Semestral bulletin on relations between Cubans and Europeans

volume 9 | issue 1 | june 2014

|Ever More United|

cuba-europe dialogues

rewriting cuba
CUBALOG.EU

Index

Editorial

Agnes Koleman

Cuban dissidents are often seen as a marginalized minority, isolated from the rest of Cuban citizens, who prefer to keep their distance from them; either because they despise their anti-regime attitude or because they simply don't want to face the same repercussions as them. Thus, to speak of the Cuban opposition is to speak of loneliness and fear. The struggle of dissidents sometimes resembles an isolated, private endeavour, which has little to do with the Cuban reality.

However, quite a few have already abandoned the dream of the Revolution and it seems that common people and the opposition are not as far apart these days as they used to be. It may even have been quite a while since they stopped being divided.

The Varela Project, conceived by Oswaldo Paya in 1998, is seen as the crucial moment in the process of identification of Cubans with the opposition. Appealing to Article 88 of the Cuban Constitution, which allows citizens to propose laws if they gather 10,000 signatures of registered voters in favour of a particular proposal, Paya and his fellows managed to collect 11,020 signatures in support of a constitutional reform and presented them to the Cuban National Assembly in 2002. Two years later, in 2004 they were able to submit 14,000 new signatures. Although the National Assembly rejected their petition (and by doing so, violated the Constitution), there's an important fact to be emphasized: the great number of Cubans who dared to sign the Project. Most of them, as one of the authors in this newsletter points out, were state employees.

What exactly did the Varela Project call for? Basically, it claimed freedom of expression and association, amnesty for political prisoners,

free enterprise, respect for workers' rights and political pluralism. It's hard to believe that there were many Cubans who didn't agree with it.

The articles in this newsletter explore the relationship between the opposition and the rest of the Cuban nation; they search for things that separate them and, above all, that unite them. In their articles, the authors give examples of solidarity with dissidents shown by a society tired of bearing hardships and, even more importantly, disappointed by broken promises and deepening social inequalities.

These days, it is more necessary than ever to nourish the spirit of the Varela Project, which, a little over a month ago, celebrated the 12 anniversary of its being submitted by Oswaldo Paya to the National Assembly. We also see that the European Union is getting closer to Cuba and the issue of Human Rights has once again become one of the most important topics after economic interests. As far as the Cuban government is concerned, it has been trying to fix the situation in Cuba by implementing some isolated capitalist measures ("capitalist patches", as one of the authors in this newsletter puts it), which, however, far from benefiting the people and changing the situation regarding their rights at least a little bit, have only increased their wants and needs.

Oswaldo Paya believed that Cuba doesn't have to choose between totalitarian populism of the Havana government and savage neoliberalism consisting in the policy of appeasement towards the United States. Cubans have to find their own way. The photos by Cuban photographer Claudio Fuentes which appear in this newsletter show dissidents and common people in Cuba, who are increasingly closer together every day.

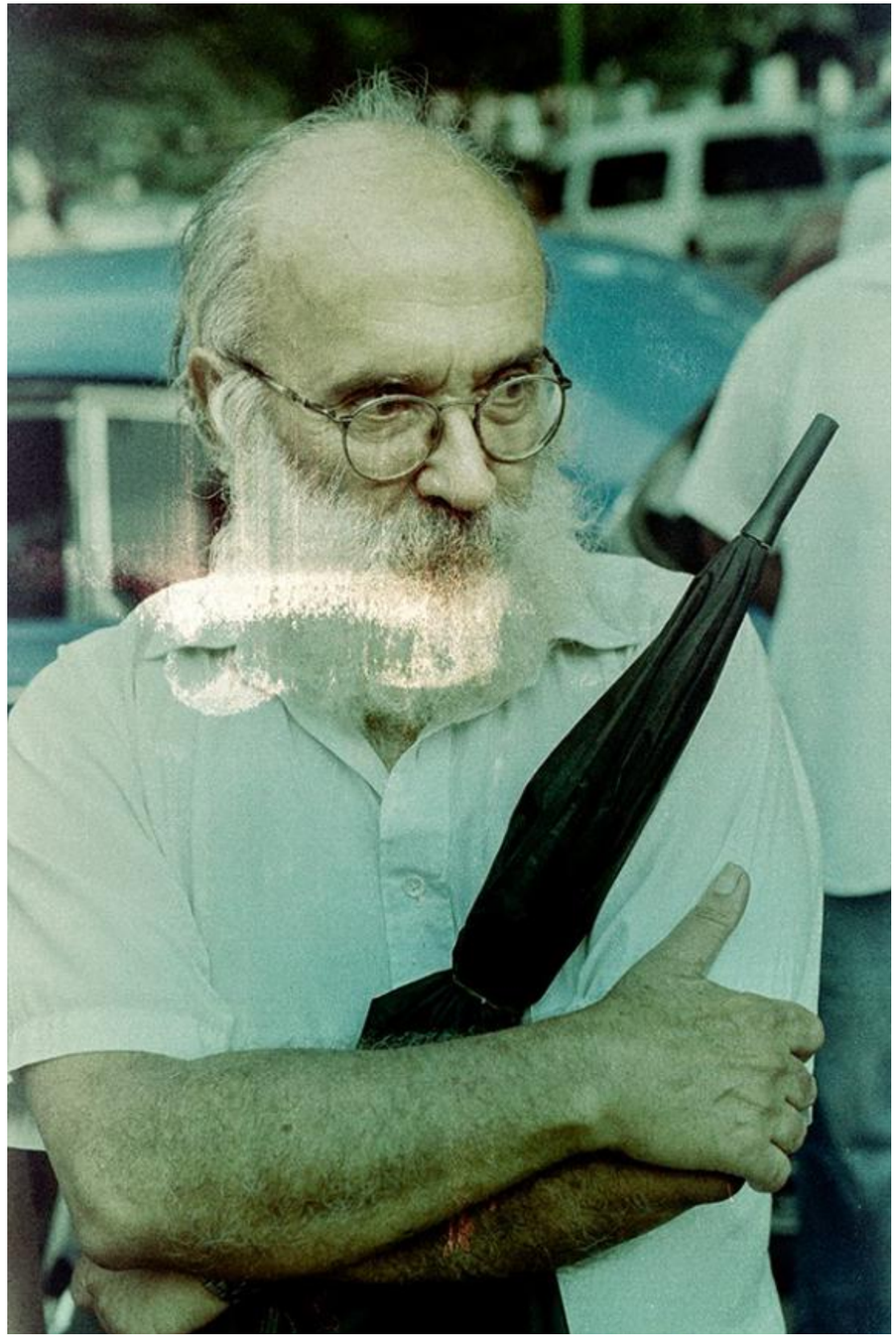


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

Solidarity with the Opposition in Cuba on the Increase

Roberto Guerra | Hablemos Press

Terror in the form of exemplary trials and executions that has been exerted on the Cuban population by the Castro regime for over half a century is gradually leaving the island.

New technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones, personal computers, cable TV and other multimedia devices are dramatically changing people's thinking, but not only this: these modern conveniences have actually succeeded in bringing together ordinary Cubans with the opposition. Although the use of new technologies is not exclusively linked to the struggle for human rights, it often goes hand in hand with it.

I know what I'm saying because I have edited videos shot by my colleagues during various protests in the streets. Reflections of things I saw still remain in my mind. Day by day, ordinary Cubans are a bit closer to the opposition.

In the first three months of 2014, two women, Melkis Faure Echevarria and Sonia de la Caridad organized over a dozen protests in different parts of the capital of Havana. Both of the two women were followed by dozens of citizens who grabbed the leaflets they were handing out, eager to know what was happening. Recordings of these events can be seen on our website www.cihpress.com.

The videos show that while the Police was arresting Melkis and Sonia, a great many of people tried to protect them, shouting: “murderers”, “offenders”, “traitors”, “corruptors”, “these women are only demanding their rights”, “release them,” and many other things. Many of the words and phrases they shouted have not been heard in Cuba for half a

century, some elderly commented.

All of this can be taken as a proof that the protests that have been organized in the provinces of Santa Clara, Holguin and Guantanamo in 2014 show solidarity of the Cuban people with the opposition.

An important event that brought together the opposition and common Cubans was a popular protest known as “cacerolazo” (people banging pots and pans) organized by Ibon Malleza and Rosario Morales in the old market of Cuatro Caminos in 2011. People were chanting “freedom”, “freedom”, “freedom”... for the first time in more than 50 years.

Something similar happened during a protest held by Sara Marta Fonseca, Odalys Sanabria and two other women in front of the building of the Cuban Capitol on August 23, 2011. I remember that people clapped their hands to show their solidarity with these women. Pictures taken there circulated on mobile phones, memory sticks and DVDs, travelling from hand to hand, from province to province, from region to region, to the most remote places on the island and even to the rest of the world thanks to videos that appeared on various websites and were seen by thousands of people.

I see gestures of people's solidarity every day when I walk through my neighbourhood and people ask me if there are any new videos, they are eager to know what are the latest news, what happened with the North Korean ship full of weapons from Cuba that was detained in Panama, they wonder what's happening in Venezuela, what will happen in Ukraine... They always praise us, journalists, for doing a good job in informing the public.

Now, what's there to say about the Damas de Blanco movement? Every time I walk next to any of the women like Berta Soler, Magaly Norvis or Sandra Guerra, I always see people, both young and old, coming to congratulate them and implore them to keep fighting for a new Cuba; I see people who lift their hats or caps, kneeling down to kiss their hands; people who pay their car or taxi fare or give them a flower. That's true people's solidarity with the opposition.

In my opinion, demonstrations of solidarity will, by and by, overthrow the dictatorship that has tried to keep us divided. I believe that the government was able to hold us prisoners for over half a century only by suppressing all signs of solidarity and togetherness.

I could give you dozens of other testimonies of people's solidarity with the opposition, which become more and more common every day. I could spend days narrating them, but I'll give you just one example: an old woman walking around with a memory stick on her neck, gathering videos.

I trust in solidarity, I think it is changing the minds of Cubans and I believe that it's bringing the change we need.

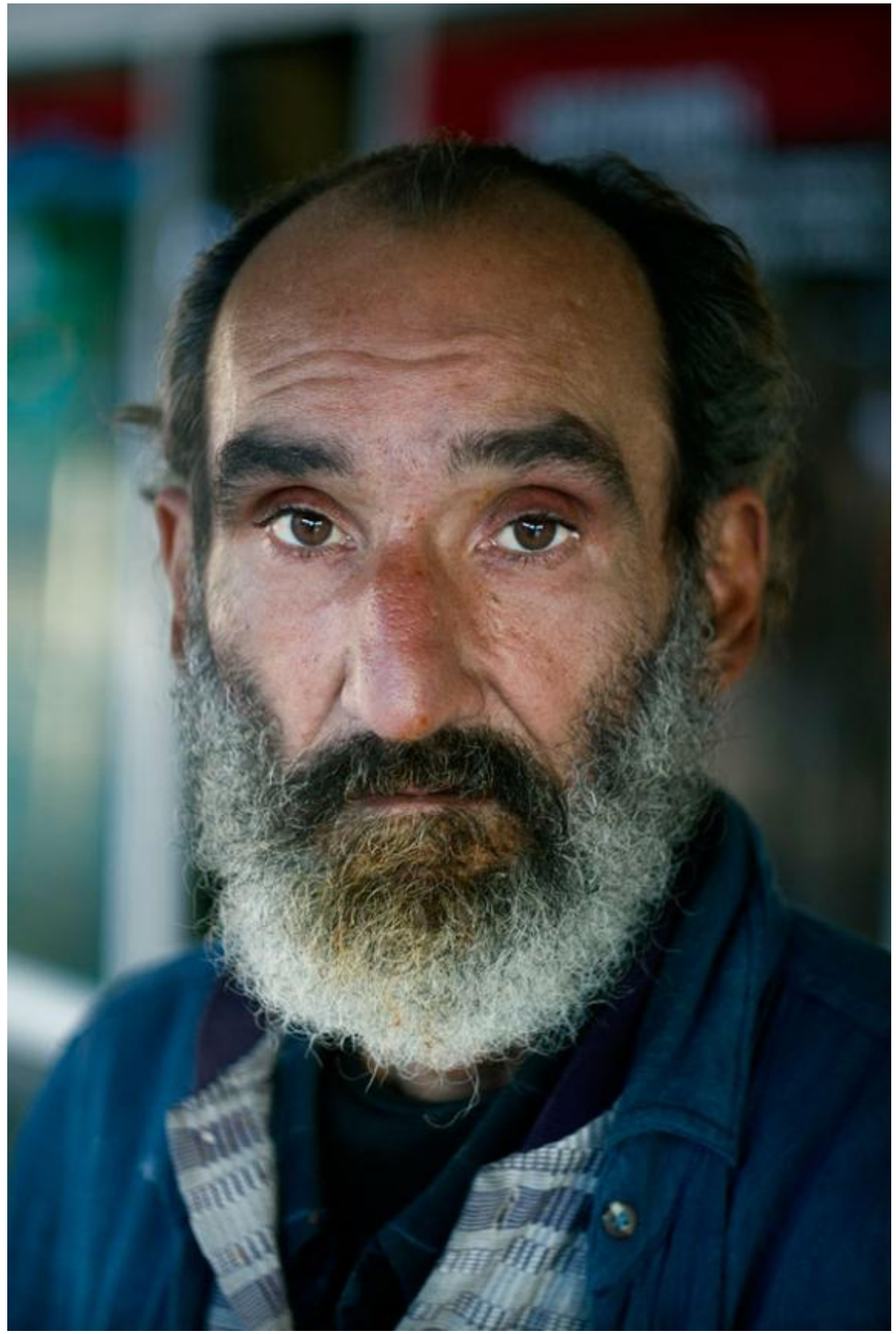


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

Fear, Lies, and Videotapes

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

The period of fear in Cuba seems to be over. Or is it just an impression?

The “culture of fear”, as Oswaldo Paya Sardinas (1952-2012), founder of the Christian Liberation Movement and a martyr of the regime, described the situation in Cuba, may be, at last, fading away in every corner of the island, hand in hand with the decline of the regime's apparatus of control, which has plunged the country into several-decades-long delusion and decadence. To be sure, I'm not speaking in symbols, I'm talking about an actual apparatus that has been wickedly feeding on censorship and imprisonments and corpses of Cuban people for dozens of years.

Faced with the unpunishable barbarism of the State, the wisdom of our people has developed a cynical streak. Generation after generation, Cubans have been learning to fear. Fear has become a value in itself - an unmistakable symptom of our instinct of self-preservation. We learned to fear in order not to die, to live on. Or, perhaps, to die on.

Worse still, we got used to hiding that fear - we even got used to hiding it from each other. As lying became our way of life, we wanted to think of ourselves as innocent, as children facing the Patronizing Tyrant, the Philanthropic Ogre, the Maximum Leader. As a result, we have developed a kind of an Oedipus complex: everything-for-the-Revolution and everything-against-the-Revolution, as if the totalitarian utopia was the measure of everything.

The savvy of a servant: to imagine oneself being a servant at one's own will. To think of oneself as a useless servant to one's master instead of a servile one. To go unnoticed under the panoptic eye of the power.

Indeed, we believed that this gloomy tactics would save us from being taken for the regime's accomplices. We thought that this clean strategy could excuse our lack of concern for all injustices and evil acts around us. Oh, poor little things, that's how we saw ourselves, so locked up under that vile Castro boot, there, in his despotic tropical paradise. As if it wasn't enough, so far away from the world and so close to the imperial archfiend...

Behaving like infantilized citizens, we pretend not to know anything at all - this insulting ignorance forms the basis of our most sinister wisdom. We have learned to be ignorant the hard way – the Revolution has taught us. We learned not ask, not to doubt. Yet, we also learned to obey without knowing anything about what we obey, and that is the worst anthropological legacy of Castro's regime: millions of lives based on lies, a fake Peter Pan syndrome, which all psychiatry books classify as the most incurable mental illness. Perhaps also the only truly ele/mental illness - we believe that the world around us violates our will and our only defence is self-suppression. The disease could be called a “Pinocchio Pan Syndrome”.

Fidel Castro managed to turn Cubans into rag puppets, which are now about to lose their puppeteer. Indeed, a new life form inhabits the island - the New Homunculus, an unbelievable, multi-purpose ventriloquist able to fully adapt to the rhetoric of the Revolution regardless of the era. Luckily, the 21st century has finally brought the first gleams of another illusion – the period of fear in Cuba seems to be over. Hopefully it's not just an impression.

It's easy to switch from fear to a lie, without any transition. On the other hand, there is a great abyss between living in lies and living in truth, which can only be overcome by the power of virtue. For Fidel Castro, virtue is a war crime, an act of treason. It is something that the Commander in Chief has never been able to forgive Cubans – it fills him with horror, if he cannot corrupt us. That's also the reason why the regime cold-bloodedly murdered the freest man in Cuban history - Oswaldo Paya Sardinas. For that very reason the executioners in olive green uniforms did not hesitate to sacrifice the life of a young witness of the crime (as if it were collateral damage), the social activist Harold Cepero, one of the noblest and most brilliant leaders of the Christian Liberation Movement.

The Varela Project, initially conceived by Oswaldo Paya and jointly carried out by hundreds of citizens committed to achieving real change in Cuba, has been the most important point of identification between opponents, dissidents and common people. It should be emphasised that those who signed this peaceful and constitutional initiative to amend Cuban laws managed to drop the mask of cowardice and cynicism. They stopped being Fidel's subjects and inaugurated the future, which has been stolen from them since the first Thursday in January 1959.

The Varela Project has been the first demonstration in Cuba in decades with participation of thousands of Cubans. Yet, it wasn't an ordinary demonstration in streets, which, in a militarized state like Cuba would only result in a Tiananmen-style slaughter under the baton of the Havana government (which would probably provoke hardly any international condemnation). It was a different kind of demonstration - one that took place within the very heart of the system (an infarcted one). It was a libertarian statement made right within the obsolete

government authorities. Actually, with the Varela Project, Cubans have jointly said “NO” to lies and fear and they said it openly, before the disbelieving eyes of the world.

Thanks to Albert Camus, who was also a victim of a car attack like Cepero and Paya, we know that a rebel is someone who once stops and says NO. The realization of this has been the source of Castro's vengeful panic when he found out that after the Varela Project, the socialist system in Cuba could never be considered legitimate any more. He still owes Cubans an answer to this and for this reason, he has to make way for a transition, which will put an end to the seizure of the State by a clan dressed up as the Communist Party (which is but one of the many mafia families that have turned Latin America into one large, uncivil cemetery).

Cuban paradoxes: the overwhelming majority of signatories of the Varela Project were people employed within Castro's Cuba. That means that the petition was actually signed by people paid by the establishment itself, it was signed by the Cuban proletariat, by people from within the system, who, at close range, like an apoptosis in face of the apotheosis of the Revolution, exercised their right guaranteed by Article 88g of the Constitution ratified by the tyrant himself in 1976.

The Varela Project is a cry of hope in the midst of defeat and emptiness, a farewell to the empire of lies and fear. It is the most feasible of all hopes to fully restore the splendour of the word “truth”. Naturally, quite a few of the signatories were expelled from their jobs and schools. Almost all leading representatives of the initiative ended up in prison and were deported. To top it all, the father of the project was assassinated.

Nevertheless, the repressive power is unable to focus on each individual person in the ocean of over 25,000 signatories, who are still waiting for the Cuban National Assembly of People's Power to start observing its own law.

In a way, each signatory to the Varela Project is a living gospel; beyond any political affiliation (which is a very ephemeral thing, anyway) and any ideology (always so idiotic!). Being apolitical, they are an instrument capable of mobilizing the best energies not only in civil society, but the Cuban nation as a whole, be it inside or outside the fossilised borders of the island, a nation that has only just started to enter the era of modernity.

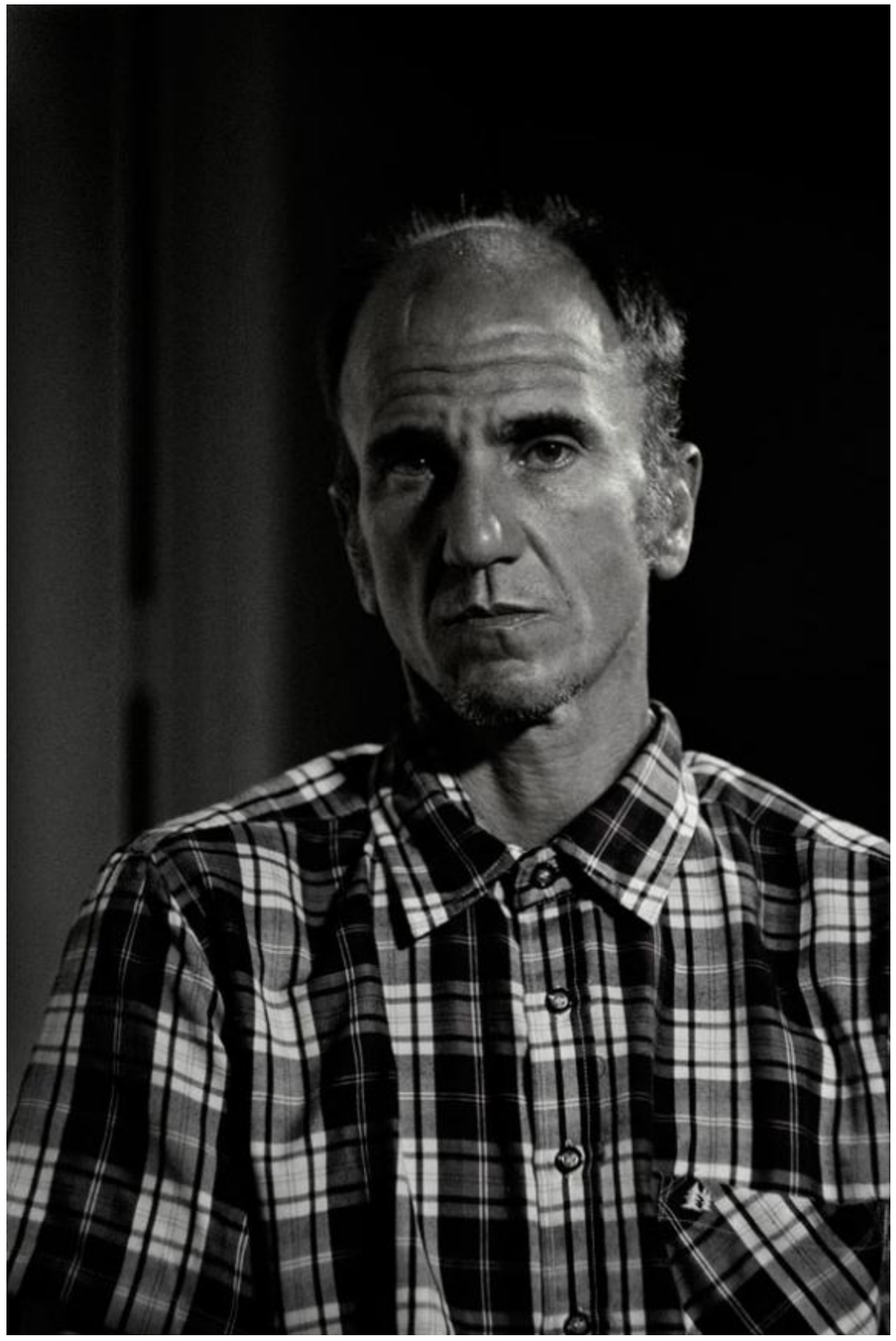
In recent years, many countries (whose number, however, should have been higher), showed their solidarity with the human rights activists in Cuba, supplying them with audiovisual recording equipment and laptops to allow them to edit their recordings. Thanks to this, the State can no longer hide repressive acts against Cubans in the island behind the “Sugar Curtain”, it can no longer cover them in the darkness typical of the Middle Ages. Thanks to this, many acts involving violation of rights and physical violence by the Police can now be recorded and, sooner rather than later they are reported to the world, using the cracks in the wall of the government censorship trying hard to stop people from obtaining private Internet access.

For this reason, it has now become less difficult to abandon the lie of the “perfect social system” because more and more Cubans have gathered first-hand testimonies – records of violations made either by themselves or by their neighbours, which can be preserved for posterity. Yet, video

cameras (formerly with tapes, these days almost always digital) are not only the voice of the brave, they also show the truth of those who still don't have enough courage to be their true themselves in their country.

Facts are dumb and that may be the reason why they are so eloquent. They are absolutely independent of the point of view of those who narrate them or receive their message. They cannot be manipulated, unlike many other things including the popular imagination, when it gets caught in the crossfire of tribunes and state terrorists. Facts are quantum critical points of history, they nourish hope. Despite the deaf demagoguery typical for the Castro regime since the very beginning, it's now perfectly clear that history will condemn the Castro, Inc.

Beyond any internal differences and disappointments, Cuban opposition is still alive and kicking, narrating the indisputable facts of the penultimate days of the era of despotism. The future is now. So be it.



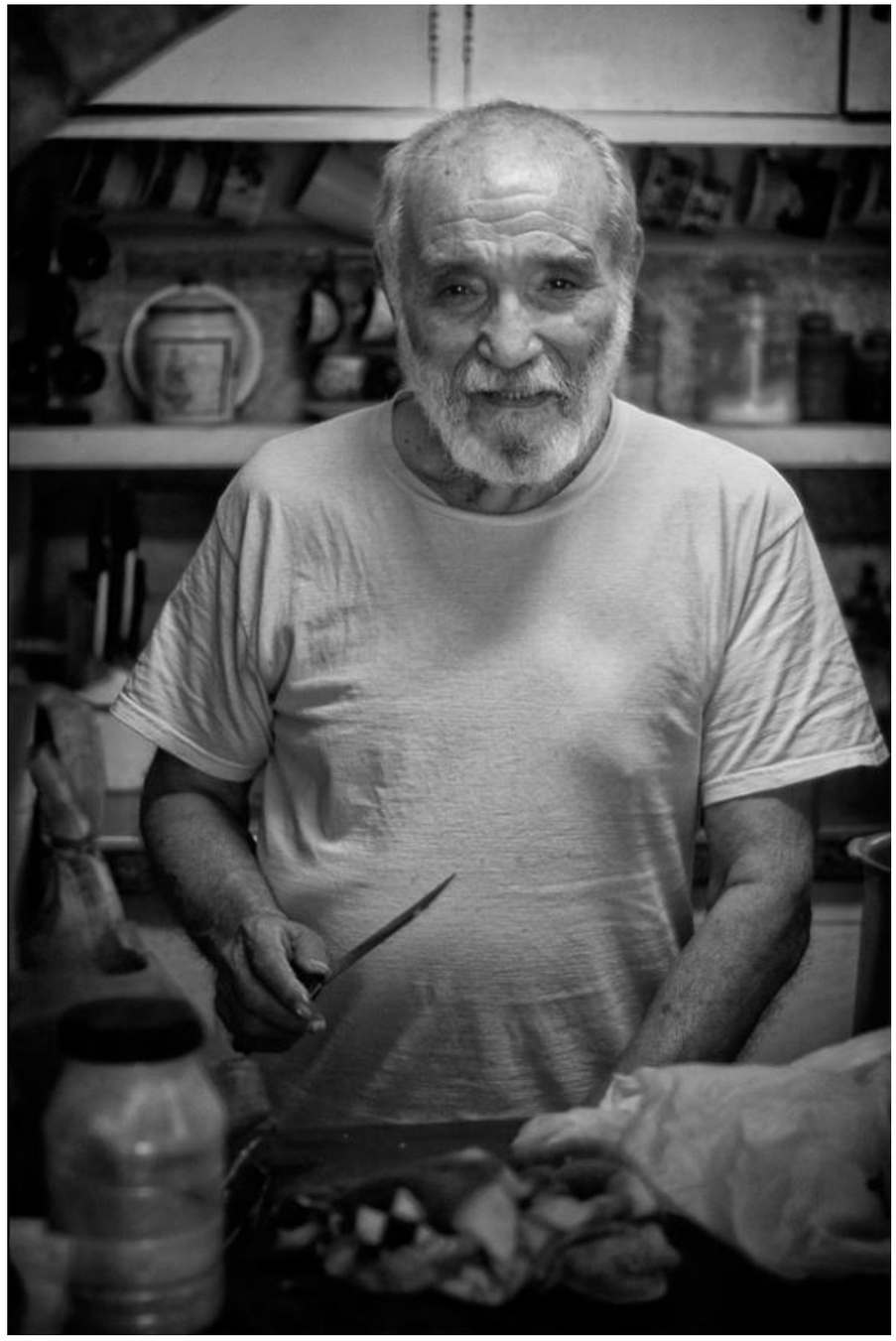


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

The Journalist Who Tells the Truth

Alejandro Tur Valladares

I heard somebody banging at the front door. Dogs were barking like they never bark at this time of the day. Being well aware of the current situation in the island, I immediately knew that there must be a group of parapolice, who had come to my house to perform an act of repudiation.

As I was getting up from the bed, the banging continued. This time, its urgency was increased by an authoritative voice ordering me to open the door.

It was so early in the morning that there were no shadows yet. I groped my way to the door and when I opened it, a uniformed man stepped forward. Behind him, there was a heterogeneous group of people waiting for their turn to scold me. They were members of the infamous Rapid Response Brigades.

Someone who acted as the director of the wrathful orchestra shouted "One, two, three," and the people obediently began to cry epithets that they had prepared for me: "Mercenary", "traitor", "terrorist", "spineless creature" were among the most repeated ones.

That happened in 2005 - two years after the Black Spring and the subsequent wave of repression, which resulted in the arrest of 75 political opponents, of whom over twenty were independent journalists. And a year after I started to work as an independent journalist myself.

My articles reflecting the Cuban reality as it was, without embellishments and understatements, had annoyed the guardians of the Communist Party ideology, who decided to crush me with the most powerful weapon against dissidents that they had in their arsenal: fear.

When the government wants to inspire fear in somebody, it often uses the Rapid Response Brigades - a dispersed mass of manipulable

individuals who, for various reasons such as ideological commitment, opportunism, joy of defamation or simply for fear, condescend to abusing and even to beating up political opponents.

The hard core of these Brigades is formed by militant communists, who are usually accompanied by ordinary citizens recruited from workplaces across the island. These are either hoaxed or compelled to participate in acts of repudiation against “political heretics”.

As it was the first time I was facing such a situation, the hysterical screams of the tumultuous crowd obviously hit home. Of course I was scared, mainly because I was not alone – my wife and daughter were going through this surreal experience with me.

In spite of my determination not to let myself crush I must confess that I felt depressed. How could it be, I wondered, that there were Cubans willing to repress other Cubans?

After three hours of the distorted Castrist litany, the initial indignation and excitement gave way to abomination. Suddenly, two things happened that completely changed my pessimistic view of the Cuban society that I had formed back then.

Everything happened so fast that nobody had time to react. A cyclist who was pedalling through the crowd stopped and with an amazing calmness and a serene, manly voice, shouted to me: “Buddy, don't let them intimidate you! Keep your chin up and move on!”

His bold demonstration of solidarity was like lightning. Demoralization started to spread among the Brigade flunkies.

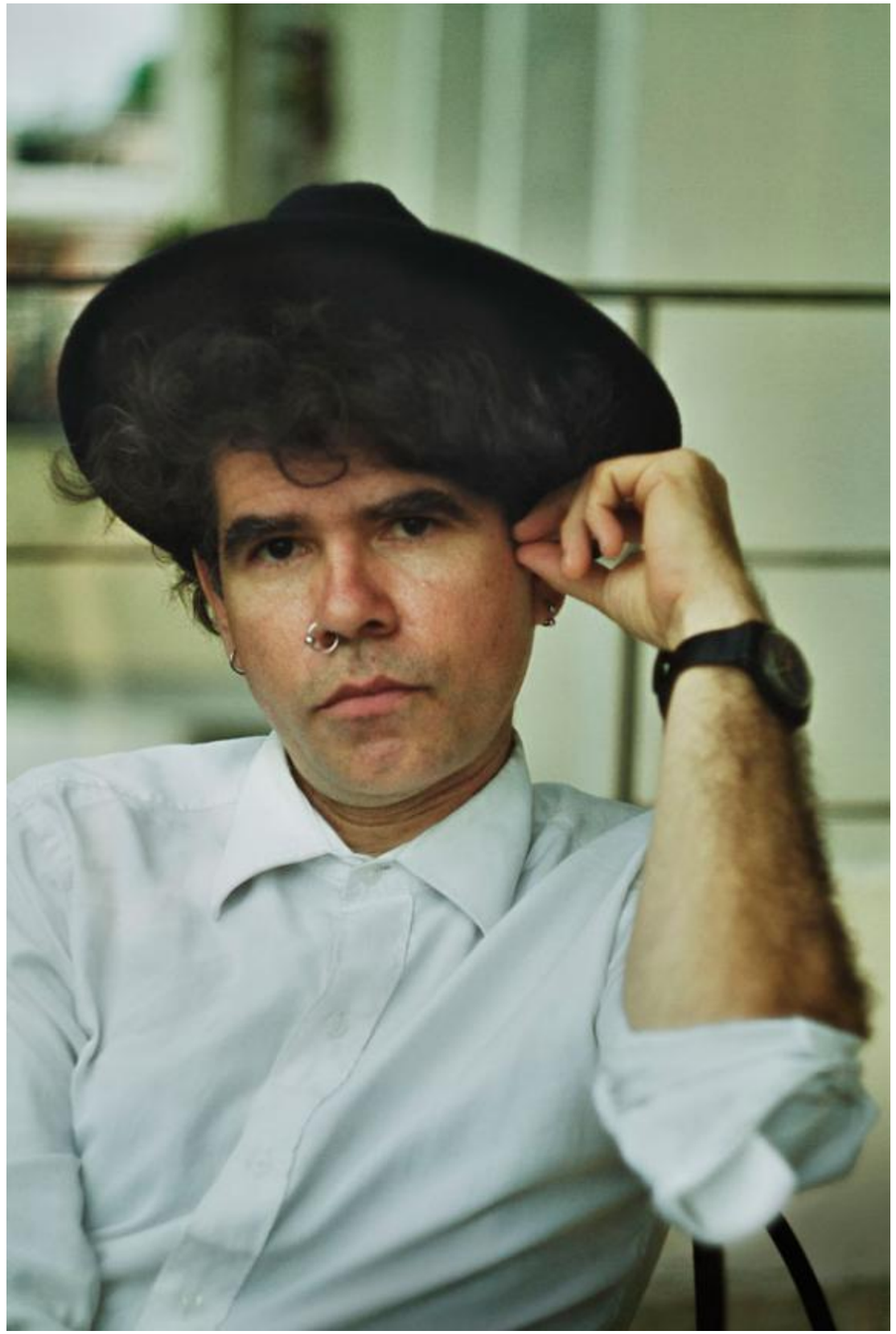
Before the person in charge of that Witches' Sabbath had time to restore the morale of the group by shouting slogans, another thing happened – a deed as brave as the first, which had an unintended but monumental effect.

To show his solidarity, a neighbour of mine wanted to enter my house despite the apparent resentment of the small group of fundamentalists. He was stopped in his attempt and after that, three members of the Brigade beat him fiercely.

In no time, the vast majority of those present showed their disagreement with what was happening – especially those who were participating in the act involuntarily, due to having been deceived or forced. Their throats filled with expressions like: “I don't agree with beating a defenceless man” or “What kind of revolutionary are you if you beat somebody who hasn't done any wrong to you?” and they, without prior agreement, started to move away.

From that moment on I have been able to perceive the face of solidarity in the Cuban society – a face that the government tries hard to keep hidden in the dark through fear, official propaganda and imposed ignorance.

Also, at that moment I stopped being a stranger (from the point of view of social life). People I didn't know from all corners of the city would come to my door to show their support. My very identity changed once and for all - I stopped being Alejandro and many people now know me as “the journalist who tells the truth”.



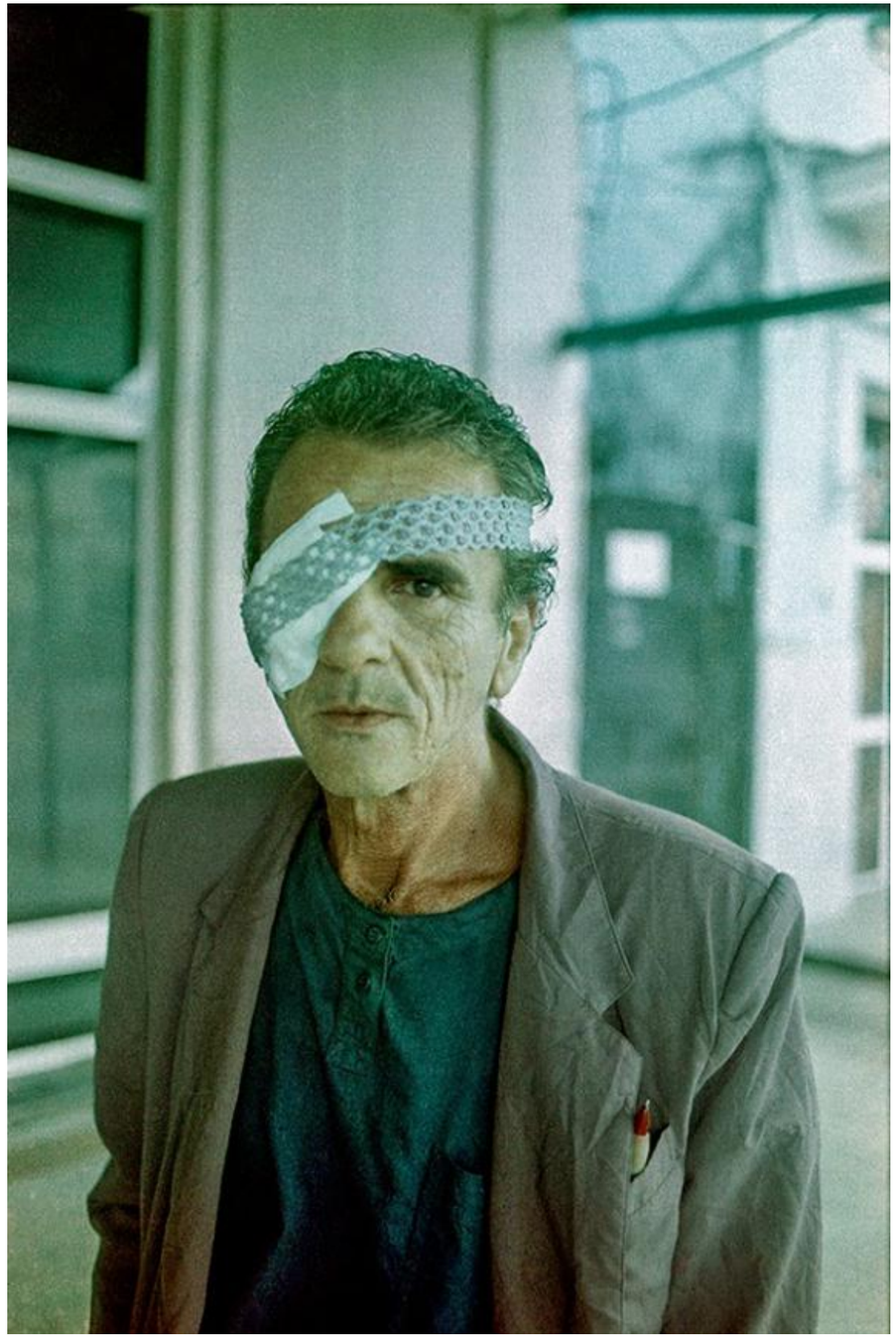


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

What Made Me Cross the Line

Francis Sánchez

There are still people coming to tell me, with a mournful expression, how sorry they feel about “my situation”. They even take the liberty to speculate on what I did wrong, what made me become a kind of writer who emits some kind of subtle radiation that the State power detects and rejects. I feel ashamed and sick about the intelligentsia around me and sometimes I'm quite unable to defend myself, running out of words or even will. But from time to time, I do ask myself what went wrong...

For example, when did I cross the line and lost the opportunity to work as an official Cuban writer (along with the perks of being one)? What did I do wrong, or out of the “normal”? When did my name appear on the blacklist?

Could it all have started when me and my wife and some friends went to visit Reynaldo Hernandez Soto, who was held in the Canaleta prison, to show him our support? The young poet was imprisoned for having dared to write a letter to the Cuban president, in which he expressed his disagreement with the execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa in 1989. A romantic soul, the lad put his name and address in the heading of the letter. He was charged with contempt and locked up behind bars.

Was it when I received the Catholic sacrament of baptism in 1994, the year of the great Cuban migration crisis? At that time, adherence to religious beliefs had not yet been authorized by a government decree, which means that religion had not yet been accepted as part of the country's spiritual landscape. Yet, there might have been an even more decisive factor that has ruined my career – my participation in the act of taking the painting of Our Lady of Charity (La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre) out of the basilica and carrying it on our shoulders through the

street and around the park, in front of a cordon of the Police dressed in plain clothes, at a time when such processions were forbidden.

Perhaps the last straw that broke the camel's back was when I wrote and circulated the article “The Crisis of Low Culture” right in the middle of the “e-mail war” (2007). It was when Fidel ceded the presidency to his brother Raul and a group of elite Havana writers panicked in fear that it could lead to purges like those of the 70s. As a result, there was a wave of chain emails expressing fear. Someone informed me that the minister got really angry about my article, which he called a “malicious text”. Of all the participants, I was the only one who received an official response from a functionary, who was trying to be as “destructive” as he could, but in the most shameful and childish way possible, throwing me in the face how much I could have earned from holding copyright on my published works and indirectly offering me a deal if I agreed to sell myself to the regime.

Also, it might have been my participation in the “Poetry Without End” festival in 2009, which took place despite the fact that the government stopped supporting it. A week before the festival, each of the invited received a phone call informing us that the event had been officially suspended. I called the boys from the OMNI-Zona Franca group, who told me that they were banished from the Community Centre of Alamar after they had refused to act as the Police and guarantee that they would not let Yoani Sanchez or any political opponent participate in the festival. They also told me that the festival would be held at any cost - in their own homes. So I went there and, clearly, there weren't many other disobedient poets from the rest of the country.

Yet, perhaps the most serious offence was my disobedience to the already mentioned functionary, who came to me one day in the evening to discourage me from participating in the pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Lazarus that was to be held the next day. He said that “something could happen” and expressed his belief that it would be very pitiful if a poet like me found himself in such trouble. Next day, as we were walking the pilgrimage route stretching several kilometres, taking turns to carry the huge piece of wood representing the cross and chanting rhymed slogans, we were flanked by rows of armed guards taking photos from all angles.

The worst thing, still, could have been my opening an independent blog site in 2010 and calling it “Man in the Clouds”. If I had stayed only with comments on imaginary figures in clouds and other delights, I might have avoided problems. However, I wrote an article in which I advocated freedom of my friend, political prisoner Pedro Arguelles, and another one in which I commented on the first anniversary of the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who died as a result of a hunger strike. I'm well aware that the regime's method of domestication of Cuban intellectuals involves teaching them that “other people”, or, strictly speaking, political dissidents must not be recognized or even seen.

It could also be that I quit UNEAC (Union of Cuban Writers and Artists) in 2011. Nobody should have been or should be alarmed by it (regardless if there were any other cases), if it really were a voluntary decision to participate (or not) in an association uniting the whole range of artists of the country, with all their ways of thinking and abysmal contradictions, in a common doctrine: the guidance of a single party. The truth is that the politicization of Cuban society has a peremptory nature – it leaves

no space for intellectuals to express or develop themselves through various means and ways or participate in spontaneous organizations. That's why getting out of control and rejecting institutional patronage means suicide. I committed it. Yeas, my loathing resulted in a suicide.

Yet, I don't see a point in digging through memories and looking for break-even points in my life and my professional image. It has always been clear to me why the idea of independence gained that monstrous appearance: because being independent means being unpredictable. It doesn't matter what my poems suggest or what my books say, there will always be a difference, a gap between the way I walk and the official road to success.

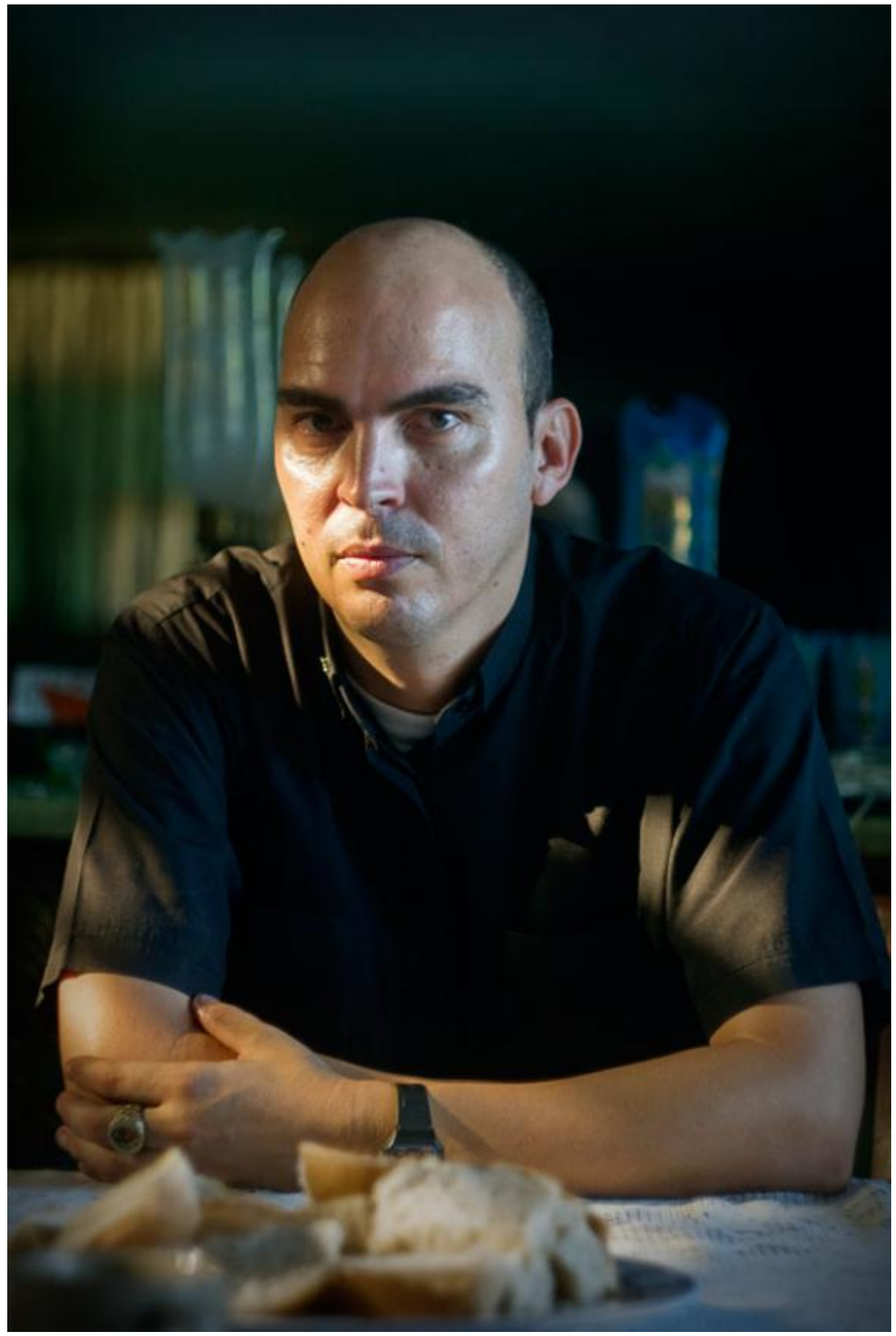


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

A Difficult Situationl

Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello

Many people wonder how is it possible that Cubans are so “obedient”. Over 50 years, the regime has been trying to shape the inhabitants of the island with the aim to create a “new man” - one that would not protest, that would clap his hands, parade through the streets, keep his head down and tighten his belt more and more each day.

The truth is, obedience to the State has been instilled in people from early on. Yet, it has been done in such a subtle way that only a few have been able to notice it because everything has been carried out in the name of social justice, equality and development.

Nowadays, Cubans of the first and second generation of the totalitarian era wonder how they could sacrifice their whole lives without looking ahead to the future – they haven't accumulated anything but needs and dreams.

Some Cubans manage to overcome their fears, mostly with the intention to leave the country. Difficult as it may be to admit, there's a very high percentage of dissidents who become opponents only because they want to emigrate to the United States.

Those who join the opposition must first go through an adaptation process – a period when the Political Police tries to force them to give up dissident activities or start cooperating with them. Luckily for the opposition, only a few leave its ranks at this stage and only a few decide to cooperate with the regime. However, the vast majority of dissidents eventually gets used to hours-long detentions, imprisonment, beatings, social discrimination, acts of repudiation by the Rapid Response Brigades, and a long list of other forms of harassment.

Forms of abuse and violence used by the regime against the opposition include criminal propaganda. The government keeps accusing dissidents of being mercenaries paid by and serving to the United States, even though they have no money and live in deplorable conditions. Also, you can be sure that there's always a Political Police officer (at a local, regional or sometimes even government level) eager to scare everyone somehow related to the particular dissident, including his or her family.

Some may ask, why do people obey them? The answer lies in the longstanding work of the communist regime, which is something that can't be understood by anybody who has not lived in a dictatorship. Everything, absolutely everything belongs to the State and if there's anything that doesn't, it inevitably runs the risk of vanishing. This, for example, is the case of the small private sector established recently.

Broadly speaking, nobody wants to risk the little they have by showing support for the opposition, which is also the reason why many people consent to participate in acts of repudiation against dissidents. Also, the government makes use of children in schools, who can be freely manipulated without asking for a permission of their parents, whom the regime gets mobilized during school hours.

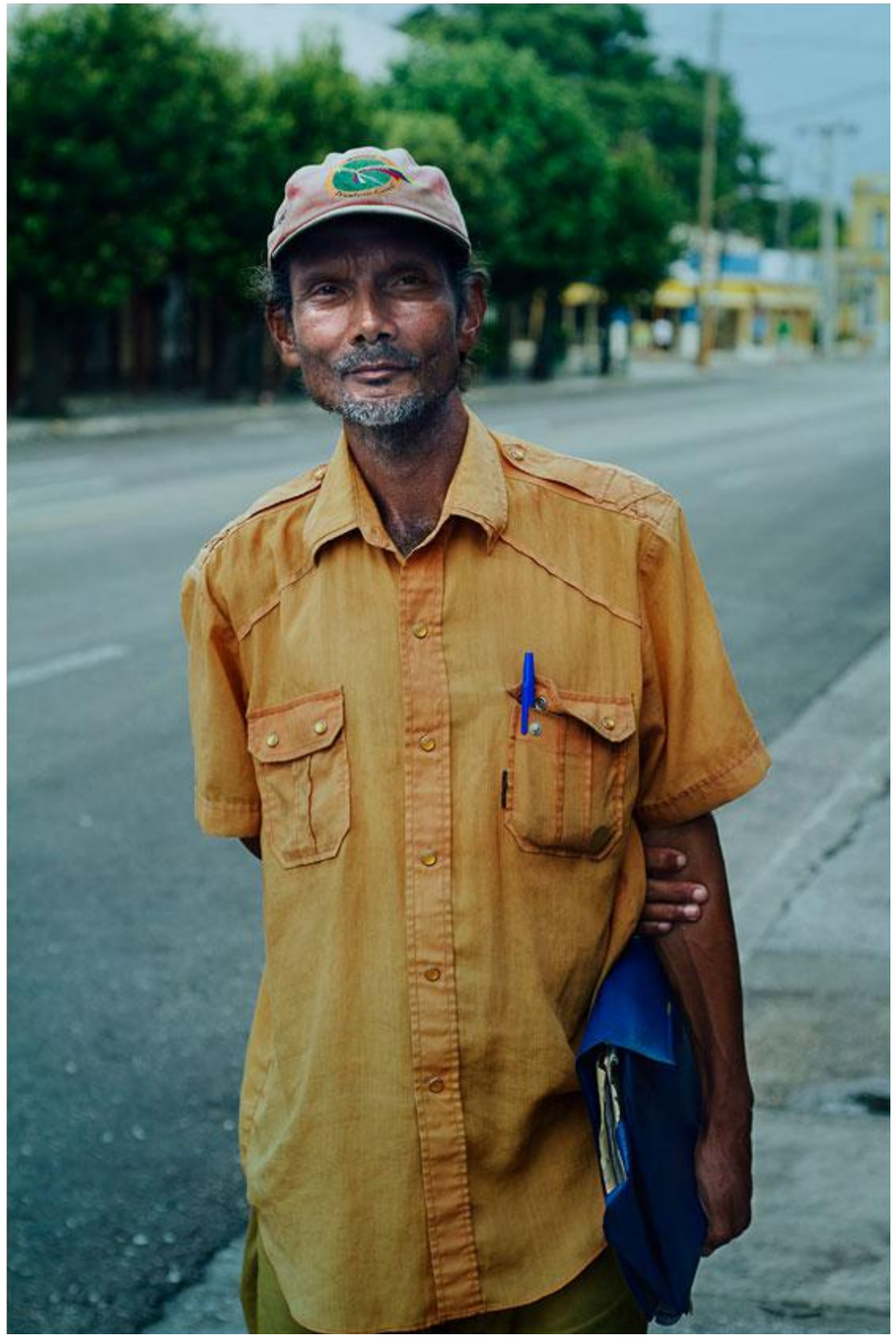
The dictatorship wants to make the world believe that most Cubans support the Revolution. Unfortunately, it's not an overstatement but a sad truth, since most people are simply unable to refuse to do what the regime wants and orders them to do. But that doesn't mean that Cuban society is divided. Even though there is a deep abyss between the devotees of the Party and the dissidents, there's one thing they all have in common: Everybody longs for a change and there's widespread admiration for dissidents and people known as “members of human rights”.

It must be owned that some of the opposition groups in the island have not been able to develop a clever policy of approaching people. Quite the contrary, their activity has sometimes lead to promoting fear in the population.

For instance, there are people who bravely shout slogans in the streets (especially while being arrested) such as: “Down with Fidel!”, “Down with Raul!”, “Long Live Human Rights!”, and others. By doing this they only aggravate the anger of the Police, which beats them in plain sight of ordinary citizens passing by and takes them to a station of the National Revolutionary Police (PNR).

Some organizations have changed their tactics, but the message still doesn't get through to people. Part of the opposition give themselves to making documents, collecting signatures, creating new organizations, etc. Others use twitter to communicate with the world, publish articles abroad, talk to diplomats and important personalities, etc. It's not that these things weren't necessary – it's only that they fail to connect to the people, which is a necessary condition for the opposition to become the spearhead in organizing the society and seeking democracy once and for all.

Despair and material needs are things that link Cubans together most strongly. Social inequality, which has increased significantly in the last ten years, has already sparked some protests, which are not enough to bring about a change, but sufficient for the regime to understand the danger in which it has fallen.



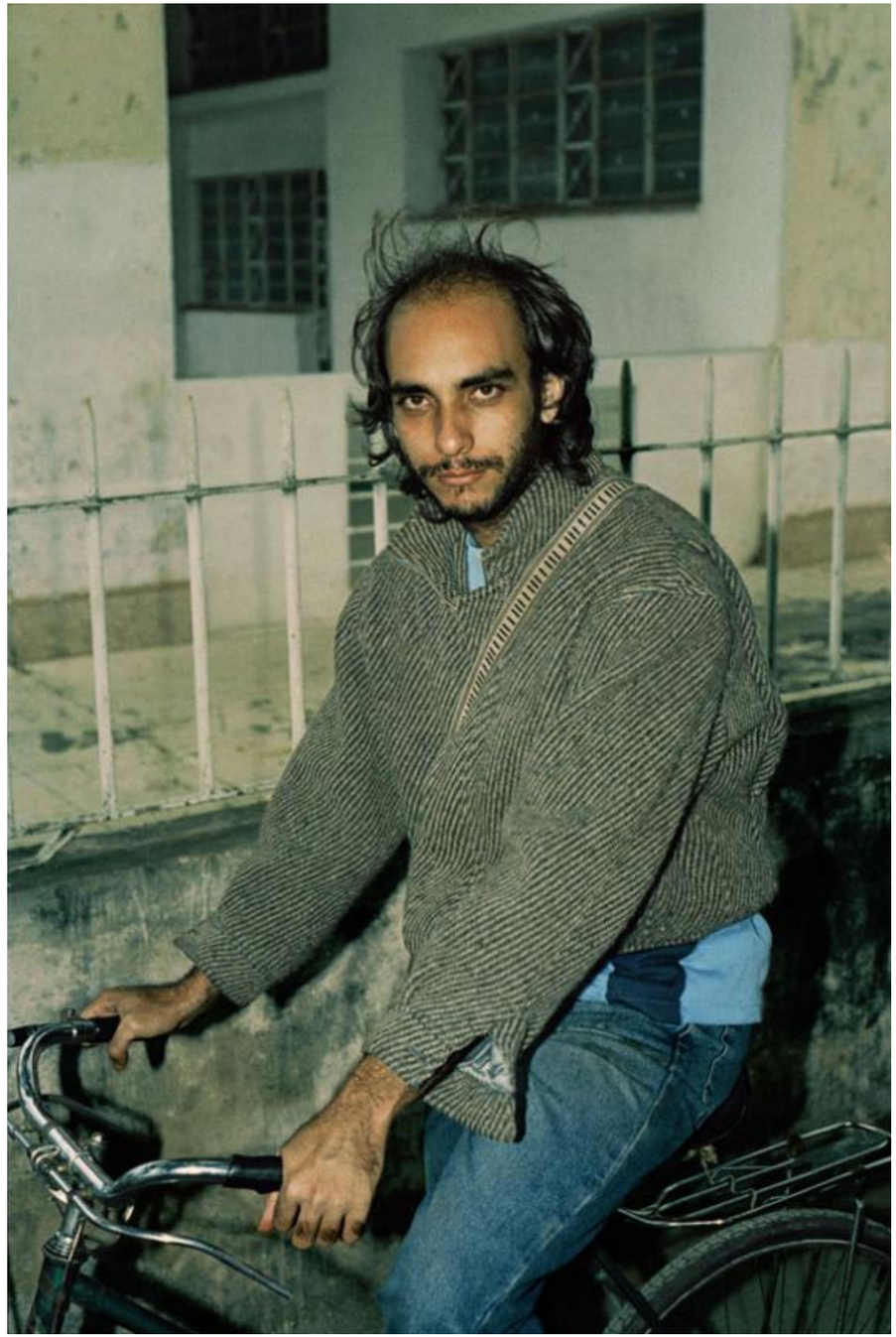


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

A True Agreement

Jorge Olivera Castillo

There are very few Cubans who would not wish that the model in their country changed. Even active members of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League are filled with this impossible longing for a change as a result of the critical socio-economic, political and ideological situation in Cuba.

Yet, it's extremely difficult to materialize such desires in a country controlled by a complex network of agents and collaborators, where there are no other institutions than those controlled by the State – a circumstance which alone is sufficient to realize the vulnerability of those who have decided to join any of the opposition groups.

Despite all adversities, progress has been made in putting together a united movement for transition to democracy. Clearly, there's still a long way to go, but the mere fact that the pro-democracy efforts have spread across the whole island is an indisputable success.

I would like to mention initiatives like Concilio Cubano (Cuban Council), La Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil (Assembly to Promote Civil Society) and Proyecto Varela (the Varela Project), which have, irrespectively of their singularity and their specific aims, put in efforts to spread the fight for a peaceful change among the masses. None of this would be possible if it weren't for thousands of people involved in the said initiatives.

The most ambitious of the above projects, and without any doubt one with the highest international impact, was the Varela Project, which managed to gather and submit to the National Assembly over 10,000 signatures in support of implementation of particular constitutional

changes. Although all these projects failed due to government reprisals, there's one thing that should be stressed: the gradual loss of fear to protest against the status quo in the country.

This ongoing trend could reach its climax in the coming years, if the regime fails to promptly make changes that would remove the obstacles standing in the way of a more economically rational model, which would respect fundamental freedoms.

The overall agreement on the necessity to put an end to a dictatorship that has affected the lives of four generations of Cubans has taken shape naturally. Clearly, doubts and reservations still persist, but that doesn't mean that everything is lost. All in good time - and Cuba is no exception to the rule. So, regardless of how long it might take, real socialism will one day disappear from the island once and for all, the way it disappeared from the Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

This opinion may be supported by various facts, for example, deterioration of many spheres of social life. Equality, free services or full employment have become purely rhetorical terms. Most people feel disappointed about so many broken promises, about all kinds of prohibitions, about the government's efforts to fix socialism with capitalist patches, which, instead of benefiting the country lead to even more severe deprivation.

To sum it up, the Castro regime has run out of its supporters even in its very core. It can only count on backing from other countries, which, however, will not have decisive influence on the course of the country's internal development. Cubans are convinced that it's time to turn the page of authoritarianism and fully participate in the reconstruction of the moral profile and material situation in the country.

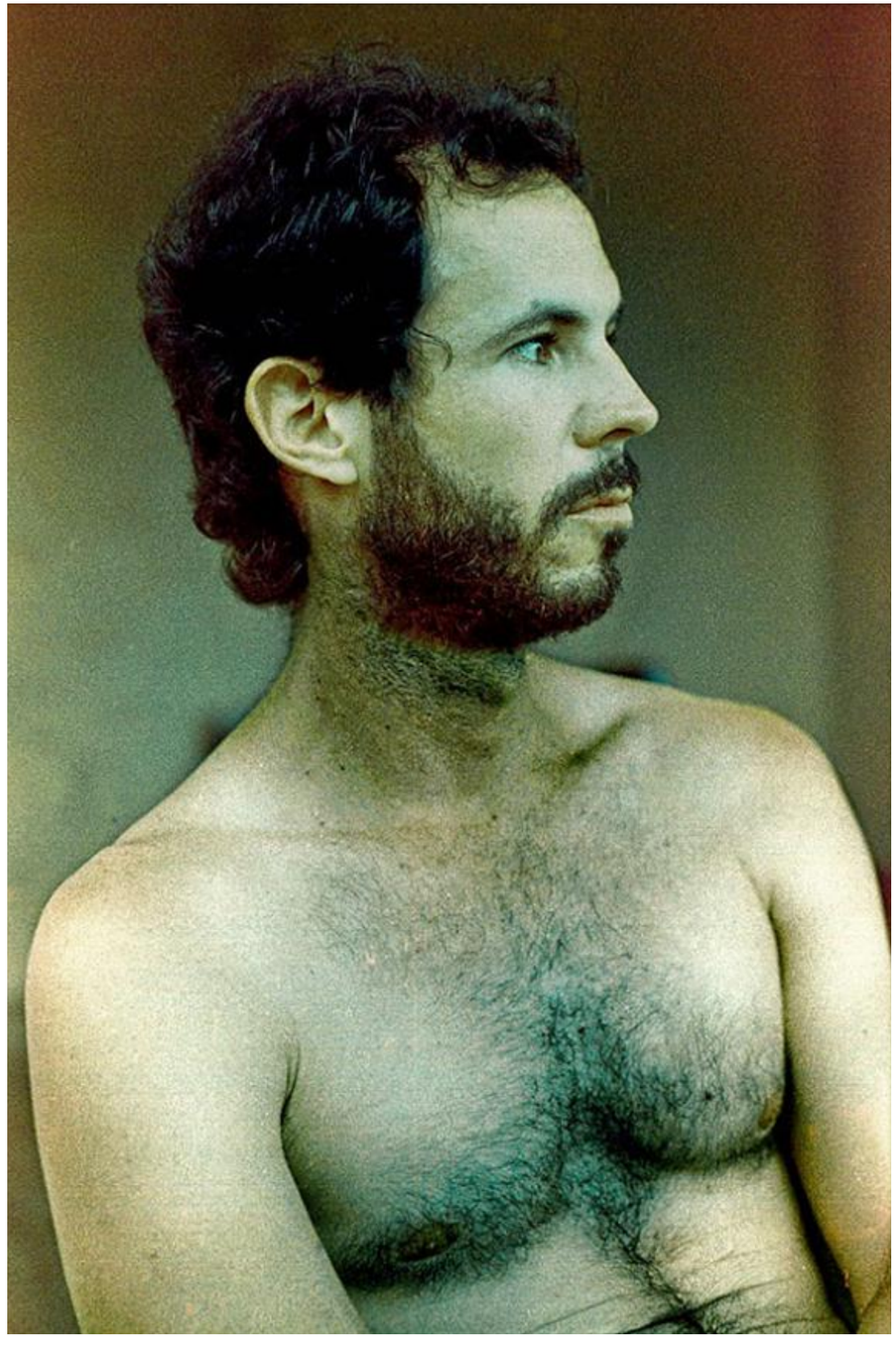


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

Separated by Politics, United in Business

Julio César Álvarez

In Cuba there are no religious conflicts, nor any competing ethnic groups or territorial disputes. However, the society is divided by different ideological views.

To be more specific, members of the Communist Party cannot associate with people who are at odds with the revolutionary process. If they do so, it's considered a serious offence and they are punished by expulsion from the Party. Members of the armed forces face even harsher penalties. If they are proven guilty of maintaining friendly relations with people opposed to the Communist regime, they can be accused of insubordination and may end up in prison.

Even ordinary citizens can be at risk if the Interior Ministry (MININT) finds out that they enjoy friendly relationships with Cubans who disagree with the country's political system. This can happen, for example, when the Ministry performs background checks on them when they apply for a job. Such “failure” of an applicant almost always leads to his or her rejection.

Despite living in adjacent apartments, the families of Antonio and Rafael seldom used to exchange greetings. They never had any personal disputes which would justify their cold relations and the only reason was that their families were from opposite ends of the Cuban society. The family of Antonio weren't members of any opposition group, but they openly criticized the government and were not members of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). The family of Rafael, on the other hand, were supporters of the revolutionary process.

“Back then, I was a member of the Communist Party. Shortly after they

decriminalized the dollar, I became the head of a TRD office (Tienda Recauradora de Divisas – a place where Cubans can pick up remittances from their relatives abroad). I was also the head of CDR surveillance in our neighbourhood. There was no personal animosity between me and Antonio and his family. It was only their open opposition to the Revolution that prevented us from having any closer relations," recalls Rafael.

As far as Antonio was concerned, there were no restrictions for him. Unlike Rafael, he could be friends with anybody he wanted: "I didn't mind that Rafael was a member of the Communist Party. I always felt that he and his family were good, decent people," says Antonio.

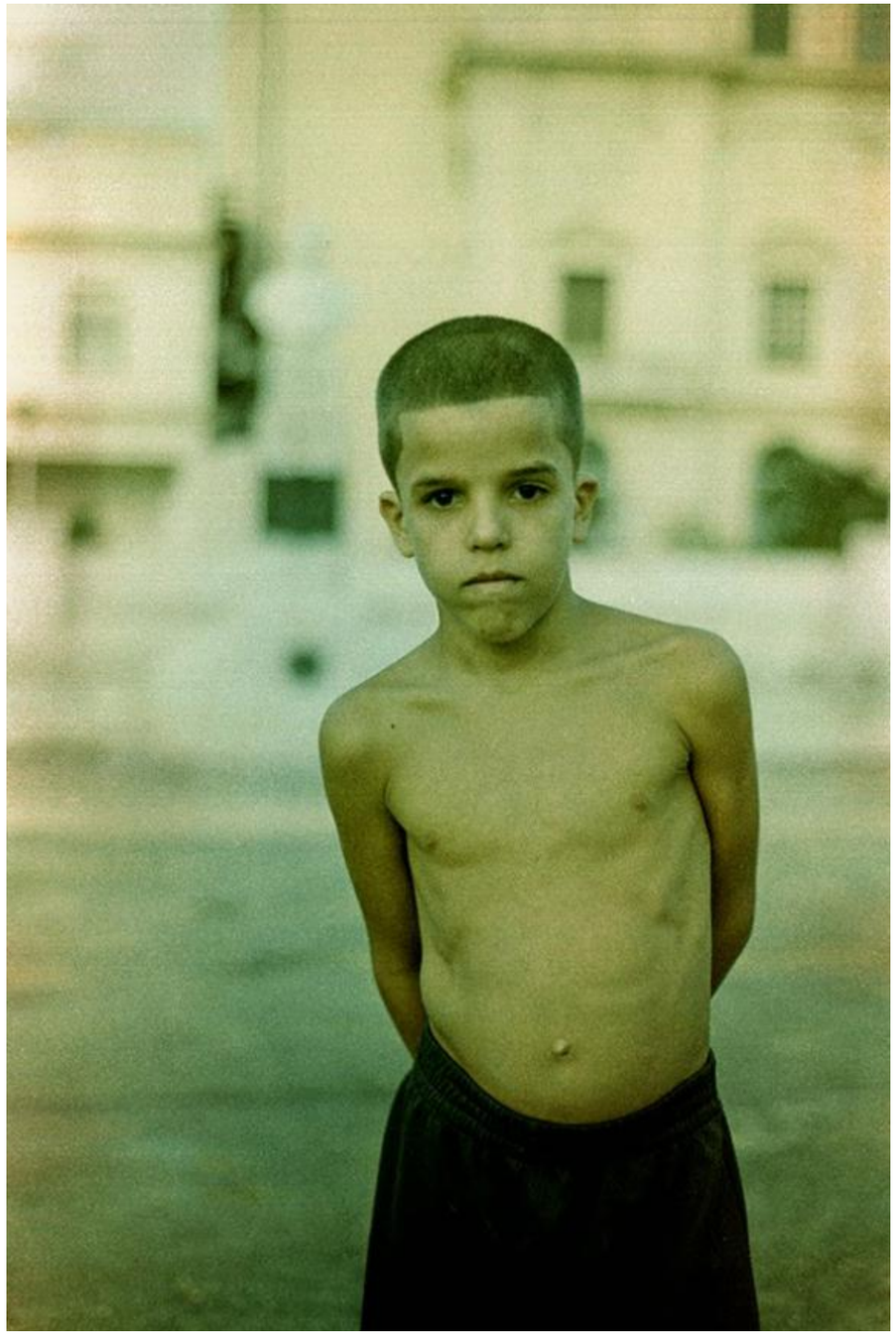
Antonio immigrated to the U.S. through the Refugee Program of the United States Interests Section in Havana. He managed to persuade U.S. officials that he was a victim of political persecution. He and his family flew to Miami at the end of 1997. After fifteen years, Antonio came back to Cuba to visit his sister. He went to a "paladar" (a type of local restaurant) for a dinner and found that the place was owned by Rafael. He learned that several years before that, Rafael left the Communist Party due to problems at work, changed his political views and started his own business.

Free of the political restrictions preventing him from maintaining friendly relationships with dissidents, Rafael was now able to befriend with Antonio. When these two men put their heads together, they agreed to start a business partnership. Rafael t charge of the legal matters of the business and Antonio of most of the financial transactions.

Since his retirement, Antonio's father in the U.S. has been coming to Cuba every year to see his daughter. In fact, he only goes back to the U.S. to collect his pension and returns to Cuba again. He works with Antonio's nephew as his son's representative in the restaurant opened by Antonio and Rafael somewhere in Havana, of which they didn't want to give any details.

Both Antonio and Rafael believe that revealing their real names and facts about the business could somehow affect them. They are right. It's not considered acceptable for a political refugee to do business with a former CDR surveillance chief, nor is a private business on the island supposed to be funded with money from a Cuban exile.

In spite of all this, economic prosperity clearly seems to beat any supposed ideological competition. Rafael and Antonio used to be separated by different political views and were reunited in business.



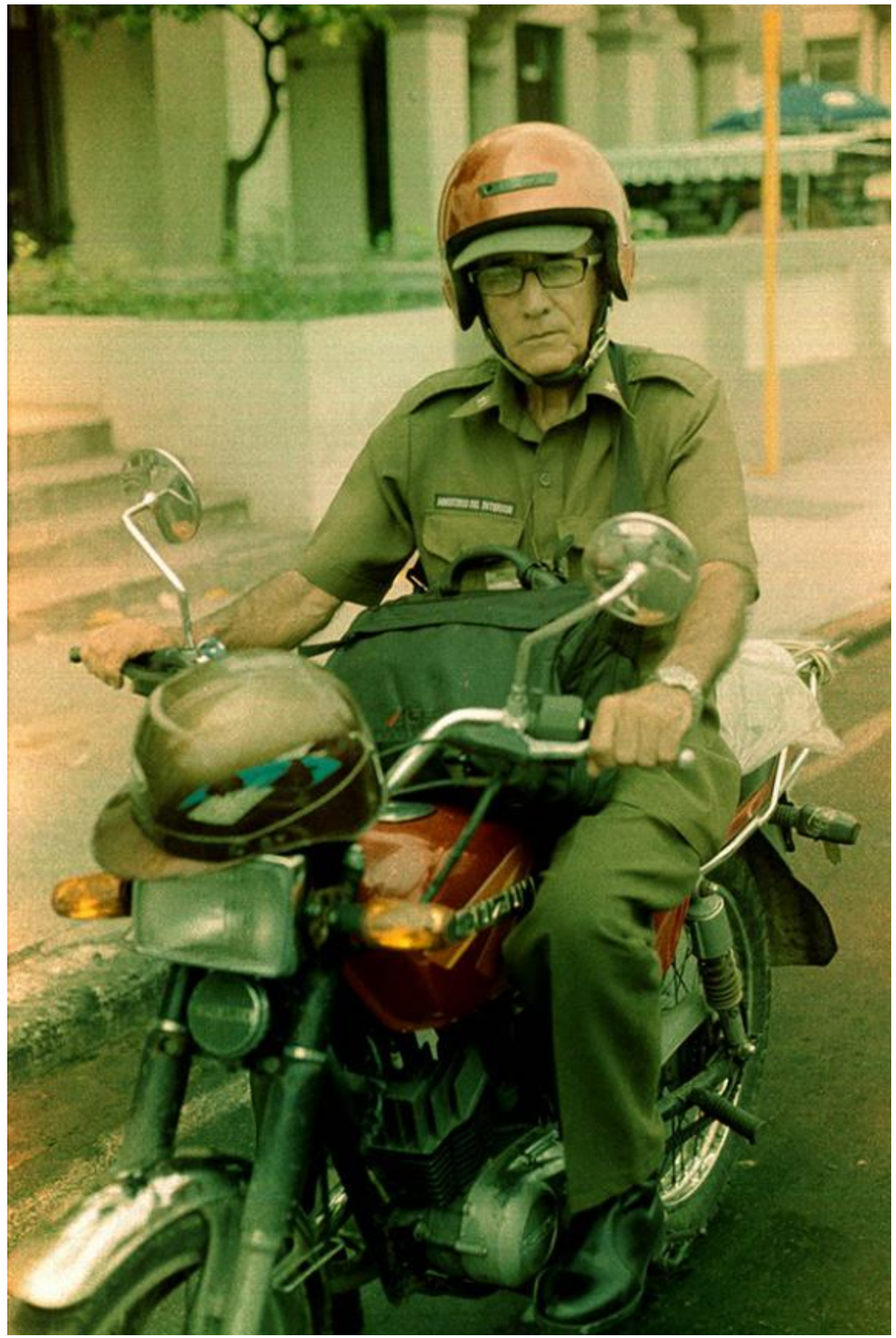


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

Overcoming Fear

Mario Hechavarria Driggs

National television keeps informing us of the chaos in Ukraine or violent clashes between the Police and protesters in Venezuela and one might start to think that nothing is going on here, in Havana, as the refrain of an old song by Carlos Varela goes: “People expect something but nothing's happening here, nothing's happening here”.

Fear sits enthroned over the national reality and is constantly being fed by the media, which have created that paralysing myth of infallibility of the organs of State Security, trying to discourage people from challenging decisions by the Police or courts, making them believe it's a losing battle.

However, our nation is slowly catching fire, the temperature is increasing and can reach the point of explosion any time. The scene is changing but fear is like a habit and it takes time to put it out from people's heads.

However, numerous expressions of nonconformity can be seen every day. It's just enough to come close to any line of people waiting to buy bread or newspapers...

A great example of an inevitable protest against injustice was the recent revolt of the self-employed in Holguin in the East of Cuba. Hundreds of workers were involved in it and although they had no leader to guide them, they had a worthy cause to fight for: they were claiming their rights. The Police suppressed them, but the overall result was favourable - for the first time, that state media had to at least briefly describe the facts of the event.

For their part, the Ladies in White continue to challenge their oppressors, calling for respect for human rights, guarded by an army of uniformed police and undercover agents. People watch them from balconies, admiring their great determination in face of institutional violence.

The independent press tries to exploit every loophole, every little opportunity to denounce the brutality of the Police and comment on the difficult Cuban reality, referring to those who are to blame using their names.

Blogger Yoani Sanchez can come to Cuba and leave it again and when they detain her, they have no other choice than to let her go. Truth is gaining ground and there are more and more people who dare to take risks. By sticking to the truth, dissidents are slowly but surely progressing.

We are not fighting in vain: all the diverse minds forming the opposition are advancing, along with the people of Cuba; they flatly refuse to accept the sad reality of their lives and are gradually overcoming their fear, the main enemy of freedom.

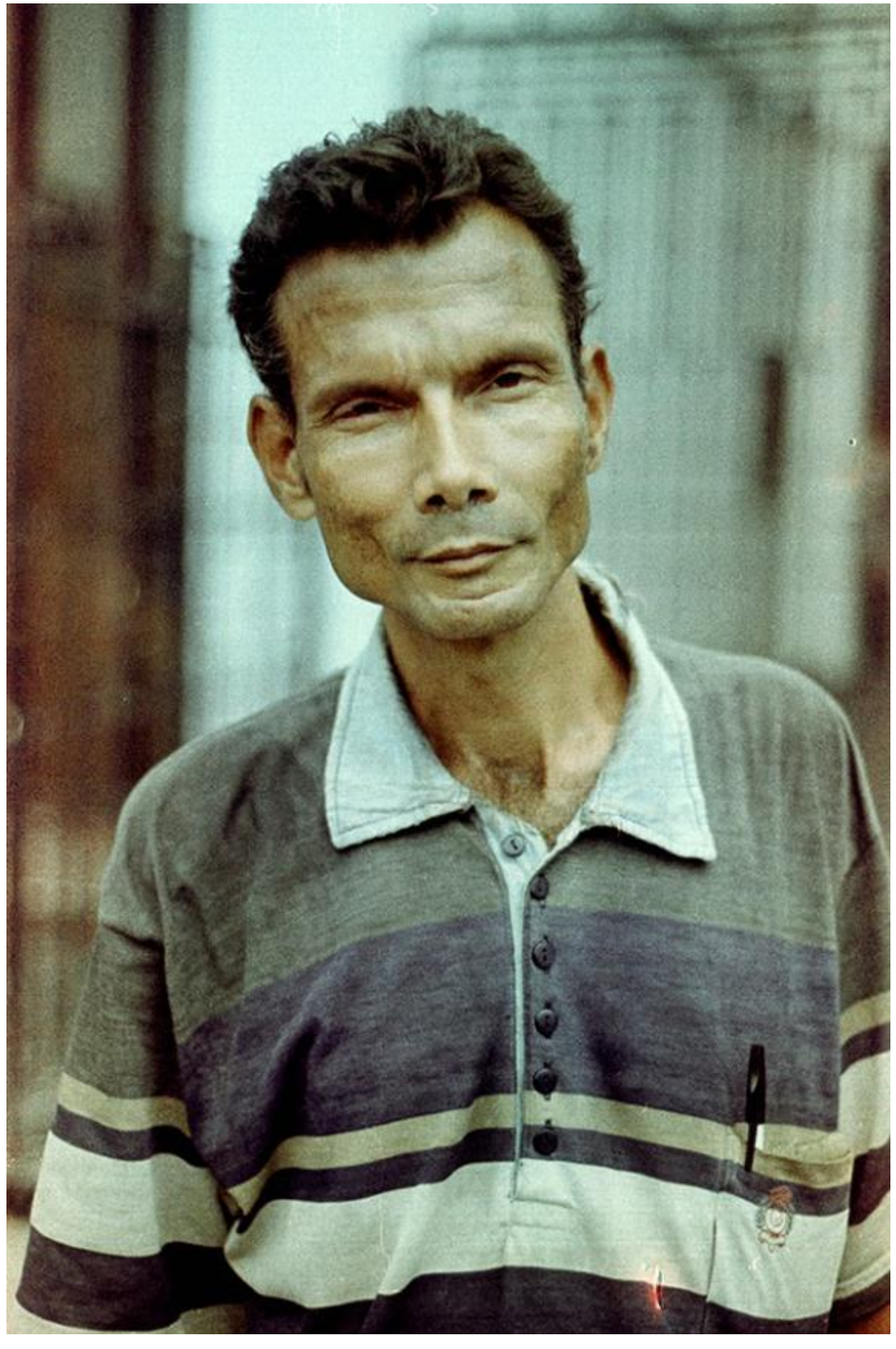


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

Passive Opposition

Tania Diaz Castro

Cubans have never been known as a nation who would take to the streets when trying to overthrow an unwanted government. The very history of the country is a proof, in particular the most recent years. After all, not even the general strikes ordered by Fidel Castro on August 5, 1957, and April 9, 1958, whose purpose was to speed up the fall of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista and put an end to urban terrorist activities and the guerrilla war, did take place.

The idea of a general strike as a possible remedy first appeared in Fidel Castro's “21 Point Manifesto” from February 1957, in which the future dictator expressed his faith in a collective action of masses despite the fact that no such displays of heroism had been observed in Cuba before, except for several feats accomplished by some minor groups before and during the Republic.

As a teenager I lived with my parents just three blocks from the University of Havana and thanks to that I could see the first student manifestations against Batista in April 1952. I had many opportunities to watch Luis Blanca Fernandez, Jose A. Echeverria and Juan Nuiry, leaders of a group of about 20 to 30 young people, who would march along the Avenida de San Lazaro street, watched by silent local residents and passersby and monitored by the Police, waiting for an opportunity to act.

This way, I was able to closely see the very budding of the student opposition, whose members gradually became more and more aggressive, throwing stones at the Police, who, in turn, tried to dispel them with strong jets of water. In the end, the students took up arms, which lead to an open confrontation.

January 15, 1953, marked the death of the first student martyr, Ruben Batista Rubio. Also, 175 university students were arrested. In reaction to such a spread of violence, the University decided to close.

The question is, what did the Cuban people (a nation of six million people back then) do? Absolutely nothing! The workers went to work as usual, parents sent their children to schools and young people continued to go out and have fun.

Already in 1956, two of the most radical organizations succeeded in turning small opposition groups into a strong terrorist movement, which, however, would never find support from the masses. It was known that many revolutionaries even died as a result of their own bombs, such as Urselia Diaz Baez, Enrique Hart Davalos, Carlos Garcia Gil and many others.

This may be the reason why Cubans failed to obey Fidel Castro on a mass scale when he set his mind on ending the dictatorship through a general strike. People saw him as a leader of a violent war - both in the provinces and in urban areas.

Now, what's going on with the Cuban nation these days, under the longest dictatorship that has ever existed in Cuba? Why don't Cubans act the same as the Venezuelans or Syrians?
There's only one possible answer to this question: The Cuban people act in line with the country's 27-year-long tradition of peaceful opposition.

The mass of Cubans, who are financially dependable on their master – the State, and who are subjected to government reprisals any time they dare to show their disagreement with the official policy, are a noble and intelligent nation, which has spontaneously opted for a silent, yet tenacious and constant struggle against the regime. Could it be a strategy? No, certainly not. The government is well aware that it's just a spontaneous popular reaction, a way of showing open disagreement with the regime.

The new President Raul Castro made it clear in July 2011 when he said: “the biggest obstacle that the country is facing when implementing the approved reforms is the psychological barrier formed by inertia, inflexibility, double standards, indifference.”

He continued with an accusation of the masses: “Over the last 20 years there has been a steep decline in moral and civic values in the society - values like honesty, decency, conscientiousness, grace, honour and interest in problems of others.”

Clearly, he was referring to non-productive people, to those who show disregard for public welfare, those who copy American fashions, those who steal bread for their children, those who no longer want to be pioneer workers, those who secretly rail against the government, those who sell their goods on the streets, those who curse and swear when they run out money and suffer hunger, those who are unwilling to participate in political meetings, etc.

We are witnessing a kind of peaceful mass opposition against the Castro regime that the dictatorship hasn't been able to control - an opposition that has been growing stronger in the last eight years of the era of Raul. For as much as the new president speaks ill of this mass, this mass is probably on the right track.

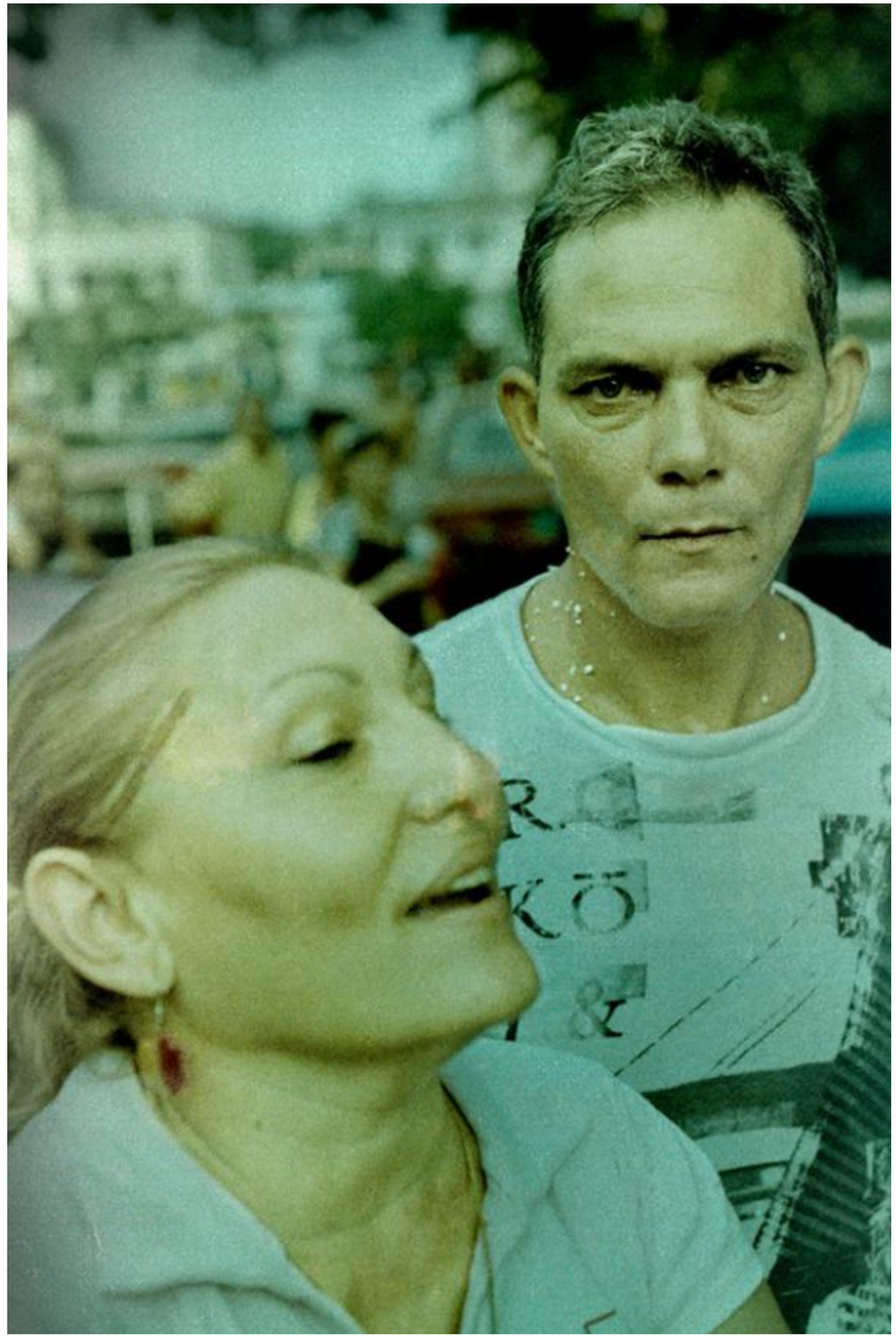


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

The Loneliness of the Dissident

Lia Villares

We, the Cuban people, have been living our lives immersed in nothing less than an outright lie (some call it a “myth”) in disguise of social revolution. That lie has become the way of life (or even a lifestyle) of almost all Cubans, regardless of their social class or even of the place where they live, whether inside or outside the psycho-physical space known as the Cuban nation.

In fact, for many Cubans, Cuban nationality has become more of a mental state, or, perhaps, yet another euphemism used to conceal the static reality.

The excessively long life of that lie has left mark on the personality and identity of individuals born in the era of the evil that has been so persistently called the Revolution. In my opinion, this persistence, this need for constant reassurance is the best proof of its being just a fantasy.

Verbal forms used in connection with the Revolution are also revealing – they are always in the first person plural (“we are building” and “we are advancing”). Yet, they were not so empty and hackneyed in the early stages of this mass-scale experiment, nor was the great parade of catchwords and political slogans (mostly absurd). Was there really a kind of wide-spread contagion of reconstructive and revolutionary enthusiasm? My parents thought so but people like me, who have lived all their lives surrounded by these ghostly echoes, seriously doubt it.

Hopelessness, so often criticized by the church as a lack of spirituality added up to economic scarcity and vice versa, emanates from the difficulty to create in an environment where there's no inner freedom to

act. Moral poverty exceeds material poverty. It's nothing unusual to see young and even older people to cherish a deep desire to leave the island, without having any clear life plans.

The young generation consists of marked personalities, who are wholly detached from the delirious mass euphoria of 1959. The various personality types include pessimists, agnostics, the indifferent and the “ethereal”. The last type - the activist - is very rare but much closer (perhaps even dangerously) to the crazy generation. They are people trying to raise awareness of others.

The rest of Cubans may be seen as trapped inside a tunnel with no way out – they are in a state that we could possibly call “automatismus tremens”. These people always gather in “mass organizations” or create simple paramilitary mobs and are always ready to take part in acts of repudiation, which involve insults and assaults (physical and verbal) against those who dare to differ: those who express their dissatisfaction or simply try to reclaim some basic civil rights. Activists are also known as the “internal opposition”.

It should be noted that the number of “dissatisfied” people is growing and multiplying in all parts of the island due to ever-increasing social discomfort and that popular discontent increasingly takes form of public expression. Here in Cuba, both the victim and the offender have a chance to gain first-hand experience of discrimination and terror of a totalitarian state, because, let us not be deceived, the offender is both the tool of and a prey to the horror.

Generation after generation, one mechanism always activates another and the two are complementary. Over the years, Cuban dissidents have been trying to figure out how to get out of this diabolical machinery. The internal opposition sees itself as peaceful, but even if we as a nation thoroughly studied all transition processes in Eastern Europe, especially the Polish movement of Solidarność and the principles of non-violent struggle, we would still remain caught in the communist trap.

This trap is based on recycling hatred and hostility and recurs to encouraging aggression between various social groups in order to maintain a sense of misunderstanding in all areas of life: human, social, international -a valuable tool to wipe out everything that could harm the absolute power of the dictatorship in a country frustrated in its political core.

Personal differences, ego battles and conflicts of interests favour the division, disunity and fragmentation of the opposition in spite of the fact that they all share the same cause. On the other hand, this lack of unity is an indisputable sign of diversity, which is typical for democratic environments. It's the first step to reach understanding and mutual acceptance in the future reconciliation process, the first step on a path that only the opposition has been trying to follow, apparently all alone.

The dictator's main goal when suppressing dissidents is to make passive observers believe that they are alienated human beings who have terminated in a dead end. Basically, everything has been carefully staged to put on a theatrical performance -a fable with an appropriate moral lesson in the end. The drama also involves discrimination of these strange human beings, who are banned from leaving their social community, which often determines the quality of their lives - lives

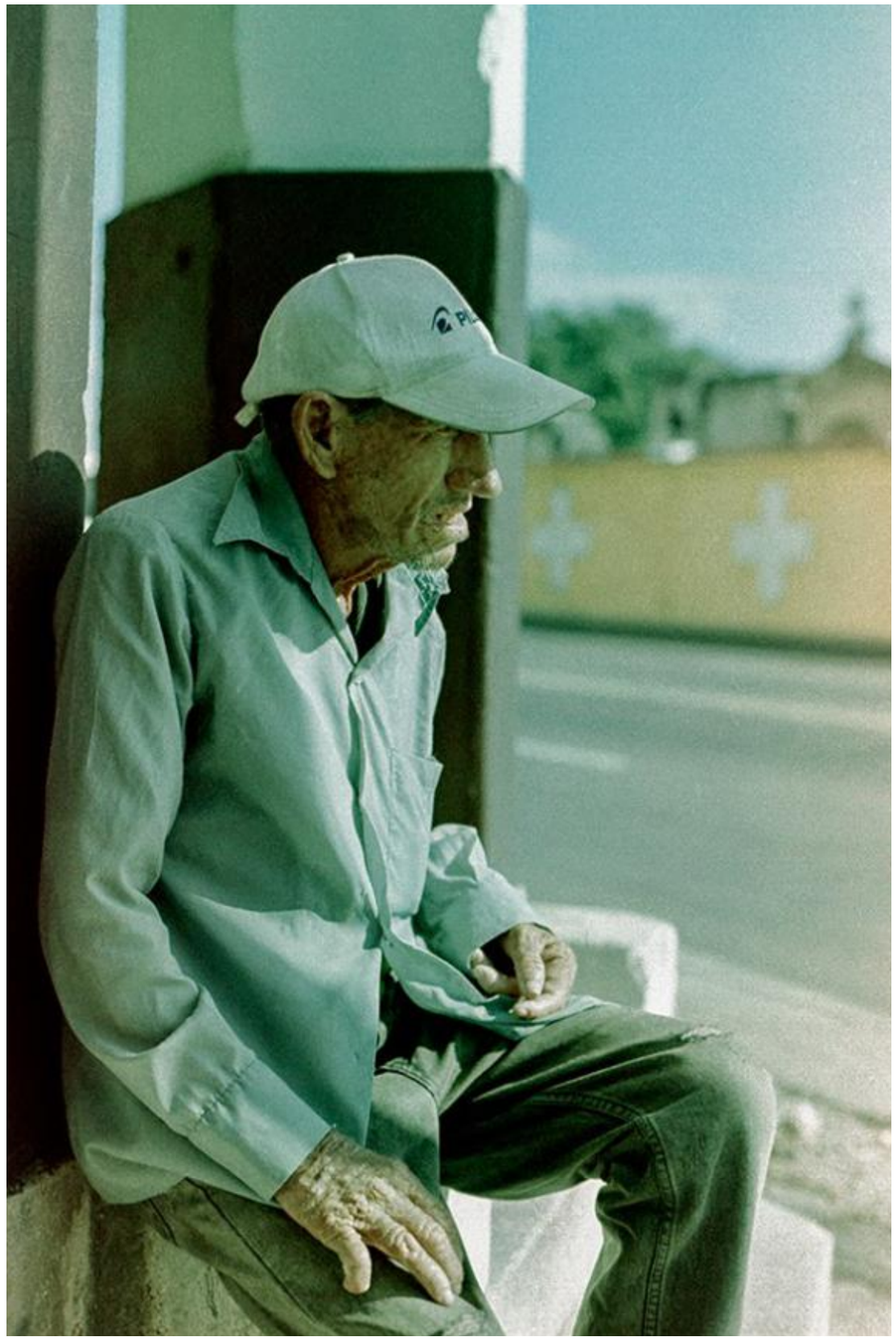
exposed to harassment and public ridicule. In the long run, nobody wants to be in the shoes of a “dissident”, who is thus made void and invisible.

However, those who are restless by nature, those who ask questions and who always look around with a curious eye are able to discern at least some of the true features of the reality distorted by the regime to suit its needs. Anonymous citizens who show their solidarity with the opposition are a clear proof of the visibility gained by the internal opposition recently, mainly thanks to new communication possibilities offered by the Internet. Such people who provide indispensable active support to the opposition prefer to stay in the shadow. Almost always, they include distant friends of dissidents, concerned citizens living in exile, or unknown people motivated by the support of a common cause -a shared desire for freedom, because they are able to plainly see the “glimmer of hope” that dissidents represent.

Spontaneous group demonstrations are also abundant and common. They take place in theatres, cinemas, or anywhere else where people refer to “Cuban issues” and make implicit political allusions. Anywhere, where the public acts as a compact group, where individuals can hide in the happy anonymity of the darkness of an auditorium. Sometimes, people even dare to come closer to dissidents, stealthily, to congratulate them for something they have seen them doing in any of the clandestine videos circulating from hand to hand.

Thus, the former “loneliness of the dissident” is now being substituted by an increasing wave of interest of the international community, which is slowly breaking the vicious circle of stigmatization into which dissidents have been driven. Interestingly, those who are (with perverse insistence) trying to block the alley of entrapment at both its ends are inadvertently reinforcing the urgent need to escape from it[1].

[1]Enrique del Risco, Elogio de la Levedad (In Praise of Lightness), Colibrí, p. 116..



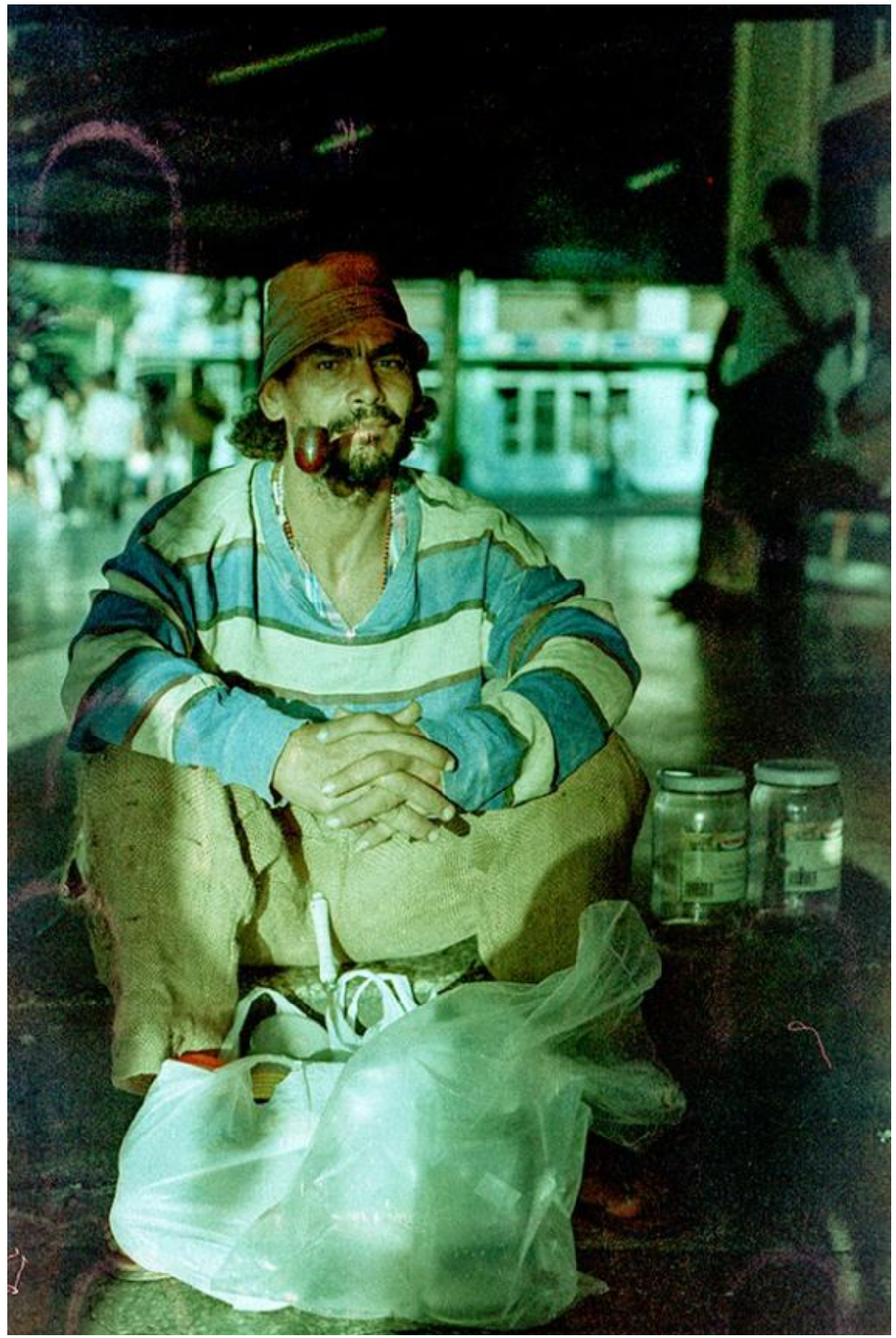


Photo by Claudio Fuentes

#the12

Human Rights

HH.

RR.

In recent months we have had an opportunity to share journeys, stories and experiences with a number of Cubans who have been able to travel outside their country thanks to a letter of invitation. Many organizations, friends and families have already taken advantage of the adoption of the Immigration Reform in January 2013, which allows Cubans to visit other Cubans outside the island, regardless if they are activists or not.

Yet, 12 Cubans have not obtained permission to travel abroad despite having obtained an invitation – they are a proof that not all Cuban citizens are equal before the law. They are the 12 dissidents of the group of 75 who were unjustly imprisoned in 2003 during the “Black Spring”. The 12 who, after being released, decided to stay in Cuba in spite of being under constant pressure to go into exile.

These 12 former political prisoners were conditionally released after arduous negotiations between the Cuban government, the Spanish Government and the Church, which gave freedom to a part of the 75 dissidents who accepted the government's condition and left the country on a one-way ticket. However, several dissidents refused to leave Cuba (thus rejecting what seemed to be the only chance of their release and suspension of their sentences) and remained in jail, subject to harsh and unjust penalties. After international pressure, the Cuban government finally agreed to liberate even those who refused to leave the country, but contrived to place them under parole supervision (“licencia extrapenal”).

In Cuba, a parole is normally granted for medical or humanitarian reasons. However, in case of the 12 innocent citizens who had spent

years in prison, it was just an excuse for not granting them unconditional release or amnesty. It infringes their rights because it prohibits them from travelling abroad. Moreover, it can be revoked. Thus, they are constantly reminded that they are not totally free, that they depend on the arbitrariness of the government and that they can get back to prison any time.

People in Need would like to reiterate the need to revoke the conditions of their conditional release or grant amnesty to these 12 former political prisoners living in Cuba (and all those of the group of 75 who cannot return to Cuba).

The photos show Jorge Olivera and Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, activists and independent journalists, permanent contributors to our newsletter, who belong to the group of the 12 ex-prisoners.

DIALOGUES
Online version of the bulletin, extra studies, comments and studies of EU-Cuba relations.

HUMAN RIGHTS
Updates on the human rights situation. Online resources.

MEDIA
A choice of exclusive articles for your media and service for foreign journalists.

CUBA – EUROPE DIALOGUES
Biannual bulletin on relations between Cubans and Europeans / Volume 9, Issue 1

Published by People in Need, Prague, Czech Republic with support of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To obtain this bulletin in Spanish please visit www.cubalog.eu
Design: Punto Diseño Gráfico

TRANSITION
Transition Promotion Program

rewriting cuba
CUBALOG.EU

rewriting cuba

CUBALOG.EU