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## WHEN WE DECIDED TO TAKE THE STREETS

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# EDITORIAL

## WHEN WE DECIDED TO TAKE THE STREETS

Empowering the voiceless, increasing the power of belonging and translating people's power into action represents what citizen participation is in a democracy, but above all, in Cuba, it represents the long-lasting effects two recent protests will have in the collective memory of the country.

On April 7th 2019 the first independent march authorized by the Cuban government took place in Havana to fight against animal abuse, followed shortly after by the LGBT pride parade which for 11 years was one of the very few rallies allowed by the government, however, in 2019, the state-run National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX) and organizers of the pride parade cancelled the demonstration, but activists decided to organize their own, unauthorized march, defying restrictions on freedom of assembly imposed by the government. The latest was met with state repression and arbitrary arrest of activists and the first, even though was duly and

timely authorized, was met with a more subtle repression represented by the dismissal of the government officer who authorized it, showing the two-sided repressive mechanism of the Cuban government.

All over the world peaceful protests met with state repression triggered civil society resentment and increased the participation in political sphere, moving the cycle of empowerment, participation and representation. In Cuba, it was not different and in this issue of Rewriting Cuba some of those who contributed to the recent protests have a space to voice what it meant (and still means) to reclaim the streets.

Regardless of the why, who or what was the protests about, the taste of enjoying the public space is there and it is not going away.

**Dona Novack**

# MARCHING FOR NECESSARY CHANGES IN CUBA

Ariam Norcal

Participating in a March in Cuba has led me to question how much my social life and even my own sense of integrity were at stake.

Participating in a March in Cuba, like the recently held “No to Animal Cruelty” or for LGBTIQ rights, has led me to question how much my social life and even my own sense of integrity were at stake.

After spending so many years in what passes for normality in Cuba, i.e. that almost all of our social relations are proposed and regulated by the State that also governs us, an understandable fear has taken root in light of the repression of these institutions against those who speak out or act differently, amongst a people that has long remained silent about the discrepancies between reality and utopia, that has lost their rights over the course of waiting for better times and for a change in the mistaken decisions of their leaders in power.

I decided to take part in those marches, because I was thinking about the good of others, because animals need representatives among humans who advocate for their rights. And because what has happened to the LGBTIQ community has been unjust. First of all, the government took advantage of a critical situation of those who were against same-sex marriage, which allowed it to redirect the attention

**“An understandable fear has taken root in light of the repression of these institutions against those who speak out or act differently”**

of people more towards this issue than towards everything entailed in the project of the Constitution, which was approved very recently without the section that contained this request. Second of all, because of what had happened they suspended the realization of the only public expression they have as a community - a kind of Gay Pride that had been taking place every year.

The April 2019 march “No to Animal Cruelty” did not have as much obvious harassment, only a few police officers were present and other less visible civilian repressors. There was more of a sense of freedom and less of terror, because this march was known to have been authorized. This was an exhibition of people with their pets, carrying printed posters with written words on them and voices being raised in some chants. It was all a truly impressive display, one that did not seem possible, since it was something so unusual.

Compare this with the harassment suffered by those who took part in the LGTBIQ March in May of the same year. Here the marchers were escorted by crowds of people who were not part of the group and where the vast majority of them was not there out of solidarity. We came to realize

that they hurried their steps, they always talked with two or three people who were acting like bosses – they were giving them orders, and they filmed and photographed us, without being just journalists - the latter are already known from other encounters. Among them were elderly people and people with other gestures, which were obviously there with different intentions. These people showered us with looks of anger or hatred, that were noticeably annoyed in that context.

This march had not been approved by any institution and even before it began there was no information about some of the people who knew they would be in attendance. They did not answer their cell phones and even their close relatives could not account for them.

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**What will happen if the justice might be on the other side other than ours? Would we still be able to be there to defend it or to defend ourselves?**

This march ended with the arrest of some figures in opposition who are opposed to the Cuban government's ways of acting and who supported the Cuban homosexual community on this occasion. Just like a fence that in principle only lets people out to foreign lands, the government was deploying the strength they possess in human and material means to be organized like an army, to demonstrate their superiority to civilians who only possessed their convictions.

Showing my solidarity and commitment to a cause that I consider just made me think about: What will happen if the justice might be on the other side other than ours? Would we still be able to be there to defend it or to defend ourselves?

It could be said that the majority of Cubans are unaware of these types of events, but it can also be said that the need to express what they think and to make their discontent visible it is being awakened in people, more and more. This leads me to believe that civic action continues to be a space for freedom to defend, which will allow us to express ourselves, denounce and / or demand our rights as long as Cuban social relations continue to be abnormal.



Animals Rights march and LGTBIQ march in Havana  
Photo by: Ariam Norcal

# OUR STREETS ARE NOT FREE



Leodan Suarez Quiñones

**In Cuba we cannot occupy our streets because they have not been declared free for the sake of marching and demanding our rights.**

To me, being able to go out to demonstrate means that all men and women who love freedom have the right to change the most unjust aspects of their society, but in Cuba we cannot occupy our streets because they have not been declared free for the sake of marching and demanding our rights.

Marches, if they have not been called for by the government, are not allowed. Nor have there been many attempts made in the past to have them because for years the state has taught us more how to obey than to protest. The few times I have participated in protests, I have been met with repression, and many times I have suffered the rejection of the community



LGBTIQ march in Havana

Photo by: Ariam Norcal

around me, because many people interpret demonstrations as a subversive act that can create problems for them with the government. It is true that participating in an independent and self-convened march represents a risk to the safety of anyone who decides to bring an event like this to fruition, especially for LGBTIQ people in Cuba, who are already very vulnerable to violence.

However, I believe that if the people responsible for the government and the institutions do not look after our interests, we will have to do it ourselves. Mariela Castro Espín did not respond to our needs and expectations when she declared that there would be no LGBTIQ Pride march because the country is in the midst of an economic crisis, so we decided to go out into the streets on our own.

We went to the march with the hope of achieving that in the future we can have the same rights as the rest of the people. United in the streets we felt safe and protected. We know that unity is strength, and all together we want to show the world that we do have ethical and moral values, to eliminate all sources of discrimination and to get society to accept us as we are.

There is a proverb that says “the important thing is not how much or how little one has, but what you can do with what you have.” And we, by participating in this self-convened conga line of a march, used that small space that had been opened to reclaim our identities. Despite being repressed, we were able to show that we are many, and that we intend for things to change.

# WHEN MARCHING MAKES YOU FEEL MORE FREE



Nonardo Perea

Cuba is a fake country, with marches  
that are also built from that  
falsehood.

On March 8, 2019, International Women's Day, I had the opportunity to be part of a march held in the Czech Republic. It was the first time I was able to do so for a truly just cause and the experience was intense. There I could verify that each person was free to say and act as he wished, many women and men were carrying signs with slogans in support of feminist movements. Being from Cuba I did not know what it was like to march like this. On the 1st of May I never did it because I was not and I am not in favor of those

marches organized at the convenience of the Cuban State, where you will not find a person carrying posters demanding their social rights, such as increase in wages, or improvements in their jobs.

Nor did I feel very comfortable in the marches promoted by Mariela Castro and CENESEX, which are held once a year and where everything turns into a carnival event. This march is little more than dancing around in sandals in a conga line in the streets, and nobody dares to carry



March 8 march in Prague.

Photos by: Petr Zewlak Vrabc (A2larm.cz)

posters demanding rights for the LGBTIQ community, and when someone dares to take out a poster that is deemed to be inappropriate, the police immediately arrive and order you to stop.

There you will only find slogans of a political nature such as: Socialism Yes, Homophobia No, which have nothing to do with the gay rights' movement, and social struggles. These are marches that really

do not serve to bring about changes on an island that increasingly takes away fundamental human rights from its citizens, with a government that somehow deceives its own people by letting them act how they want to a certain extent, but making it clear that you cannot go beyond what is permissible. Cuba is a fake country, with marches that are also built from that falsehood.

All this and much more on [www.cubalog.com](http://www.cubalog.com)



## rewriting cuba

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