
Conner Gorry: The Blockade is Like Strong, Chronic Pain

By: Giusette León García / CubaSi
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Thus, with the most absolute humanism and solidarity, describes the North American journalist based in Cuba the effects of the blockade that the United States has kept against the island for over 60 years.

Conner Gorry spoke with CubaSi as a woman whose half soul is in Cuba, who has shared our struggles (from great causes to immense daily battles). She looks at us and for what she tells, she is and for many reasons, the protagonist of the story.

—If you were asked what is like the life of Cuban women, what would your story be about us?

—The Cuban women have a life of struggle, they are guerrilla fighters who wake up every morning to work, study, care for, and love their families and create moments of joy within a difficult and often contradictory context.

«Why contradictory? Because, on the one hand, Cuban women enjoy rights that many, too many, in the Latin American and Caribbean region cannot even dream of: free health (at all levels); education (at all its levels, both for herself and for her children), free; and a legal / constitutional framework that guarantees rights that neither North American women have (examples: wage equal to men, maternity leave).

“But, on the other hand, these rights are reduced, affected by the blockade. Most Cuban women and young girls living today were born under the blockade of the United States, with all the limitations, difficulties, and scarcities this policy represents, which has not achieved its goal

for 60 years. Food, medications, clothing, toiletry, technology, school / work materials; it's a constant struggle to find these resources. And they also have the political situation with the United States embassy, ??which is even more cruel, it keeps families apart. This reality of decades, generations now, contributes to the resilience and creativity that Cuban women have, but the most draconian measures of Trump's administration and the global pandemic are taking this resilience to the edge.

"The other contradiction is that Cuban women - legally, constitutionally - have guaranteed rights, but within a society that is culturally macho, patriarchal, with gender constructions that are disadvantageous for the entire society, not only for women."

—What do you see as our main achievements?

—Professional achievement is impressive and, for me, essential: an economically independent woman, with her own salary, responsibilities and professional networks, interests, and possibilities for further training, is a more integrated, more productive, happier, and more dynamic human being, and more empowered, and this is good for any society.

«I am also impressed by the dedication, effort, and encouragement that Cuban women bring to their families to guarantee their good health, well-being and care. Achieving a balance between work (or studies) and family under the geopolitical and economic circumstances that you live in is hard to believe at times. Just the fact of cooking something every day, especially now, under this pandemic, is a superhero thing.

«Most of the housework and family care (with the elderly and children) falls into the hands of women, and this affects their chances and well-being... Ah, many times women share the blame: reinforcing "traditional roles", sharing macho perspectives, passing this paradigm to younger generations...»

- "What else should we desire?"

Well, this macho, patriarchal paradigm must to change, in all senses and in all its manifestations. This takes hard work, which is scary for many people, but a more equitable society, with equal rights for all, is better. And this change, this transformation to a more inclusive and fair society, has to include ALL the population, not just women. Here I am specifically referring to full and equal rights for my LGBTQ + family, friends, and colleagues. It's difficult to change a culture of centuries, but if anyone can do it, it's the Cuban people.

"I believe Cuban women can also wish a little more political representation and more positions of power or decision-making in all sectors, in all modalities (state and private). It's not enough to have women in parliament, it's not a matter of quantity. It's a matter of women who can fight for all, who represent the problems of Cuban women and their families.

And it's not enough to have women as waitresses. Women who own restaurants are needed. It's not enough to have women planting vegetables. You need women running farms. It's not enough to have rights for girls and women, and not for transgender people".

- What are the main obstacles represented by the blockade on that path?

—One thing that's very, very difficult to convey about the blockade is that it affects absolutely EVERYTHING and EVERYONE, in one way or another.

«That Cuban women cannot access technology for their businesses or their art or their studies,

this is real. When I speak to artisans and designers, for example, they regret the inability to access global sites like Etsy and PayPal. If you write down www.etsy.com or www.paypal.com in your browser from Cuba, you get a message that reads you don't have the right to access these sites, according to the blockade, and more specifically, OFAC regulations. How can a person market, make visible and develop a business or vision without access to the main tools in use today? and there are many, many more, not just Etsy and PayPal.

«In the health and science sectors, two sectors that have more women than men, the blockade also affects. From raw materials for research and development of medicines, vaccines and scientific medical technology, to opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences with colleagues.

“That Cuban women cannot get visas to visit and reunite with their families in the United States since President Trump closed the embassy (a situation that continues today, despite the new president in the United States) violates rights and, furthermore, it's cruel. My friend Consuelo could not comfort her only daughter and her two granddaughters when her son-in-law died in Miami; my friend Esther María could not be with her only daughter when she gave birth to her first child in California; my friend Mary was unable to travel to Florida to accompany her sister when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. And the fact that Consuelo's daughter and granddaughters, Esther María's daughter and Mary's sister cannot travel to Cuba due to the restrictions imposed on flights by Trump, also affects them.

«In no way do I want to suggest that domestic problems, internal errors in Cuba have nothing to do with it. They have to do, but with 60 years of an interfering and imperialist policy on behalf of the U.S., how can we separate the problems generated by the blockade and the problems generated by the Cuban policies themselves? First you have to lift the blockade and respect the sovereignty of Cuba, to uncover and reveal the current damage of the blockade, and then you can analyze the domestic problems and challenges.

—If you had to tell about the impact of the blockade on the Cuban people, and specifically on women, how would you do it?

—The blockage is like a strong and chronic pain: you wake up every day with a terrible pain that limits you, but you are used to it, half resigned. You don't know a life free from that pain. It never gets better, sometimes it gets worse, but to this, you are also used to. You don't want your children to know the degree of pain; you do everything and fight day in and day out so that it doesn't affect them. At times, the pain (or blockade) makes it (almost) impossible for you to keep going, but you know you have to keep going and you look for new, creative, alternative ways to keep going, despite the limitations. Now imagine that 11.2 million people are suffering this chronic and terrible pain because of politics, and there is no pill to relieve this pain, which is in someone else's hands ...

«To put give another metaphor: imagine you have your period. There's a store two blocks away that sells sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, all kinds of high-quality materials a girl or woman needs. You have the money. But the shop owner says: you can't buy here. Neither your neighbor or friend. No one who lives where you live can buy these materials. It's like saying: just keep suffering (and bleeding), because I don't like how you and your neighbors and friends live, therefore, they won't have access to what we sell. It sounds like science fiction, doesn't it?

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-"Any particular story that impressed you?"

—As a person who firmly believes that health is an inalienable human right, the stories of the health sector shocked me greatly. When I interviewed Dr. Dagmar García, the research director of the Sovereign vaccines against COVID-19, and she tells me that her work and the development of the vaccines are complicated because of the blockade, that infuriated me. When she tells me that you cannot get materials for vaccines - which are the first in Latin America, and already proven by clinical trials to be safe and effective - because of the blockade, and in the middle of a global pandemic, I was red with rage.

“This week, the WHO director cited this data: one out of four people in the first world has already received their first dose of a vaccine against COVID-19. In the developing world, this number is 1 in 500. And Cuba's vaccines, safe, effective, are also conceived with equity, they come out cheaper; furthermore, they only need regular refrigeration, alleviating a barrier for developing contexts. Cuban vaccines are presented as a solution to this pandemic for the most vulnerable, but the country and its scientists face problems in obtaining materials due to foreign policy. This also infuriates me and saddens me a lot.

—How much could we women do from one shore and the other in order to connect the two peoples?

-I don't know. There are so many divisions in the world today, so many obstacles, so much apathy and fatigue, so much misinformation, that sometimes it seems to me that ignorance is more powerful than science ... I think the best we can hope for is that women of all shores keep your physical and mental health, your hope, your faith that a better world will be possible one day, hopefully not so far away, and we can continue to fight for just and non-interventionist policies.

“Personally, I hope that North American women, especially those in Congress, state representatives, mayors, and governors, those who are in power, wake up before the violation of rights generated by the blockade against the Cuban people and Cuban women and vulnerable people, especially.

«The world is fighting against the COVID-19 as a daily reality. But only Cuba has COVID-19 and the longest blockade in modern history as part of its daily fight. And I wonder why?»

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