
The Havana of Blue Tanks

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There's increasingly less time left for the capital of Cuba to reach its half century, and many Havanans rejoice from their anonymous everyday life.

At present, when there is increasingly less time left for the 500th anniversary of Havana, it is usual that you hear about the great and well-known spaces, the iconic sites of the city.

But not very few Havanans from that other anonymous Havana —the one that does not appear in pictures or postcards— lean out of the door or the window every morning these days too, and discover a new lamp on their street, colorful painted façades, and new benches built in the local park.

And the fact is that this Havana on the verge of its half century is actually felt by all who inhabit, enjoy and suffer it, neither occasionally nor from a car window that does not let the sun's rays enter or the cool air escape. I am talking about the Havanans who unintentionally are remodeling their city every day, walking on its sidewalks and asphalts, charming it with a symphony of warnings that the (rationed) chicken had arrived (at the butcher's) or run, run, because so-and-so is fighting, stirring it up from its nights, sensual or sordid, of red and sharp, of skin and rhythm, of boredom or passion, and a very hot weather.

This, the City of Columns, by Alejo Carpentier, is also the city of blue tanks today. No talented artist cast them, they did not accompany Havana in its village flushes or in its ambiguous wiggles of pseudo-republic; no old patina marks them. But they are also evidence and

witnesses of recent and heroic times.

Just as current archaeologists have investigated among ruins, rubble and aged drains, helping rebuild past ordinarinesses from crockery fragments or a piece of fan, perhaps the future archaeologists will stop reflectively in front of a piece of blue tank, comparing it with photos of the period when the roofs of the city were crowded by these “mysterious” containers.

Maybe, they will not know how to deduce with so little evidence that those blue tanks were also a symbol of endurance, of creativity, of a day-by-day work, but anyway people walked clean and freshly bathed.

They are the same people who proudly comment today from their balconies or in front of the television at home, about this or that restoration, this or that change in the city that improves their lives.

They are also the same who, without fuss, toast or artificial lights, will get up next November 16 and, as every day, they will savor a cup of coffee. But this Saturday all their routines will be different: Their Havana, that of the Capitol and also of the blue tanks will be celebrating its birthday.

Translated by Jorge Mesa Benjamin / CubaSi Translation Staff
