
The meaning of a lifetime

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / Special for CubaSi
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Life is actually human as long as it embraces a meaning that transcends the reproductive cycle, as a species and as an individual. In Mafalda's (that is, Quino's) comic strips, for example, some topics are tackled: Manolito, son of a hardworking grocer, is good at mathematics (accounts that increase his small capital), and dreams of being able to build “when it grows up” a supermarket chain. On the other hand, Susanita only perceives herself as a mother and wife, in an atmosphere of homely happiness. They are the typical characters of classical capitalism, in certain contexts already surpassed by the system itself. But the meaning is not always easily discovered, nor is it the same in all circumstances of life. That Susanita, who could have been my mother (a housewife with four children), was undone when the Revolution triumphed, when she became a socially useful woman, both in her workplace—a conquered place—and in the multiple functions she took over as zone leader of the CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution).

It is not about unifying meanings, because each life is unique and unrepeatable. But it is false that capitalism protects individuality. If the image of the artisan, of the small producer, was opposed to the wealth inherited from the unproductive feudal nobility in the beginning, capital was concentrated in a few hands, and inheritance returned as one of the main sources of wealth and power over time. Since the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, Enrique José Varona sensed the disappearance of the individual (the individualist ideal, he calls it), both economically and socially. This is how he described the city of New York: “Man is reduced to an atom. He is less than the sick person in the hospital, who becomes a number; less than the soldier in the army, he is a simple unit. There he is not even counted. He is a blood cell that comes or goes, like any other in the enormous circulatory flow. Who numbers the atoms? Each one may be anyone. Each one takes up the least space possible. The other, and the other, and a hundred thousand are similar, who come and go, unnoticed, without anyone seeming to care. That face that is seen now will never be seen again. Why paying attention to him?”

Socialism is not the predominance of the collective over the individual: it is the transformation of the mass into a collectivity of conscious individuals. It is the concentration of over a million people in the Revolution Square, with their own will and discernment. Socialism begins with a million-dollar circulation, at a symbolic price, of the literary classics of the language, such as **Don Quixote de la Mancha**, and with the simultaneous rescue of the knowledge and cultural traditions of the “voiceless,” as happened with the maroon Esteban Montejo or with the creation of the National Folkloric Ensemble. It begins with a Literacy Campaign that teaches how to read, how to interpret, how to dream. It begins and lasts by making each individual the protagonist of the collective triumph. The culture of being is based on what we are, an always complex mixture of virtues and flaws, whose radiating center is the usefulness of our lives. But if the centrifugal force that makes all wills revolve around the collectively assumed ideal ceases, individuals once again disintegrate, become atoms, spin on their own axis.

Capitalist society promotes a model of success that is counted in material goods. Individual success is measured in possessions,

regardless of how they are obtained. Of course, human spirituality (a word hijacked by religions) only expands where minimal material needs are covered. But consumerism is not the exclusive heritage of the rich, because it is not the abundance of goods: it is the mental state that enslaves us in the perennial desire to follow the itinerary of the market. Dreaming of owning every novelty, every branded object, every material element that shows how much (or how little) we are worth. The one who comes “from below” displays his “success” more vigorously to his people, be it in gold chains, in modern cars or in brainless Barbies and Kens.

For all human beings there is a place in the world, the difficult thing is finding it. The possible meanings are almost infinite: the pleasure of creating, dancing, being useful, supportive, stronger or faster, more resistant... the revolutionary is capable of even offering his life for justice, the one who creates with his hands, with his mind, or with the body, the peasant who caresses the tobacco leaf like a woman's face. Diana, the sixty-something American who conquered her dream of swimming across the Strait of Florida; José, the Spaniard who thinks every morning about how to support the Cuban people during the day; the man or woman who, without electricity in his house, works ten or more hours a day to provide light to others. Socialism is the culture of being. Fidel warned: the first thing to save is the culture (of liberation, anti-capitalist). What we call cultural colonialism is not the replacement of some national traditions with others. The Cuban tradition has proven to be capable of assimilating and processing all foreign influences without ceasing to exist. They colonize us culturally when they inoculate us with the culture of having, a preamble to all political colonization. In this cultural battle, which is fought mind to mind, no one is expendable.

I have met rescued people. Daynelis, 21 years old, whose minimal home in a supportive and sometimes turbulent citadel, placed her at a disadvantage and she was left without a university degree, but she was able to become a social worker and save others in her humble neighborhood, and in a special program, begin her Law studies. The director of a Polyclinic in Cárdenas, whose premature pregnancy had marginalized her from studies, but who followed the same path as Daynelis, and became a doctor and specialist, and an internationalist in

the Amazon jungle of Brazil, and went out with other doctors to defend her health center that July 11; or Coqui, the exceptional Cuban nurse, formerly a prostitute, living an aimless life, who learned how to firmly grasp the hand that the Revolution extended, and was chosen among hundreds of applicants to go fight for the lives of others during the epidemic of the Ebola in Africa, and died of malaria, surprisingly, and was mourned by colleagues and patients. Not even death can distort the certainty that these are lives saved, and not because they acquired material goods. The three found a meaning in life, which is the most precious asset a human being can treasure. That is socialism.

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