



Democratization

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Causes, symptoms and consequences
of the anthropological damage produced
by totalitarian regimes

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I. Introduction

In the democratic struggle, there are different lines of work. Many centers, such as the Center for Coexistence Studies, aim towards democratic transformations, along two main lines: the education of Cubans to live in democracy, that is, ethical, civic and political formation so that citizens know what to do with freedom and responsibility; and the strategic prospective labor regarding Cuba's future.

A fundamental aspect in the transformation from a totalitarian, populist or authoritarian regime to quality democracy and governance is to present a national project to its citizens. The Center for Coexistence Studies (CEC-Cuba) (www.centroconvivencia.org) has gradually transformed into an independent think tank, that is, into a laboratory of ideas with academics, intellectuals, specialists and even citizens still on the island or emigrants, who

compose the only Cuban nation and who work together to think ahead of the country that we propose.

I personally studied the fundamental aspects for democratic transformation on my Master's thesis¹, focusing on how to heal the anthropological damage caused by totalitarianism in Cuba, which may also occur in other systems, populist or authoritarian, depending on their degree in each country. This article will present the conclusions of my study.

Why study anthropological damage? It is very important to determine the impact that the entire process of democratic degeneration has had and may have in the future on citizen performance. I have identified it with the term "anthropological damage". Prospectively, this damage can significantly, and for a long time, affect the democratic reconstruction of countries that have suffered from it, hence the importance of identifying and studying it, and seeking an opportune remedy, even prior to political or economic change.

A first definition of anthropological damage can be gathered from the surveys and interviews carried out with islanders in Cuba and diaspora Cubans. They established their views and expectations regarding economic change and entering a social market economy, social justice, wealth distribution, political change, and considered that overcoming anthropological damage, including the subjectivity and talents of the people, will be a more difficult path than the other aspects of the transformation². This

1 Dagoberto Valdés, *El daño antropológico causado por el totalitarismo en Cuba* (Master of Political Action and Institutional Strengthening, Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, Madrid, 2019).

2 Consider the direct quote in Spanish: *Vamos a ver si tenemos un cambio económico y entramos en una economía social de mercado, con justicia social,*

means that there are people who suffer from social anomie, people for whom economic or political undertakings are impossible. We thus behold one of the dimensions of anthropological damage.

Others state the need for political leaders, activists, political action and political thought³. However sound this might be, if there is no political training before achieving change, before the transition or transformation to democracy begins, it will not be enough. Another aspect to consider is that there are people with a certain human fragility: people who do not know how to do a life project or who do not know how to use freedom. There are people who want freedom with no responsibility: this turns into debauchery, and ultimately into an ungovernable country with a failed democracy, in a failed State. These are, without a doubt, the main fears that transcend economic and political transformation in terms of actors, and transparent and free elections.

II. Definition

As defined in the previously mentioned thesis⁴, the anthropological damage in Cuba due to totalitarianism is the total or partial weakening or damage of the essence of the human person, of people's internal structure and their cognitive, emotional, volitional, ethical, social and spiritual dimensions, depending on the degree of disorder caused. It has arisen and has been established as a result of living long years under a regime

distribución de las riquezas, con el correspondiente cambio político, aún quedará realizar la conversión antropológica teniendo en cuenta la subjetividad y los talentos que tienen nuestros pueblos. La superación del daño antropológico será un camino más difícil que las demás transformaciones.

3 Consider the direct quote in Spanish: *Bueno pero hacen falta líderes políticos, activistas, acciones políticas y pensamiento político.*

4 Dagoberto Valdés, *El daño antropológico causado...* p. 103.

in which the State, and, more specifically, a single Party, intends to embody the people, univocally orient all institutions, interpret the meaning of history and maintain total control over society and its citizens. In this way, it subverts life in truth, undermines their freedom and violates the civic, political, economic, cultural and religious rights and duties of people, which deeply hurts their intrinsic dignity, as it provokes their passive adaptation to the environment and a persistent social anomie.

Anthropological damage can therefore have six dimensions: cognitive, emotional, volitional, ethical, social and spiritual. These dimensions may be totally or partially implicated depending on the degree of the disorder caused and the length of time a person has endured under this regimen. Totalitarianism and other authoritarian regimes try to invade people, and without subjectively trained and healthy citizens, there can be no democracy. These six dimensions may have been affected to varying degrees: injured, weakened or broken in more serious cases. The degree could depend on the number of years of authoritarianism or totalitarian rule in that country or on each person's resilience. It has been noted that the generations of Cubans that have endured longer periods of totalitarianism have been more negatively impacted in almost all these internal structures of the human condition. This causes a very serious impact in different social spheres: family, work, study, social commitment and political life.

III. Causes

Based on this definition, some causes of anthropological damage can be identified:

1. The subversion of life in truth, as mentioned by Hannah Arendt, that is, living a life in lies;
2. The undermining of internal freedom beyond civil and political liberties: civil and political liberties are almost always pursued, however, there is an internal freedom product of the typical fear of these regimes that marks and further damages the internal structure of the citizen;
3. The enthronement or idealization of the official ideology as a secular religion. This is one of the characteristics of totalitarianisms: turning an ideology into a dogma of a secular religion. Anyone who disagrees with this ideology is considered a “heretic” and is sentenced to the media or to prison;
4. The indoctrination through the educational system whose sole objective is promoting the regime’s ideology;
5. The use of all means of communication for propaganda;
6. The imposition of a single party;
7. The use of repression and verbal, media, physical and psychological violence.
8. The separation of family members or family disintegration;
9. The State’s total control over the economy. People lose their freedom to decide what to do, since whatever action they take that might be opposed to the regime’s interests might lead to their unemployment, suspension from academic institutions or bear social responsibility. The idea is no longer subverting civic fear, but the State’s controls over the people’s means of subsistence;

10. The broad and enduring discretionary control of the Churches;
11. The use of an external enemy to create a besieged plaza environment. In one country threatened by another, anyone who disagrees has consequences;
12. The dismantling of the fabric of civil society. This is a painstaking process for totalitarian regimes. It is interesting how the personal impact of the disarticulation of the spaces of freedom and participation of diverse groups of civil society, undermining the processes of socialization in the civic participation of the people;
13. The union of the 3 State powers, all under the control of the ruling party;
14. The organization of a capillary structure of denunciation. Anthropological damage is related to universal mistrust, that is, it is impossible to articulate the fabric of civil society in a normal way, because the capillary structure of denunciation causes those within the same family to look the other way. The capillary structure of betrayal causes a kind of constriction of the soul, that is, a wall is erected so as not to interact with others;
15. The control over cultural expressions. Decree laws that are directed to the control and appropriation of cultural expressions are issued;
16. The revision of history. Totalitarian systems rewrite history to erase the memory of peoples. A nation without historical memory loses its roots as newer generations grow. They believe that the nation's foundations and

principles begin with the authoritarian or totalitarian system;

17. The existence of a messianic and charismatic leadership;
18. The so-called class struggle, which is not really a class struggle but rather the conflict between those holding the power and the rest of the people;
19. The restructuring of foreign policy so that the image of the country contradicts citizens' conscience. People start to doubt their own opinions. The Manichaeism of foreign relations: the world is all bad, the country is all good;
20. The creation of a new language. Semantics is a privileged subject within these systems. All words are re-signified. Language is one of the soul's manifestations and social exclusion is created with this new language.

IV. Symptoms and consequences

The third dimension of anthropological damage is its symptoms and consequences:

1. The incoherence between what is believed, thought, felt, said and done. That is to say, there is a kind of schizophrenia between those dimensions, arising from living a life in lies;
2. Depersonalization and massification processes. This is one of the aspects that will have the greatest impact on democratic transformation. When people become depersonalized and overcrowded, they lose the condition of civil coexistence;

3. Moral relativism. There is an unconscious Machiavellianism where anything goes as long as I save myself or my family, which causes difficulties in ethical training;
4. Ethical and civic illiteracy. There can be no democratic transformation with illiterate people. Just as the instruction of mathematics, physics and chemistry in the Cuban people is valued, equal concern should be placed on ethical and civic illiteracy. People cannot be expected to practice the unknown;
5. Lack of life project, which mainly impacts young people. The life project must be freely chosen, with an ethical discernment, a scale of values, a fundamental option and with specific options;
6. The numbing of critical consciousness;
7. The affectation or blocking of political life;
8. Fear, but with an unidentified cause;
9. The citizens' legal defencelessness;
10. Distrust and paranoia;
11. Lack of religious freedom, turning some into alienating cults;
12. Lack of knowledge or reinterpretation of history;
13. Political or moral manichaeism, which separates life into good and bad, with no space for nuanced values, damaging the path to democracy;

14. Upsetting the roles of Cuba in the world, making it look like a victim.

In short, the political project that proclaimed the creation of a “new man” caused the appearance of a sick man, the “*homo saucius*”: The anthropological illness of a person, “injured, eakened or broken”, in the different dimensions of its internal structure or in all of them.

V. Healing processes of anthropological damage

It is essential and urgent to start working on the healing of anthropological damage, even prior to democratic transformation, and then simultaneously. We propose some suggestions:

1. The mentioned study identified that the first great solution is education. A new, comprehensive, plural, liberating educational system must be designed, with the human being as its center, subject and end. The new educational system must be inclusive and must develop all the dimensions of the citizen, cognitive, emotional, volitional, ethical and social, in order to weave a fraternal coexistence, and all these dimensions must be encouraged, informed and grounded in the full and fruitful development of the spiritual dimension. This educational project should include the education of moral conscience in the values and traditions of the recovered homeland to move from a formulated moral to a lived moral. This would cause a transition from *homo saucius* to *homo vivens*⁵, that is, citizens

5 San Ireneo de Lyon, Siglo II (Esmirna, Asia Menor, c. 130 - Lyon, c. 202). *Gloria Dei, vivens homo*. “La gloria de Dios es el hombre viviente”. Análisis de Ireneo, adv. haer. IV, 20, 1-7. According to Benedict XVI, it could be paraphrased as: “the glory of God is the full health of man, and this con-

would become aware of their life project and would then be capable of making their own decisions and walk freely and responsibly.

2. Another dimension of the solution is that the educational system must have a strong program of ethical, civic and political training⁶. Many countries consider civic training as an alternative to religious training, that is, either one or the other. Here, it is not understood as such. There are, rather, fundamental complements to each other, a source of mutual inspiration and a formidable meaning for life.
3. Conceive, together, a project, and many complementary and specific projects of each initiative, to rebuild the social fabric. The rebuilding of civil society is a new name for democracy⁷.
4. Strategic prospecting to present country project alternatives where there are consensual groups between Cubans from the island and the diaspora that develop economic projects, social political models and that become the first proposal, even before democracy is reached, to enthuse the citizens with a future outlook and to forge a critical opinion of the model they are currently living.

sists in being in a profound relationship with God. We can also say it with the words that John Paul II liked so much: man is the way of the Church, and the Redeemer of man is Christ”.

- 6 Centro de Estudios Convivencia (CEC-Cuba) Collective of authors. *Ética y Cívica: aprendiendo a ser persona y a vivir en comunidad. Libro de texto de 14 cursos de formación* (Ediciones Convivencia, 2014).
- 7 Dagoberto Valdés, *Reconstruir la sociedad civil, un proyecto para Cuba*. (Fundación Conrad Adenauer. Published in Venezuela, 1997). Translated to English in 2008, not yet published in the language.

This would motivate changes regarding the social anomie that produces anthropological damage.

VI. Conclusions

Contemporary societies that have lived under totalitarian, or structurally authoritarian regimes, verify that, in addition to the deterioration of their economy and the alienation of democratic participation, there is a far worse ailment at the base of all the phenomena of socio-economic and political impoverishment, which we have here called “anthropological damage”.

The impact that this anthropological damage causes in the stage of transformations towards a democratic society and, even more so, in the stages of structural transition and the consolidation of a quality democracy, has been proven to be of such magnitude and durability that it deserves to be identified, studied, and that there is a need to become aware of its seriousness and look for possible healing processes at an educational, psychological, emotional and ethical level.

This article outlines the causes of anthropological damage, its symptoms and consequences, as well as some suggestions for its healing starring the main role of the human person, accompanied by teams of specialists and educators who do not manipulate consciences and subjectivities but rather provide the tools and subsidies people need to rebuild themselves towards an integral human development.

Conclusions

This issue seeks to contribute to the understanding of the problems Venezuela faces and influence national and international public opinion. Each of the authors, from their own perspectives, offers diagnoses and proposals. On this occasion, we offered an added value: the vital testimony and intellectual reflection of Dagoberto Valdés.

Below we will specify four ideas that deserve to be developed in future editions and that show the intellectual and political effort to identify phenomena that are found in our daily lives.

1. **On “anthropological damage”:** “Anthropological damage” is a concept created and developed by Dagoberto Valdés. It identifies what is –perhaps– the direst consequence of any totalitarian system, because it refers to the intimate world of the human person. Although the concept has some features associated with the culture and specific temporality of the Cuban case, we must make an effort to identify its universal aspects in order to find antidotes that serve both countries. This initiative is FORMA's first multilateral effort, and it fills us with joy to be able to build bridges with those who for so long have suffered from the same wrongdoings that plague us.
2. **Transition and transformation:** The identification of the autocratic nature of Chavismo was followed by a series of reflections on the need for a “transition to democracy” in the country. Numerous investigations, proposals and reflections on the subject have been developed. Most of these initiatives reference transitions in Latin America in

the second half of the twentieth century. Although they offer key aspects to understanding the phenomenon, they deserve to be expanded. For this reason, we put the concept of *transformation* at the service of the country with the aim of extending the scope of political reflections and its practical dimension.

3. **State building dimensions:** Eventually, Venezuela will face the challenge of rebuilding the State. We propose that this challenge be faced with a sense of transcendence. Initiatives that address the quality of political society and the nation, which show symptoms of suffering that “anthropological damage” identified by Valdés, should be added to the technical tasks of the process. We do warn that if these aspects are left aside, we can run the risk of sinking in our aspirations for freedom and promoting new illiberal orders that maintain autocratic features.
4. **Transformative disposition:** Given the dimensions of the damage that the Chavista revolution has created, and based on the demands for transformation, we consider that it is convenient to cultivate in the political actors a disposition oriented towards the impulse of a systemic change that allows progress towards democracy in a stable, inclusive and sustained manner. This provision requires unity of purpose among the members of the political society and the construction of a joint vision of the country.

We thus conclude this edition, hoping that it contributes to the political debate.