

# THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE

FIRST NAMES BEGINNING WITH  
LETTERS S, T, V, Y and Z

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## Senel Paz and Rebeca Chávez

Translated by Regina Anavy

We share your views and look forward to the immediate opportunity to act firmly and respond quickly and forcefully to this action. These messages are very useful and mobilizing, but we must move right now to a more concrete and frontal action.

Senel Paz and Rebeca Chávez

## Sigfredo Ariel

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear Jorge Ángel,

Has someone really summoned on television, in person, the ghost of Luis Pavón, executioner of the worst period that the culture of this country has gone through? If today were the day of the Holy Innocents, I would not have been surprised to receive this news, inconceivable for more than one reason: this exhumation in the most influential and mass media cannot be understood—it received flattery, you say—after so many congresses, public meetings and all kinds of obviously official meetings that have examined those dark days and judged its leadership very negatively. It is clear that the ICRT—especially the political body that monitors and ultimately designs its programming—doesn't remember that long season, the *pavonato*, for what it was: a lasting shame that opened wounds that have not yet healed, if indeed they can.

I hope this is not a sign of revalidating the vulgar Stalinism, witch hunts, prejudices, denials and limits of the 1970s, God forbid. In any case, it will be a new attempt to restore the dubious intellectual relief that no one knows for what artistic merit this character once enjoyed. I remember that in the early 1980s, a sample of his “poetry” appeared—to the ridicule of *Letras cubanas*—in a luxurious hardcover edition, along with other anthologies of true intellectuals who had not made the press groan for many years (Lezama dixit): Fayad Jamís, Dulce María Loynaz, Fina García Marruz, Rafael Alcides and other poets who were returning to editorial life: Pablo Armando, Díaz Martínez, Arrufat... Why was Pavón in this select group? Let the editorial leaders of the time respond, if they want, although it's not worth it.

In the years that followed, that name was not heard again except to publicly deplore his management at the head of the National Council of Culture, and that is how many of those who suffered the forced silence, the non-existence, the accusations often evoke him whenever they can, for this or another stigma, and to whom Pavón and his collaborators dedicated various forms of humiliation. This is a delicate subject that no one should talk about by parroting other people's opinions, and I will not, of course. I believe that some of today's respected writers and artists who have received National Awards in the last ten or twenty years have an opinion on the new resurrection of their victimizer. Could this unexpected appearance open a new dialogue, hopefully keeping extremes and rancor at bay? We, who didn't experience the *pavonato* itself, who received only a few lashes from his agonizing beating, would have to listen, pay attention and connect the dots. By the way, did you watch the show?

A hug,  
Sigfredo Ariel

## Message from Sigfredo Ariel about the Conference of January 30, 2007

Photos and messages that I have received over the last few hours from young people interested in entering the Casa de las Américas on Tuesday afternoon have reminded me of very hopeless days when the then-young writers—without being scandalously adolescent—could not even dream of intervening in “the things” that were taking place at UNEAC, which was then the enemy headquarters of what we wrote, and of us ourselves.

Let’s remember together, friends in our forties and fifties, so many contest prizes left unjustly deserted—by advice, pressure, dark interventions—the weekly attacks in *Tribuna* (and even in *El Caimán Barbudo*) on poetry and narrative—intimate, escapist, “originist”; that mansion of 17 and H with fine little roosters fleeing from the hesitant footsteps of writers and artists (not all of them very brilliant, by the way, about whom almost nothing is known now), who “ran the show” in rooms frequented by opaque Hungarian colleagues, Bulgarians, Czechoslovakians...

It seems, when reading some of the angry messages from young unknowns that have arrived in this mailbox, that one of the ways of “the Pavón” is now called “secretism,” which, as I understand it, is a buzzword very close to hypocrisy, previously called the *doble moral*, the double standard. “Mystery Syndrome,” I have heard this aberration called some time ago, or something like that.

Like it or not, the guests who climbed the stairs of the Che Guevara room last Tuesday, before the eyes of hundreds of young people who tried in vain to enter the Casa, took part in a kind of secret meeting that for our benefit (or who knows what privilege of listening and talking they attribute to us) excluded them.

The explanations that were given to them—true, by the way, those referring to the magnitude of the premises and its architectural limitations—were not received with satisfaction, nor twenty years ago would similar reasons have left us satisfied.

These young people want to fight their Pavóns, which are also—who can doubt it?—ours. Perhaps they thought that the time had come to denounce, ask for explanations, or at least find out about matters from a past that is not taught or mentioned in classes or homes (again “secretism”).

Those boys trusted that some collective pressure (unusual insistence for attending a conference on cultural policy) would end up opening the doors of the Casa de las Américas. At midnight many were still there. I felt ashamed, and I was not the only one.

If it had been a concert, the decent thing would have been to start the show again at that time.

Sigfredo Ariel

## Tomás González Pérez

Translated by Regina Anavy

After that time, where things as painful as bestial happened to me, I was left in a lethal state. What was for me the possibility of living happily and fulfilled vanished, like a furiously colored kite. I believed in the truth, but I was forgetting Brecht's "Five difficulties in telling the truth," that of "in whose hands do you put the truth." I presented a paper, written on two pages, in which I set out my views on the problems for the development of national culture in our country. I said that blacks and whites were not on an equal footing for the integration of their cultural contributions.

Racial discrimination is not erased with a decree. And in that paper I gave several examples. From the blonde doll in the arms of a black girl; the actors and actresses in a cast for a novel or a classic couldn't be black; the thousand ways of considering the black a wild and brutish being that "if he doesn't make trouble at the entrance, does it at the exit." The reaction against these arguments was extraordinary. A majority of white Cubans asked for me, with their thumbs down, to throw me to the lions of the Roman circus.

Of course, this brought me an emphatic consequence. I was left without a job and salary for a few years, during the time that Llanusa was minister. For that presentation they considered me the leader of Black Power in Cuba, in the style of Black Power and with ramifications about the "negritude" of our friend Césaire, the great poet of Martinique. From that moment I was a plague.

In the midst of all this dark period, a daughter of mine dies. Time passes and one day they call me to an ideological commission of the Party. They tell me how I had put up with so much, what did I live on... And before me was the President of the National Council of Culture, Dr. Mucio, a psychiatrist. That was the night they rehabilitated me. They watched me for a long time, despite the fact that I did not have a salary. I worked for free in the theater, not just eight hours, but many more.

I was a member of the group *Los Doce* [*The Twelve*]. When they gave me a salary again, it was the minimum. All this happens until the arrival of Torquemada who summons me to the Palacio del Segundo Cabo in a dark office, with a small lamp aimed at my face. He told me that my Hamlet was black because the actors he had cast were black. But this time they gave me a transfer to keep me away from the theater, to sing again all over the country in the Benny Moré group. I returned to the theater when Pavón's "hiccups" from a hangover took him out on a stretcher from the Palacio de Segundo Cabo.

### **Another message from Tomás González Pérez**

Dear beings who illuminate the path of our dark jungle. What we are seeing was to be expected, but it is not all; there are others who are behind these "Furies." Beings who know how to hate, because they have put their hate, which is their only talent, at the service of a disastrous utopia that wants to put under control everything that is beautifully human in a society. The true utopia that deserves all our effort is that of ending the

equation of the werewolf with the man. They are of such mediocrity that they depend on us, but they know that without us—all the intelligentsia and talented artists—they cannot do anything.

But all these, be careful, are the children of Manuel Sanguily; and they remember why Placido died. This is a preview of what's to come. But remember that what has just been executed is the opening of "Pandora's box." You don't have to rush. Names are missing. Once a cabaret dancer—of course she was not a good dancer, although very beautiful—asked her lover: "Hey, Papi, you who are up there. Tell me why Torquemada can do and undo?" The old official answered: "Divine power protects him." Wait until they discover the faces of those who are masked. Remember that we are close to the Bermuda Triangle. And what we have given for dead is actually masked.

What fumlbers we can become.

I love you.

Tomás González Pérez

## Víctor Fowler

Translated by Regina Anavy

### ***Pavonato, one of the names of authoritarianism***

“Chance is not, nor can it be, more than an unknown cause of an unknown effect.”  
Voltaire.

“The truth never harms a cause that is just.” Mahatma Gandhi.

You have to refine, or broaden, your gaze to be able to read the event in a global space; to propose that the practice is directed in directions that, in general, yield contradictory as well as complementary results. Work within the country, its history, cultural evolution, social system, ideological devices, control structures, spaces for the circulation of opinion or negotiation, educational system (for all that it has to create traditions, canonization of facts or figures), local problems or any of the many human layers that make up the whole. Move towards the relationship with the outside, while countries are part of regional frameworks as well as of the world space of nations. They belong to organizations of all kinds; they defend their autonomy and identity there, their internal policies and projects with neighbors or distant countries; they face conflicts or bitter enmities.

For several weeks, Cuban television has been broadcasting the sessions of the colloquium entitled “Fidel: memory and future” (it is already on fragment number 22 of that celebration, which took place last December and lasted several days). A surprising meeting, because—in life—it takes place without the presence of the figure around whom the attendance takes place. Fidel Castro has been recovering from a serious illness for months, and despite all kinds of speculation during the days leading up to the colloquium, he will end up not attending the event, although it may well be said that he presides over it from afar.

It is worth remembering that the colloquium, with an attendance of more than 3,000 personalities, constituted a way of reasoning about the future of Cuban socialism, as well as establishing the need and desire for its continuity. Unless something else has happened in the halls, the sessions broadcast on television speak of a stable country, homogeneous around its history, immersed in struggles for survival and development, a society without wounds or fractures that elaborates a future of shared ideals, and where, above the daily difficulties of life, happiness is a common banner.

On another stage on that same television, and just around the same time the colloquium was broadcast, a forgotten former official from the world of culture was invited to be the central figure in a program (titled *Impronta* and lasting five minutes), whose purpose, as the name indicates, was to pay a quick tribute (almost a reminder) to those people who have left an important mark on the national culture. The official’s name was Luis Pavón Tamayo, and apart from books of poems of little relevance and his journalistic work, he made his real contribution in administrative terms during the years he directed the National Council of Culture (1971-1975).

The next day, a brief email appears in which a young writer communicates his indignation at the tribute, since that former official is exactly the one who, at the head of the organization he then directed, implemented the repressive policy that, in the sector of writers and artists, is commonly identified under the name “gray five-year period.” After this, and for more than a week, dozens of electronic messages are sent within the community of Cuban writers—at the beginning in the interior of Cuba, after a few days with the participation of others who no longer reside in the country.

## II

In reality, what happened is a kind of chaotic avalanche whose best explanation is a state of exalted anger: a person begins by sending a message to several recipients; a small group responds quickly, and the community of readers identifies them as the kind of leaders to whom, in turn, they can send new messages of support. Finally, a new group, this time of Cubans living outside the country, joins the group. The first signatures indicate that the majority of the members of the circuit are writers, especially those who today are over 60 years old and who suffered in their own flesh those excesses of which the former official Pavón is accused. This can be verified in the message where Arturo Arango, one of those who quickly adds his voice to the rejection, wonders if perhaps the youngest (he himself is over 50) are not going to participate in the exchange.

When, finally, members of said challenged group begin to participate, the consequences become dramatic. It turns out that people who were children when the events for which Pavón is held responsible took place can recount the same, similar or related events in their adult lives. In other words, they establish a solid line of continuity between the yesterday that someone tried to clean up with the frustrated tribute to the former official, to our present lives, and there are even those who extend the connection to the life that awaits our children.

To make matters worse, in the course of the exchange, threads are being discovered that connect the “Pavón affair” with other actions that, in previous weeks or months, have taken place on Cuban television: the invitation to Francisco Serguera, former director of the organization, to an interview where he assures that he does not regret anything; the interview (in another program) with Armando Quesada (who was Pavón’s subordinate, in charge of the Cuban theater world, and who is accused of having carried out the policy of “parameterization”), and even the mention (as a historical date worth remembering) of the First National Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, from which emerged the political directives for the treatment of the presence of homosexuals in educational facilities and in Cuban cultural life throughout the decade, still with profound consequences up to today.

The group of Cubans living outside their country deserves special mention. They are more aggressive; they use irony and mockery (against the community of writers to which, still very recently, they belonged). Some—while they are astonished and criticize previous silences—congratulate the unanimous rejection, and, above all, demand political responsibility. They are not satisfied with a criticism of the former official Pavón, but rather want to follow the threads of power and trace its latest consequences, Pavón's



connections to the Cuban political fabric of the time. Given that they also extend the atmosphere of those seventies to the present, the acceptance of their proposals practically implies the need for a review of the history of national culture in the revolutionary period.

### III

It's difficult to extract rules from something that is nothing more than a chaotic exchange where no one is the center and in which the main person questioned has not responded, nor has anyone who may share their ideas about how to deal with the problems of Cuban culture (from the point of view of someone who directs and administers it). In reality, apart from a conversation someone recounted, we don't even know what Pavón may think of his years as a civil servant in the field of culture or his current assessments of the global state of that culture (of which, at least as a journalist, poet and researcher, he continues to be part).

Now, since at one point in the exchanges one of the participants (Arturo Arango) introduces a digression in the central argument (calls for a balanced look, since television also celebrates the awarding of the National Social Sciences Award to the Marxist essayist Fernando Martínez), and since another of the participants (Desiderio Navarro) feels alluded to and responds by giving continuity to the digression, it is fair to point out that both digressions and responses—between the participants and no longer in the direction of Pavón—are possible.

If this minimum rule is true, together with the catalog of practices of cultural violence that have appeared on the scene, as in an eruption, it is equally true that no one among the participants has answered them. In other words, although it is possible that they do not know the ultimate reality of the narrated episodes or that they have even heard them mentioned, it seems that—through the permanent updating of a shared knowledge and memory—they accept them as plausible. Attenuated or activated, as needed, the practices of violence are a structural component of the universe in which these people carry out their daily lives. They are part of the “game.”

On the other hand, although the participants in the exchange are writers and artists, quite a few of the episodes they expose refer to the life of anyone (demonization of a type of music, prohibition of wearing long hair, pants cut off by the police, internment or harassment of homosexuals only because of their sexual identity, etc.). Other episodes (censorship of books, contests, self-censorship when creating artistic work, etc.) are already typical of the cultural field.

What's interesting here is to unite both catalogs and make the resulting figure intersect (we can consider that this figure is that of shared knowledge and memory) with the portrait of the nation that the colloquium offers, mentioned at the beginning, since—after complying with the task—the latter is more of a political fantasy composed for a specific audience outside the country. Due to an elementary demand for coherence, the audience of such a discourse must be external, because how can one imagine that a sector of society (in a broad sense, and given the extension of the catalogue, the entire society) celebrates and congratulates itself on its own wound?

## IV

It's important, at this point, to propose a delusional operation (to speak in the abstract when it almost seemed that we were going to specify responsibilities and names) and set aside two things that the colloquium unifies: the leadership of the nation and the portrait that is offered of it. If this is so, then it must be accepted that it is not only a sweetened portrait, but false to a great degree, and was enough to demonstrate the amount of pain that has flowed in barely a week of electronic exchanges between a small group of writers and artists, which, after all, doesn't reach even fifty people.

Seen from another angle (that of possibilities), we cannot even imagine what would happen, what would rise to the surface, if instead of the narrow circuit of these exchanges, the process of reviewing this pain is carried out, in an open way, in the most diverse media, educational centers, political or social organizations; if it grew to become a "topic" of debate in current Cuban society.

Of course, this forces us to raise the issue of responsibility. What do we do with Pavón, the official who structured a device for the control and repression of differences at the level of an entire country, but of whom no other trace remains? There are no books that compile his speeches or essays on any topic; his journalism is scattered enough to make it difficult to follow him or contains so few ideas that, in general, his thought doesn't exist; except that he is, from any point of view, an executioner.

In historical terms, there is a scheme proposed long ago by Hannah Arendt in her famous study on the trial of Adolf Eichmann (from which the idea of the "banality of evil" was born): the modest civil servant who is a model of dedication and honesty; who never opposes any ordinance of superiority, but rather goes ahead to deploy the actions that satisfy what he interprets as the desires of an abstract "command" (which, although its main figure is a concrete leader, is also fragmented into dissimilar figures placed on a higher level), and whose only defect is that he puts all his energy at the service of a horrible idea.

But, even taking for granted that the idea could have arisen solely in the mind of the official (with which only his accomplices would be those who, throughout the country, are willing to comply with it, with fervor on many occasions), what do you do with your peers or hierarchical superiors in the apparatus, and how do you evaluate them? And, this time in greater depth, where are the ideas that opposed the one that took flesh in the exemplary functionary? Not only within the "world of culture" (which, in the first place, suffered the onslaught), but especially outside it and, above all, within the administrative and political apparatus.

Said in another way, what classes of society (above all, the administrative and political system) opposed the deployment of control and repression? What social personalities, "cadres" of management, departments or offices, and at what hierarchical level were they? What were their destinations? Which of those suffered the effects of the apparatus?

Given the extension of the device (media, educational centers and the world of culture, at least) to cover the entire country, it is natural to assume that the effects were suffered by the entire population, only that here it is necessary to consider the presence of gradations, since the consequence has to be more serious, the greater the deviation from what is supposed to be the norm. That is, there will be people (many) who consider that either the events in the catalog didn't exist, or that they weren't touched by them, in their private lives.

This, mathematically acceptable, leads, however, to an even more serious and complexly interwoven reasoning, since it forces us to imagine subjects who were "ignoring" and for whom it seemed normal that in Cuba, young men with long hair dressed in western fashion, who listened to music sung in English (especially rock), who read authors not sanctified by the most "official" portion of the literary institution, who expressed pride in their religious beliefs or who lived alternative sexual identities openly without conflicts in the public space were non-existent.

In other words, if the conflict existed (and it did), the only way to appeal to the benefit of ignorance is to have been part of the repressive device, either by being one of its various links (those who applied the directives or monitored their compliance), by manifesting a substantial lack of solidarity with those punished (either by sharing the deployment of the device, or by simple fear of also ending up being part of it or accommodating it by considering that it's not one's problem). Thinking statistically, the linked individuals must have been strictly a smaller quantity, reducing the relationship with the environment to practically the relationship with oneself in order to be sure that it's really a matter of "ignoring"; that is to say, one must have remained silent in the face of the problem of the neighbor, the close or distant family member, the co-worker or simple acquaintance.

This exemplary brand of lack of solidarity is one of the most harmful effects of times like those discussed here. Nor do I forget that, in order to qualify those who suffered, it is essential to add one more element to the analysis: the fact that Cuban legislation prevents any citizen from leaving the country if they don't have an exit permit beforehand. This is not free information, since it implies that the pariahs of the universe designed by the former official were unable (as an option to not suffer) even to leave the country if they so wished. They were, in the fullest sense of the word, victims.

Culture (publications, award systems, shows, events and artistic exhibitions of all kinds); Teaching (study programs, textbooks, conditions for permanence or access to this or that level); Media (topics covered, circulation and, more than anything, the possibility of proposing not just alternative opinions, but simply nuanced ones around the basic elements that make up the ideological nucleus of the repressive structure); Political-Administrative Apparatus (directives, decrees, laws or modifications of the law, operating routines during problem solving, interaction practices regarding proposals or demands of the citizenry) and Public Space (conditions for its use, stigmatized or encouraged behaviors, introduction of new meanings or reformulation of traditions).

The main thing here is to elucidate whether the period, under any of its denominations (*pavonato*, *quinquenio gris*, “repressive period,” etc.), was the result of the enunciation and implementation of policies enunciated by a man (arch-responsible ) or if (as the data—the universalization of certain control and repressive practices—allow us to suspect) it was rather the implementation of a State policy, a project of the Nation and human engineering typical of the context of the Cold War.

Here it’s fundamental to analyze and reveal the fabric of relations of that particular area of Cuban life directed by the former official with the rest of the areas that make up the administrative, political and, in general, leadership apparatus of the country—an analysis that cannot but encompass the refraction and effects of the ordinances at the lowest levels, as well as the way in which the “superiority,” the summits of the apparatus, knew about them, controlled, encouraged or rejected them.

As long as the investigation (in particular, the one carried out in Cuba) does not propose (or is not possible) to advance in all these fields, the environment of the former official will remain a black hole, less and less important as he himself. This is true, as the need to understand the overall design of the device and its management from higher levels gains in importance (to the point that any search for culprits pales before the formidability of the device itself and its consequences up to today). I point out the latter because the pretense of finding exact culprits can also function as a trap that forces infinite mobility in the web of the administration and the political estates and structures; that is to say, along with the question in a positive sense (who was it who enunciated, defined, accepted, stimulated, rewarded or did?), the opposite should also be asked (who conceded, kept quiet, dissuaded, falsified, concealed?).

Even deleting names, out of pity or with the desire to protect, proposing both series of questions in a merely operational sense (how did it come to be?) can generate answers of interest. Otherwise, for the questions to end with Pavón, we would have to accept the ridiculous premise that he managed to direct the sector of “culture” as head of a sort of parallel government of the country, and even in this case we should ask how he could do it and where the real government was.

However, what we have called the Now, what we have called the “catalog,” encompasses much more than Pavón's particular period and, in reality, threatens to become a temporary quantity as long as the lifetime of the Cuban Revolution up to the present. (I insist once again on the fact that none of the “facts” has been, at least until now and within the exchange of messages, refuted.) There has been talk of repression for reasons of sexual identity (which, among us, opens the way to the years of the UMAP [1965-1968]; the “Gray Quinquenio” (1971-1975, although some propose starting the period earlier and extending it to the early 1980s) and then a long chain of “facts” that goes right up to the present day.

Giving as a reality the acceptance, on the part of the participants, of the existence of the aforementioned “catalog” (which, I repeat, seems to bring together moments that are plausible enough so that no one has quickly ruled them out), then we have to add a new and a much more sour element to the analyzes to be carried out: the continuity of the practices of the so-called *pavonato*, which even precede the appearance of Pavón himself;

this last thing means, in reality, the constitutive nature of said practice to the daily life of Cuban socialism.

## V

Condemning Pavón's appearance on television (as a praiseworthy figure for his work in the cultural field) in an email exchange is simple and even elemental, although it does not imply that it's not also essential. Linking his presence to that of other characters who were leaders during the same period, even though it may be the effect of chance or unpredictability, is also a message or a wink in various directions to past and future history, to the citizens who see one of their nightmares return—surreptitiously and even without being able, due to ignorance, to identify it—and, finally, to the country's top leadership.

It would be naive to the point of idiocy if the strange situation Cuba is experiencing is not known now, when its leading figure has been absent from public life for more than half a year for health reasons; a context where, suddenly, former officials who seemed forgotten begin to reappear, people around whom there was a kind of pact of silence. They were there, but so little was said about them that there have even been those who now, in the middle of the exchange, are surprised that they continue to work in positions of responsibility and even that they are alive.

Voltaire's tremendous phrase ("Chance is not, nor can it be, more than an unknown cause of an unknown effect") calls us, however, to continue even deeper. What can the appearance of this group of commanding officers of a vanished army mean? As much as there are messages from the exchange that try to convince us that "everything is the same," it's a self-evident truth that the life of the country has changed (and a lot) with respect to the repressive atmosphere of the seventies. Of course it can be answered that the change only serves to introduce the continuation, under new forms, of the same and identical previous repressive atmosphere, but at any rate it can be granted that the external signs have changed.

Put with the previous directive of the country there seemed to be an agreement that Pavón would live, until physically disappearing, in a kind of low profile. What other target can the message have that isn't the current directive? As I recently heard, imagining a very murky scenario, there would be the possibility of a positional power play or an outcry translatable into a martial "the troops are ready!" (of course for a presumed return). Following the joke, and within a greater scope, the most interesting task would then remain, locating that sector that never stopped brushing the horses and ironing with starch the grimy suit kept in the window display for the moment of return; not only of the "old" ones, but the fusion of this hard wing with today's new ones, who, deep down, share identical ideas about the ways of governing (actually, disciplining) a Nation and the lives of its inhabitants (who, by their essence, stop being citizens inside similar projects).

## VI

It's appropriate now to imagine a very distant possibility, to travel to the other side of the globe and for someone who doesn't know us to wake up from his dream and read us. He is an Australian aborigine learning the Spanish language; he may not even know exactly where Cuba is; he has no particular emotion about our lives. He simply reads us; we are text before his eyes, and he must face two sets of meaning that run in parallel. He will try to form an opinion about this. On one track is the country of the official celebration, on another that of the complaint of its intellectuals, and there are several questions: what is this world of ours? what are its operating laws? What is it worth for him? Can what's not valid be changed and how?

If I assume this somewhat crazy possibility, it's because the crossing of a limit reveals to us what is really at stake with this "rebellion" of the intellectuals, this staging of pain that—for the first time in a long time—has not only taken place, but has been opening up more and more to fields that perhaps weren't considered during the first messages. At this point I draw attention to the fact that some of the messages call for controlling the geographical area that the circuit should cover (only within Cuba) and that another explains the non-participation of the person who writes it with the argument of not giving weapons to the external enemy.

Beyond the particular period of the so-called *pavonato* or its effects, what is at stake is the judgment about life (cultural and social) in the universe of the Cuban Revolution, from its origins until today. It might seem like a highly extreme approach, but if one of the series operates as a tacit denial of the splendor or opacity of the other, which vision do we finally have? (For example, what questions do we expect from our Australian Aborigine the day we meet in person?).

Although the indignation at the tribute to former official Pavón is fair, the aspiration to prevent any other similar episode on the stage of Cuban television (and, by extension, the country's mass media) leaves the strange aftertaste of ambiguous flavors. One feels uncomfortable applying to the former official, the same directives that he, in the past, promulgated. In the end, as much pain as it may have caused, this is not Adolf Eichmann organizing the "final solution" within which millions of Jews and other human beings died during World War II (at this point, and this is important for the human being, it's appropriate to apologize to Pavón for the excessive use of his name, since he was only a small figure within the tide that contributed to his unleashing and administering).

In other words, by imagining a possible pain-grading table, society can afford for these former officials to appear, but it also has to have and stimulate (especially the latter) spaces where actions that are harmful to the community are criticized. In this sense, the recent episode is an example of the immaturity of the Cuban institutional system (its mass media and, very especially, its political apparatus) in regard to the mere existence of criticism (which is not only pointing out whether an artistic product is "good" or "bad") and public debate on sensitive issues for national life (in truth, on almost any type of issue). It is known that here, precisely at this point, the argument will arise that "this is not the time," "the conditions are not created" or any other similar excuse (which, moreover, those of my age have been hearing since childhood and now for almost half a

century), but then it is worth reviewing the idea that Gandhi proposed to us when he stated that “The truth never harms a cause that is just.”

Very little will remain of the initial demands of those who sent messages: there will be no public apology from television (that is, from its directors). and only UNEAC will issue a statement addressed to its members (as if the *pavonato* and its consequences would have been only a matter of writers and artists). None of those affected (who so vehemently sent electronic messages) will be granted the largest national platform to explain themselves. The offense is enormous and the satisfaction tiny. The possible revisions to the national history (even to that small period of the *pavonato*) are going to remain confined to academic spheres, union assemblies or sectorial publications.

The call for a new silence comes along with the promise not to repeat old mistakes (for which, too, there is the convenient expedient of later calling them “deformations”), and the pain will continue to persist as a result of the renewal of the social pact. As a result, the false problem (the appearance of the ex-official on national television screens) is going to bury the real problem (the form of solidarity and activism that this exchange of messages proposes; the need for the core problems of national life to be the subject of public debate; and, above all, the very content of the messages: the catalogue).

## VII

For the end I leave a more personal opinion. I believe that we have all suffered from Pavón, even those who barely encountered his name. We are his children and his victims. The very fact that such a large matter was confined to an exchange among fewer than fifty people (when what they are disputing is one of our most damaging pasts and national legacies) is as good as any other piece of evidence if one wants to analyze it, the same as the fact of having chosen to remain silent when it was so simple (and fair) to offer an apology and, making things better, even to ask for forgiveness.

*Pavonato* is but one of the many names that authoritarianism, violence, fear, hypocrisy, duplicity, emotionality and other harmful qualities take when it comes to leading human masses. Police cutting long hair and pulling down too-narrow pants; people willing to watch whether you listened to “American music” and “foreign broadcasters” and if you had an antenna on the roof of your house that could tune into “Northern” television stations; hostility against religious believers of any denomination, against male or female homosexuality, against “weird” handwriting: this was the food of my childhood and youth. Not just a little of it is still alive today, sometimes in new and subtle forms, and as we grow up, we continue to learn and add elements to that dark catalog (censorship, self-censorship, undesirable visits, open fear).

Many of the demands raised in the messages remain unanswered, given the solution chosen. For this reason, I want to express my total solidarity with the beautiful message sent by Reina María Rodríguez regarding the “deactivation” of Antonio José Ponte as a member of UNEAC. I am equally interested in applauding the honesty of Francis Sánchez, who raised a fundamental question, which no one has answered until now: when, at what moment in Cuban history, was it that intellectuals stopped being interested in social

issues? When was it that they didn't give an opinion about problems placed beyond aesthetics? When, from whatever position, did they stop participating in the most serious conflicts of their respective times? (to which, strictly speaking, one more should be added: where is the space for them to do it?).

Despite its meager result, if this exchange of messages is of any use, it is to verify that opinion, connection and solidarity are necessary and possible. We have, after all, to get to know each other again, care about each other and learn to respond to each other, especially the latter. We have family, friends, children; we are not discussing a specific matter, but nothing less than the fate of all of them. In the case of children, it's the country that we are going to give them and the horizon of life that they can expect, and whether they will be people with hopes and dreams or be suffocated by new fears.

Intolerance, the renunciation of dialogue, the neutralization of difference in the public space, self-censorship, the untouchability of the official, the consecration of the directive, the simulation and the adulation are all components of the "Pavón effect." Because we must understand the cultural in a deeper dimension than that pertinent to the artistic object, as an environment where the human species develops its life and transforms it. In this sense, the deployment of a catalogue of prohibitions is also a way of manufacturing culture, but one of obedience and passivity.

Here it's worth going back to personal stories; for example, those of my age, and remembering that it's not that a group of prohibitions/sanctions were designed and applied for a certain social group that deviated from a supposed norm, but for those who, like me, were born into a universe of prohibition and fear. Or perhaps someone imagined that, because we were sweet school Pioneers we didn't have neighbors, friends, relatives involved or overwhelmed in one way or another so that trying to "cleanse ourselves" (from a methodological point of view, the traditional super-objective of these practices is to build "bright futures"), weren't they going to contaminate us too?

In this way, not even the justification that such things have not been the primary objectives of such policies exculpates their effects and still, apparently for even longer, we will continue to live within the "Pavón effect," since each new failure of direction and renunciation of open criticism updates it. Public space is the key to everything. The fascinating thing about a Revolution is that it releases forces that surpass any initial idea of it, but if it cannot bear to discuss its problems, then it doesn't deserve that name.

Víctor Fowler



## Virgilio López Lemus

Translated by Regina Anavy

You should know that I adhere without hesitation to the essential approaches that you make and which go beyond any aggression of a personal type, of “revenge” or of unnecessary “adjustment of accounts.”

Virgilio López Lemus

## Waldo Leyva

Translated by Regina Anavy

It seems to me that the silence here is too dangerous. Although I don't believe that such events respond to a "strategy," I do think that there are those who consider that it's time to revive, by other means and perhaps with other protagonists, those methods. We have sufficient intelligence and moral and intellectual authority, grounded in an inviolable commitment to the essence of the nation, to prevent a revival of such practices. I repeat, I don't believe that the presence on TV of Serguera and Pavón responds to a strategy of the political or cultural leadership of the country, but if we don't stop these demonstrations, the unity, which with so much care, personal sacrifice and dedication we have achieved in these years, can be shipwrecked, and a loss of that nature, at this time, yes, would be irreversible.

### **From Waldo Leyva to Reynaldo González**

Reynaldo, I have circulated the opinions you sent me. It seems to me that the silence here is too dangerous. Although I don't believe that such events respond to a "strategy," I do think that there are those who consider that it's time to revive, by other means and perhaps with other protagonists, those methods. We have sufficient intelligence and moral and intellectual authority, grounded in an inviolable commitment to the essence of the nation, to prevent a revival of such practices. I repeat, I don't believe that the presence on TV of Serguera and Pavón responds to a strategy of the political or cultural leadership of the country, but if we don't stop these demonstrations, that unity which with so much care, personal sacrifice and dedication that we have achieved in these years, can be shipwrecked, and a loss of that nature, at this time, Yes, would be irreversible.

A hug,  
Waldo

## Wendy Guerra

Translated by Regina Anavy

Hi, Carlos,

At home we have received the UNEAC statement that includes collective opinions on the matter under debate. In the same way, our phone doesn't quit ringing with calls of disgust about said "council."

If I told my personal story from the 1970s, when I was born, to the 2007 in which we live, my voyage through puppets from all over the Island, local radio station broadcasts with my parents and my own work in Cuban TV, the recount would be interminable. We all have something to say. I ask then, with all respect, that a book of signatures or a collective space be opened so that those of us who sign or speak our points are sure that it is, strictly speaking, our tone, style and opinion. This book is something similar to what the institution usually does in cases of emergency.

It's not, as the letter says, "a matter of a group of our most important writers and artists." In fact there is a huge group of great, regular, unknown, brilliant or simple people who want to be heard. There are more than we imagine. I ask you to take my opinion into account. It's the moment.

All this time I have thought about that song that says: "You have the word; I keep quiet out of modesty." I prefer to speak with my work, but, please, it's now up to us in the continuous present in which we live. We need to see alive that same letter they sent to our mailboxes.

Let the language and agreements sound like oneself, that it not be "the same phrases and the same words."

Ernán López-Nussa, my husband, adheres to this petition.

Greetings and good luck,  
Wendy Guerra

## Yasef Ananda

Translated by Regina Anavy

To begin with, I must say that I'm amazed, and I admire the unusual public turmoil of my colleagues—artists and intellectuals—and the fruitful assembly, unfortunately virtual, whose imprint has reached distant Tokyo, where I currently am, under temporary travel permit issued by the Union of Artists and Writers of Cuba. The youngest, that is, those of us who are now around 30 years old and have been working for barely a decade in the “cultural sector,” have always been made to understand, admire and even follow the example of the “historical” wisdom of mature Cuban artists and intellectuals, wisdom that has always been constituted by recollection, silent stoicism and the conviction that there is no evil that lasts a hundred years nor body that resists it: officials die, but art is immortal.

An attitude, in a way, inclined towards the metaphysical and contemplative. Motivated, I speculate, by a superlative devotion to that orientalist maxim, of clear Christian parallel, which expresses: “If I punish with evil the evil you have done to me, what is the difference between you and me?” And which, by the way, intersperses a warning-refrain towards the punished colleagues: “Defend yourself and leave it to me, that I defend myself as I can.” And so, the lesson has been passed down for decades, all the way to my generation, and is a truth that works and resolves a lot but is not established. It is, as the extinct shoeshine man in my neighborhood might say about napping late into the night, food for today and hunger for tomorrow.

When we evaluate the real influence of mature intellectuals within Cuban society (not the influence within the guild, whose magazines publish bold critical opinions, which my grandmother or my “ordinary” neighbors have never read nor will read; therefore, an attitude influenced by these texts cannot be founded or develop consequentially real actions), the influence could be described as insufficient or disheveled. Whose responsibility is it? That of the institutions and officials that deny the spaces of social confluence or of the guild that accepts this refusal as a sine qua non condition, and using “representative intelligence,” retreats towards other alternatives of resistance waving “the right to kick the hangman” inside and outside the Island?

Whose responsibility is it? That of the institutions and officials or of the artist-deputies (the elite), who from their seats in the National Assembly of People's Power, should be the legitimate defenders of the interests of Cuban artists and intellectuals and their most authentic aspirations, favoring the debate on the appropriate legal instruments to ensure the free development of intellectuals in the real society and prevent the “excesses of enthusiasm” of the 1970s from being repeated and our rights respected?

Have they, that unquestionable elite, like the Japanese royal house, ever been questioned, publicly and from the guild, about their babbling role in difficult events such as the most recent shootings, imprisonments, the approval of gag laws, the quality and orientation of current education and the omission to submit to constitutional review so many historical and present barbarities, among other urgent issues? Or have they opted to understand that they, that is we, represented in them, form part of the status quo and, therefore, an

artist-deputy ceases to be an artist or an intellectual when he enters the National Assembly to become a municipal or provincial conceptual abstraction that does not cast its own shadow and that is a democratic pastime, like playing dominoes every Sunday “for a few minutes” to make your elementary classmates happy?

I believe that those who read these lines know what I’m talking about. They—who represent us in the National Assembly—and we—the artists and intellectuals—are the main ones responsible for the triumphant return of characters like Pavón to the small screen, after the harassment and ignominy perpetrated. It is our representative forgetfulness that doesn’t take shape in real actions, that is satisfied with a neatly written page or a bottle of rum to remember old times, fortunately overcome (since at least we have a park called John Lennon), in which lies our weakness to implement—with all the risks involved in the foundation of a sustained attitude over time—a space of respect within civil society, where the role of the intellectual is not only oriented towards the mission of the soldier who safeguards the achievements of the Revolution. There should be and must be room for more.

The lineage of the hardline official, endorsed by the State and invested with full powers for the execution of unhealthy criteria and aggressive policies “by his balls,” directing without majority support, is a typical character in the recent history of our island, like the taxi driver who never goes where we need or the agents of swapping houses. It’s so common that it has become “familiar” and “harmless.” Serious mistake. This has happened for more than 40 years in our social system of a new type, where this little boss has always pretended to act in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is nothing more than the hand of the Government on the shoulder of the reliable official (whom it later defenestrates and accuses of being anti-government, to the astonishment of the parishioners affected).

Pavón is not the water under the bridge of the 1970s that now comes to light on TV as a diploma for its outstanding attitude. Each generation, after Pavón, has had to deal with its “kick-ass bosses” that it has nurtured, and once in power they have instrumented censorship with the aim of eliminating difference and individualities, silencing criticism and advising the acquisition of “convenient invisibility” to earn their bread and, incidentally, the Chinese bicycle whose brand is Forever. Each generation has also had to deal with the gendarmes who have put these little bosses in those positions and who have even kept them there, despite the criticism and the “wake-up calls.”

Those who are not seen but exist are also responsible and must be denounced along with Pavón and other visible faces of the cultural censorship. In the 1990s my generation also suffered them in the Faculty of Cinema of the ISA, governed by the “balls” of Jesús Cabrera, who is logically remembered by the national audience for his serial whose title needs no comment: “In silence it has had to be”... but it should be remembered that Cabrera is not an isolated entity. Above him, in order of command, were the Rector of the ISA and the Minister of Culture. Because all these little bosses have a common way of operating: an opportunistic phrase of our dear Commander in Chief Fidel Castro on the lips and the barrel of the revolver that comes out from under the guayabera. One wonders, Who gave him that revolver? Who takes it away from him?

For years the antidote to ignorance, contempt and mistreatment of artists was silent stoicism, a proud version of the tropical cowardice of those who read in French and know the Orphic rite of the guild, except for a few voices of rapid extinction and little adherence. I think this historical rash suits us all very well: those who suffered from the real, televised Pavón, and those for whom the concept “Pavón” has other names and faces, equally abhorrent. It is even good for us to take out the redeeming mirror and glimpse—sooner rather than later—the Pavón that is or may be latent behind our sacred Martí conviction: with everyone and for the good of all, in the personal acts of each day.

And at this point, I wonder: Why, after so many years, does the official story continue to favor the cocky bosses on national television and in other media? Is there no regard for intellectuals and artists? Are they afraid of what we can achieve? Is it that, as we used to say in high school, “they show us disrespect”? Or is it that, deep down, we are resorting to street slang that says there are women who don’t complain no matter what you do to them and the Cuban government takes intellectuals and artists for idiots? The appearance of Pavón on television, I believe, wakes us up from rhetoric, chronic complaint and erudite protest in magazines that nobody reads, and in circles marked by the “I know that you know I know” to clarify precise attitudes against the spores of the past and the viruses of the present, expanding the radius of action. I propose:

1. That artists and intellectuals who adhere to the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national TV refrain from participating in Cuban radio and television programs until the ICRT offers a formal apology, through its media, including the national radio news and the national television newscast, in prime time.
2. That the artists and intellectuals who adhere to the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national TV summon the artist-deputies so that, through them, a formal complaint against the ICRT is presented to the Commission that is in charge of citizen ethics in the National Assembly of People’s Power.
3. That the artists and intellectuals who adhere to the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national TV summon the artist-deputies to review the constitutional irregularities and legal arbitrariness that prevent the democratic and full exercise of the activities of the guild in our socialist society and its current laws.
4. That the artists and intellectuals who join the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national TV establish a Committee for Historical Memory, whose objective is to diversify the official history of “the gray quinquennium” and provide evidence of the arbitrariness of the period. And that the information and personal testimonies, once published, can be of public consultation.
5. That the artists and intellectuals affected morally, psychologically or professionally by the cultural censorship that Pavón and other censors were in charge of leading, present a formal accusation before the revolutionary court, requesting that a case be opened against them.

6. That artists and intellectuals who join the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national television NEVER stop making the art they consider most committed to their own ideas.

P.S. And personally and in good Cuban, I propose that we shit on the mother of all the Pavóns and the little Pavóns.

Revolutionarily,  
Yasef Ananda

Yoani Sánchez

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

### **Pavón, Serguera and the revolutionary cultural policy**

The only victims of the *pavonato* were not only the writers, poets and critics who saw their creation frustrated, a paragraph crossed out or a book banned, but also all those who should have consumed and drunk from the natural channel of Cuban culture. What we had in the end was a parameterized and schematic product, with which we barely identified. Those of us who had to grow up learning texts by Virgilio, Cabrera Infante and Gastón Baquero at school saw the spectrum reduced to the unquestionable names of nineteenth-century culture and the texts of the impeccable Manuel Cofiño, whose stories and novels were not uncomfortable for the censors.

I wonder what would happen to us now if, in addition to the verse—repeated ad nauseam—of “I have what I should have,” we would have received the torn cry of “the damn circumstance of water everywhere.” Perhaps we would be more tolerant, we would accept differences better; for all mutilation and censorship ends up forming in the receiver a flat mentality in a single dimension, which is frightened when it discovers everything that has been hidden or denied to it. Several generations formed and nourished with the rigorous selection of “within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing” ended up considering artistic production as the property of others, who were granted the right to decant and filter what we were later going to know. That is perhaps (paraphrasing Dagoberto Valdés) one of the most important anthropological damages caused by the revolutionary censorship.

For the initiators of this controversy it’s easy to point out and name the causes of many of its ills, but we cannot do the same for the millions of Cubans who missed out, without even knowing that there was something more, on what we had by the mere fact of having been born in this land rich in artistic and literary talents. For my contemporaries, names like Pavón, Serguera and Quesada are only cryptic references among academics, because for us, the shadow of the parameterization and the scissors of the gray quinquennium, did not have a specific name, but were identified with the cultural policy of the Revolution. Sometimes innocence can be wise.

That same cultural policy flooded our childhood minds with Soviet cartoons that we devoured without knowing exactly what a steppe, a poplar or a fox was. Guillén’s work was privileged over that of Eliseo Diego; he made Martí seem to us—by dint of decontextualizing and manipulating him—a boring figure. In the pretense of making us the most cultured people in the world, they choked us with knowledge, but they did not teach us to debate, to reflect or to listen to one another. We repeated and traced the style of political discourses and turned art and culture into a “weapon of struggle.”

Some of those responsible for this policy have already been removed from their chairs, but the positions they held have not been removed from the structure. What other Pavón or what new Papito Serguera lurks behind the current Cuban literary and television



production. Which of its already permanent tentacles determines that the National Television News is the crude caricature of “everything inside is right and everything outside is bad?” How is it possible that even today, the few spaces for reflection and debate on the small screen are reduced to the simplicity of whether the reggaetón or the trova is better, or if fashion is a banality or a necessity. With so much to discuss, it’s frustrating that an hour and a half is devoted every day to that dull soliloquy called the Round Table, where participants shout themselves hoarse to look more revolutionary than the others. It’s inexcusable to look at the speck in the eye of our neighbor to the north, while our own story crucifies and crushes us.

If the gray five-year period has passed, why don’t we gather to mourn the death of Cabrera Infante and have the self-criticism of the atrocity that led him into exile and pushed him to his “Mea Cuba.” What new Pavón prohibits Zoe Valdés’ novels from being sold in Cuba, so that we can assess their true artistic weight and not have to wait for the Minister of Culture to discard them in our name. The long shadow of the *pavonato* still takes away the enjoyment of the novels of Jesús Díaz, Cuban to the marrow, only because some have confused culture with Revolution, and in that injustice they have ended up parameterizing not only art, but all Cubans in schematic categories such as “revolutionary,” “worm,” “puppet of imperialism” and other stupidities, as if we weren’t, like our culture, a multiple, extensive and varied flow.

It’s significant that all this debate has been carried out, precisely, by email, since—without that being the intention—it’s a way of excluding and isolating it from the general public, which doesn’t have the good fortune of having an email address of .cult. cu and is unable to pay the prohibitive price of Internet access. If “Emilio’s Way” is the highest step that Cuban intellectuals have to carry out a polemic, that shows that other means are forbidden to them. How can they be the critical conscience of a nation if they can hardly get their opinions across to those who make it up?

If the intolerance and debauchery that moved the former prosecutor, director of the ICRT, are already dust upon dust, who then sentenced the journalist Adolfo Fernández Saínz to 15 years in prison for writing what he thought? If the *pavonato* is over and Serguera just a bad memory, why does nobody give us the warm voice of Celia Cruz on national radio, so that she shakes us with that “without permission you can’t leave,” just as you can’t prune and curtail the spontaneous sprouting of our culture?

Who holds up and maintains the fence around of those who, from within Cuba, edit the digital magazine *Consenso*? Which disciple of Pavón and Serguera is behind the expulsion of Antonio José Ponte from the UNEAC, behind the commissioners who handle and discard certain books in each publishing house, behind the university professors who brandish their authority to crush the “dangerous” opinions that arise among their students, the political leaders who suggest among their subordinates that we must “get out in front” of those who think differently?

Let’s take advantage of this opportunity to debate issues that are not exclusive to intellectuals, Cubans living on the island, much less to revolutionaries. The debate must include all sectors of our society; it must give space to the criticism, to the collective and

private catharsis that have waited so long. It must value and criticize not only cultural structures but also those of a political and governmental order, passing through the weakened civic framework. We must add to this controversy the true owners of culture, those who, overwhelmed by the problems of everyday life and disillusioned by not seeing them reflected in the media, have chosen to alienate themselves from Cuban cultural production. To stop this much-needed debate would be to censor it like Pavón, a return to prohibiting it like Serguera and to parameterizing it like Quesada.

Enough of separating, confronting and predisposing ourselves against each other. You, who started the controversy, owe it to me—and to young people like me—not to let our culture be cut off. We, in turn, owe it to our children. That is the only “parameter” that we cannot breach.

### **Message from Yoani Sánchez to Orlando Hernández**

Orlando:

I get the impression (sorry, but the keyboard doesn't put the accents) that this idea of regulating the entrance to the colloquium by invitations that will be given to “the UNEAC, the AHS, the UNHIC and the UPEC; the professors and students of the ISA, the Schools of Art and the Faculties of Arts and Letters and Social Communication of the UH; the researchers of the Council of Social Sciences of CITMA and the Martin Luther King Center, as well as the specialists and cadres of the ICRT and the institutions of the Ministry of Culture” is nothing more than a strategy to leave out of the possible debate a large majority of people who are not affiliated with these institutions, or being affiliated, know in advance that the invitations won't even arrive.

Greetings,  
Yoani

### **Another message from Yoani Sánchez**

Hello everyone:

A couple of weeks have passed since the Conference at the Casa de las Américas and despite having written these notes the next day, I have debated whether to send them or not, always with the argument of the estrangement that little by little all this is producing in me. In the end I decided to do so because this complicit silence scares me.

Greetings,  
Yoani Sánchez  
Havana, February 15, 2007

### **From outside**

### **A short chronicle of what happened on January 30 outside the Casa de las Américas**

I was in the group of people who waited for more than five hours on Tuesday, January 30, 2007, with the intention of accessing the debate that under the title of “The Gray Five-Year Period: Revisiting the Term” was held at the Casa de las Américas. A wall of custodians, bureaucrats and staff of the Casa itself prevented us from doing so. The arguments were more of the same: “It’s by invitation only”; “the room is already full”; “there are architectural problems that don’t allow too many people” (an argument that was dismantled when some invited people began to leave, but instead others were not allowed to enter). Fernando Rojas himself confessed that he could do nothing about the guidance he had been given not to let pass those who didn’t appear in the meticulous lists at the entrance.

So a good part of the intelligentsia of this nation joined our parade. Most seemed not to want to notice the closed filter that operated at the entrance, which assimilated them and excluded us. Others showed solidarity and questioned why there was so much exclusivity. They weren’t many, but their support was enough. There were even some who, with the invitation in hand, preferred not to enter, seeing so much “narrow-mindedness.”

We, the excluded (symptomatically the youngest) argued, uselessly, with the staff at the door. We asked for explanations; we shouted a catchy rhyme, which said “Desiderio, Desiderio, listen to my opinion!” (surely it was not heard in the protected Che Guevara room). We collected our signatures and finally waited, those of us who could withstand the intense wind of G and Malecón, until everything was over.

Our presence out there went through different stages: at first we had the illusion that once the colloquium began they would let us pass; however, around four-thirty, it was already clear that we would miss the scheduled conferences. We were left with the illusion of accessing the time allocated for the debate. Finally, when night fell, we decided to stay to listen to what the few who wanted to answer our questions were saying when they left, and above all, so that they could see that we had stayed, despite the cold, the exclusivity and the police presence.

Many will wonder why we had so much insistence on gaining access to the room. Among those of us outside there was hope that this debate would be ANOTHER KIND of debate. We thought that, for the first time in a long time, belonging to an institution, union, exclusivist and bureaucratic concepts were going to be set aside. Perhaps we bet on something rather informal, with the Guevara room full of people sitting on the floor—as we have seen in so many concerts—and each one accessing the microphone, with discipline but without hogging it. We thought we could shed some light on the “gray quinquennium” by telling our stories, *post-pavonato* but incredibly similar. Some imagined that the words spoken in so many emails would take shape and would dare to be pronounced in front of everyone. We dreamed that we would return to our homes with the taste of having started something and not with the strange uneasiness of having been “out of the game” again.

The truth of what happened inside is only known by those who participated, but something has already leaked, and it doesn’t fit with what was dreamed. It is clear that not everyone could speak that night, but I have the impression that the long speech by the

Minister of Culture smothered the time of other very interesting statements. The space to listen to the “words of the intellectuals” was reduced. The “bogeyman” of imperialism that comes to attack us silenced many mouths again, and the same old song of “this is not the time” stopped the most cautious and warned the most daring. It’s worth mentioning the brave and heartbreaking interventions that didn’t want to let the debate be hidden, but which unfortunately seem to have remained within the walls of the Che Guevara Room.

I wonder if what should have begun that January 30 will have a greater echo than the publication of the Fonet conference. Perhaps this day will be remembered as the beginning of a series of debates, which, starting with the intelligentsia, covered all social strata. Will we who were left out have space in the next opportunity to take the microphone? Will the same old panics also flair up in front of our faces to silence us? How many things are we left out of? It’s time to make our own space to debate and reflect, without waiting to be included on a list or for an RSVP to let us in.

Despite having missed what happened inside the doors, we lived a historic event, when a majority of very young people remained, literally planted, but loudly demanding their right to be, more than admitted, a core part of the debate. So we attended “the other debate” that perhaps did not have the infrastructure and academic level of the one held in the Sala Guevara, but that sprouted spontaneously among the small groups around the Casa. Although the number of “uninvited” was decreasing as it became more unlikely that we would be allowed to pass, we managed to articulate an idea shared by all: **THERE ARE STILL MANY DEBATES NEEDED, AND WE WILL NOT CONTINUE WAITING TO BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE.**

Yoani Sánchez

## Zenaida Romeu

Translated by Regina Anavy

### **From Zenaida Romeu to Reynaldo González**

Reynaldo, the anger has long been contained. It is time for voices to be raised. I myself saw Papito Serguera's program, and I wondered why they had taken that fossil out of the worst that has happened to us by giving him a prominence that distorts reality. Those were years of relentless darkness and repression. Young people could not be in a group in a corner. Not to mention the short skirts of the girls, the directors with scissors at the door to cut the boys' hair, the Fianna [small warrior-hunter in Irish mythology] at the door if they saw us with a Beatles record. A lot of *Mozambique* [dance song by Pélé el Afrokan], because jazz was the music of the enemy. It makes my stomach turn over!!!

A kiss,  
Zenaida

Dear friends,

I was not impressed by the unnamed writing of the "Secretariat." It is so clumsy and the writing is so mediocre compared to so many other good ones that we've been reading that it seemed inadmissible that it wasn't even signed, because we have all spoken with our names and surnames.

That is why yesterday I requested that this statement-letter-opinion-decree, or whatever you can call what I received, be accompanied by the signature of the one who drafted it. For me it is a matter of principle. This has been an open platform, and I believe that the response must be thoughtful, intelligent and contain a statement that shows the personality of an institution that represents the best of the thought of contemporary Cuban society.

Zenaida Romeu