

Exposing the True Story of Cuba

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According to Galbright (1992), there is presently a 'culture of contentment' in which a country's foreign policy is merely a recreational activity as it usually does not affect the life of the average citizen. This idea never ceases to amaze those of us united here in a globalized world, and may even amaze me more so due to my personal experiences in a country like Spain, in which just recently the consequences of foreign policies have been so very obvious. I do not think that it is adequate to speak of diversions in the case of Cuba, however it is true that all of us, and especially the Spanish (evident in Spanish public opinion) have felt at one time like a particular archaeologist I would like introduce here. This archaeologist was one of the characters that appeared in the work of a famous Spanish writer, José Pla, who in my opinion may be the best Spanish writer of the 20th century. Pla wrote of an excellent specialist who, like many of his colleagues, considered the Greeks simply as museum exhibits and whose activities and whole existence could only be explained by his far-fetched and fantastic archaeological theories. He was convinced that the Greeks were and did exactly what the archaeologist designed for them 2500 years later. Although this may seem a little exaggerated, it is nonetheless true and represents something that occurs quite often in archaeology, and which I think has also occurred in our situation. We have been watching international politics which is dictated by great analysts and we, the organizations that work everyday within the Cuban reality, have been extremely interested in the institutional political discourse while our minds were occupied with new projects.

'Cuban affairs' have lately become a topic of interest for journalists, appearing in newspaper columns, radio talk shows and all public forms of communication. Nevertheless they have, in the course of becoming a media topic, begun losing their characteristics, their tears and smiles, to the point when their reality has become blurred. This is a common risk in our hyper-informed society, and it is becoming ever more dramatic in cases like this one, in which prisoners' human stories lose their flesh-and-blood acuteness: of families living without their bread-givers, without any kind of financial income, children without parents, wives without their husbands and husbands without their wives.

That is why when you travel to the island and visit prisoners' families, you feel an overwhelming urgency to write the true story of humankind, as Joe Gull has. Forget the macro-political theories and concentrate on the intra-history discussed by Unamuno, and which was later converted into a category of its own by Ortega. Unique as it is, true history never appears in history books, just as the reality of American beggars living in cardboard boxes in Central Park is never recognized and noted. The problem is that in Cuba today, true history is being perceived as a farce, as a piece of absurd, grotesque theatre. We can predict that all these adjectives will be integrated into the outrageous argument employed by Fidel Castro. This is a great farce that would cause hilarity if it wasn't for the dramatic consequences.

A part of this was described in a book called *Voces tras las Rejas* (Voices Through Bars), in which sympathetic descriptions of the more human side of today's Cuban political prisons are presented. I sincerely hope that this is the last book of its kind. Because of my professional inclinations, I tend to analyze things from the point of view of a teacher of constitutional law. Therefore, while reading this new book and reading about this great farce that constitutes the Cuban revolution, I could not but accentuate the true story of normal men, women, youngsters, minors, single and married people, Catholics, Protestants, free masons, journalists, trade-unionists, librarians, teachers, politicians and poets. The number of incarcerated poets is so surprising that one wishes he or she were a poet in order to get a bit closer. I think that one day it will be necessary to study the true role of poets in

revolutions, because I am sure that the fact that there are so many poets incarcerated in Cuba is not a rare phenomenon. Although I don't feel that any imprisonment in Cuba is usual or normal, I believe that the number of poets and members of the Varela Project in prison are the results of a concrete objective.

This is what we wish to show the public: the true history, the true story of the hundreds of people who have fought and who keep on fighting to defend human rights. Human rights are systematically violated by a revolution which is celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary and which is in a hurry to both persecute and devour its own children who are doing nothing more than fighting for the ideals that the Revolution itself claimed to want to establish: the right to live in freedom, equality, justice and democracy.

We want to tell the public about the true history of the completely unacceptable objectives through which, according to the given sentences, dangerous weapons have come to include such objects as a Sony radio, a cassette recorder, a Samsung personal laptop computer, newspaper articles, printed versions of the Declaration of Human Rights, of which Cuba is a signatory, or books by highly suspicious authors such as Ghandi, George Orwell or Václav Havel. We have to tell the public the true history of the summary proceedings that sent seventy-five Cuban democrats to prison merely for thinking freely and expressing their freedom.

We want to tell the true story of prisoners of a penitentiary system in which, as we are told by Héctor Palacios, very many people are disabled after having injected themselves with petrol, salt and other chemical substances in order not to have to physically suffer the rigour of prison life. There are many people with tuberculosis whose infection results from the lack of medical attention and food, prisoners are beaten, doctors act as policemen and do not provide medication, and prisoners are not being treated like human beings. The food isn't even good enough for dogs.

We must tell the true story of all those prisoners supposedly enjoying the pleasures of the 'extra-sentences', thanks to which they are not held in prisons. It is a new juridical invention and the fruit of Cuban juridical experts who lead the struggle of what we might call creative legality, i.e. the satisfaction of every caprice the dictator might have. In practice it does, however, mean home arrest. There is no real liberation. It is all lies, the demagogic and artificial actions of an exhausted and fundless director. Just recently, we were able to experience these extra-sentences when in July we visited a couple of prisoners who have been given this opportunity. We directly experienced the horrible consequences, many of which are irreversible, that one and a half years in prison had left on them. In the faces of these prisoners, the regime once again accused itself.

The first part of our mission must be to inform the public of this true story, to provide the public with faces and names, with smiles and tragedies. That is exactly why I like the leaflets distributed by People in Need which clearly state that Cuba is our problem too. That is what we want to tell society. Cuba is the problem of society as a whole, we cannot simply remain indifferent in front of our TV screens and say "what manner of atrocities! Please, somebody, do something!" If the human rights of one person are violated, then the human rights of the entire world are similarly violated. Therefore, everybody in Spanish society as well as worldwide must take part in the fight for democracy in this country. It is in this sense that we established the ICDC which is working closely with the media: writing articles and reports, presenting awards, paying homage. The exhibition of photos we displayed at the ICDC Summit in Prague was a demonstration of that homage and respect. These photographs show us in a very contrastive manner the portraits of the prisoners and their family members, the separation they have endured.

The second part of our mission is to increase the number of activists. We have had wonderful experience in this respect during the one and a half years that this association has existed. We have been sending people to the 'island of freedom' on humanitarian missions, people who have been meeting others and who have become interested in the work of the Association. All these people who have experienced the Cuban reality up close and personal have, after their return, become leading activists of the association to the point where they have started to lead the way better than we ourselves have sometimes managed to do. No one who has experienced such a reality directly can turn the other way. Even while on the road, they become the principal activists, and that is one of our main goals

— to increase the number of young Spaniards who are active in the support of human rights and democracy in Cuba.

As I outlined in the beginning, the main objective must be to succeed in demanding that the liberty of those imprisoned be regarded as something beyond the political, as something apolitical. We think that good foreign policy is by definition non-partisan; we think that Cuba ought to be considered a topic about which all Spanish political bodies join forces. This is the main priority of the Spanish association Cuba in Transition (Cuba en Transición). That is why we plan to join the campaigns of patronage that exist throughout the world, together with members of the Spanish Parliament, and bring other European and Latin-American countries to this initiative, that has already begun to bear excellent fruits.