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Catherine Murphy: The Blockade is Unfair, Unethical, and Illegal

By: Giusette León García / CubaSi

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The North American Catherine Murphy is a sociologist and filmmaker. With the gender in the eye and a long and deep love for Cuba, she looks at us and talks about the women of this island.

"Correct me if I make a lot of mistakes with the language," she says at the end of the interview, and I can't help but smile from this side of the sea and phone, because Catherine was born in the United States, but she speaks "Cuban" almost perfect.

She learned it on foot and biking during the hard days of the economic crisis, in the 90's, and she trains it constantly. For example, when I met her, in 2008, shortly after the devastating passing of three hurricanes, this "gringa" in Cuba, accompanying La Colmenita and the group of \* clown \* led by her countryman Patch Adams, in the camp set by Kcho and the Martha Machado Brigade in Santa Cruz del Sur. Catherine Murphy is a sociologist and filmmaker. With the gender in the eye and a long and deep love for Cuba, she looks at us and talks about the women of this island:

«I feel very blessed to have spent several years in Cuba, working and studying in the 90's. I met many Cuban women in various branches, from different generations, racial identities, religions, geographies and sectors of society: artists, musicians, poets, scientists, doctors, housewives, workers, community educators, teachers, and I feel that if I were to write a story, in that infinity of particularities there's a collectivity as Cubans that is a passionate commitment to family, to their communities, to their nation and with independence, with the beautiful and strong legacy of Cuban independence; to build, to dream that country with everyone and for everyone, and for the good of all and to build it every day ».

**\* —What do you see as our main achievements? \***

—I see that the fundamental achievements are to have found strong answers to many of the world's major challenges, build an education system for all, a health system for all, eradicate social problems like eviction, which is a huge problem worldwide.

This commitment to try, with the existing means, to take care of the population as much as possible is not only a huge achievement, but a lesson for the world that it's doable.

«Most women in Cuba have a child and, on average family, less than two, and then a very interesting study gave as five factors that were: poverty reduction in general, access to health in particular and to family planning and contraceptives specifically.

In addition, access to work and study opportunities, and also the absence of policies that limit family size: it's by choice, not because it's imposed by the government or public health, or because they get a fine as has happened in other places; that is, they have an adjacent alternative to the central, beautiful and important fact that can be motherhood and family. Cuban women also have real access to educational and job opportunities that had been until the Triumph of the Revolution practically prohibited for women or for the vast majority of women. That distinguishes, differentiates Cuba from the vast majority of the world.

«Besides, the path that Cuba is already on to celebrate diversity in all its manifestations in society, have had advances, but of course, there's a long way to go, to promote social tolerance to celebrate diversity ... both sexual orientation and gender identity, the racial diversity that exists in Cuba, of course, regional diversities, and also have a permanent commitment to the equity of women, that Cuba has made so much progress in that field, decades ago, and it's a permanent topic, because you have to uproot such old patterns so we can all be healthier and have a more equitable society.

**\* —How much do you think the blockade hinders Cuba's advance in those and other areas? \***

—To me the blockade touches every aspect of the Cuban economy and life in Cuba, because there are so many aspects of life that should be simpler instead, they are more complex, more complicated, take more time for women and Cuban families, men too, but at a family level, women carry a lot of the weight, and I don't see that there's an aspect of life in Cuba that's not deeply touched and affected by the blockade.

«The blockade is unfair, unethical, and it's illegal, according to international laws, and it must to end. Cuba has been able to advance a lot, despite the blockade, but the advances would be much more: there are drugs unavailable now during the pandemic, very important food, construction materials, spare parts ... also books, technology ... it touches every aspect of life in Cuba, and it's a miracle that Cuba has been able to resist, survive and achieve so much in the face of the blockade. '

**\* —And you, who have lived like just one of us Cubans, how much do you think it affects special the life of women? \***

—The blockade has specific damages that include a lack of medicines to women's health issues; the transportation problem: as women remain the main responsible person for domestic affairs, not in every family, but in most families, women continue to exercise that role of the main person responsible for cooking meals, caring for children, the elderly, people in the family when there's a health emergency, that is, that role of caregivers which is beautiful on the one hand, it's very important to be able to give and receive it, but many times it becomes a burden for women, then all this work is multiplied, it's more complicated with the limitations of the Blockade: if they need to go to work during the day, as women still have a double shift, then they are faced with the limitations of transportation and they have to come later to cook, wash, etc., to review the homework with their children, and that makes the daily schedule much longer for women.

**\* - Has the story of one of us especially impressed you? \***

—I have been impressed by so many stories of Cuban women in all the years that I have been in touch with the island, that I will never have time to mention them all. In my first stage here, when I was investigating a little environmental issues, organic farming and sovereignty food, I met peasant women, community activists in short, there are so many... «But then I started recording interviews that had such an impact on me the testimonies of Cuban women who participated in the Literacy Campaign of the 1961... So I collected, recorded dozens of interviews over almost ten years, testimonies of the most young women, and that for me it was like looking through a magnifying glass, for me it was very important that this story had an impact on Cuba or that Cuban men and women also felt the stories as theirs and spoke to them, it was relevant to them, but for me it was also paramount to carry these stories to the United States, where there has been a misleading, a lack of information, but also fake

and negative information about Cuba, and I think the Literacy Campaign goes a little to the heart of the entire social development process that for 60 years has evolved in Cuba, building in Cuba, going against the wind, the tide and the blockade, but it also goes very deep into the lives of women, into the transformation of life, of the realities of women, of their own self-awareness, of their self-esteem, of their vision of the world, of their country and of themselves, and poses that intimate link between the liberation of the nation and the liberation of women.

That story for me is infinitely inspiring. «I am also very pleased that in this "stay at home" year I have gotten some new testimonies, and soon I hope to present and share a testimony of two of the first volunteer teachers, of the early calls of that network that in the 60's laid the foundations on which the massive campaign of the following year was built ».

**\* —How much do you think could bring us a greater bond between Cuban and North American women? \***

—That's a need we both have, because we have a lot to learn from each other. We in the United States have a lot to learn from Cuban women and their strategies, their advances, their pending subjects ... I am very proud to be part of an organization which is called U.S. Women and Cuba Collaboration or Collaboration of Women between Cuba and the United States, which was formed in the 1990s. We have a network nationwide in the United States of women academics, activists, and artists and in other branches as well, that we have been impacted by being able to travel to Cuba and meet Cuban women, and we are committed to continue building reciprocal bridges and showing solidarity with our Cuban sisters, and also demanding the end of the blockade on behalf of the women of both peoples. «Also, at the University of Havana, Professor Norma Vasallo has organized for years a women's meeting between Cuba and the United States that helped a lot to build these ties, it's another grain of sand that I have also experienced. There are many more things that bring us together than pull us apart and we need to work together to dissipate that enmity, neither allow the aggressions of the United States.

**Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff**

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