

OPINION: Truth, Lies, and Common Sense

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / Special for CubaSi
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Two decades ago, on the verge of the new millennium, I was convinced that no one could deceive Cubans anymore with cheap fabrications. I would recount, with a mix of amusement and sadness, how uninformed people—who were not necessarily uneducated—in other countries would ask me inconceivable questions. No, in Cuba, parents are not stripped of their parental rights to indoctrinate children, I would explain in astonishment. Operation Peter Pan was based on colossal lies, the magnitude of which depended on the gullibility or the level of ideological colonization of the audience: from claims that the government intended to deprive parents of their right to raise their children to the absurd assertion that Soviet Union canned goods were made with human flesh.

Thousands of educated parents believed these tales—or perhaps they wanted or needed to believe them, I'm not sure—and rushed to send their children to temporary camps in the United States, planning to follow later. Ironically, the feared "*brainwashing*" and indoctrination would take place in that very country, yet they willingly accepted it.

Cuban doctors in Venezuela shared a telling anecdote: An elderly man, proud of his affiliation with the Democratic Action party, underwent cataract surgery in Cuba. Upon returning, he began collaborating with the *Barrio Adentro* program. When asked about his change in stance, he responded, “*They say there’s communism in Cuba, but that’s a lie—communism is what we have had in this country for forty years!*”

However, the influence that social media now exerts over even well-educated minds is unprecedented. The other day, I overheard a father warning his child, “*Be careful, they are kidnapping children.*” Authorities swiftly debunked the false report, yet why do people believe anything they hear? Our media has adapted to the immediacy of the internet, but it cannot chase down every falsehood. Some individuals fail to verify information, believing what they want or need to believe. As Gustavo Villapol aptly points out, today’s media does not merely shape “*public opinion*” but rather constructs “*emotional states.*” Others knowingly spread falsehoods with the intent to destabilize. The mechanisms of contemporary misinformation are embedded in the algorithm. The cultural war is fought within each individual —this battle is personal, one mind at a time.

We see only what they want us to see. For every ten reports of murders, robberies, or frauds in Miami, only one crime story emerges from Cuba —sensationalized, of course. The truth is that violent crime is far more prevalent in the United States than in the rebellious island, where people can still walk the streets at night, even during blackouts. But the goal is clear: to instill fear and uncertainty among Cubans, to erode their sense of security —one of the Revolution’s achievements— and to deter tourists, a vital source of foreign revenue for the country.

Yet common sense is crumbling. The Emperor has watched too many movies or, rather, too many reels. The hyper-individualism cultivated by social media is consuming the empire: I, and only I, exist. And things happen—beyond or beneath the web of lies spread across social networks. There is no longer a need to justify falsehoods: “*I want to take Greenland, the Panama Canal, Gaza—because I like those territories, or they serve my interests.*” Suddenly, the empire discards all rules of engagement. A handful of unproductive billionaires gather,

open a bottle of whiskey, and start playing —not in front of a screen, but with the real world. How far will impunity go? How long will the strong —those who believe they still are —continue to dictate abusive norms of coexistence? I am not referring to schoolyard bullying or gang-controlled neighborhoods. I am talking about international relations.

U.S. imperialism is abandoning its own allies. In a state of economic, political, and consequently moral decline, it demands total submission —even from its traditional partners. The ideologues who thrive in its shadow suggest that the empire is not serious, that it sets an impossible price only to extract a lesser but still profitable concession, that these are mere distractions. Meanwhile, they keep us occupied typing out obvious yet futile responses. Words and arguments will not stop the Giant with Seven-League Boots. What we see is not a giant —it is merely its shadow. Let us turn on the light that will make it disappear.

Amid blackouts —three hours of electricity for every three of darkness in the capital, even more in the rest of the country —the International Book Fair takes place. Thousands of families visit the fairgrounds at La Cabaña over the weekend. Books, both digital and printed, are subsidized yet still expensive. And still, people buy them —the same people who struggle to secure their monthly food supplies. “*Read, do not simply believe,*” Fidel once urged. Will Cubans free themselves from the dictatorship of the algorithm? Only culture will save us. How do we organize an International Book Fair amid crisis, blockade, and power outages? The Revolution lives; its heart beats in every book, in every reader —real or potential —in every dream captured in words. Only the light of knowledge can save us.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
