

Brown Cubans, pink Cubans?

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A black acquaintance was being recommended for a job and to endorse him, someone in front him said by phone: "He's black, but is well trained, disciplined and a good person".

Adversative conjunction "but" in that phrase involves a retreated racism, many times latent following declarations in defense of equality. In fact, it assumes that being black is a significant point against. But it generally appears underhanded because it's something politically incorrect and does not match with should be.

humiliatingly!

What filled him with indignation was that: "You could have said I was dark skinned, colored... but not black, buddy".

Aren't we all "colored"; or will it be that white, Caucasian or Asian people are translucent? I find it more offensive to call someone "the black", "the skinned", "the colored" than just black.

But not a few people with black skin seem to realize that belonging to that race implies, in fact, to be disadvantaged.

Although obviously, it is not a per se disadvantage, statistics confirm that the university and scientific community is mostly white; white people are a great majority in executive positions, as well as in the most desired positions of the so-called emerging sector. What some call "the path of dollar" does not seem to be their path. In contrast, socially disadvantaged neighborhoods feature a population that is mostly black, as well as local prisons and other correctional facilities. Blacks aren't great majority among the owners of self-employed businesses that are gaining space in Cuban reality at present.

Despite such numbers, in Cuba there are no rigid forms of racial segregation.

Since the early years of the revolutionary victory racial issue took center stage and many measures, laws and radical changes favored the dispossessed, among them the dark-skinned population, but premises and wordings are one thing, and social relations and prejudices are another. Laws can, to some extent, rein in prejudice, but cannot eliminate them at a stroke.

Fidel Castro himself, at the closing session of the 2003 Pedagogy Congress, acknowledged: "While science undeniably shows the real equality of all human beings, discrimination subsists. Even in societies like Cuba's, that aroused from a radical social revolution where the people had reached full and total legal equality and a level of revolutionary education that threw down the subjective component of discrimination, it still exists in another form. I would call it as objective discrimination, a phenomenon associated with poverty and the historical monopoly of knowledge".

In another moment of that speech, he stressed: "...the Revolution, well beyond the rights and guaranties reached by all citizens of any ethnic origin, hasn't achieved the same success in the struggle to eradicate the differences in the social and economic status of the country's black population, even though they play an important role in many highly significant areas, including education and health".

The protagonist of the story that opens these lines became an engineer, while his friends, equally black, from the poor neighborhood where he grew up, chose the road of "invention" –as some benevolently call illegal acts. "Why didn't they study if I could?, wondered the young man in dialogue with this editor. Because they were black? No, but while I used to get up at dawn to arrive early at the CUJAE, sometimes with a bread with sugar as breakfast, they slept all morning and at noon tried to "invent" (*a colloquial term frequently used since the 90s to describe the tenacious inventiveness with which Cubans find ways to survive daily life*) how to buy a bottle of rum in order to set up the domino table".

The issue is complex, because prejudice towards certain race –like all prejudices– is a socio-psychological phenomenon of human behavior, forms in the process of socialization of each person and the ways in which it assimilates the culture in its environment.

No wonder, anthropologist Rodrigo Espina ascertained a few months ago at a television Round Table debate on the theme: Discrimination persists because we are brought up as discriminators. Nobody is born a discriminator; we learn it within the family, at school, in the environment.... It's a learning that we get as long as we grow up. And discrimination entails the undervaluing of another human being.

Racist manifestations, expressions and behaviors impact on black people's self-esteem, the same way a drop of water, persistent though unique, is able to dig through the rock.

This has reached such a point that thick lips and frizzy hair have earned pejorative epithets of “bemba” and “pasas”. And at this time, it would be interesting to know the statistics on how many aesthetic surgeries have been carried out to reduce the size of the “bemba” and how many hectoliters of keratin have been used to straighten the hair of black men and women.

PhD Jesus Guanche Perez, Senior Researcher of the Fernando Ortiz Foundation and anthropologist, recalled at the aforementioned roundtable that races do not exist, but humans do need to assimilate them as a cultural construct, which generates certain attitudes towards other people and with respect to oneself.

Hence, referred the scholar, one of the goals should be to help reduce social inequality, basis of racism as an ideology and as triggering or prejudice. Sometimes it’s so painful that, like the protagonist of the anecdote that opens this text, may lead to deny his own skin color, which is the same as his parents’.

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