

rewriting cuba  
issue 18  
june 2018

# rewriting cuba CUBALOG.COM

## VIOLENCE WITHOUT BRUISES

IN  
THIS  
ISSUE

2  
Editorial  
Agnes  
Koleman

4  
Article  
Lucía  
Martínez

8  
Visual Poem  
Francis  
Sánchez

10  
Testimony  
Abel  
Hernández

12  
Testimony  
Iris  
Mariño

14  
Testimony  
Tania  
Reyes

# EDITORIAL

## VIOLENCE WITHOUT BRUISES

Repression in Cuba works in a way that sometimes is not easy to understand for people who are not in direct contact with it or with those who suffer it.

Cuba has managed to create an international image of a social country, concerned about the lives of people. It has continuously promoted its progress in public health and education, which, while undeniable, is not enough to understand the human rights situation on the island.

Part of the problem is that these social guarantees are not conceived as citizens' rights, but as gifts, generously offered by a government that, at the same time that can give them, can also take them away. Thus, in exchange, people have to behave correctly, and that means following the instructions of the government and not going beyond the established limits. Of course, these limits are not always clear, neither are the same for all people, and are justified by arguing that Cuba is a country at war against imperialism, in constant need to defend itself, so it is necessary to control individual freedoms in the country.



Artists and independent journalists are usually in the spotlight of the government, as well as people who develop projects autonomously, without belonging to any institution. In a country where there is no freedom of association, any initiative for a joint meeting or action can be seen as dangerous for the nation, regardless of its content.

In Cuba, in general, there are no cases of people killed or disappeared because of their political activities and for years people have not been locked up in jail for long periods of time because they think differently. However, life can be very difficult for those who decide to leave the official path, who decide to express their opinions or act independently.

This new issue of Rewriting Cuba tries to explain, through the testimonies of some affected men and women, how the social control tools of the Cuban government work and the psychological consequences they produce in people.

Agnes Koleman

# PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN CUBA: THE LONG ARM OF POWER

LUCÍA MARTÍNEZ

The success of the Cuban government consists in dominating the people without resorting to physical aggression

The government of Cuba projects to the world the image that its main raison d'être originates from the fact that it is a victim of permanent violence at the hands of an almighty enemy, the United States. This image usually provokes sympathy on the international level and provides justifications for arbitrary acts and the lack of rights suffered by Cubans.

However, this international victimization glosses over another situation of violence that has more real and constant manifestations for life on the island, where the population lives in a system dominated by a single party, and at the mercy of a political police force that acts with absolute impunity. This type of submission becomes more visible when acts of public repression occur, but the truth of the matter is that this system's success is fundamentally based on trying not to reach the point of physical aggression, that is, its goal is to achieve dominance through psychological violence.

Theorists describe "psychological violence" as "an action or omission intended to degrade or control the actions and behaviors of other people, through intimidation, manipulation, threats, direct or indirect, humiliation, isolation or any other types of conduct." It is characterized by being silent in nature, it does not leave any

visible traces, it is expressed through the progressive manipulation of feelings, with threats and coercion that end up inflicting on the victim as much – if not more - damage as an act of physical aggression. It can be divided into vertical and horizontal forms of power, present from the first moment when the bully enjoys a position of power superior to its victim.

Everyone in Cuba experiences vertical violence, regardless of their social status, before a superior and faceless controller that is the State Security apparatus, which conditions the generalized attitudes that allow for double standards, denunciation, self-censorship and pretense. Now, the main objective of this continued harassment are the dissidents, in their different shades: members of the opposition, activists, critical thinkers, journalists and independent artists. Perhaps the most vulnerable group of all is women, since the widely accepted machismo adds an almost infinite capacity for the abusing of political power.

**“Every person in Cuba experiences the vertical violence before a superior and faceless controller”**

Security agents roam streets and corridors, with the image of arrogant tough guys, thugs. They try to disguise their harassment in simple conversations, even supposed chivalrous acts, while freezing the blood of their victims who fear for themselves and their families.

Belkis, a woman who made the mistake of using the Internet at her workplace to communicate with family members abroad, described the meeting with the agent who “handled” her company: “Without any pretense, he showed the gun on his hip. To scare you even further, they pause in silence in a way that terrifies. He inspected some papers calmly, before speaking again. They like to transmit the feeling that your life belongs to them.”

All excessive power, regardless of the ideology that sustains it, has been - or is - patriarchal and misogynistic. But for even a stronger reason, it is always the type of power that emanates from the use of force, intolerance and lack of dialogue. Therefore, psychological violence, when repeatedly exercised on women - to

**“Every excessive power, regardless of the ideology that supports it, is patriarchal and misogynist”**

**“Belkis have said: he started to flirt with me in exchange of favors, told me that if I accepted going out with him, he would let me use the internet freely”**

undermine their self-esteem and to shatter their emotional balance - then presents a clear connotation of gender.

Belkis herself recounted: “He began to endear himself to me in exchange for favors. He told me that if I agreed to go out with him, he would let me use the Internet freely. They are usually disgusting types, who use the impunity they have to intimidate others.”

Such impunity on the part of the repressive agents has a profound impact on their victims who are in a position of extremely inferior power and defenselessness. This is even stronger in the case of women in the opposition, such as the Ladies in White, for committing the crime of disobeying the power of the patriarchy. They

are turned into non-people through demonization campaigns, they are isolated, and they and their families have to see for themselves how the whole society can be used against them.

María Matienzo said: “It is not known how many women are part of the Cuban opposition, how many have been expelled from their jobs for ‘not being trustworthy,’ how many think differently and have decided to remain silent or ‘collaborate’ with State Security so as not to ‘harm’ or ‘mark’ your children or your family.”

What is certain is that none of these will appear in the statistics that the Government promotes as part of its campaign against violence against women and girls.” And - we must add - nor will these be added to the statistics of the UN, where the Cuban government tends to position the data that are most agreeable for them.

Unlike other countries in Latin America, where physical violence abounds as a result of imbalances, in Cuba the hard hand of patriarchal power leaves hardly any intimate cracks or public spaces where a coercive will is not present. Slogans such as “the street belongs to the revolutionaries” and “the university is for the revolutionaries,” are painted in red lettering here and there, proclaiming the fact that in those same streets there would not have to be chaotic lynch mobs, where social death it has been sufficiently normalized, under forms of absolute intolerance.

**“In Cuba the social death substitutes the physical one, to the extent that the patriarchal power allows the luxury of the psychological violence in large scale”**

The rivers run in frozen silence, instead of blood. In Cuba, social death is a substitute for the physical death, to the extent that patriarchal power allows itself the luxury of psychological violence on such a large scale.



*Visual Poem by Francis Sánchez*

# SANCTI SPIRITUS



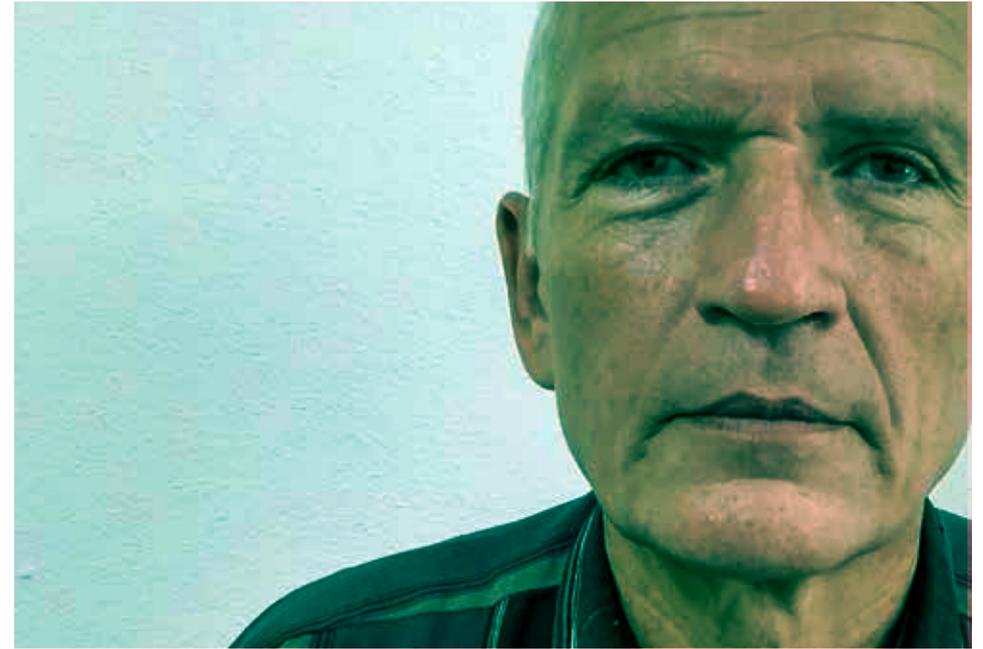
Abel Hernández

**Biologist. Writer and Researcher.  
Director of the environmental project  
PRONATEN**

It all started with several people who simply stopped responding to our greetings, later on they looked at us with hatred and in silence. Others roared with laughter and said that we were crazy, that our salary was low and that we were going to have to go abroad. Then (some people) started screaming at us that we were scoundrels, bandits, mercenaries and traitors. Later they began to talk loudly claiming that we were criminals and that we were spoiling the youth.

They had videos or pictures on their mobile phones of the course that we did in Miami, and they laughed at us saying that we were ‘worms.’ Later they went looking for a troublemaker to teach us a lesson, but apparently once they found out that we knew about it, they gave up on the idea of giving us a beating, which was not supposed to have a political character, but a street brawl that lacked any pretext.

Currently many of these people who embarked on such an elaborate set of lies



Abel Hernández Muñoz. Selfportrait

have continue to reject our greeting, they turn their backs when they see us and initiate malicious whispering. Some people that have given themselves over to such cowardice and avoid having any contact out of the fear that “they will be thrown in the same bag” with us.

All this has drastically changed our relationships with many other people to the extent that such relationships, which in the past were cordial, already no longer exist. The only thing we can do, once we

run into people with these malicious intentions, is to avoid eye contact with them and ignore what they are saying to avoid a conflict. And all this despite the fact that our methods are peaceful and we have made the apolitical character on our activities clear. Could it be that in Cuba it still is not possible to think differently?

# CAMAGÜEY



IRIS MARIÑO

Actress, Dancer and Professor of Dance  
Contributor to the independent  
magazine La Hora de Cuba

I began to experience repression the day my father shouted in my face: “If necessary we will kill, but they will not triumph, we cannot allow it.” My father is a professor of Social Sciences and Master in Cultural Development, and belongs to the Communist Party of Cuba, which he follows with a blind faith. He has never used physical violence against me, but this year on March 23rd he threatened me.

In October of the same year, two State Security officers came to the school where

I worked and where my youngest son has been studying for three years. They interrogated me for four hours and tried to coerce me by alluding to my child’s physical and mental safety. They acknowledged that they were watching him and that more than once they had been sitting next to him. Over the course of the more than 10 interrogations and a detention that I have suffered since then, men in groups of two to four, have always used my son to threaten me.



Iris Mariño. Selfportrait with Václav Havel

On the day of my son’s birthday, eight MININT officers appeared with a search warrant for my house. They were searching for food, which was never found, was the excuse, but the truth is that they inspected everything. The house which had been prepared for a birthday party was transformed into a thuggish terrain full of uniforms.

For my son, this repression has marked a before and after in his childhood. Visits to the psychologist and numerous

family talks have been incorporated into our family routine. My son, who is only twelve years old, is forced to manage this repression day after day. It has not been easy for him, for instance, that the front of our house appears full of excrement, or that at midnight someone knocks on the door, nor dawn with offensive posters for the family on the walls and the door of the house. For more than two years our dream has been transformed into a state of constant vigilance.

# CIENFUEGOS



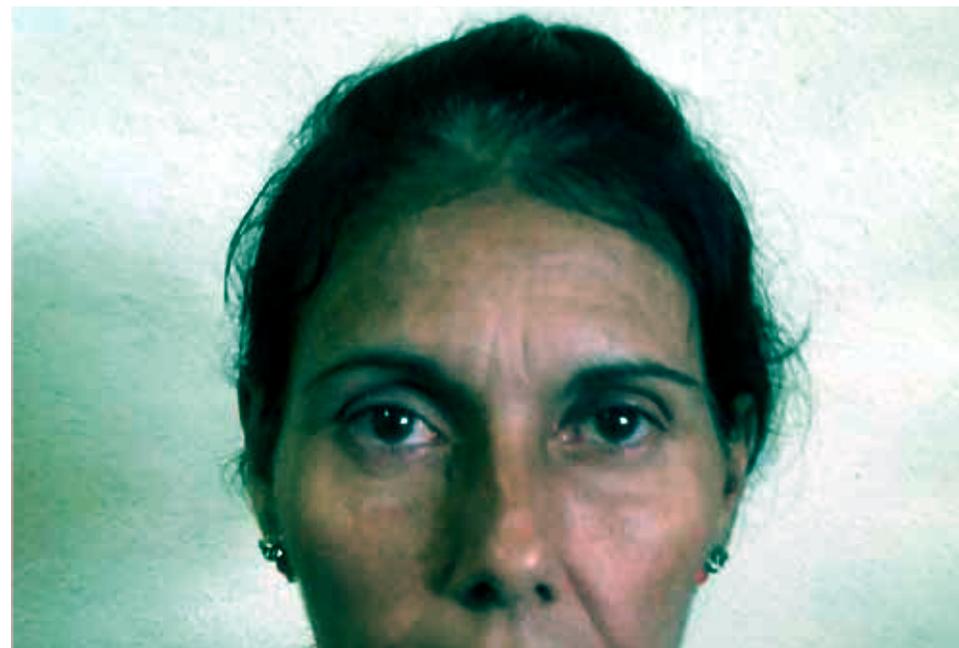
Tania Reyes

Director of the children's social project Nueva Esperanza

The truth is that I don't know which story from my life I should tell about psychological repression. Ever since I began taking an interest in our rights and how to assert them, they started calling me a counterrevolutionary and making life impossible for me. They start to make it like a war for you from within your own family, they use the people around you (neighbors, friends, acquaintances), which leads you to distrust everyone until you become paranoid; you can never know if the people

at your side really support you or are being used to incriminate you for something at any time.

I could talk about the ways in which my children have been discriminated against in school because "their parents were counterrevolutionary," or how my daughter was rejected by a gymnastics school, despite having the skills to do so, because "she could not represent the school as a pioneer."



Tania Reyes García. Selfportrait

I could also tell you that I can barely move around in my own province because many times they follow every step I take. If I travel to another province, they take me off of the bus or, in instances where I reached my destination, they detain me and return me to my province, as was the case in September 2016, when I traveled to Pinar del Rio to meet with colleagues from the group Convivencia, which in the end I was unable to attend.

In conclusion, since 2003, when I started working as an activist within the independent libraries and with my community project Nueva Esperanza, I have lived under constant stress. I suffer from severe chest pains, digestive system disorders, tachycardia, dizziness and headaches, which force me to take various medications, although I try to take them only in moments of crisis.

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



## rewriting cuba

Biannual magazine about Cuba made by the LatAm team of People in Need, Prague, in collaboration with independent writers, journalists and artists from Cuba. | Issue 18 Year 2018|

Published with the support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Cover photo by Agnes Koleman

Design: Punto Gráfico

**TRANSITION**  
Transition Promotion Program

rewriting cuba  
**CUBALOG.COM**