History defies us

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / Special for CubaSí
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I once heard a European man saying that we, Latin Americans, lived stuck in history. Actually, the history of Our America is short but intense, and there is no way it is stuck in history books. Its brevity involves all of us: the so-called discovery of America brought about and unleashed the still incipient productive forces of capitalism. A few centuries later, the last colonies of Spain were already facing the overflow of American imperialism. From colonialism to neocolonialism, from Bolívar to Fidel.

Despite the obvious differences that characterize each country with respect to the others, and sometimes, with itself, in its tremendous amalgam of peoples and cultures, one circumstance unites and integrates us: the same colonial origins and the same external and internal dangers. These dangers have created a pantheon of common heroes, which we exchange without hesitation, regardless of their place of birth: Bolívar, San Martín, Morelos, Betances, Martí, Juárez, Zapata, Sandino, Che Guevara, Allende, Fidel, Chávez… All revolutionary movements turn to them to draw the continuity of the struggle: followers

of Martí, Tupamaros, Sandinistas, Zapatistas, Bolivarians.

From time to time, they are called to combat. In 1893, José Martí said: *"But Bolívar is in the sky of America (…) still wearing his field boots, because what he did not do remains undone to this day; because Bolívar still has to do lot in America!"* In 1953, Fidel argued in defense of the attackers on the Moncada barracks: *"It seemed that the Apostle was going to die in the year of his centenary, that his memory would be extinguished forever, such was the affront!"* and declared him the intellectual author of the armed action. In 1995, faced with the disappearance of the so-called socialist camp, Martí helped us understand the meaning of the Cuban Revolution, the one that began in 1868, as Fidel pointed out, and triumphed in 1959: social justice, anti-imperialism, taking sides *"with the poor of the earth,"* wherever they may be, in Vietnam, in Africa, in Palestine, in Venezuela. A century after his death in combat — I was then director of the Center for Martí Studies — we organized an International Meeting in Santiago de Cuba that we called **"José Martí and the challenges of the 21st century."** Martí returned so that we would not forget the history of the Homeland, which is not *"the land that our feet tread on,"* which is not reduced to customs, tastes, the way of walking, speaking or laughing.

A historical clarification is in order: the renowned British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm characterized the 20th century as short, and reduced it to the years from the First World War to the fall of European socialism in 1991. The 20th century would then be that of the Cold War and the confrontation between so-called "real" socialism and capitalism. However, it can also be understood as a long century, which began with the first imperialist war of Humanity (the Spanish-Cuban-American war) in 1898, and is not over yet: the century of imperialism. Although there are authors who refer to the invasion and conquest of more than half of the Mexican territory, and to other previous events, as actions of an imperialist nature, the truth is that in 1898, as Lenin points out, imperialism began a new model of domination: the neocolonial one.

In that case, the main contradiction of the century would be between exploited countries and exploiting countries, as Che Guevara pointed out. Although José Martí was born in 1853 and died in 1895, his status

as the founder of the literary and political modernity of Our America, his early understanding of the danger that the nascent American imperialism represented for the Latin American peoples, to the point of saying that everything he had done in his life was to try to prevent the United States, by taking over Cuba, from falling with that force on the peoples of the South (Roberto Fernández Retamar considered him the first thinker of what would later be called the Third World), make him a man of the 20th and 21st centuries, that is, of the era that we still live in (if we accept that it is that of imperialism).

There are periods in history of revolutionary effervescence. The horizon seems close. Sailors sing in chorus, with the stroke of their oars, anthems of victory. *“Let us be realistic, let us do the impossible,”* they exclaim euphorically. There are periods, however, in which the fog and the storm blur the horizon. The sirens' song makes hardened men throw themselves into the sea and perish. *"Let's do what is possible,"* they say in a low voice. What is possible is half of what is possible, because the other half does not seem possible. That was the Zanjón Pact, which brought positivist scientism, and took refuge in autonomism, in possibilism. Then a Baraguá of light, of hope, exploded. And the ship returned to the sea in 1895.

After the American intervention in 1898, with the deaths of Martí and Maceo, *“domestic virtue”* prevailed, the *“lesser evil”* in the face of the Platt Amendment and the muzzled Republic. In the 1920s and 1930s, a generation emerged that faced “scientistic” possibilism and overthrew the servile dictatorship of Machado. The Revolution of 1933, however, *“went aground”* in the words of Raúl Roa. Until the Centennial generation blossomed, which recovered Martí and raised the impossible once again. Cuba is a ship that sails. But there are internal forces that can make it run aground, as Fidel warned in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana. The great fight in the history of Our America is between faith and despair, between the flight of the Condor and the positivist *“insecting”* (a Martian verb) for the concrete. *"My son: I have faith in human improvement, in the future life, in the usefulness of virtue, and in you,"* wrote José Martí in the preface of his collection of poems **Ismaelillo**. *"And in you,"* he said, and I repeat; children and young people of "our America," I have faith.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff