

Uneven Power



Clarification:

- 1) I went as a participating observer in field research to prepare a law proposal regarding freedom of expression in public spaces in Cuba and the penalization of violence for political disagreement (violence of any type against those of a differing political opinion.)
- 2) I did not receive my hematomas because of police blows, rather from the strong pressure from the police that arrested me
- 3) I am told that this Sunday was much less violent than the previous eight Sundays

Description as a participating observer

The Mass and the walk through Quinta Avenida went without problems. After this the weekly meeting of the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) was held at the intensity Gandhi Park, where a police patrol car circled various times. Several people, with cell phones at the edge of the sidewalk, disappeared. There was a certain calm, too calm.

We started to notice an intensity which manifests itself when we are paying close attention to details. Without speaking everyone was in agreement to accompany the *Ladies* to the bus stop, due to the experienced repression they suffered in recent weeks; that's why they were there. Some would say do not separate from one another let's stay together; others, while walking, would check with the one next to them as to their peaceful reaction to any potential police action, so as to verify that neither would give any reason for any aggression. It was very clear this was a non-violent action: at one point, some that had remained behind were warned don't run don't run to meet the others, to maintain total peace, so there would be no wrong signal, so the beast of violence would not be awakened.

As we were approaching 3rd Street, someone had seen the police operation (in this type of event it doesn't matter when or where it occurs, there is a fragmentation of evidence in real time) and, thus, it was decided to turn around and head towards 7th Street. It seemed to me a good idea since it is never wise to go to the gallows, even though inevitable or foreseeable, without having required some effort from those who want to punish you.

All in silence, most with a photocopy on hand of some political prisoner. Upon crossing 5th Avenue someone let loose in the air, some photocopies which would cover a small area of any potential pedestrian crossing. Immediately we were heard to say: "pick that up, do not throw out anything". Someone picked up the photocopies the wind had taken.

It felt good to be able to march down the street as if we were in Madrid or Mexico, being in La Habana. Those that were at home or in their workplaces looked at us in silence (none of them felt compelled to yell at us or hit us; some looked on in curious stare, some continued with their own, and some respected what they were seeing). Reaching 7th we turned on 26th St, always in silence whereupon someone yelled: "there they are, in buses they are waiting for us"; to which someone responded "calm down" and we continued walking (at that moment I thought about all those who say: "why are you going if you know you are going to get slapped"; but at that point it is neither a time to turn back nor start running).

There time would expand or contract; time that things would last would depend on that which I would stop to ponder; the street would be filled with women from the PNR (Revolutionary National Police) who held hands in order to surround us and separate the men from the women. Shouts of Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! began. Immediately a group of that "aroused people" (name given by the revolutionary government to those supposedly improvised, inflamed spontaneous peoples) arrived with printed posters of Fidel and Raul and yelling "Counterrevolutionaries!, Mercenaries!, etc. (it seemed strange to me that the neighbors that were opening their homes due to curiosity, did not feel compelled to join a group that yelled at us with a hateful chorus, not even in that section of Miramar, where there are so many government big shots).

At this point the "aroused people" supplied with appropriate graphic material (which could have been seen in a dress rehearsal) transformed themselves into plain-clothes agents that were taking away the men in strangle holds. I felt as if someone was trying to take from my elevated hand a paper with the image of El Sexto (graffiti artist imprisoned for political commentaries since last year), and the second time tried more violently and successfully, turned to see a tall, strong man without much intelligence in his stare (or maybe hate makes intelligence to hide, ashamed). I looked upon him without saying anything to try to gauge his rage and the uselessness of his satisfaction).

That's when I felt someone pulling on my hair and shouting "Yes, by the hair, and hit her hard". My head began to circle around to them rhythm of several hands pulling each to their own side. My neck offered no resistance. I allowed to let my body fall (as a well learned student of non-violent rallies) and before being able to sit down on the floor I hear: "not her, she's Tania"! Some hands grab me by the arms so as to isolate me from the Ladies in White. I realize they do not want any witnesses. Several more police agents come to get me out of that scene. I grab on to one of the Ladies and I allow myself to fall sitting on the floor. They drag me until several of them can drop me inside the police bus. Once there I am handcuffed. Javier (the "agent" assigned to me) and he says "let's go"! I grab on tight to the bus handle, and I say "No, I am going till the end so you cannot say later you did not hit them". Maybe because they had already labeled me a rebel, and I am very hard-headed, he got off, they removed my handcuffs so they could handcuff me on my back, a much more uncomfortable position.

In the bus most of them were police; maybe 4-5 police for every lady. They played loud music and the female police began to sing popular songs from the radio so as to make their "victory" very patent, or their disdain to what was going on. By the beginning of the second song, they were no longer singing, but just waiting for their arrival.

I started to talk to the girl who had handcuffed me. I asked her if she knew about the political prisoners in Cuba, and she said "I only follow orders"; to which I replied "do you know who these *Ladies* are and why do they come out every Sunday? You should find out about what orders you are given". To which she replied: "you don't have to deal with them because that is not your business". And I said: "I am going as a Cuban citizen". We continued in such back and forth between arguments and orders. I said "Some time the law will change in Cuba and you will have to think about how you feel as to what you are doing today". After that we remained silent for the rest of the trip. She let me know how the handcuffs would not be so tight on me. I believe her energy changed, because whenever you make someone think, you make them respect, and I believe that everyone knows this has to change.

When we reached Tarará, to an empty little school, there were 4 patrol cars, 2 mounted police and 20 pedestrian police there. I counted 61 police in 2 buses (I could not count the third), ultimately 100 police all in all. They took me out of the bus I asked why the other women were not taken out, and where were they taking me. They answered only by making their grip on my arm even stronger. I said "Don't take me so tight, you are hurting me", to which they answered by gripping me even harder. Another female police got closer and said "do you want me to take her so you won't be affected?" And my captor said "No, No" without altering her finger's grip. Then I said "Let me look at your number" so I could remember as the pressure in my arm increased. From there they took me to a small room where the Colonel from my second visit to the Acosta station was, as well as the agents Andrea and Javier. They started to talk, and I asked them to talk but well, they talked and talked. I tried to argument that I was an observer for the law that I wanted to do. They said that the police in the USA was more aggressive, and I said "even today I saw the police in Mexico repressing, but what I do not understand is why that is an argument as to what is going on in Cuba".

So finally... In one moment they took my backpack out of the room and wished they would be interested in the book I was reading, Michel Foucault' s "Network of Power". I thought about Foucault the academician and Foucault the activist as a whole, the importance of carrying the file in the body and his phrase " life enters in the dominion of power".

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