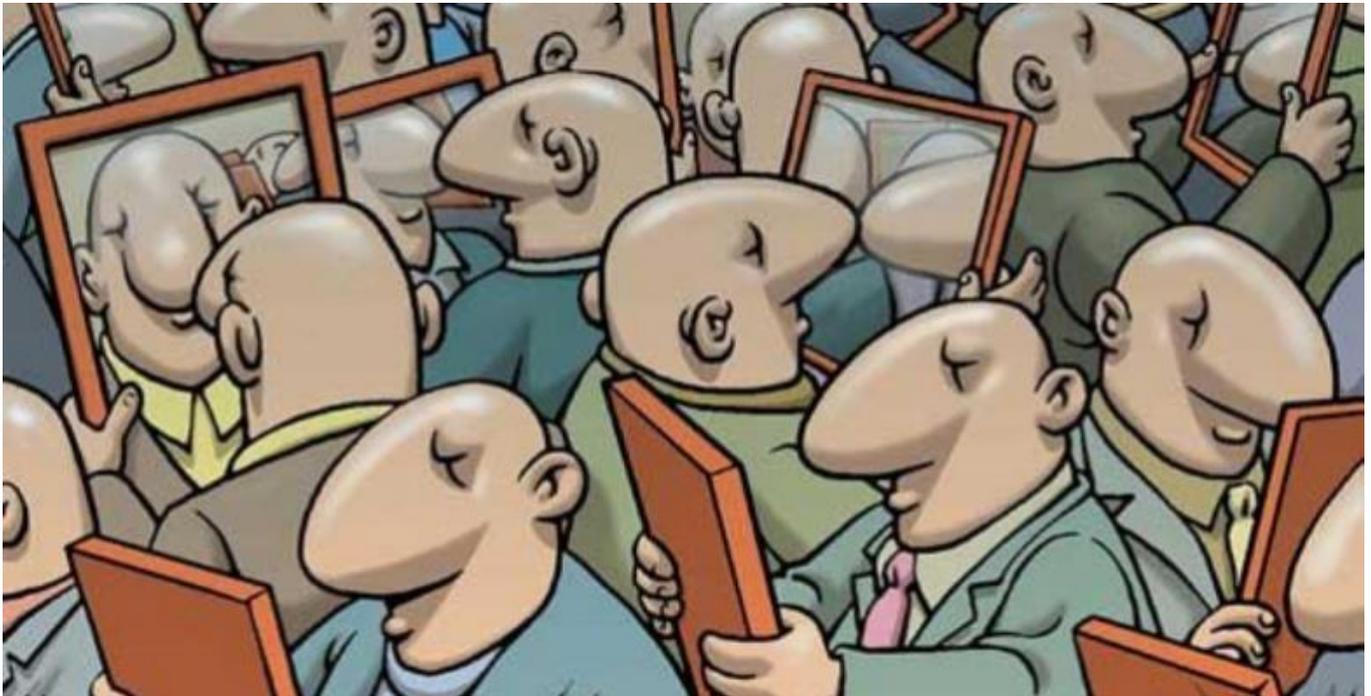


The New Face of Old Cuba

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An expert at derailing debates, instead of placing it on the apocryphal blog La Joven Cuba and its New Face, fueled doubt around the guests and fostered the wrong discussion. In reality, I believe each of them responded according to their own opinions, sincerely, as they have done in other forums; their opinions, for several years, have been part of the national debate, whether we agree with them or not. Very few would have seen those interviews without those guests. None would have aroused that curiosity had they appeared in a state-run media outlet. As González Penalva has written, the media was the message. I insist, the greatest bet of the new/old project was to distract us with accusations that stimulate reading, and forget what's important: the media and its ends.

A brief reminder. La Joven Cuba, the space I supported in its early days and of which I was one of its driving forces (the three founders know this), despite the recommendations of Ted Henken—the American agent who created a friendly bilingual blog and established friendly contact with some Cuban bloggers, then visited them on a working tour of the island, first with Yoani Sánchez (does anyone remember her?) and then, one by one, with each young critic contacted—“Get close to Yoani, talk to her, and stay away from the officialists; you are the future,” he said like a “good” friend. His map of the Cuban blogosphere, with academic pretensions, allowed fundraisers to grant trips and scholarships. La Joven Cuba, the medium/message we are referring to, gradually became a counterrevolutionary platform, and its real influence gradually diminished.

I believe the current shift is the result of a profound and, we might say, accurate analysis of that reality. It's not a real change, it's a discursive rearrangement (or have they deceived the Norwegian Embassy?). The country is drowning in a crisis caused by the intensified blockade, with added surgical measures, as they like to say, and yet, the Revolution does not fall; the people resist. Suddenly, the empire's think tanks have understood that, despite the extreme conditions in which our lives unfold (lack of electricity and sometimes water, and unattainable prices for the basic basket), a deteriorated but insurmountable ideological wall persists within the population, maintaining the historical commitment to Social justice and independence. In Cuba, there's a moral reserve whose true proportions had been underestimated. If today's Cubans—most of whom were born after 1959—are not indifferent to poverty, to the fate of others, it's because we are children of the Revolution. Imperialism's reasoning is simple: the economic

suffocation measures are already in place, they work, now it's necessary to gently push, using language close to the people (and this includes revolutionary clichés), that incriminates the government and increases distrust, to instill in people's minds the desire for a change of system. Of all the spaces that the counterrevolution maintains in Cuba, this was, due to its already distant university origins, the most appropriate. For this, there's nothing better than using revolutionary interlocutors, although sometimes the move doesn't work out entirely well.

But there are two obvious changes: the acceptance of the US blockade as an obstacle to overcome, and the point that, for example, begging did not exist in Cuba before—a small but powerful implicit recognition of the Revolution's success (begging is endemic throughout the world, and especially in Latin America). They know they have to repeat phrases so common among the population, such as "this didn't happen before," and that before isn't the mediated republic. I don't think they'll exalt the figure of Fidel, as the country's common people do. But as one interviewee added, before answering the question about the changes supposedly demanded by the population, "we should also define what changes we are talking about."

The unspoken truth by the builders of the space, is that capitalism would exponentially increase poverty and begging in Cuba and lead to a loss of national sovereignty. That's why they never mention the words capitalism or socialism, as if the changes were unrelated to politics—the exercise of power by one class over another—as if a pragmatic attitude could ignore them.

We are experiencing a crusade to abolish limits, not precisely those that curtail freedom. The assault is on the conceptual limits of all political identity: there's supposedly no right or left, capitalism or socialism; there are, however, good or bad people, effective or ineffective solutions. For this, nothing is more effective than bourgeois-style freedom of thought: everything is displayed on equal terms, which implies a fundamental inequality due to the cultural hegemony held by global capitalism and the fraudulent way in which this "diversity" is built. But if technologically capable media outlets emerge to compete and the revolutionary truth, by accident, prevails, it's immediately banned and repressed. Let Russia Today, TeleSur, or Al Jazeera tell it. Let the American students protesting against the genocide in Gaza tell it. Unity is not alien to authentic diversity, but it's built in and for the Revolution.

A question posed to one of the guests revolves in my head: Is this the country they promised us? The distance is shocking: they, those who promise; we, those who receive the promise. The question holds a trap: they are us. There is no them, there is an us. We all promised ourselves another country and worked hard to achieve it. And yes, we achieved incredible things. But not everything, and not permanently. They, in truth, are the ones opposite, those who said "they won't be able to," and did and do everything to prevent it. Should we set a deadline for "we will win," as if we had never achieved it before, in a context of ruthless war? The Goliath that confronts us is not just the US government, it is Western imperialism, whose leadership continues to be exercised by Washington. But yes, there are development plans that contemplate the continuation of the blockade. No one is more committed to advancing toward the horizon we Cubans promised ourselves than the revolutionary government. And Old/Young Cuba, and its instructors, know it.

How sad it is, Pascal Allende, former secretary general of the Chilean MIR during the dictatorship, once told me, not to belong to a collective hope. A few days ago, I felt it again, watching a film about the lives of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, even though Hollywood glosses over the political background that united them in the 1960s and reduces them to two parallel stories of love and success. But love in those years leaped from the private to the public, from shared social commitment to loving intimacy. "With the same hands that caress you, I am building a school," Roberto Fernández Retamar wrote in 1962.

How sad these young people are when they distance themselves from the collective hope, these children who believed they "deserved" (we, their parents, made them believe they deserved it) the promised paradise; something they should have received and was not given to them. The Revolution is not that: it's the joy of building together a better, more humane society, "defying powerful external and internal forces," dirty, laughing, in love, in the common trench, which can become Parliament, as Cintio Vitier called for, if we don't drop our rifles, or believe we should listen to Martínez Campos. No, we also haven't gotten used to the existence of poverty in Cuba, which is why we don't accept being sold the capitalist "solution."

It doesn't matter that the casual tone, that the atmosphere is filled with after dinner airs, the questions and intentions revolve around an I disconnected from the dreams lived by several generations of Cubans. They weren't disappointed, because the greatest reward we received, grandparents, parents, and children, was simply that of being protagonists in one of the most heroic, most beautiful, most human stories of the 20th century.

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