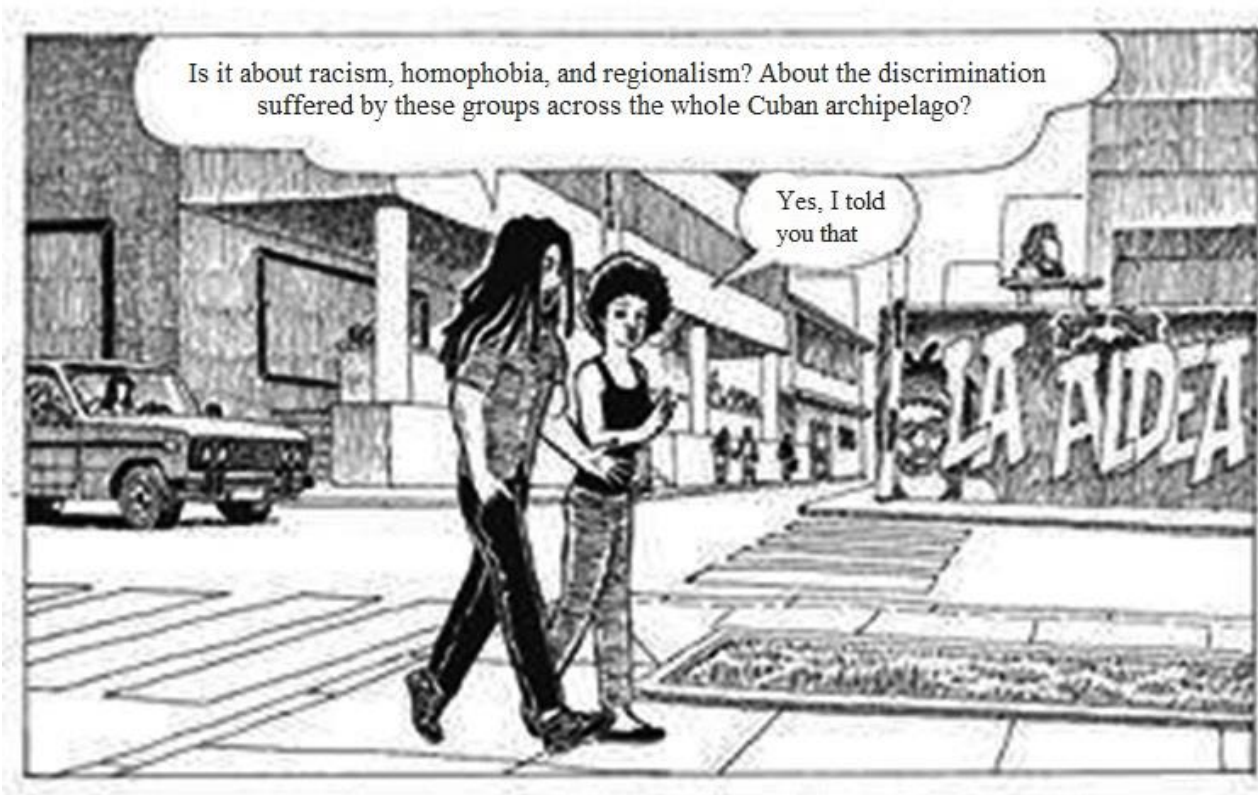
Do you think that economic and cultural openings will expand democracy?

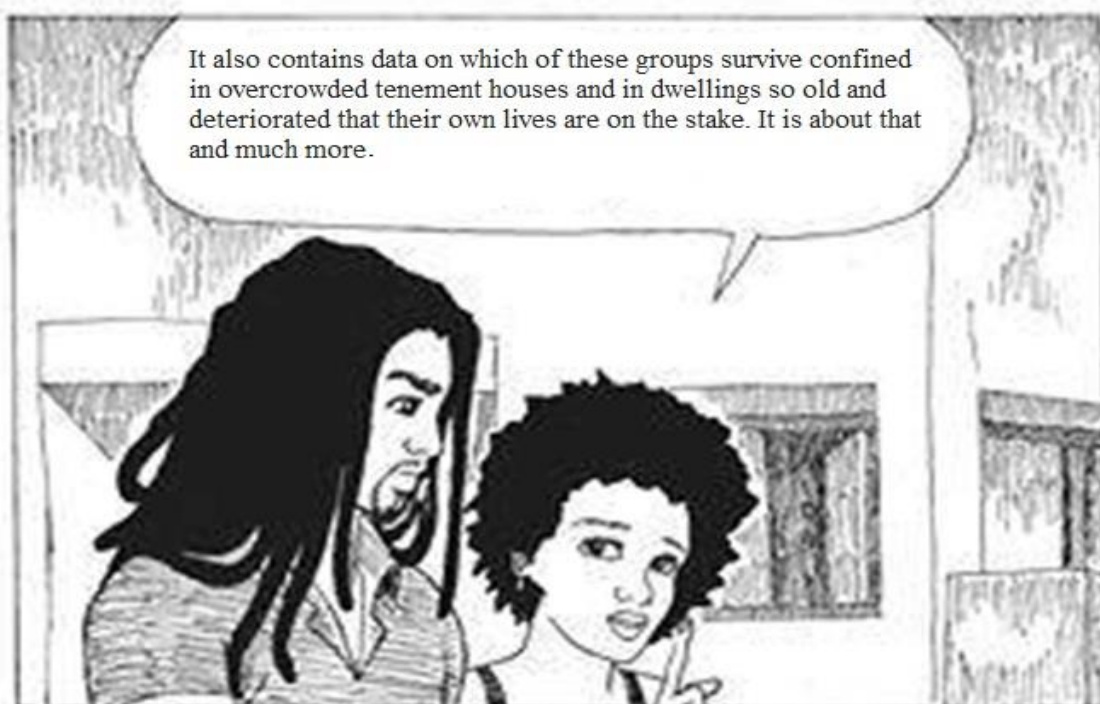
I do not think the Castro and Company family consortium is interested in losing the stranglehold of the nation. There will be no democratic opening. I want to be mistaken, I would like very much to be in error.

If it occurs, will you return to live in Cuba?

I do not know. I just know I'm Cuban and I will be a Cuban until the day I leave this world.

Juan Carlos Briñas
IDENTIDADES





Realities of Cuban Literature

Nonardo Perea
Havana Cuba

Lazaro Andres is a chemical engineer, writer and essayist. He lives in Santa Clara, in central Cuba. He graduated from the Literary Training Center Onelio Jorge Cardoso and has received the awards "Enrique Labrador Ruiz" in 2003 and 2004, as well as the scholarship "*El caballo de*

coral - The coral horse" in 2004. The editorial "*Sed de Belleza* [Thirst for Beauty] published his book of short stories *Para pintar la nada* [In order to paint the nothingness]. I recently visited him at home and could ask some questions about his work and the literature of our time.



The Santa Clara's writer Lázaro Andrés

NP: How do you see the current literary scene in Cuba, especially in the light of the latest Book Fair?

LA: Maybe it is not very literary to say it, but ultimately the literature has to do with the people who read it. In the Book Fair I realized that it was easier to find a poster of Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo than certain books. This event has been focused more in merchandising than in the authors and their readers. There are many things around that tend to clog the essential fact. Our book fair cannot be compared to others in other parts of the world that really focus on the literary issues. In the literary scene it would have been worth to decide what can be called Cuban literature, because many authors, especially the most important, do not reside in Cuba anymore and they are still writing from other places. Thus, their works are somehow subject to their own environments with the influences of other world. The Cuban literature has another serious problem: the publishing issues. We do not find much literary value even in works published because they were rewarded at certain literary contests. The competition systems has done much harm to our literature, because people do not write for the reader. They simply write to win a contest seeking the approval of a jury. Often you know in advance who will be in the jury and you write thinking about what they like. That detracts a little the literary fact and the levels of creation decay when you write for competition due to the lack of spontaneity. The author would have given something more valuable in another context. Often the published book is a rare bird. Although the system of territorial publishing houses has allowed that many writ-

ers from provinces and in their municipalities to be visible now , it has a downside that once their books are published, but neither reviewed nor commented in the press and with only a few copies and no critics, the book is virtually nonexistent and its author gets lost in the everyday life.

NP: Why a literary work awarded in a competition has not always a real literary value?

LA: Well, that's what I told you before. I remember that —while in the Literary Training Center Onelio Jorge Cardoso— I went with the provincial boys to a reading of stories by an author from Havana. I remember his name, but I will not disclose it here. The point is that the written piece was abominable, but it had deserved a prize by the Embassy of Spain. The story was full of quotations in English and references that only a reader born and raised in Havana could understand. It meant nothing to us. Many people left the room; I did not because where I was sitting was very visible and I was ashamed that everybody would see me leaving. But I should have left, because it was a reading that did not provide anything valuable. However, it was awarded. The next day we spoke with one of the teachers at the center and we wonder if it was the way we should write, because most of us do not write that way. It happened again in the Cuba Pavilion with other authors from Havana in poses that turned literature into performances. I think that literature is not a visual art that allows you to do performances in order to communicate; I conceive literature to be read, to be enjoyed by a reader and not through a performance.

By that time there was also a performance to present a book at the center Onelio Jorge Cardoso. The author said the performance was very important to understand the book, so the readers who have not seen the performance will not understand it. For me it is very difficult that something like this can be understood. I read pieces that have been awarded and I wonder where the jury found some basis to grant the award; sometimes you find pieces of good quality, but most of the time it is not the case. And I do not speak of any awards, but of major awards. Once I visited Luis Manuel Pérez Boitel, awarded with *Casa de las Américas*, and he asked me to write and write, and to send to contests. At that time, he was writing and sending to many contests, including one called by a village in Spain. I told him, Boitel, you have the *Casa de las Américas* Award, and he answered: Yes, yes, but write; here anyone can get a prize. The truth is that an author is recognized if he or she is awarded in a competition; if you are an author and you fail to get an important prize, you'll be a stranger. Simply you are not going to transcend.

NP: What inspired you to write a book of essays on the writer Ena Lucía Portela?

LA: I have written essays on other writers. The first thing I published was one essay about the storyteller Milene Fernández Pintado. It was very easy to do, because I approached her and shared experiences, because I believe that the essayist need to know a little the person and what is behind what he writes. Although you can give an opinion about a literary work without personally knowing the author, if you know her or him you can have clearer ideas. I am

very interested in narrative written by women, because there is sexism in Cuba and discrimination against the women writers. Many times they are not even considered. I remember a book fair, years ago, dedicated to Argentina, in which a panel on Cuban narrative was formed only by men who spoke only about authors who were men. Something stirred inside me. Then I sought to write about Cuban narrators from my own point of view and among these narrators Ena Lucía Portela has more specific weight, since she has a better development in the discourse and something to say. As a human being, Ena Lucía Portela is one of the most complicated people. There are other important authors, but Ena is the most interesting. She articulates a complex discourse that overlaps within the scope of what has been called the neo-baroque, with many references, a very broad cultural universe and recurring themes as the lesbian world and the homosexuality in general. In many books she reflects the marginalization from different points of view and I found them very interesting. When I started writing the essay on Ena, I thought it would be short, but I was getting very long and became practically a book that I would like to publish. Of course, it stopped at certain stage of her narrative and she continues to write; she is still a young woman and a lot of her work may appear later.

NP: What can you tell me about the contemporary Cuban authors?

LA: Speaking about contemporary Cuban writers is a bit complicated. There is a group of sacred cows, authors who have had a transcendent work and won significant awards in the '60s, as well as others who have won awards

and then disappeared from the literary scene, for example, Maria Elena Yanes, who spent many years without writing and doing other things. Anton Arrufat is a living example of those who were missing in the Cuban literary circles, but they are also those who always were on the spotlight, because they were riding and have kept on riding the wave. There are pro-government authors, that are somehow supported by the government and have not been subject to any retaliation, as Abel Prieto, who wrote some interesting books in the 1980's, despite of being a very gray decade with a very bad published literature. In the 1990's, he returned with the novel "*El vuelo del gato*" [The Flight of the Cat] and he is currently writing. On one side we have the usual and veteran authors. I always talk about one of them, Mirtha Yanes, who has plenty of critics' awards and has been recognized in various genres, from essay to narrative, but has not been taken into account for the National Award of Literature and, therefore, no book fair has been devoted to her, although she has a broad narrative work that includes even books for children. There are differences between generations. The earliest generation at the revolutionary triumph suffered reprisals for some reason: sexual behavior, practicing any religion or an active political position. Throughout the 1990's started what I would call the Cuban thaw and authors of literary quality reappeared, some with more strength than others. After generation hit hard by everything that happened in the 60's in this country, a new generation with no previous reference to the revolution started to write in a context marked entirely by the Cuban revolu-

tionary process. Its authors were born after the 70's and they are marked by that experience although they are located elsewhere in the world and in genres like science fiction. Within that group I would divide the authors from Havana, closed in and very tight universe that is difficult to be understood by the common reader without similar experiences. These authors are self-references. Amhel Echevarria, Raul Flores Iriarte, Dazna Novak and other nucleated around the center Onelio Jorge Cardoso. Some touch me and others do not touch me at all, because their works do not tell me anything and their literature is built on a structure or support like a building that has walls, but if you enter, there is nothing to discover. There are others who have something to say and I really admire, like Anna Lidia Serova. She is not among the writers who says things in the best way, but she always has something to provide in her stories and I think it's important. The literature made in province does not have many references as in the Havana milieu, perhaps due to the estrangement. Some literary works still preserve the connection to the rural context, although its characters tend to disappear. We all are writing another kind of literature, but in Havana it is the literature from the city and in province we still write about environments and conflicts within the small towns, which are reflected, for example, in the narrative on Santiago de Cuba and Holguin by Yunier Riquenes and Mariela Varona, respectively. In the group with something to say we find Maria Liliana Celorrio and especially Gleivis Choir, which I love for handling irony and humor so very well. I think that the literature brewing in the prov-

ince is much more authentic and communicates better with the reader than the literature written by the group of Havana. Somehow they have forgotten their readers.

NP: Has it been easy for you to gestate your literary work? How and where do you write?

LA: For me it is not hard to write. I write in my mind, I hold it and when I can sit at a computer I am simply translating what's in my mind. Of course the written piece requires a review and as a writer I am hardly ever satisfied with what I have done. Since I have neither a computer nor the possibility of acquiring one, I write as I can. I wrote much in the Young Club for Computing at my hometown, but it is not the best environment. You have people playing everywhere and it's difficult to focus. There is no room to lock you up with your inner voice, but at least I have some ability to concentrate. That's how I am gestating my work.

NP: How was your experience at the Literary Training Center Onelio Jorge Cardoso? Was it worthy to pass the course in 2003?

LA: The center did somehow what Salvador Redonet had done: to take the last pieces that practically nobody knew in order to publish them in an anthology that is like a debut. Previously invisible authors came thusly into existence.

That happens a little with us; when you enter the center, you have already some recognition, because entering means that you're a writer in some way, according to the opinion of the evaluation panel, even without being published. Among those who came with me, some had already published, but very bad literature, while other unpublished were much more talented. At the end, the publication does not necessarily have to do with talent or ability as a writer. It was good to know different people, their realities and their ways of writing and thinking. I was with a very good group that brought me a lot. I'll never forget that experience.

Re-modernization of the State: An Urgent Task

Manuel Cuesta Morúa

Historian and Political Scientist

Spokesman of Arco Progresista Party

National Coordinator of the Platform New Country

Member of the Citizens Committee for Racial Integration (CIR)

Havana, Cuba

After more than 50 years, Cuba needs a new contract, generated by State policies and anchored on the citizen as the sole source of sovereignty and power. The type of medieval state established by the Cuban Revolution simultaneously opened two original sources of law and sovereignty: the Revolution and the People, but the relationship between the Cubans and their State became unhinged as the former were placed at the service of the later. All modern state should be, in principle and because of principle, at the service of its citizens, but in Cuba the relation was inverted and the source of legitimacy ended up in the confusion between ownership and sovereignty, which is the basic condition of all medieval states. Cubans can sue neither the state nor its officials or bodies before the courts. It's more than just an abuse of power: it's the establishment of the abuse of power as a structural principle. The daily humiliation of citizens by those who are supposed to be their public servants is the clearest index of

perversion of this inverted relationship. The lapse of two generations is enough time for societies to enter into a new contract. The sign of vitality within a culture lies in the fundamental questions that the governed ask the people in power or seeking to exercise it. The key is neither a simple adjustment nor a correction of the mechanisms of coexistence, but a repertoire of new or slumbering questions that thoroughly challenges the views, forms of control, ways of living, lifestyles and languages of communication. This is more than complaint, discomfort or restlessness; it's the expression of a basic mismatch between the vision of society from the power and that from the society itself. By understanding this, leadership emerges; by rejecting this, domination or chaos arises. We have four generations without finding satisfactory answer for the fundamental questions. In each generational question, the government has responded with a shift from leadership to domination.

This continuous shifts went far away from the living reality of the people and led to a divorce between power, enclosed in a Revolution that already has its own past from which it can and should be judged, and Cubans, confined in their private world. Hence we all have lost sight of the nation in favor of the family and, in the worst case, the me-first attitude. We also lost sight of the State that uses its assets for supporting three types of families: the consanguineous families of the Castro brothers (a dynasty without divine-theological coverage, but with all the rights for irresponsible management), the warring families of the Sierra Maestra (enclosed in his guerrilla bubble), and the co-opted political families (surviving as socially constructed officials without leadership). Therefore, the legacy of the Cuban Revolution is a failed State successively or simultaneously rescued by foreign interests, which are meeting again in an appropriate enclave to exercise their cultural, economic, political and diplomatic geo-strategies, not always in line with our country's national interests.

Why is Cuba a country in bankruptcy?

The *political country* is governed by a segmented State that revolves around political families that mix economical, military, political and symbolic powers that make proprietary decisions that are far removed from Cubans. The institutional country is weakened by two entities: the Communist Party (PCC) and the National Assembly of People's Power (ANPP), which lose their social legitimacy due to their inherent inability to express the multiplicity of interests and cultural, ideological and political voices.

The PCC still claims superiority and self-granted legitimacy in order to exercise control over the diversity of worldviews, cultural traditions and civic options within the Cuban society. Through Article 5 of the Constitution, the PCC imposes the institutional racism. The ANPP disconnected the citizens—for destroying them as political entity—from their legitimate right to legally form their political will. The ANPP accepted the legal subordination of the popular will to other positions of power that claim to represent the political and ideological popular will, like the Politburo, which has designed itself as a kind of tropical Quom and has legitimized himself for determining, beyond any civilian State institutions, the limits of both the State action and the citizens' options, regardless of civic elections, political and cultural rights. The economic country reflects a state of affairs that no word can describe better than disaster. An ownership structure without consistency, due to its proprietary and discretionary dependency of the State, explains the structural crisis in agriculture and the strategic damage to food security. Obsolete production plants complete the economic structure that does not satisfy the domestic needs. The State is unable to develop the inherited human resources and to build on the comparative advantages of the territory. The country does not catch up harmonically with the global changes in creative approaches, technological levels, structure of markets and capital formation. The desperate sale of medical and educational services abroad—in sharp contradiction with the ideological foundations to take a position in the world circuit of capitalism—is not

structurally helping to compensate the needs of an increasingly unproductive society. If we add the external debt (Cuba is the second most indebted country in the world after Indonesia), the Cuban economy could be declared in bankruptcy and the country survived because the in-coordinated emerging capitalisms of Russia, China and Venezuela came to the rescue. Now the American capitalism opens other options. The labor country collapses. Its economic and ownership structures do not enhance productivity and profitability. Working with the State is neither a source of social wealth nor a condition to meet the needs of the families. It is not a social motivator. Both the amount and the structure of the wages do not cover the prices of essential goods in the most dynamic and stable markets: the hard currency market and the informal market. Neither the state nor the rationed markets provide stability to the basic living expenses. Cubans are forced to seek incomes out of the state economy and to develop their work ethic outside the official economic system. The government's approach towards work reproduces the Creole mentality and sees the workers in autonomous and independent activities only as a complement to the bureaucratic economy, although they actually promote freedom and horizontal mobility of the labor market and thusly innovation, profitability and wealth. For the government, these workers are proletarians at the borders of the state. Moreover, they are limited in two additional ways: the legal uncertainty of their property and the inability to accumulate assets.

The government intends to continue endorsing the workers to the bureaucracy and to great human conglomerates that are always unproductive, but serve as extra-guarantors of the state control, as in the old Spanish and Creole haciendas. Such work ethic is structurally more related to spending and wasting money in symbolic and political valued luxury projects than in projects aimed to increase productivity and savings. Therefore, work is deemed as an obligation and a duty, rather than a source of motivation and responsibility, which are the only ways to create work ethic. The ways imagined by the government for leaving the crisis behind and facing its consequences couldn't be more contradictory: the sale of workers abroad, which artificially forms some privileged labor segments and administratively and illegally punishes those who refuse to reproduce their poverty and to reduce their expectations to the state job offers. The institutional, economic and labor collapse prevents that Cuba relocates itself in the circuit of modern states. This collapse politically eliminates the modern institutional communication between the State and the citizens. There are no clear rules to ensure the continuity of the public policies and the predictability of the actions by both the citizens and the State. The Communist Party is acting as its entire discretion and so it destroys the legitimacy born of the behaviors with constitutional status. Economically, the peripheral condition of the Cuban model of production is recovered and reinvented around such centers of power like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa),

and even around countries like Venezuela, where the economy is not running according to the sense of rational action with scarce resources, but on the basis of nature (oil). Hence the insistence in recycling a selective model designed for underdevelopment. And in terms of labor it's rebounding the state enhancement of the economic profitability provided by the semi-slave labor force. If, as the statistics indicate, most of the foreign currency inflows comes from the sale of medical, educational and sports services, then the Cuban model designed for underdevelopment relies on the structurally slave labor condemned by the United Nations agencies. Thus, the re-modernization of the State is not only an ethical duty, but also an aesthetic request socially justified.

Militarism versus Civil Society

Armando Soler Hernandez
Havana, Cuba

T*he Foundations of Militarism in the Isle*

The subordination of the civil society under the jackboot is not a new phenomenon in the Cuban history. It started in the earlier times of the colonial regime, when Havana¹ was a Spanish strategic position at the entrance of the Gulf of Mexico. Throughout the whole term of domination over the island by the peninsular authority, nothing changed that ominous *sprit de corps*, despite the facts that this Spanish possession became the world's leading producer of "the white gold" of the time: sugar, and also the richest colony left in the metropolitan hands. While covering less than 1% of the Iberian imperial territory in the Americas, Cuba brought to the moribund Spanish Empire around a sixth of all the wealth it drew from the continent in four centuries. The national independence wars of the nineteenth century reinforced the military presence among the population, with a vast number of colonial troops and their local auxiliaries, as well as numerous freedom fighters.² Thus, the military spirit accompanying the colony was further reinforced after the war concluded. Their ominous presence hung like a heavy fog on the national reality, and worst, on the civilian character of the nascent republic, which in many occasions was relegated to the background. During the first 57 years of republic, the militaristic viciousness inherited from the past conflicts manifested itself intensely in national politics through the figures of ex-general-presidents and, with greater impact, through outbursts like military coups

in order to bring law and order to disrupted civil governments. This created a loophole for gun violence that would ensue as "the true birth of the mountains".

The Permanent Militarization

With the advent of the Castro regime, the model of militarized society was enthroned and consolidated itself. In this first stage of the absolute leadership by a warlord, which repeated a continental phenomenon with certain historical delay, the militarization cancelled any autonomy of civil society. It disappeared from the national landscape. Thusly, a tenacious historical claim of how to govern the country was thus fulfilled. It was imposed since the times of the *mambi manigua*, although it did not managed to prevail completely until 1959. Despite all the historical legends to legitimize its permanent shape and constant improvement, this new political-military class in power, which declared itself the natural heir of the wars and the history, has not enough foundation to consolidate a steady guiding presence in society and to prevent the loss of credibility in medium-term. After all, it was an attempt to confine in a cloister a sybaritic society very prone to the benefits of consumption and modernity coming as manna from their constant economic and cultural relations with the United States. Does anyone know how such a society could be transformed into a kind of bellicose and austere Sparta? It was something quite unthinkable and difficult that could not last too long as something attractive for the cosmopolitan Cuban society. A credible enemy and a permanent threat were needed to justify the entrench-

ment, the uniforms galore, the collective surveillance, the imminent attack, the military invasion.

The Enemy

America was a powerful presence on the island even before the latter detached from the Spanish yoke and the 13 Atlantic colonies rid themselves of the British crown and its redcoats. Despite the heavy taxes imposed by the Spanish colonial administration to export and import of goods, the American merchant fleet was constantly visiting Cuba. This activity represented twice the trade from North American ports to Britain and France. Much of the laborious transformation of an almost barren military colony to a productive emporium was due to such an impetuous trade and the related technologies. In short, the interaction between the Cuban and the American people was much more favorable than harmful from the very beginning and throughout all their history until 1959. Despite the oversizing of the unfortunate episodes and disputable aspects in the mutual relationship, it costs an enormous effort to understand how the powerful neighbor so enmeshed in our formation as a nation could so easily transformed from one year to another in the credible enemy that the newly seated regime needed to justify their stay with an endless militarization of a small country. However, this radical concept is an igniting spark in a civil society captivated by the effluvia of a picturesque mountaineer militarism that fiercely supported or silently consented the mass executions —without legal guarantees— of former or suspected henchmen of the old regime. The civil society was captivated by the jingoistic warmongering profile that never before, even during the independence wars, appeared to be a feature of the light Cuban idiosyncrasies. Such an eventual perversion of an important (although not critical) part of the

population was defined by the majority's tendency after the failure of another invasion, this time by Cuban exiles at Bay of Pigs sponsored by the United States. Thus, the civil society helped to confine itself and to throw away the key. It condemned itself to be in a site under continuous surveillance as in a military base.

The Greenhouse Effect

In a brief analysis, it is virtually impossible to define all the adverse influence of conservatism, intolerance, repression, and subordination brought by the continuing militarization to the Cuban nation. The socialist law justifies the army as both means and end. Nothing could better explain the functions of this instrument as a support system. At the same time, it intimidates the civilian population subordinated to the interests of the ruling military caste. Precisely this consistent, comprehensive development of the civil subordination to the military carried out a devastating effect on the society as a whole. Firstly, it zeroed the independence of the citizens and their civil rights. Secondly, I think the people in uniform hold an oversized sense of superiority and dominance over the rest of the population. They considered the latter fully available for complying with their commands³. Even the design of the ill-fated Special Period was aimed to subject the Cuban nation to a Pol Pot-ian military camp routine.⁴ The false view of the country in a permanent state of war and about to be invaded resisted —albeit with significant deterioration— the onslaught of more than half a century without connection to reality. The constant stoking of the "Enemy", the snatched system of mass mobilization against an imminent attack, the alleged provocations, and the government statements on the adversary provoked a radical transformation in education, customs, behavior, family relationships, cultural perspectives, and personal perception

of the real world, including the nation itself, where an atmosphere of suspicion and betrayal prevailed even through a distorted everyday language, all under a permanent setting of command and control. The total mass of the population was slowly dragged to an ideological corral where dissent or doubt, simply apathy or lesser enthusiasm remain anathema. Those so anathematized were punished in flesh and spirit as agents acting under the influence and for the benefit of the external "Enemy". The population ended up fully compartmentalized according to military parameters. A whole mixed and suffocating universe revolved around military reserves, militia frontlines and ideological battles. The people were organized in battalions, or crowded with designations such as staff or element... The summit of this stage was reached when the model citizens performed their warrior role in the military expeditions to Africa. My purpose is not to elaborate on this aspect, but simply to point out the retroactive effect brought to exaltation by strengthening the armed forces and subordinating further the civil population to them. It is hard to deny that it had results. The boyish enthusiasm of many volunteers led to take part in a war so distant from their country and to accept as indisputable justification the confused demagoguery about transferring the defense of their homeland against an attack that never came to the engagement in wars between almost unknown African countries and factions. It is a very vast subject that leaves a lot to say about its militaristic permanent effect on civil society. After using hundreds of thousands of men for consolidating extremely corrupt dictatorial systems in Africa, the government left Cuban society in greater confusion and apathy, resigned to accept as unshakable context the order imposed from "the top".

The subordination and absolute fidelity to the military and political leader, as well as the blind belief in the infallibility of his dictum for establishing the correct and indisputable truth on any matter, were rigidly set since the very beginning at the mountain hideouts. Members of the Rebel Army that transgressed these inflexible rules were subject to drastic punishment (even summary execution), but the state of affairs never reached the peak of the general purge in all the armed bodies and their own power structures unleashed by the criminal case number 2 in 1989, which entailed a cleaning cold-blooded designed to spread terror nationwide.

The Second Military Period

It starts with the physical and mental incapacity of Fidel Castro for continuing as the absolute big shot. His brother Raúl took power surrounded by five heirs appointed by Fidel, like King Lear, for taking their respective plots of political land. Soon thereafter it was understood that the new national foreman did not accept a parceling of the inheritance. An ambitious initiative towards the real power by two of the younger sycophants, Carlos Lage and Felipe Perez Roque, was crushed by a general purge in all the organizations of political support. Many young civilians were dismissed and the whole move was welcomed by the retired leader, who angrily thundered against the ambitious young cadres⁵. The initial 5-heir Plan B was quietly canceled and the possibility of engagement in "internationalists wars" vanished due to lack of cash. With the ubiquitous leader in retirement, the armed bodies turned to manage the entire economy. They began to control the companies in the so-called hard currency market, but it was clear that the purposes were far beyond. Knowing it was impossible to fully fill the vacancy of Castro I, who made everything in his image and likeness,

Castro II wisely distributed the economic power among their unconditional followers in uniform by placing them in key management positions. Thus, the military expansion upon the civilian population reached its maximum in the history of Cuba. And like almost all the continental examples of military ineptitude in the economy and public affairs, the adverse results in both fields keep on piling upon the back of the people.

The Dissolution of the Enemy

But the drift of history, which always surprises, has put on the table both the sudden reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the United States and the dismantling of the embargo. Forced by unexpected circumstances, the constantly repeated menacing image of the enemy begins to vanish quickly from the popular consciousness. It was surprising to the holders of power. With stupor they realized almost nothing has been caught in over half a century by stirring a tamed people against the Yankee imperialism. It caused excitement and controversy among the people that in the new context of relationship the energetic neighbor is ready to devastate the country with goods and services highly desired by those who are surviving in their impoverished existence. From now on it is the fifth column, the internal enemy facing the military tissue thoroughly extended over the nation. Now the military fear that the population will gradually begin to pose indiscreet questions: If you do not have the Enemy anymore, what is the reason for spending disproportionate resources in the military and for having a disproportionate number of troops?⁶ Why are thousands of teens called on to do military service each year? Why does Cuba have so many military units and carry out combat training maneuvers with thousands of reservists away from their families and work places? Why

is it necessary that the population pays the wages or pensions, and even the unconscionable privileges for thousands of active or retired soldiers? How much does the military cost? It is nonsensical to start talking now about a "veiled aggression" in regard with an invasion that the whole world considered very beneficial: millions of tourists coming from the immense North.

A Postscript to the Barracks?

There are many other questions about the whole structure of barricades against and the efforts to ensure the continuity of an eternal dynasty. It does not seem to be not enough that subordinates and civilians remain as a defensive rock, like the Spanish military colony from which this country rudimentary emerged. Will it turn into an empty project losing meaning and credibility in a very short term? There are many other questions, all of them vital to our nation in need, but the undeniable fact is that the greatest threat to the totalitarian military government headed by a general through a quiet and ruinous course is not the sinking of *chavismo* into the Venezuelan "sea of happiness", along with its oil supplies, but the reality of Washington lifting the mildewed legal barriers that prevented the overflow of the incalculable social, commercial, economic, and cultural forces from Cuba to the States, as well as the fermented effect that this perception is already causing among the Cuban population. Actually, it wouldn't be anything new under the sun that a return to the reality promotes a radical change in our country. Because of a natural drift, proven in most parts of the continent, Cuba is destined to return to the institutional normality of a civilian government with the military returning to the barracks under rightful subordination to the civilian order. The Cuban nation needs to shake off its military morass and to be governed in favor of

the people, not of the military class brought to the reins of power by a bad historic exercise.

Notes:

1- For many years, the Spanish crown referred to Havana as synonym of Cuba. See Moreno Fragonal, *Cuba in Spain-Spain in Cuba*, Grijalbo Mondadori, 1995.

2- At the end of the conflict, about 65, 000 combatants of the Liberation Army were demobilized (See Jorge Ibarra, *Cuba: 1898-1921 Political parties and social classes*, Ciencias Sociales, 1992). On the Spanish side, 50, 000 guerrillas and about 100, 000 volunteers put down their weapons. In total, a quarter of a million men, the sixth of a population [1,573,000] according to the 1899 Census.

3- The author was an eyewitness of such a self-promotion at a military unit in February 1980, after being mobilized by force during one of the most stressing forced call-up to the Army Reserve. Yelling threats against a latent revolt in society (the upcoming mass-exodus from Mariel), the professional military, many of them veterans of Angola War, tirelessly repeated to the numb ranks (a strong cold from was entering) that the armed forces were “the most sacrificed” in the country, *id est*, worthy of admiration, considerations, privileges, and obedience by the civilians.

4- In a public speech (1991), the Commander in Chief said, apparently exulting, the imminent transfer of all the citizens to barracks in the fields, organized into battalions to compulsory labor in agriculture. Luckily for all Cubans, it never happened. A few years before, Pol Pot had managed to implement a similar plan in Camboya.

5- A recurring phrase of Fidel Castro was something like “I believe in young people; I trust them”. It was never clarified whether the framework of reference was his own family or the Cuban society.

6- In 1980 the Cuban population totaled 9.7 million inhabitants. About 126, 000 were members of the armed forces: 100,000 in the Army, 11,000 in the Navy, and 16,000 in the Air Force. During the 16-year war in Angola, 450, 000 Cubans went over there, among them about 300,000 soldiers. In 2006, Cuba reported 650 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants (75,000 in total). No verifiable figures are available, but the budgetary allocations suggest that the apparatus of political repression, following the most sophisticated model of the STASI in the GDR and the KGB in the URSS, employed around 80-90 thousand people.

Street fighters

Rudicel Batista

Freelancer

Manzanillo, Granma Province, Cuba

The title has nothing to do with street fights or anything like that, but with the daily struggle of Cubans, whether elder, handicapped, or African descendants, who are popularly called fighters because they go out to look for money in order to survive in these times full of economic needs and uncertainties. Down Martí Street, a central artery in the city of Manzanillo, several of them roam every day. Such characters are present throughout the rest of the country. They are smart traders who try to be incognito, but are illegal in the eyes of the government while providing the ordinary Cubans, accustomed to buy on the black market, with the merchandise that the state economy cannot offer. It seems illogical, but that's Cuba. You sell anything that can provide a minimum income for buying, at the end of the day, a simple plate of food. Such a food is far, very far, from what God commands. Many fighters do not even have a retirement pension. Those who enjoy it are sunk in misery anyway, because the pension is not enough to survive. So the retirees go to the streets every day in order to earn a living in the best way possible. They spend all day in front of the state stores promoting and selling their goods, ranging from plastic

bags to ball pens, noodles, razors, matches and cigarettes. They are truly mobile shops, always with the fear that the police, popularly known as *casquitos*, proceed to lead them to the station, confiscate their goods, take their money, and impose severe fines. All this comes amid threats of bringing them to justice. The repressive police force uses bikes to patrol the city. Thusly, the police work is easier and the law enforcement agent can prevent the furtive vendors from escaping. It's amazing the will, courage, and tenacity that these illegal traders show by seeking to survive both to police harassment, the marginalization, and even the discrimination that haunts them wherever they go, either by their skin color or social status. These times are very difficult. A normal economic livelihood presupposes changes that are not on display. Each morning the street fighters leave their homes and walk to the commercial establishments with the firm intention of making a living without panicking when the police arrives. After all, they are honestly seeking a little money that barely gives them something to eat in this society full of difficulties.

Graphical testimony



Homeless Octogenarians

Marcia Cairo

Havana Cuba

Teresa Rodríguez and Jesús Pino are a retired couple. They were left homeless since 2011 after a partial collapse of the building where they lived with their eldest daughter and her husband. Since that time they are living with relatives.



Teresa and Jesús

MC: What exactly happened on 11-11, 2011?

TR: It was something terrible, it seems like the hand of fate. My husband and I were at my daughter's house, because a short time

before I had fractured my hip and she was taking care of me. My husband was staying a few days too, since he missed me; just imagine, we have been married for more than sixty years. That afternoon there was a

landslide in my house. A next door neighbor phoned my daughter and said, " Your mother's house fell", but I did not find out until two months later, because in the midst of the commotion she decided to conceal the truth in order to prevent us from suffering.

MC: What caused the collapse?

TR: The culprit was the neighbor of the floor below, who started making some repairs without the assistant of an architect or anyone who knew about construction. He paid some young people who were not even masons and they removed a capital from a load bearing column. As a result, two rooms and the balcony of my house collapsed. My children did not want to tell me and my husband anything, because he had suffered ischemia due to high blood pressure and they were afraid it would happen again.

MC: How old are you both?

TR: My husband is 86 and I'm going to be 84.

MC: Where was the house located?

TR: E Street, between 27 and 29 Streets, in El Vedado neighborhood.

MC: Who were in the house when it collapsed?

TR: My oldest daughter and her husband, but luckily they were in the back of the house and the firefighters were able to get them out through the window of the kitchen, in view of the danger at the front. The floor was bent at the bedrooms and it was very risky to get out through the front door.



The house after collapsing

MC: What happened next?

TR: The so-called architect of the community came and ordered a complete demolition. Some officials said they were going to provide shelter quickly and even two workers from the Department of Housing in Transit made me sign a paper, but nothing happened. We weren't relocated. My daughter and her husband had to move to the his parents house and they are still there.

MC: Do you think the officials were deceiving you?

TR: Yes, I do. After one month, one of my daughters went to the State Council and delivered a letter explaining what happened. From there the same letter was sent to the provincial management of the Department of Housing in Transit. Its officials invited my children to a meeting, but they did not solve our problem.

MC: Did you save the furniture?

TR: It was necessary to pay the demolition workers after asking them for help to remove the furniture. They behaved like bandits and stole the kitchen slabs and other belongings.

MC: What about the neighbor who caused the collapse?

TR: He was not even charged, because a lawyer advised us not to press charges, because he has a child with mental problems and it is considered a social case.

MC: Did you try to find out if you could build again?

TR: We were told that we could not rebuild, but the neighbor of the floor below managed to repair his columns and to install a rooftop; he displayed the chutzpah to request our place, he wanted our space after all. He lost two lawsuits and the case never

reached the Supreme Court because, according to our lawyer, it wasn't appropriate as we did not have a home yet.

MC: Have you made new efforts after 4 years living with your daughter without a response from the Department of Housing in Transit.?

TR: My son has been talking all these years to the director of the department, who has promised this: when some buildings were ready to accommodate people living more than 20 years in shelters, he would relocate us in a shelter. We have learned that such buildings had been opened in Playa and other municipalities, but nobody has notified us and we are wasting our time. There are rumors that bribes are frequent and rooms in shelters are on sale. Our application was shelved and nobody is interested in our case.

MC: Did you own the demolished house?

TR: Yes, it was already ours. We are very upset with everything that happened and lost our hope after so much work. It took many years to pay the house. My husband did a cistern with his own hands, but be aware that everything depends on decisions taken by the government. My husband worked most of his life at the Ministry of Tourism, where he was a founder and an awarded employee, but when he sent a letter asking for help the answer was elusive. However, two blocks away from my daughter's house, here in Miramar, the house of a painter who died was given to a former Minister of Culture. Just tell me: does the government have or does not have houses available? We are no longer important for the society; we have almost one foot in the grave.

The negligence in cases like this is a kind of injustice in a society that is not fair and where the rights of the elder citizens are not respected. After having fulfilled their social and family duties, even a secure old age is not granted to them.

On spiritual identity

Ivonne Hernandez C Lascaiba
Havana Cuba

The lack of identity causes that things going right today go wrong tomorrow. Thus, you become unstable and insecure. Identity means knowing who you are, what your values are and where you want to go, as well as understanding what is the purpose for which you were created and what is the vision that God planted within you. This identity goes beyond your language, race or nation, because it comes from God and it will manifest later in your behavior. When a person is convinced of such an identity, he or she feels joy and externalizes it since this kind of identity is carried in the heart. However, both the enemy and the carnality do not want your identity to become evident in order to keep you in the same condition: imprisoned, captive and enslaved. To fight the battle for your identity, you must first fight against the principalities and the powers that be, against the rulers of the darkness of this world and against the spiritual wickedness that steal all the truth and maintain the deceptions and lies. When it is not clear what measures your worth as a person, then you're looking for things that ultimately do not satisfy you. Maybe you have a very low self-esteem and start to identify yourself and even to call yourself by the problem, for instance: I am the most miserable or the more useless person, or I am living in the poorest country with hunger and disease, or I am rejected and discriminated because of my skin color. This creates a dark force in your spirit and you admit that the wrong will determine your future. There are countries with lack of identity, extremely poor and completely in crisis, because they

not to follow the divine design of God, but others live in a good economic condition and accumulate huge profits without having identity. Neither the good life nor the race give identity. Today the world values you for your possessions and not for what you really are, but no child of God is a failure. You will always achieve victory, be the head and not the tail; you will be above and not below because your faith will conquer the world. There is neither a weapon conceived against you that can defeat you nor a language able to condemn you. God will never leave you. Although you pass through the valley of the shadow of death, God will always be with you; His rod and staff will encourage you, and his good and his mercy will accompany you every day of your life. There is a good news: You are not an accident, you were created by God, who took care of you before you were born. Your birth was neither a mistake nor a misfortune, your life is not a fluke of nature. Your parents did not plan it: God did it long before you were conceived. You were designed in the mind of God, who thought of you first. It was not because of fate, chance or luck; God designed every feature of your body, chose your race, the color of your skin, your hair, your body to the extent He wanted. He also granted all the natural talents you possess, the uniqueness of your personality. God knows you inside and out, every bone in your body; He planned your place of birth and where you would live. Your race and nationality are not accidental; it doesn't matter whether your parents were good or bad, whites or blacks. God knew that they

have exactly the right genetic makeup. You are the best fruit of creation, a beautiful and unique creature. You're just what He wanted to do and its main motive was love. He loved the world to the extreme of sending His only son in order to secure that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life and abundance. When you recognize in your heart that Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Savior of your life, you will immediately be adopted as a child of God. All circumstances that happen around your life, the adversities and afflictions, the conflicts and situations, will be momentary and transient. With them a great weight of the glory of God will be flourishing inside you. In the parable of the prodigal son (*Luke 15*), Jesus begins His story describing a family of a father and two sons, without mentioning whether they were white, black or mestizo. For Him there is no personal distinction: we are all equal. The father educated his children on principles and values grounded in love; they did not have anything, but they enjoyed the benefits provided by their father. One day the younger son approached him and asked for a rightful part of the inheritance. I will not dwell on how the father felt. He simply agreed and this son launched into an adventure toward the worst humiliation: he lost the meaning of life because he lacked an identity. This son did not care who he was and the values that his father had instilled in him. The older son did not have the same attitude, but he was as insecure and resentful, that is: he also lacked identity. Both sons were not in accordance with the teachings of his father.

They were moved by the price, not by the value. If you're not sure about this principle, you have no identity and you will feel slighted., First of all search (which actually means continually seeking) the kingdom of God and His Righteousness (which is simply the Will of God, His Way) and all things will be added. God will never fail in the promise made by Jesus Christ; on the contrary, He will exceed your expectations.



The Latin American Studies Association (LASA), the largest organization of scholars on the subject, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in the context of its recent congress, which included the panel “Cuba: the representative democratization,” organized by our Editor in Chief Juan Antonio Alvarado, President of the Cuban Integration Platform.

The panel focused on the possibilities for democratizing the political order in Cuba based on the current reforms by the State and the changes in the society. The topic was addressed from three crucial perspectives:

- The possibilities of democratic change on the basis of the current law
- The civil society as critical factor for democracy
- The cultural and the electoral systems

Our magazine is pleased to present to the readership the respective papers on the mentioned perspectives.

The Civil Society: A Key Factor for Democracy

Fernando Palacio Mogar
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Is it feasible to invigorate the civil society in Cuba, where exercising the right to independent association is strictly forbidden? And if the civil society eventually gains strength, what impact could it have on politics: progress or regression? Is it common and normal to speak about civil society in Cuba nowadays? The obvious answer is no. The term itself is poorly understood, even by people with certain quotas of power. For many of those seeking — through associations independent from the State — to do their bit in building a free and democratic society, strengthening the civil society is a great challenge. In the current social context, the life intensely breathed in the streets is marked by the general discontent of citizens with the form of government. Different positions are taken in regard of democratic change. Some have fallen into paralysis, because they think there is so much to do that it's better to do nothing; others have decided to escape, even at the risk of their own lives, because they think that there is no solution for achieving the fundamental freedoms and human rights. Some economic reforms have been taking place since years ago, in an attempt to overcome the great crisis and to mitigate the social tensions, but the results are clear: ongoing shortages. Cubans must do a juggling act to put food on the table. After more than 50 years of socialist system with no progress in politics either, we are stepping back in

time and I wonder: Is the government responsible for this crisis? Furthermore, when will the government demonstrate its wisdom by steering its policies toward the commitment with the body of creditors known as the people, and more specifically with civil society? Everything changes in the course of life. Even without yearning for change, the latter happens anyway because everything is constantly changing and mutating. But if we let change happen in a spontaneous way, we are irresponsibly giving up our own ability to choose and regulate the ways of change. Here we are referring to choose the appropriate ways, since social changes should essentially occur through peaceful means in a gradual manner, not through violence and trauma. The project #Otro18 has been embraced by more than twenty groups of the civil society. It opens the way for taking, from the civic perspective and within the legal framework, the first steps towards a democratic and deliberative exercise leading to the rule of law. There is a wide range of groups within the civil society. Far from weakening it, their different views and opinions enable civil society to find solutions to the problems of the country. The diversity of these groups does not lead to perpetual unsolvable conflicts. Likewise, the lack of diversity within the ruling elite does not lead to perpetual absence of conflicts. Hence the civil society bet on a diversity based on confidence in order to remove the sus-

pitions and fears that hamper both the transparency and the dialogue while exacerbating the secrecy and the confrontation. Some minor changes had occurred, they are not enough and had not been the necessary ones either. The genuine reforms needed, will not come on their own or by magic; they will arise from the efforts of the citizens and the civil society, and also from the inputs of those taking seriously their responsibilities in any area of the social life. Cuba deserves a democratic and free society where human rights are respected and citizens could enjoy fundamental freedoms. Such a social order should emerge in conjunction with the impulse and performance of the civil society. Many Cubans dream to achieve the long-awaited change to a participatory and democratic politics along with a strong and efficient economy. It will depend on our influence and participation in the political life, in a peaceful manner that avoids the increase of pain and fear among the people. Anyway, the shift will result from the working ability of the democratic forces, their leadership and negotiation power, as well as from the strategic approach to the perspectives. Civil society is a key factor to achieve such a dream; it is a genuine representative of the people's living forces. It's actions will serve as the guarantor of the civil liberties. One of its great challenges is to ensure that the citizens can disagree without being attacked; criticize without being discriminated; provide alternatives to those of the ruling elite without being sentenced to prison. Civil society must secure free spaces for the citizens' participation without detriment to diversity. It must promote dialogue to make transitions based on active and free engagement. The main challenge is to choose between two very different Cuba: a Cuba with fundamental freedoms and respect for democracy and human rights, which demands us to take

decisions and actions right now; and another Cuba that, on the contrary, will be set by default if we are not able to decide and act, or if we decide and act erroneously. Civil society and the citizens at large pave the way for better interaction, social maturity, and ability to manage and work. Deliberative democracy will give citizens the opportunity to use tools in order to ensure their well-being more effectively and, at the same time, to help crafting and preserving transparent, efficient, and fair institutions. Thusly Cubans will follow a way leading to an authentic and well-grounded democracy, where citizens will be the true social players performing the tasks related to both the citizens and civil society. Such a long-awaited democracy would be consolidated with a multiparty political system, which should be able—in a timely and appropriate manner—to response to the challenges the country may face. And the state apparatus should be designed with separation of powers and rule of law. We must incessantly work to become a real social force that promote and make decisions. We have to demonstrate our ability and strength as well as our strongest will in order to achieve our goals. By organizing and empowering citizens, we can help to provide solutions to the problems in our communities. Let's start to move further down the road to a free society by implementing the process of deliberative democracy, the citizens' participation and others actions that will bring us together. Thus we shall take the places that were taken from us. An independent civil society has and will have a leading role in moving forward on such a difficult and rough path.

Otro18 in Defense of the Law

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An authoritarian political system undertakes legislative reforms by different reasons. In the 1970s, the Castro regime ended its so-called revolutionary provisionality by implementing a new constitution and numerous complementary laws, including the electoral law. Rather than subjecting citizens to the rule of law, the new legislation endorsed the authoritarian practices from the previous decade and a half of the revolution. The notion of three powers was clearly defined as harmful (Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, *Letra con filo*, 1983) and the democratic centralism —adopted from the so-called socialist constitutionalism— secured the authoritarian form of government. Raúl Castro himself stated that the new constitution (1976) was "the highest and most important legal norm of society" (*Opening Address during the Act of Proclamation of the Socialist Constitution*, February 24, 1976). However, time showed that its regulatory function would be less important than its political role, to the point that nowadays the very official academy states that, as a law, the constitution is neither

properly nor effectively implemented, since the prevailing idea is that it's rather a legal standard of programmatic nature than an operating juridical rule (Andry Matilla Correa [Coordinator], *The Cuban Constitution of 1976: Forty years in force*, 2016). Winds of reform are currently blowing and the constitution seems to be a target, although the Cuban nomenclature maintains absolute discretion about it. Notwithstanding, the Central Report to the Seventh Party Congress suggests that while new forms of doing business and trade will be constitutionally endorsed, the political rights will remain confined to the usual legal practice. The socialist constitution endorsed both the political and economic orders implemented during the first decade and a half of the revolution; for its later stages, the constitution will maintain the political order as the Castro regime opens up to new possibilities for market development and improved management. It's not what the country needs. Recently, the eminent Cuban economist Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva remarked that if a new election law will enter into force, then it

is assumed that the parliamentarians will work as professionals, with a fixed seat, instead of being judge and parties like it happens today, because one must not be minister and deputy at once. On the eve of the Party Congress, statements like this to the Catholic magazine *Palabra Nueva* were enough for removing Perez Villanueva from his tenured faculty position at the University of Havana. Thusly, a brilliant economist aware of the political needs demonstrates the competence of the citizens to address such issues, while being expelled because of that shows the incompetence of the Castro regime to address such needs and entails a kind of political myopia that can be regarded as crime.

Otro18 and the activation of political changes

In the middle of such a drought of ideas in politics, Raúl Castro has decided to relinquish power in 2018. Upon his departure it seems certain that a regime of alternating Heads of State—for a five-year term and with only a single chance of reelection—will come into force. None of this is good news in terms of political rights, which do not emerge from procedures or practices that occasionally make some difference with respect to the previous order. The political rights do not even rely on the hope of reaching them in time to come or in the feeling of being a little closer to them. Political rights are only confirmed in the freedoms of information, expression, and association enjoyed by the citizens while electing their representatives. In such a context, the citizens themselves enforce the respect for human rights and experience them as a common good. Among them the politi-

cal rights should be an ongoing process, not the result of a series of specific events. The citizens' campaign # Otro18 assumes that the year 2018 will be an exciting opportunity to mobilize the citizens to demand changes, but not the changes proposed by the prudish Castro officials according to their latest liturgy, but changes that truly implement a democratic system. # Otro18 declares the relevance of political rights and it is constituted on the basis of two key documents: a Maximum Agenda and a Minimal Agenda, as expressions of the will to strengthen the rule of law starting from the precarious legal body available in the Castro legislation. Hence the idea of a minimal agenda; through such a way, the deficits will be exposed to demonstrate the need for more substantial reforms and more citizen engagement in achieving them. The reasons for this strategy are simple: it's preferable to build a legal culture on a crumbling state than on some kind of social outburst. Both notions, transition and abrupt end, are based on the urgent need to put an end to a human rights situation that becomes criminal due to the bullying or mobbing against political activists, the indiscriminate beating of men and women, and the use of paramilitary forces to silence the clamors for freedom. The citizens' campaign # Otro18 runs with the certitude that the collective building of legality delivers precious results. On the contrary, outbreaks and insurrections have led to true legends of heroism, but also to dysfunctional behaviors in order to achieve the common good. # Otro18 worships the struggle for independence from Spain and the citizens' actions that overthrew two dictatorships during the republican

period (1902-58), but the benchmark for our action is the legislative work and the legal institutions, primarily the joint effort that led to the Constitution of 1940 and provided its subsequent complementary laws. They were true examples for its time and even the Castro regime resorts to them whenever it needs to validate some of its current changes. Any change seeking to eliminate the economic and political stagnation caused by the dictatorship always leads to recognize both the current international practices and the Cuban advanced legislation prior to 1959. It was self-evidenced in the recent Party Congress. One delegate asserted that the private property has a positive impact if it is conceived with a social function. He added that contemporary capitalism and the Constitution of 1940 encompass such functions. But it is also self-evidence that the changes couldn't be partial. After decades of excessive suspicions, the current developments are perceived only as escapism. The Immigration Reform Act (2012) did not generate freedom of movement, but further stimulus to emigration; the regulations for buying and selling homes did not rescue the sense of ownership, but is actually financing the immigration as escape route. The Party Congress made it clear that the Castro administration has spent ten years without achieving its stated main priority: the economic improvement and the boost in food production. Many measures have been implemented, but the citizens are still missing in the framework. # Otro18 holds that broad participation is inextricably linked to collective commitment. The failure on the part of all inspires much more to

move forward that the success on the part of one. In the social processes, it's only smart what is jointly conceived. It is so easy to understand, but it becomes a wall difficult to overcome by those who are afraid of losing their narcissists leading roles. Hence # Otro18 also conceives an alternative to dialogue with both the skeptical sectors within the opposition and the political regime that prefers to be criminal than civic. Most actors taking part in the campaign for an electoral law ensuring massive and committed participation in the polls welcome the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba because it's a role model, not because we are deluded optimists or true believers in such event as a mission fulfilled in the best possible way. The pursuit of excellence and ideals belongs to the world of fantasy; our paradigm balances the notion of process and the actions oriented towards results. In the Central Report to the Party Congress, Raúl Castro wrote that the changes ready to be implemented by the announced new constitution will be endorsed by the people in a referendum. Presumably voting yes would ratify the changes and voting no would force to redraft the constitutional text. Both # Otro18 and the civil society must make people understand how important is the vote for sending the citizens' message of rejection against the powers that be. The victory in the referendum would be a crucial step in the right direction to nullify the article of the constitution that imposes the hegemony of the Communist Party over the rest of the society (Article 5) and thusly makes unenforceable the article stating that the sovereignty resides in the people (Arti-

cle 3). The same should happen with the notion of an unitary power unit, which prevents the essential separation between judge and judged, as referred by Perez Villanueva, in order to put an end to the subordination of the judiciary to the political bodies. Without these basic changes, Cuba will remain anchored to the past. In a repressive environment, a referendum does not turn a dictatorship into a legit political order, as voting in a ballot box does not guarantee a democratic election either. Both processes must be carried out under the basic validating conditions of well-informed voters who freely exercise their right to organize and express themselves following their political will.

A Strategic Proposal Underway

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The project development process # Otro18 has been making progress in two essential directions: defining the general contents of the popular debate on electoral systems, association law, and legal system of political parties; and building alliances with political organizations, civil society groups, and other social actors. Looking ahead it is necessary a triple step: bringing the popular debate on constitutional and legal changes to a national level; rigorously refining the tools of deliberative democracy: deliberative poll, rules and requirements to moderate the deliberative debate; and calling in experts on constitutional reform and political theory specialized in transition processes. # Otro18 takes up the minimalist concept of partial and gradual reforms in a continuous procedure, which concretize the possible changes in favor of the people reforms and prevent the public misperception of a purely theoretical process without practical significance. We have also agreed on political feasibility. The latter is an indispensable requirement for carrying out the legal and constitutional reforms based on a real assessment of all the internal forces. It is important that people can perceive that genuine and concrete changes

may effectively occur by articulating them from the perspectives of both the civil society and politics. Such an approach accepts the challenge of connecting the partial reform with both the reform of the constitutional context and the principles of constitutional law. It's the only way to open the constitutional reform as a continuous procedure in a cascade process, in order to grant the internal coherence and to anchor the reform on the basis of political liberalism, since without it no democracy is possible. A new window opened with challenges from the perspective of specific reforms in the legal space without being constitutional reforms by themselves. The legal space can be progressively modified without affecting the hard core of the constitution in its spirit or substance. The advantage of going now from the concrete to the general approach lies in making measurable changes in favor of the people. Thus, they will generate and ensure the perception of the process as real and viable. The political and intellectual challenge is that such an approach requires conducting the legal and constitutional reforms in the same process within a compacted segment.

What is # Otro18? It's a civic project to promote structural changes in both the electoral and the association laws, by opening them to a system of political parties based on electoral integrity to ensure plurality, competition, and transparency in free and democratic elections for public offices on an equal access basis. # Otro18 is actually a project that, starting from the change in the electoral system, will lead to reform the State through constitutional change.

Why # Otro18?

The appointed president Raúl Castro announced that he will step down from power in 2018. He stated further that it will be an institutionalized transfer of authority through the mechanisms of access to the State, not through the Communist Party. It is important to analyze all this in a new context, where four events coincide in an open beam: the generational transfer of power, the structural renewal of the institutions giving access to the State, the ideological debate within a serious crisis of legitimacy, and the unsystematic openness of Cuba to the world along with the sociological mutation in the Cuban society. It's very importantly that, for the first time, the government is moving in the same direction as the society. Thus, a creative storm is taking shape for the first time in the last 56 years and it creates the necessary and favorable conditions to change the constitution in a procedural sequence. The electoral reform provides the best opportunity for that. The debate is no longer whether there will be constitutional changes, but what kind of constitutional changes would be possible. Contrary to the more widespread opinion that trivializes a scenario of economic reforms first and likely

political changes thereafter, the possibility of political reform is already open. Why? Let's start from this negative hypothesis: the relationship between the will of the policy makers in a specific scenario and the possibility of political change is not compelling. The change is also possible when the context reduces the options of rational choice, as it happens in Cuba nowadays. And the problem is that the government faces a delayed generational change in power, which forces to open the political game in order to guarantee certain legitimacy and credibility to the institutions it's trying to strengthen in a forward-looking approach from the historical setting of legitimacy traditionally based in charisma. In such a situation, the transfer of institutional power is a political change in itself because the legitimacy of the upcoming actors is put into question: who represents whom in a changing situation? Which are the criteria of legitimacy: origin, charisma, institutionalism...? So we are in what I would call a creative circumstance, in which all social and political actors are forced to imagine and reinvent their options and status while the paradigms are discussed.

How # Otro18 is articulated?

By 2018 we want to make a difference with the Project # Otro18, together with other organizations and actors of the civil society and the democratic community in Cuba. #Otro18 primarily pursues the democratization through well-thought-out proposals of legal changes, designed and legitimated by deliberation among citizens, which open the public space and the political game in order to move from reforming the electoral system to making fundamental constitutional re-

forms. In the process of deliberation, two crucial issues have emerged with the force of necessity: a comprehensive constitutional reform and a Constituent Assembly. The constitutional reform is needed to ensure social consistency and viability. From such a perspective, the policy of specific legal reforms must have two relevant traits: the need of constitutional reform becomes more understandable and conspicuous to the citizens in connection with their specific rights and demands, and the link between legality and constitutionality allows the gradual deactivation of the sort of shielding that the constitution has mounted for delegitimizing the exercise of civil and political rights. In this sense it's possible a consensus to work directly on reforming at least three articles: Article 3, regarding the exercise of sovereignty; Article 5, which endowed the Communist Party with an hegemonic and implicit social superiority (its reform would be extended to Article 62, designed to limit the exercise of civil liberties against the socialist State); and Article 137, which clearly excludes the citizens as subjects legally able to reform the constitution. These articles not only provide the typical shielding of the State before the society and the citizens, but also reveal the conceptual distortions in the contractual nature of constitutional law. There is a political precedent that legitimizes and reinforces our project: in 2008 the Cuban government signed the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). # Ot-ro18 should emphasize on this fact as external political factor.

What does Article 3 say?

“In the Republic of Cuba, the sovereignty resides in the people, from whom all of the power of the State emanates. That power is exercised directly or through the Assemblies of the People’s Power and other organs of the State derived from them, in the manner and according to the rules established by the Constitution and the laws. All citizens have the right to fight, using all means, including armed struggle, when no other recourse is possible, against anyone attempting to overthrow the political, social, and economic order established by this Constitution. Socialism and the social revolutionary political system instituted in this Constitution, proven by years of heroic resistance against all kinds of aggression and the economic war engaged by the government of the mightiest imperialistic power that has ever existed, and having demonstrated its ability to transform the country and create an entirely new and just society, shall be irrevocable, and Cuba shall never return to capitalism.”* This is the key article in terms of contractual basis and political legitimacy. It regulates the fundamental issue of sovereignty by defining its essential source and by building the pyramid that sets the possible and legitimate relationship between the citizens and the State via society. It affects the rest of the constitutional articles and the legality of the acts performed by the States and the citizens. It should be restrained to express —concisely, briefly, and clearly— the essential source of both the legitimacy and the law, which seems quite clear in its first paragraph. The following paragraphs are superfluous. They refer to elements that have no natural connection with the main source of legitimacy and sovereignty; in fact, they limit the full exercise of the sovereign power, since they set a kind of order that can be theoretically and constitutionally established only by the sovereign itself (the people).

The latter is recognized and included as mechanism of defensive violence. In principle and by nature, the political and civic resolution of conflicts must be given through the mechanisms that the sovereign can and should legitimately establish. In terms of constitutional technique, it's even more serious that this article smuggles a different and superior source of both legitimacy and law in order to superimpose it over the citizens. The appeal to a pre-revolutionary order, which chronologically precedes the constitution, takes away the sovereignty of the State or simply establishes it around its very existence, not outside the State, as befits any modern constitutional state. Thus the sovereignty of the citizen is reduced to dust and the constitutional legitimacy ends up in the aberration that the sovereign is not sovereign to change the order and the regime granted by itself as sovereign. There is a double contradiction. The right to act is denied to the sovereign and the latter unfolds as an ungraspable ultimate entity with such a right, *id est*: the sovereign ceases to exist in the same and only article that recognizes its supreme legitimacy. This analysis requires further development, but pointing it out is enough to demonstrate the connection with the basic proposal by # Otro18 and the need for consistent reforms in both the legal and the constitutional order. It is also very necessary for another strategic goal: to reinforce the culture of law, the supremacy of law, and the relationship between political facts and legal structures. In modern terms, it is important to go from the law to the facts, avoiding the opposite course whenever possible.

What does Article 5 say?

"The Communist Party of Cuba, Martiano and Marxist-Leninist, the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, is the superior leading force of the society and the State, organizing and guiding the common efforts aimed at the highest goals of the construc-

tion of socialism and advancement toward the communist society." This article is as structural as structuring. It poses the issue of the essential plurality for developing an electoral law and a democratic electoral system based on fair, free, and competitive elections that make possible the rationality inherent to the deliberation among citizens.

This article is the conclusive evidence and the manifest will of a State different from and standing above society. It is racist in two ways: the article establishes a cultural superiority over the multiple views that set up Cuban nationality and it sustains hegemonies anchored in a minority over the rest of society. This moral indecency should be addressed to ensure that the constitutional and electoral reforms will be consistent with the rights of the majority, the fundamental freedoms, and the diversity expressed in the growing demands of the citizens. Reforming this article is the key for modernizing and democratizing the State. The access of the citizens to power can neither be mediated in an exclusive manner nor ideologically represented by the State. A government may be ideological, but not a State. Hence the importance to remove the ideological shields of the constitution in order to turn it into a real civic realm. However, the article could be read in terms of minimum policy for advancing the pluralism from the restrictive political system established by the constitution. A constitutional and legal principle prescribes that what is not expressly prohibited is allowed; thus, it is possible to open the game of political plurality, since the Communist Party is the "superior leading force", not the only force. The historical praxis of a single party was never legitimized by the constitution. It's not today either. Only the factual party-state in the

countries of the communist orbit established—without any doctrine in jurisprudence and law—the "right" of the Communist Party to be the only one in nations under the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Like the acquisitive prescription, by which ownership of property can be gained by possession of it beyond a certain period of time, the "legalized" praxis in such States spread, but unlike the aforementioned method it was never acknowledged by a notarial deed that certified and justified the right of the single party on the basis of the political fact of its own existence. Regardless of the need to address this article—after being analyzed by independent lawyers—in order to reform the electoral system, the option of political plurality is open from the viewpoint of the association law, which shall be also subjected to reform. A reform of this article involves the abrogation or modification of Article 62: "None of the freedoms which are recognized for citizens can be exercised contrary to what is established in the Constitution and the law, or contrary to the existence and objectives of the socialist State, or contrary to the decision of the Cuban people to build socialism and communism. Violations of this principle can be punished by law." It's actually another limitation of the citizens' sovereignty; most importantly, it shows the illiberal condition of both the constitution and the state mechanisms for promoting democracy. The order of precedence starts with the State; then the people is defined, and nothing can be done by the citizens, who in fact should exercise their sovereignty in the variety of legal and political acts.

What does Article 137 say?

"This Constitution can only be modified by the National Assembly of People's Power, by means of resolutions adopted by roll-call vote by a majority of no less than two-thirds of the total number of members; except [where the modification] regards the political, social and economic system, whose irrevocable character is established in Article 3 of Chapter I, and the prohibition against negotiations under aggression, threats or coercion by a foreign power as established in Article 11. If the modification has to do with the integration and authority of the National Assembly of the People's Power or its Council of State or involves any rights and duties contained in the Constitution, it shall also require the approval of the majority of citizens with the right to vote by means of a referendum called upon for this purpose by the Assembly itself." Reforming this article is crucial for any constitutional reform. A technical analysis should be done—from the perspectives of the jurisprudence, the sources of sovereignty, and the comparative law—in order to move forward with crucial reforms that return sovereignty to their legitimate sources and allow to recover or to reinvent the modern and democratic nature of the State. The first argument is that this article completely denies the foundation and the way to exercise sovereignty under Article 3. The latter says that sovereignty resides in the people, but it has no constitutional power to reform the constitution, although it is actually its sovereign and holder. Such denial is more evident while the mentioned article clearly states that the State power "*is exercised directly* or through the Assemblies of the People's Power." The added emphasis has not attracted much attention, neither from the propaganda cadres of the regime nor from the critics of the constitution.

The analysis and enlightenment of this contradiction would have significant consequences for the entire process of rebuilding the State and implementing reforms of the constitution and the other laws. How is it possible that Cuban citizens can exercise power directly and have neither legal powers nor recognized mechanisms to reform the constitution, which is an expression of their sovereign power? From here it is possible to bring forward the concept of invented space as a direct exercise of the sovereign power. A second argument reads thus: if we see the constitution as a tree of logical branches, where its articles follow certain sequence for generating power and rights, then Article 137 closes and shields a state power that is not defined in any of the preceding articles on the source of legitimacy and popular sovereignty. The constitutional shielding of the State does not stem from the sovereignty in the constitutional order. All the constitutional shields are mounted further on without logical connection to the sovereignty, but rather to limit it and to deny it. Thusly this article is unconstitutional since it takes certain distance from the exercise of sovereignty. The latter can be exercised not only directly, but also by proxy. Indeed, the deputies elected by the people to the National Assembly cannot represent the ideas of the people on changing a system that supposedly was born from the mandate of the people.

The dilemma of the political actors

These approaches to the articles that provides shielding to the State are basic for a constitutional amendment, whether total or partial. However, the Cuban political dynamics brings into view a general dilemma for all political actors. Such a dilemma emerges from the standard praxis and the

historical path of evolution or change, running from the facts to the law, from the political reality to the constitutional and legal structures. This development is interesting and reflects three key issues of the Cuban state in historical context. The political will and actions were never built on the basis offered by the bureaucratic institutions and the very constitution. The state practices were marked by the needs of government and founded on a self-styled and untouchable Revolution as source of law. Without institutions there was neither a yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the public policies nor a way to establish accountability, legality, and action areas. The state simply acted and turned more complicated the dynamics in all the spheres of social life. In the destructive contrast between the "spontaneous" actions of the regime and the reality, the political practices are undertaken as a matter of fact, not of law. Thus politics inevitably leads to urgencies instead of a series of acts required by law and to be contrasted with the law. That's the way of acting by the time of political deadlock and it's actually way to start a political opening: the usual practice —not the law— as the main criterion for action. The constitution is divorced from social reality. Nobody can comply with its articles to have a social, economic, and cultural life. An essential political fact explains the dynamics of revolution and power in the last 56 years: the State tolerates marginal illegality as an instrument of survival of all social actors. The social cost is the sacrifice of the institutional order, but it also fuels the need to adjust both the institutions and the constitution to the reality in our country.

The social legitimacy of all state and non-state actors allows to return to the debate on universal values and even to perform the basic work on social legitimacy that is needed to push forward constitutional reforms from outside the framework of the constitution, as the government does. Why the unconstitutional reforms made by the government are legitimate, while those proposed by the civil society proposed are not? This question is central to the strategy and tactics of # Otro18: our political and social movement runs through the institutional gaps given by the constitution and the other laws in order to reinforce the scenarios for more in-depth constitutional reforms, social practices and policies, but always from the perspective of the rule of law. That's why we work with two agendas, right now as a draft bills to reform the electoral system: a Minimal Agenda and a Maximal Agenda.

Minimal Agenda and Zero Violence

The Minimal Agenda proposes a series of minimalist reforms to the electoral system, using also the few spaces for association allowed by the current laws. Our purpose is to open and legitimize the political game before the society. An enriched minimal agenda should become the Minimal Project # Otro18 aimed to reform the electoral system. Two processes are running in parallel to the deliberation by the citizens. The deliberative survey —its content is already under development— and the collection of signatures as part of a step-by-step process of public consultation through a clear ballot box. In such a way we will reinforce the sense of identity of the Cuban people with # Otro18, and also seek the legitimate and legalized support for both the universal

guarantees that any plural and competitive electoral system needs and the specific proposals of the Minimal Project. The main purpose is that the new electoral law should guarantee three basic demands: the plurality of the Cuban political society, the competitiveness of the political system, and the direct election of the President. # Otro18 is committed to train and prepare independent candidates. We already have 130 candidates # Otro18 for the upcoming municipal and provincial elections in 2017 and 2108. It's strategically important to work on the three programmatic points of the independent candidates: a local agenda, a structural agenda (the Minimal Project # Otro18) and a minimal political agenda to be presented by the Table of Unity for Democratic Action (MUAD). Moreover, # Otro18 understands that the support needed to make the difference cannot be achieved without mobilization of the citizens. This strategy must be completed in two ways: by placing the Minimal Agenda as part of the MUAD's Minimal Program and by mobilizing around # Otro18 all the projects and organizations working in areas and issues related to the culturally and historically marginalized social sectors. In the Cuban context it's essential and necessary to deploy an additional strategy for campaigning against the violence. In time and space of opening to criticism and to political plurality, it's required to deal with the specific issues of violence in order to meet the state and para-state challenges coming from a vision, overall conception and praxis proper to the closed hegemonies.

In this regard we will resume step by step the Zero Violence Project promoted by various groups of the civil society, largely formed by women.

* All the English versions to Cuban constitutional articles by ConstitutionNet (198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016)