

CUBA: AN INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTION OF A COLLECTIVE DRAMA (II)

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In an earlier publication of *CAR*, the problems posed by any attempt at reconstruction of the Cuban society were outlined, as viewed mostly from a psychological perspective. In the article, various concepts were presented, in an effort to clarify the myriad components that are at interplay within any given attempt to "reconstruct" a society that has been at the mercy of an autocrat for over 45 years.

Perception, it was stated, is key to the role that is to be played by Cubans within and without the island. Individual perceptions must be placed within the frame-work of the society in which the perceptions occur. It is therefore imperative that those who expect to be key players in the future of the island understand how this future is perceived by the different groups that eventually will become involved in the process.

For many who have not lived in present-day Cuba, it is inconceivable that people be willing to risk their lives at sea, in makeshift rafts, yet be unwilling to risk a minute sign of protest while on Cuban soil. The concept of cognitive dissonance, discussed earlier, can provide the needed framework: given two opposing sets of beliefs, humans tend to strive for balance. Forced to make a choice, they tend to move towards the one they believe to be less threatening. As difficult as it might be to understand, Cubans in the island see fleeing as the only available option, even if it means risking lives in shark-infected waters. Life in the island is perceived as a hopeless proposition. Years of indoctrination and refined techniques of behavior modification have resulted in generations that choose flight as the reaction to the perceived threats. Prior to the Castro takeover, Cubans were accustomed to either Fight or Flight, which are the two ways in which one responds to a threatening situation. For years many who engaged in fighting, were imprisoned or killed. A large number of political prisoners became exiles continued to perceive their role as that of "freedom fighters".

As years passed and absolute governmental control overtook the island, fear became the *leit-motif* of those who remained. As generations came and went, fear began to immobilize the population at large. For those who left the island in the first years of the "Revolution", it is inconceivable that apparently nobody is now willing to "fight". With the exception of a few dissidents (not necessarily opponents or *opositores* to the regime), the Cuban population appears to wait patiently for somebody to solve their problem. This is in sharp contrast with other stages in Cuban history, when repeated attempts were made by Cubans to free themselves from unpopular regimes. Those who recall earlier years, and those who delve into the texts, can find no explanation as to why no attempt is made to fight oppression at present.

In truth, one must accept the fact that Cubans in the island are paralyzed by fear. Other psychological theories and constructs help understand the factors at play. While outside the island many talk about freedom, national pride, democracy and elections, the truth is that, for those living within Cuba, the one basic concern is that of being able to find food for everyday sustenance. Basic needs are not being met, despite much international touting of the "Revolution's gains" in terms of health, education, and the standards of life in the island. The truth is that Cubans are, above anything else, hungry, and the fulfillment of that one basic need is the primary motivation of behavior at this point.

Psychologist Abraham M. Maslow, who studied the lives of successful individuals, proposed the theory of Hierarchical Needs. According to Maslow, as human's develop, certain needs must be met, in a sequential order, so that the person may achieve his/her complete potential, the stage which Maslow termed "self-actualization". For Maslow, it is impossible to bypass a stage in order to get to another. If the needs were not met in a hierarchal manner, it is impossible to achieve a "higher stage" of personality development. Thus, the "realm of being" ("b realm") and the "realm of deficiencies" ("d realm"). An illustration follows:

NEED HIERARCHY AND LEVELS OF PERSONALITY FUNCTIONING

Need Hierarchy	Condition of Deficiency	Fulfillment	Illustration
Psychological	Hunger, thirst Sexual frustration Tension Fatigue Illness Lack of proper shelter	Relaxation Release from tension Experiences of pleasure from senses Physical well-being Comfort	Feeling satisfied after a good meal
Safety	Insecurity Yeaming Sense of loss Fear Obsession Compulsion	Security Comfort Balance Poise Calm Tranquility	Being secure in a full-time job
Love	Self-consciousness Feeling of being unwanted Feeling of worthlessness Emptiness Loneliness Isolation Incompleteness	Free expression of emotions Sense of wholeness Sense of warmth Renewed sense of life and strength Sense of growing together	Experiencing total acceptance in a love relationship
Esteem	Feeling of incompetence Negativism Feeling of inferiority	Confidence Sense of mastery Positive self-regard Self-respect Self-extension	Receiving an award for an outstanding performance on some project
Self-Actualization	Alienation Metaphathologies Absence of meaning in life Boredom Routine living Limited activities	Healthy curiosity Peak experiences B-values Realization of potentials Work which is pleasurable and embodies values Creative living	Experiencing a profound insight

From this hierarchical perspective, it becomes clearly understood that one cannot expect certain values and ethical standards to have entered the education of the Cubans who have grown inside the island for nearly a half-century. With the prompt removal of religious education (one of Castro's first "takeovers"), the governmental control of instruction in Cuban schools under a Marxist approach has resulted in a population that is constantly reminded that it must support "a common good" through sacrifice and total abdication of individual free will.

In a malevolent attempt at controlling perceptions, the image of Castro has become God-like; he exercises absolute control over all lives, and, when deemed appropriate grants minute reprieves that the population gratefully acknowledges. The Cubans feel their individual rights violated, but they have also come to perceive Castro as a father figure, the Father of the whole nation. This creates inner guilt; an inner dissonance which must be dealt with in order to avoid psychic pain.

It is interesting to note that much of this perception remains intimately ingrained even after a few years of life within a free society. In the uncertainty of feelings, in the unconscious decision to obtain "inner harmony" a solution is sought: that of solving the problem through the use of two common defense mechanisms: denial and displacement. Cubans in the island 1) deny that there is anything that they can do to change the situation and 2) displace their anger towards the exile community they are so willing to join, yet blame "for what they caused".

In a forthcoming article we will continue to explore the adaptive and maladaptive behaviors of the Cuban population at both ends of the spectrum. We will continue to review Maslow's theory as it refers to personality disorders according to deficit and growth needs. It is hoped that, upon examining the different variables, a clearer view of the true issues at stake in the "Cuban reconstruction" will emerge. It is also hoped that, in the midst of the common Psychic Pain that unites all Cubans, those responsible for their individual actions in the destruction of a nation, will face their destiny.

Denial and displacement, among others, cannot be excuses for the consequences of behavior. The terms "love" and "forgiveness" (which is not a synonym for reconciliation) cannot be peddled in an attempt to seek an instant absolution from history. Each one must face squarely into his/her own mirror and accept the result of individual actions. It must be remembered that Love is one of Maslow's needs that must be met. Undoubtedly, LOVE is a healing energy. One must keep in mind however, that there can be Justice without Love, but there cannot be Love without justice. With that perspective in mind, let us all join in prayers and LOVE for the Cuban nation.

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