

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

DAGOBERTO VALDÉS HERNÁNDEZ, *Convivencia Cuba*

JUNE 12, 2012

Fear of change is always paralyzing. One of those fears is the alleged lack of projects and actors for the transition process and for the future of Cuba. Often, authorities and international observers interested in maintaining the status quo in Cuba, argue that changes are needed, but that the problem is that there are no viable projects or serious actors to play the main roles. This is one of the main pitfalls that hinder the path to democracy.

Nobody would be so irresponsible as to open a process of structural changes without projects, people and groups as protagonists responsible for channeling in a civilized manner these urgent and needed changes. If so, Cuba would be destined to live forever under all kinds of authoritarian regimes. It would be prey to political mafias and corrupt business. Cuba would be unbearable and unworkable. It is serious to ignore or bury under deceitful advertising the existence of projects and actors. Who might be interested in this future for Cuba? Why are the best thinkers ignored, discredited or sent to the catacombs, as are the most viable and moderate projects, and the most independent part of the social activists?

By doing so, Cuba would be the only country in the world to condemn itself to live in social anomy, in political and commercial emptiness, in the hands of a few who do have economic and commercial viable and profitable projects.

THE THREE OBSTACLES OF THE INTERNAL BLOCKAGE TO DEMOCRACY AND THREE PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

Three key factors constitute the obstacle that blocks the path to structural changes internally.

1. Ignoring or excluding social, political or economic sectors, with many different options, because they are not recognized or accepted by the government, eliminates the inclusive process of transformations and leaves in hands of those who hold power, all responsibility and partisan actions of needed changes. Some

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

who still think in messianic categories complain about the absence of “a” leader who is “enlightened”, “the voice” of the nation, followed by all. This would not be the best for Cuba, because it leads directly to new forms of populist authoritarianism. There will be no democracy, or path to democracy, without the actors of the political opposition, without entrepreneurs in economic diversity and free competition, without the actors in a wide choice of an independent civil society. To say that they do not exist or to ignore them at the table where the transformations are made, would mean amputating the country, excluding some of its citizens and throwing away some of the pieces of the puzzle of the country. No matter where the process begins, the important thing is that all the pieces of the puzzle fit into the process and are on the table.

No matter where the process begins, the important thing is that all the pieces of the puzzle fit into the process and are on the table.

Faced with the exclusion of social actors, we propose: The paths towards participatory democracy and the rule of law are those that favor modern institutional spaces, where the protagonists have equal opportunity and means, so that together, and through public and participatory debate, they may serve the nation as a body of limited and shared leadership, as a community of actors chosen and controlled by their constituents. Not one shall be above law and democratic institutions. Those that are more inclusive and dedicated to the Nation shall receive most of the support of the voters, as candidates that demonstrate that they can be team players, are respectful of other players, who are equal in dignity and opportunity, and are able to respect a change in power. Leaders, not “caudillos”, is what Cuba needs.

2. Ignoring or excluding some or all projects and programs, political, social, economic, alternative and peaceful would mean depriving the country of its hopes and dreams. It would mean closing the roads for the civilized exchange, gradual and peaceful that we all want. Some who still think in totalitarian or exclusive categories complain that there is not one “project” that points to “all” and that “represents the nation” and that is a new perfect and finished utopia. That’s not what all Cubans want because it leads directly to new authoritarianism and new exclusions.

Faced with the exclusion of projects and social programs, we propose: an inclusive path to democracy and the rule of modern law, which are necessarily plural, diverse, dissenting, or else they are not democratic. To think that unity is uniformity is not only a political mistake, but is also ethically unacceptable, regardless of its political position. There will not be national and democratic unity unless it is unity in diversity. This unity in diversity can only be achieved by opening public spaces to proposals, discussions and decisions to convene and include all political projects, social and economic factors that are peaceful, gradual and that respect the national sovereignty and the sovereignty of its citizens. The programs or projects that are more inclusive will obtain wide support, as those that propose more effective and realistic alternatives, not partisan privileges, and support the common good of the nation.

3. To ignore or exclude the sources of thought for the present and the future of Cuba is to restrain the spirit and mystique of the nation. It also means killing all creativity and ideas for the routes to democracy. It seeks to silence peaceful thinkers, whatever their school of philosophy, political, economic or religious, by withering the soul of the nation. Those who think that there should be a single ideology for change, and those who fail to think “first in thought” for struggling daily for survival, do not notice that a nursery of thought flows into Cuba and its *disapora*.

Faced with the exclusion of schools of thought we propose: The most comprehensive and diverse rainbow of ideas is gradually articulated among thinkers of all ages, from all political sources or from none

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

of them specifically. No country exists based on a single ideology. It is important to convene a larger number of Cubans from the Cuban schools of thought that are more open-minded, more tolerant and peace seeking, more subject to the scrutiny of public dialogue and debate, that are also the most inclusive.

WHAT CUBA NEEDS IS TO LEARN TO BUILD, PIECE BY PIECE, THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY.

Therefore to those who stop, or attempt to monopolize for their own benefit the processes of change, arguing that there is no outstanding leader and viable project, we could say that Cuba does not need more of this. Its history, past and recent, shows conclusively where these two messianic and excluding aspirations eventually lead. On the contrary, Cuba needs to believe and be convinced that democracy is built, block by block, step by step, with all the pieces of the national puzzle. “Democracy is the worst of all political systems, with the exception of all others”—joked very seriously, Winston Churchill. This may be one of the political lessons that Cuba needs most to come out of its civic illiteracy. Never seek the perfect project, forever. Democracy is the art of trial and error, without improvisation, or opportunism, or unethical pragmatism. And not to tie the score means not to tie to the nation, to any political project, exclusive economic or social. And much less one that is considered the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

What Cuba needs is to learn to patiently assemble the national puzzle without ignoring, discrediting, or destroying any of its “pieces” that are not such, but free and responsible citizens or peaceful and non-sectarian groups. Must also avoid considering actors and projects as parts of a machine manipulated by a single group or person who, without transparency, believe they can lead the masses to a future that is cooked in the backyard of the nation.

What Cuba needs is to create viable and pluralistic thought to start designing its own future consistent and faithful with its historical roots, cultural heritage, spirituality and idiosyncrasies.

WHAT CUBA HAS

This is not the space to catalog a list of social actors, programs and creative thinking. It would be a laudable project to create such a list as inclusive as possible without sectarian ideologies, but I will mention just a few examples within the island and in the *diaspora*, for those who do dare to believe within the constraints of the reality on the ground:

Some creative thinking for the future of Cuba: Cuba’s universities, and foreign universities where Cuban scholars, members of the *diaspora* teach and publish, such as Georgetown University, Pittsburg, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Michigan, FIU, Miami Dade College, among others, research centers and research of the *Academia de las Ciencias, Academia del Language, Academia de la Historia*, en Habana with its lectures, Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, Consenso Cubano, with over 30 groups of the Diaspora, the group of university students of Cuban Roots of Hope, and others who seek scientific, social, literary, regional policy on economic and social policies pertaining to the Cuban state or exiles. Professors, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians and other specialists who have spent part or all their lives studying and offering thoughts for the future of Cuba from different geographical and philosophical locations.

Other creators of thought are the different areas of study and reflection sponsored by the Churches and Fraternal Associations: *Semanas Sociales Católicas* (1991-2011), *Centro de Reflexión y Diálogo de Cárdenas*,

What Cuba needs is to learn to patiently assemble the national puzzle without ignoring, discrediting, or destroying any of its “pieces” that are not such, but free and responsible citizens or peaceful and non-sectarian groups.

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

*Centro Martin Luther King, Centro de Formación Cívica y Religiosa de Pinar del Rio (1993-2007) through their educational, economic and information society; Instituto Enrique Pérez Serantes of Santiago de Cuba; Instituto Janssen de Holguín; Centro de Estudio de las Diócesis de Santa Clara; Estudio de la Diócesis de Santa Clara, Centro de Estudio de la Diócesis de Santa Clara, Aula Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas y Centro de los Padres Dominicos en La Habana, Centro Cultural Félix Varela en La Habana, Centro de Bioética Juan Pablo II, Seminario Evangélico de Matanzas, Alto Centro de Estudios Masónicos, Asociación Yorubá de Cuba, Escuelas de Verano para Educadores, Instituto María Reina en los Padres Jesuitas and other centers of religious orders like Escuelas Pías, the Passionists, Salesians, and several others. Must also take into account, as the nursery of thought with the highest circulation and frequency, all officers or independent publications dedicated to creating proposals and vision for Cuba: Catholic magazines and other denominations and associations, such as *Vivarium, Palabra Nueva, Espacio, Espacio Laical, Vitral, Approaches, Cocuyo, Amanecer, Iglesia en Marcha.**

We must also mention civic publications and meetings, such as the *Asociación para el Estudio de la Economía Cubana (ASCE), Instituto de Estudios Cubanos, (IEC), the Cuba Study Group, Latin American Studies Association (LASA), studies of the Socialist Movement, Consenso, Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, Centro de Estudios Sociales,* and other spaces and study centers in Cuba and in U.S. Universities, Latin America, Spain and other academies, and cultural magazines such as *Criterio, Temas, Caiman Barbudo, Catauro, La Gaceta de Cuba, Convivencia, Cauce, La Gaveta, Voces, Revista de Cuba, Renacer, Nueva Prensa Cubana, Miscelánea, Primavera de Cuba, Cuba Nuestra (el Círculo de Estudios Cubanos en Suecia), Arte Cubano, Herencia* (of the Asociación Herencia Cultural Cubana), *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana, Revista Hispano- Cubana,* among others. Not everything in these publications is thought for the future of Cuba, but especially its editorials and essays are of very significant value. Some of them continue to be published, while others are not, but they provide on file an ethical, civic, religious and cultural mixture. Other sources of thought are the opportunities for reflection and audiovisual productions: *Omni Zona Franca, Observatorio LGBT, el Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual, (CENESEX), Razones Ciudadanas, Estado de Sats, Observatorio Crítico, 1cubano* + some programs on Cuban television as *Vale la Pena,* the economist Terrero space in the *Diario de la Mañana,* among others.

... it is false to claim that there is an absence of thought in Cuba that is good and viable for its future.

Of course the list is incomplete and insufficient. Those mentioned above and all those who readers know well, are witnesses that it is false to claim that there is an absence of thought in Cuba that is good and viable for its future. Just to name a few of the centers of debate, dialogue, creative thinking, proposals and alternatives for the future of Cuba, that work from a respectful, non-disqualifying and broad and inclusive perspective, without losing each its own profile and dynamics. This list is clearly incomplete, but it could serve to remind others who have not been mentioned and that are verifiable examples that in Cuba there are other issuers of thought rooted in more authentic sources of our heritage. No matter their diversity, differences and contradictions. We may agree or disagree with something that is published or studied. That is, in our opinion, the best and desirable approach. It is the process, open and varied, sometimes dialectical and other times dialogic, seeking always what is best for Cuba, which is and should be the common denominator. All these sources and all that has been published and debated left a wealth of thought which is still dispersed and not articulated, but that deserves to be collected and published without exclusions.

Some projects and programs for the future of Cuba: Nineteenth century Cuba saw the birth of the nation's founding projects. Medardo Vitier has called these *projects "disrupting agents that communicate*

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

density at a time.”¹ For various reasons, including *caudillismo*, regionalism and frustration, these projects failed to lead to the country’s independence. The same author notes that these foundational ideas and projects were unfinished as “germs not unwrapped in the nineteenth century.” But the vast majority of projects intended for the Cuba of the early twenty-first century must resort to use them.

For example, one of them, the Varela Project, named after the one who “first taught us to think”, the father of nationality and culture in Cuba who dedicated his life to organize projects for the independence and freedom of Cuba. The Varela Project, an initiative of the Christian Liberation Movement, was the achievement of a joint effort by many members of the civil society, among which stood out the movement: “*Todos Unidos*”, which forced a reaction from the Cuban government declaring irreversible this type of socialism in power. Much earlier, the first Cuban Commission for Human Rights had been founded in the 70’s, with the essential and basic goal of defending the freedom and rights of all Cubans, now maintained by all its successors, including the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. We must also recall the efforts of *Concilio Cubano*, an an example of what was emerging from what would follow. Other examples are the various relief organizations for prisoners and their families, the *Asociación de Bibliotecas Independientes*, the Club de Escritores Cubanos, the *Asociación de Jóvenes Escritores de Oriente*, la *Carta de los Intelectuales*, the manifest the *Patria es Para Todos*, and the group of 75 prisoners of conscience, who although diverse in their origins, became a symbol of unity and commitment to the Cuban cause. Among the efforts to design projects for Cuba was also *the Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil*.

Many other projects show that Cuban civil society has learned to take the first steps towards the creation of civic organizations, in time, strong democratic institutions, effective and mutually controlled, that can control the new caudillos or sectarianism. There are currently in Cuba projects and programs of liberal inspiration, Alliances and Liberal parties, projects inspired by Christian Democrats such as “*Todos Cubanos*” and the project “Heredia”, programs of social democratic inspiration, projects and programs inspired by socialism, such as the current *Corriente Socialista Democrática Cubana*, *Arco Progresivo*, Project “*Nuevo Pais*” and its Forum; projects such as the Marxist *Observatorio Crítico* and others, besides the current official project presented as a modern form of socialism, and so on.

Other examples of partnerships that have thier own projects and programs are: *Corriente Martiana*, *Comité de Ciudadanos Cubanos*, *Partido Obrero Campesino*, *Movimiento Liberal Cubano*, *Partido Solidaridad Democrática*, *Partido 30 de noviembre*, *Alianza Democrática Oriental* and the *Alianza Democrática Pinareña*, *Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia*, *Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos*, *Partido Liberal de Cuba*, *Movimiento Jóvenes de Bayamo*, *Unión Patriótica de Cuba (UNPACU)*, *Federación Latinoamericana de Mujeres Rurales (FLAMUR)*, *Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos (CUTC)*, *Corriente Agraromontista de Abogados*, *Movimiento por la Integración Racial*, *Fundación Lawton Pro Derechos Humanos*, *Asociación Jurídica de Cuba* y una larga y variada lista. They are located in Cuba, but not only in Habana. Some typical projects are presented as partisan, and other as union or trade union movements, some as new type of social movements, others as socio-cultural projects, media, economic studies, gender programs, respect for sexual preferences against discrimination or exclusion of all kinds. The *Damas de Blanco*, the movement of bloggers, independent journalists, the *Red Cubana de Comunicaciones Comunitarias* and every one of several independent news agencies around the country, which are not real

Many other projects show that Cuban civil society has learned to take the first steps towards the creation of civic organizations, in time, strong democratic institutions, effective and mutually controlled, that can control the new caudillos or sectarianism.

¹ Vitier, Medardo. “Las ideas y la filosofía en Cuba”. Editorial Ciencias Sociales, la Habana 1970 p.302-304.

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

open windows to freedom of expression and association, but contribute to make more transparent the life of the nation, the role of civil society and the events in all parts of the country. This movement, whose goal is to achieve a society based on information and communications among its citizens, is now unstoppable and has changed qualitatively the transparency of information and association in Cuba.

“In the process of human association, progress is marked by differences”

We are not able to mention all plans, but it is necessary to demonstrate with examples that they exist and are developing their programs, in the design process, anchored or underway. Each with its ideological and humanistic and peaceful orientation, always placing Cuba first. Some observers argue that the problem with these associations is that they are numerous, scattered and small, and are very different from each other. This cannot be considered a problem when you are at the beginning of a new road to a plural, inclusive and democratic society. The following phrase of Medardo Vitier in one of the works, that every Cuban should know and study, and describes the original founding time with contemporary relevance:

“Prominent Cubans who early in the nineteenth century planned political reforms in the old colony, were prepared to do so, with some degree of maturity that began to extend to the community. The mere appearance of human aggregate indicated nationality, although still nascent. Declared or not by them, that was a sociological fact. In the process of human association progress is marked by differences. These arise slowly, in the demographic, economic, intellectual fields ... and in a given period (rather than a moment), there is a sense of a friendly community governed, or at least with a share in public affairs. Cuba, the small overseas colony, began to perceive its own identity. The homogeneous and heterogeneous amorphous entity became the the ideal nation, that the writers sometimes defined, but there is no exact history ... The seed was in the groove. The structure of colonial society developed increasingly more differentiated tissues. The need for reform increased.”²

We can say that what happened in the transition from colony to republic in the nineteenth century, is very similar to what is happening in Cuba today. The differentiation of the layers of the civil society is a sign of progress and reinforces the need for reforms.

SOME ACTORS FOR CUBAN PRESENT AND FUTURE.

None of these schools of thought, and social projects and programs, economic, political, cultural, religious, civic, may exist and grow, create, reflect and propose, if they didn't have within them, and leading their different structures, a growing number of leaders, actors, animators all from a Cuba that is brewing in urgent need of peaceful change.

This is also not the place to make a list of persons of both sexes, young and old, historic and emerging political and civic activists, bloggers and independent journalists, academics and publishers of religious or cultural magazines, lawyers and farmers, artists and writers, graffiti artists and musicians, defenders of human rights and gender equality and sexual preferences. They are all part of the current stars of the future of Cuba and cannot be either ignored or disqualified, without injury to the soul of the nation, and their works and projects speak for them, as they grow in conditions that cannot even compare to democratic societies. Cuba is not a normal country due to the asymmetric and inverted relationship between the government and its citizens.

To find names of people well known in and outside of Cuba and others that are less known, but still hardworking and self-sacrificing, two studies are available linking names and projects. These are: “Cuban Civil Society

² Vitier, Medardo. “Las ideas en Cuba “Editorial Trópico”, 1938. P 112-115.

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future

Organizations Not Legally Recognized. Alberto F. Alvarez Garcia, sponsored by the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), 2004 and “Who’s Who in Cuban Policy”, 2005, coordinated by J. A. Pesant Aleaga.

These and many other characters not mentioned by these investigations, and others still less recognized, are today and might be tomorrow, amid the “lethargy of spirit” ..., considered as “our guiding light” who “interrupted the monotonous enjoyment and made signs in the tonight.”³

Some believe, as Márquez Sterling did, that Cuba is “a nation that has always suffered from a messianic obsession.”⁴ This cannot lead us to demonize, discredit or ignore the role of leaders and stakeholders. It is only necessary to distinguish carefully, based on their work, forms of leadership and ability to work together, if they are authoritarian leaders or democrats, and try to promote civic education for the former and give public support to the latter.

Martí, who is one of those paradigms of inclusive and democratic leadership, who won the most extensive and diverse response in our history, including even the “good Spanish,” eagerly invites us today:

“We hurt with the pain of the country, and for the good of the country we build, and do not want revolutions based on exclusions or factions ... and we don’t get angry or feel scared. We don’t obligate or exclude. What is the greatest freedom, but to use it for the good of those who have less freedom than we do? What is faith, but to inflame those who do not have it? ... It is true that the first signs of emerging nations, are difficult to interpret, or hard to obey, except for republican souls ... And that is what we do here, and here we craft without ostentation, a future where we all fit.”⁵

***One hundred and ten years
after the birth of the first
Cuban Republic on May 20, 1902,
we are still struggling to achieve
a reality where all different
political ideas can coexist.***

One hundred and ten years after the birth of the first Cuban Republic on May 20, 1902, we are still struggling to achieve a reality where all different political ideas can coexist. We still need the primal freedom of minorities to use it in the liberation of all. Even faith is necessary, not as power or alienating escapism from reality, but to inflame, encourage, faith in Cuba, of all Cubans without exclusion or factions.

We hope that this Martian work will help to discern, recognize and respect as republican souls, the existence and growth of schools of thought, projects, and players for the present and the future of Cuba.

Analyzing the dispersion of this thinking to Cuba, as well as projects and actors, and the need to make them available to everyone, we propose to create a website called “For the Future of Cuba” consisting of three portals: Thought for the future of Cuba, projects and programs for the future of Cuba and Actors for the future of Cuba. This site is open and pluralistic, free competition, would be a space with no admission criteria to the two that mark the identity of the future of Cuba: the thoughts, projects and actors are peace seeking and do not intend to attack or offend others. Everyone could send their thoughts to this site, programs, projects and actors with the sole aim that the scholars and people interested in Cuba could find in peaceful coexistence, more information, to have an analysis as accessible, objective and plural as possible about the Cuban reality, inside and outside the island

Pinar del Río, May 20, 2012

110th Anniversary of the birth of the Cuban Republic

³ Vitier, Medardo. “Las ideas y la Filosofía en Cuba, Editorial Ciencias Sociales, La Habana 1970 p.p.307

⁴ Márquez Sterling, Manuel, ¿Qué hubiera pasado si Martí no hubiera muerto en Dos Ríos?

⁵ Martí, José. Speech of October 10, 1881.

Cuba Does Have Ideas, Projects and Actors for its Future



DAGOBERTO VALDÉS HERNÁNDEZ

(Pinar del Río, Cuba, 1955)

Intelectual católico. Graduado de ingeniero agrónomo (1980)

Fundador del Centro de Formación Cívica y Religiosa (1993)

Fundador y director de la revista Vitral (1994-2007)(www.vitral.org)

Miembro del Pontificio Consejo Justicia y Paz del Vaticano (1999-2005)

Presidente del Instituto de Estudios Cubanos (IEC) desde 2007.

Director de la revista Convivencia desde 2008.(www.convivenciacuba.es)

Premio Jan Karski al Valor y la Compasión (2004)

Premio a la Tolerancia plus (2007)

Premio Medalla Ley, Verdad y Justicia, del Ministerio de Justicia de Polonia (2012)