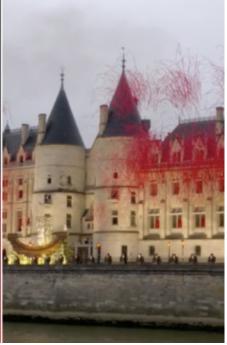Frivolity and the rounds of hugs in Paris

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / Special for CubaSí
02/08/2024

The fire of the immeasurable and the immediacy consumes all ideas. It is difficult to write a personal opinion halfway through the Olympic Games, where the news and the show of today, of right now, are devoured by what happens minutes later, or tomorrow, although in the stomach, in the entrails of each athlete, of each sports lover, there remains an inextinguishable glow of joy or sadness, for the victory or defeat that each athlete inevitably shares with his people.

But it is even more difficult not to reflect on the Olympic Games that hide the horror of war, the most urgent news that we strive to forget: while Paris flaunts its wealth, its power, in an excessive display —what is the use of wealth if it cannot be flaunted— at times boring, and imitates in a farcical and vaudeville tone the bloody events of the French Revolution, while it exhibits with alarming frivolity a talking head of Marie Antoinette, and makes blood cascade from the windows of the Palace, blood made of streamers, there is real blood in the streets of Palestine, in the weapons that France transfers and sends to the

Ukrainian fascists, in the medicines that the American blockade and the complicit "laissez faire" of the European governments, prevent from reaching sick children in Cuba, in the shameless conspiracy to make the electoral victory of the revolutionary government of Venezuela look illegitimate.

I am not worried about the sensitivity of the European courts —the ancient royalty is an institution that should have disappeared a long time ago— I am worried about the deception, the mockery of the true heirs of the French Revolution: that is not the France of the yellow vests, nor the one that stopped the far right in the last parliamentary elections. Respect for diversity? Only that of the body; that of being fat or thin, mutilated or blind, white, black or yellow, in a false range of colors? Respect for freedom? Only that of our sexual orientation, or that of acting and dressing without rules that imprison us?

I remember that in 2010, I found in Berlin the advertisement for a singular advertising campaign for youth clothing: Be stupid, was the promotional slogan. But the message was more elaborate: "Smart may have the brains, but stupid has the balls." The campaign included a variety of "funny" photos that "represented" youthful rebellion: a girl showing her naked breasts in front of a security camera, a man standing on his head blocking traffic on any street… Being stupid (rebellious) was that: being irreverent, incorrect, funny. A tweet about the opening show of these Olympic Games by Spanish journalist Pascual Serrano ironically recalled that before, being rebellious was nationalizing banks and distributing land. It still is. They want us not to notice it, to remain locked in our bodies, in a freedom chained to fashion, to the trivial and external, without transcendent purposes.

Respect for diversity and freedom goes further: it includes the right of Palestinians to their land, that of Venezuelans to their oil, that of peoples, individually and collectively, to dignity; the right to life, health, sport, knowledge, social and personal well-being for all: fat and thin, black, white and yellow, women or men, heterosexual or of any other sexual orientation, religion or culture, born in the European Garden, or in "the Jungle" where the rest of Humanity supposedly lives (the sixty dark corners of the world, according to Bush Jr.). The barge that

represented integration or diversity, and brought four former great athletes with the Olympic torch, was far from fulfilling its goal: all those selected were European or American, two of them from tennis, an elitist sport whose feats were not matched in the Olympic Games, and it missed the opportunity to include an African from long-distance racing —respecting the French of all origins is fine, but we must also respect people from all corners— or Jamaican Usain Bolt, for example, or Cuban Javier Sotomayor or Regla Torres, declared the best volleyball player of the 20th century, with three Olympic titles.

I am not going to lie: I also enjoy and suffer the Games, the performance of the Cuban delegation, men and women who train in not optimal conditions, but who sometimes carry in their chests the light that their neighborhoods do not have. And although it is still early, I cannot help but get excited when a Palestinian swimmer swims hard and comes third in his stroke, even though he or she does not qualify for the semifinals, because he or she stands for a nation that is in danger of being exterminated by geopolitical interests, which are masked by religion, and which France, the host country, does not recognize. *"I have had a lane (in the pool) —he told the Spanish journalist Ivan Molero— just for Palestine, I have marked a time just for Palestine. That is my message of peace, because the world must know that we are human beings."*

I cannot stop jumping as if I were also playing, if the Cuban beach volleyball duo comes from behind and scores eight points in a row against the American, and wins the opening match in two sets. I am not immune either, and I am overcome with uneasiness when two-time Olympic champion Julio César La Cruz loses by split decision to another Cuban boxer assisted in his corner by Cuban trainers, all representing Azerbaijan; and although the medal he may win does not count for the country that trained him, it is somewhat comforting to know that he does not deny his origins and his training. His attitude contrasts with the politicized decision of the IOC to incorporate two Cubans who decided to live in another country, and are not persecuted in Cuba, in the Olympic Refugee team. But beyond victories and defeats, I am moved by the hugs at the end of each competition, which reaffirm the possibility of a better world, although that new world can only be built

outside the Olympic venue.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff