
The Concept of Homeland Does Not Allow Sinking

By: Eusebio Leal Spengler

11/08/2025



For me, history is the memory of things. A person without memory is a victim; a people without memory is a fatality; they never find their way. There are those who ask today whether or not the Cuban nation can be preserved, whether we move away from a dream society (...) I don't know what would have happened if these Cubans, who have so many doubts, had lived in the violent times of Martí or Céspedes.

In Céspedes' time, a huge rupture occurred. Subverting that order based on slavery, the army, and the Catholic religion; defending liberal and secular ideas against the iron domination of the Church, as the sustaining power of the colonial order, was an unprecedented challenge. Those who had the courage to consciously confront him were brilliant. Hence my personal veneration for Céspedes. The second moment is that of Martí, because victory had not been achieved in 1868. Therefore, a bitter taste prevailed, a feeling of guilt. The disagreement and antagonism that seemed unresolved found a solution in a man like Martí. I'm not going to say that Céspedes was a conciliatory man, but rather one of enthusiasm, of confidence, of will to act, with a tremendously compelling character, like that of Martí, who was no easy. That will, that he had an idea, a message, something to do, was what earned him the title of Apostle. Thus we have a man as complete and fulfilled as Martí, who fulfilled the requirements of a Cuban, possessing a mysterious and vast spirituality, with a rich, marvelous discourse that reached everyone and that everyone could interpret, but not everyone could decipher.

Someone who fought for the unity of the Cuban nation, leaping through the scorching scars of slavery, and even above something much more reckless: the improbable union between Cubans and Spaniards, between the best and healthiest parts of both societies.

In this time we live, which is the best because it's ours, we must combine the experiences of those previous processes. Despite the difficulties, challenges, confrontations, and unknowns, I think we are better prepared than then, because it has been rightly said that at that time they were fighting for something that was a chimera: the nation, the homeland, that word that has lost its value for some, but for others shines more than ever. Homeland was poetry; it was the suffering of our people, of the Cuban family; it was emigration, the armed struggle, the discouragement of what was lost, the endless tears for the sacrifice of so many people. All this rich history supports

our concept of homeland today as something more than a hope, because it's already something concrete: institutions, family, territory... All of this forms the concept of homeland and also the meaning of Martí: homeland is humanity. (...)

What vital force, what mysterious power does this people, this cause, and this Revolution have, that (...) after the Soviet Union and the socialist states of the East have been destroyed, Cuba, one and distinct, lives, survives, and faces the future? Our Revolution did not emerge from the august peace of European socialism; it lived in the revolutionary turmoil of Latin America.

Fighting was carried out on this continent in an inconceivable way, and Cuba was present in every corner of the earth where people fought for it. Not only with soldiers, doctors, teachers... If we were to gather on land all the sick who came seeking help, the crippled who were healed, the hopeless who received encouragement and with whom we shared our bread, I think we would be facing an immense multitude, never before seen, and this cries out to heaven for justice. Therefore, it's unacceptable to say that the Revolution delivered justice without love. What a rash judgment, what heresy! I am certain that love saves and that this huge work of solidarity carried out at our expense, our natural inspiration and vocation, is the greatest monument to love. Things we did that were not in the scheme of the East or in that of the struggle between the two great opposing forces have saved us. Only the sword, the will, the ferocity, that intense fidelity to the humanist, supportive, and anti-imperialist vocation.

A WORK OF SOCIAL COMMITMENT

The main characteristic of the restoration work in Havana's Historic Center has undoubtedly been its intense, sincere, and true social commitment (...).

Man thinks as he lives and lives as he thinks. It's a harmonious interrelationship. You educate a child, you teach him certain traits of modesty, you show a creature that he is all matter, all spirit, you gradually discover those springs of persuasion, and that's how he will act for the rest of his life (...). When you show him a working fountain, he will first go crazy, he will climb into it, he will try to get into the water... and then, slowly, you will persuade him that it's necessary to contemplate, enjoy, and delight. If a tree falls and you replant it as many times as necessary, if there's patience for it, then there's no doubt that the relationship between the object and the person, between the environment and the person, will be modified and change positively (...)

We've tried to make it a fair project that allows a very high percentage of the indigenous families of the Historic Center to live here, improving living conditions, safety, lighting, habitability, roads, and the water issue, which is so great. Above all, we've tried to ensure that part of our efforts, and the efforts we're requesting from international cooperation, pursue these objectives and that they can support us in the magnificent task of ensuring that every school, every social center, every youth gathering place and expression of daily life can be carried out with due dignity. I believe that's the key to our work.

WHEN HOMELAND IS A REALITY

Cubanness is a feeling that can be perceived in any corner of the Earth where one focuses on the homeland, the place where one was born.

I always tried to play with these three elements: one thing is the country. Our country is a land, it's a space, it's an island. In fact, we treated the Chinese as fellow countrymen, because they were from a country. The Spaniards were also fellow countrymen from different countries or landscapes.

Then there's the concept of homeland, which was a dream, a poem, for which so much was fought. And the third, the rule of law, national symbols, life in common, respecting each person in their own space, but united by a kind of convention or respected sense of being a nation (...)

The concept of homeland does not admit sinking, it does not admit sinking or forgetting!
(...)

They say that man, the human being, has a relationship with his mother that goes far from everything. Why? Because it's the first thing you learn (...) that's the mysterious bond. It's the same thing we have with our homeland: we feel a warmth that comes to us from the past, that comes to us from time. That's why memory is so important.

When you feel Heredia's verse as yours again, and feel it as yours, when those feelings of loving the moldy stones of Viñales Valley, of the precious Cauto, as Gómez said, who returned even though he wasn't born here: "Oh, Cauto; oh, Cauto, it's been a long time since I saw you!"; that feeling of ownership and affiliation. Then the homeland is a reality. (...)

Once a great poet—not Dulce María, but her sister Flor, a great and little-known poet—told me this: "Leal, look in the Chinese Cemetery in Havana, there is a very important explanation for you." I said to her: "Tell me, Flor, what's it about?" He answers: "There's a grave with a tombstone in Chinese and Spanish, and it says the following: 'If the sky of Cuba is as blue as that of China, and the fruits of China are as sweet as those of Cuba, what does it matter whether you die in Cuba or in China?'"

The homeland is where you are morally, not physically!

(Excerpts from the book *You Have to Believe in Cuba*. Interviews with Eusebio Leal Spengler, conducted by Magda Resik)

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
