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mied

**Psychological consequences of the
mechanisms of intimidation and harassment
applied by the Cuban government to exercise
social control in the country.**



CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

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People in Need (PIN), the biggest non-for-profit, non-governmental organisation in Central Europe, presents a qualitative report based on a compilation of personal stories entitled “Tengo Miedo”. It approaches the psychological consequences brought by the intimidation and harassment exercised by the Cuban government in order to exert social control over the country. PIN is built on the ideals of humanism, freedom, equality and solidarity. It is

based in Czech Republic and is currently present in over 30 countries all over the world. Since 1997, PIN’s Centre for Human Rights and Democracy works in Cuba with the independent civil society, protecting and promoting Human Rights.

The text will aim to comprehend how the Cuban government exerts social control by applying a group of political persecution techniques and intimidation, which then cause psychological damages in the short, medium and long term to those in the island who decide to dissent, show opposition or simply raise their voices to claim for reforms. By making use of testimonies from the people affected, the day-to-day in Cuba will be analysed as well as the risks of disobeying the rules established by the government.

Our objective is to draw attention to the measures of social control which are based on intimidation, threats, defamation, emotional blackmail, social isolation, restrictions upon leaving the country, amongst others. Even though these measures are not as noticed by the international organisations and the press as the murders or the physical tortures, they also constitute violations to Human Rights and cause long lasting psychological damages.

The report is composed of an introduction, followed by the first part entitled “Cuba in context: the openness and the persistent social control” which offers the macro context of how Cuba has managed to obtain international support whilst concealing distinct forms of violence and psychosocial control. The central part of the report is “Methods of social control applied by the Cuban government and the psychological consequences of the repression” which approaches the techniques and psychological consequences brought by social control. The content in this part is based on testimonies from journalists, artists, activists, human rights defenders and other critical individuals who suffered psychosocial damage after breaking the tacit contract imposed by the government under which gratuities and social acceptance is exchanged for support to the official rhetoric. Finally, the report ends with recommendations to the Cuban State and the international community.

The objective of this initiative is to look back on and bring to light the stories of those who have suffered the effects of living under an authoritarian regime. When the repression in Cuba is analysed and exposed, the effects of everyday life are not generally considered and is often characterised by different levels of fear. For that reason, this report intends to remark the cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment present in an environment of fear which profoundly affect the wellbeing of Cubans.

INDEX

Introduction	1
Cuba in context: the openness and the persistent social control.....	4
Methods of social control applied by the Cuban government and the psychological consequences of the repression.....	6
The presence of psychological damage and mechanisms of psychosocial control from early on.....	6
Pressure and emotional blackmail based on the ideology of the victims.....	10
Job loss and the psychological consequences.....	11
Citations, interrogations and arbitrary detentions.....	14
Blackmail and recruitment attempts.....	16
Intimidation to family members and close friends.....	17
Defamation, acts of repudiation and denial to adequate housing.....	19
Social and electronic media harassment, censorship and control of public information.....	20
Regulations or restrictions to leaving the country.....	20
Retentions and additional control in airports.....	22
Confiscation of work materials.....	23
Discomfort caused by the exile.....	25
Approach to women and the LGBTI+ community.....	26
Recommendations.....	27

INTRODUCTION

« *In Cuba, many of the methods of psychological or repressive torture intend to destroy the self-image of an individual and remove from them any sort of control over their surroundings. This creates a state of helplessness, psychological regression and depersonalisation* »
Psychology Without Borders .

In May 2018, during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the United Nations Human Rights Council, Cuba received 339 recommendations from the international community: some with light criticism regarding the Millennium Development Goals¹ and others more demanding, requiring the respect and protection of the Human Rights. In the first cycles of the UPR, at least four States — Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany and Hungary — expressed in their recommendations the concern with the repressive strategies including intimidation and harassment². Other eight States — Costa Rica, Spain, Mexico, Chile, United Kingdom, Estonia, France and Tunisia — recommended that Cuba endorsed the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, criminalised torture and/or invited the Special Rapporteur on torture³.

However, the Cuban State continued to deny any reference to the lack of freedom of association and expression, political persecution, arbitrary arrests, restrictions on freedom of movement within the national territory and abroad, lack of judicial independency, censorship, internet control and the scarce diversity in the media. At the same time, it stops independent national groups and international actors from doing their jobs when they relate to Human Rights. They also do not allow the Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations to visit the island. In fact, many of the recommendations made during the UPR relate to “facilitating the requested visits” by both the United Nations and its member States.

1- The Millennium Development Goals are: 1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. 2. To achieve universal primary education. 3. To promote gender equality and empower women. 4. To reduce child mortality. 5. To improve maternal health. 6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. 7. To ensure environmental sustainability. 8. To develop a global partnership for development.

2- UPR Info, Recommendations database, <<https://www.upr-info.org/database/>>, accessed on 10th November 2018.

3- Ibid.

This report intends to identify the psychological consequences of the repressive techniques utilised by the Cuban government which intimidate those who think and act freely in order to exert social control within the country. Different measures of intimidation and the generalised fear that violate the Human Rights in Cuba will be described as well as how they affect those subjected to them.

The specialised literature often describes these techniques as mechanisms of psychological torture. Their denomination varies according to the regulation in each country. In general terms, they refer to certain actions committed by State authorities that violate Human Rights and result in psychological damage, incur suffering to the victims, diminish their faculties and damage their moral integrity⁴.

There is no international consensus as to at what point a specific harassment technique constitutes an act of torture in itself. Neither are defined the specific psychological consequences to each repressive technique. There are however concrete cases and individual life stories. The analysis of several Cuban stories allows the identification of specific techniques of repression and their psychological consequences to the people subjected to them.

The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁵ firstly defined torture legally in article 1.1: “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.”

Usually, Cuba is not cited as one of the countries where torture is a method of political coercion. The reason for this is that the Cuban government selects repressive techniques which leave no long term physical damage and cannot be easily evidenced.

In order to comprehend how Cuba avoids international commitments and how their legal principles are structured to counter the international criticism, this report describes in its first part the historical and social-political context in which people suffer psychological consequences brought by intimidation and harassment.

4- Peters, E. La tortura. Alianza Editorial, 1987.

5- United Nations General Assembly, 1987. <<https://www.ohchr.org/sp/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>>, accessed on 5th November 2018.

This report was produced between October and December 2018 by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy at PIN. It gathers information from people who have suffered any type of harassment or threat during the last 5 years and their personal stories about the psychological consequences they carry with them.

The data obtained since 2013 by the EYE on CUBA network helped identify the most common harassment and intimidation techniques in the country. A total of 5,143 cases of violations to Human Rights have been reported to EYE on CUBA. These cases do not represent the total number of violations occurred in the island during the period. The sample is qualitative and therefore represents a well-documented and sufficiently great sample to deeply understand these cases, as well as gather information about victims and perpetrators. In 2018, a total of 540 cases were reported in 12 of the 15 provinces in Cuba, with Guantánamo and Matanzas showing the highest level of violations. In regard to the gender of the victims, it has been evidenced that 59.6% of people affected are men and 40.3% are women. The most common violation of rights were deliberate arrests, restrictions to freedom of movement within the country and the right of assembly⁶.

PIN has produced this report by making use of a flexible qualitative methodology, analysing the psychological consequence of the repression integrally. The techniques applied were the participative observation via visits and interviews which took place in the country between 2014 and 2018, and the experiences onsite of several observers; as well as the analysis of the data provided by EYE on CUBA and the bibliographic and documental investigation of reports from international organisations in Cuba, the press and specialised publications.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 people from inside of the island and overseas who suffered intimidation or feared working as journalists, human rights defenders and political activists. The interviews were face-to-face or via electronic media. In Cuba, 18 people were interviewed whilst the other 6 interviewees contributed from abroad.



6- EYE on CUBA. The EYE on CUBA network of Human Rights activists collects stories in the island and in some cases provides assistance to victims of abuse. The extensive EYE on CUBA database is source to each case published on the internet. <http://www.eyoncuba.org>.

CUBA IN CONTEXT: THE OPENNESS AND THE PERSISTENT SOCIAL CONTROL

Since the Cuban Revolution, the country's diplomacy has given priority to strengthening international links, enabling the cooperation with nations from the global south through the exportation of health services and education. Thanks to their solid cooperation network, the country acquired a political status that not only allows them to avoid the observation missions but also to avoid their obligation to respect, protect and apply Human Rights.

The Cuban government has endorsed 11 of the 18 International Human Rights Instruments⁷. Cuba was assigned by the General Assembly of the United Nations as one of the members of the Human Rights Council in 2006. The country has also been reelected for the 2014-2016 and 2017-2019 cycles, thanks to the support of over 100 States⁸.

These strategical relations in the international arena have constituted a key factor for the Cuban government to move away from the Human Rights discussions which is seen as a menace to the official speech and the Cuban sovereignty. This strategy gives the government the ability to deny Human Rights violations whilst highlighting the universal access to public health and their focus on child care as examples of their commitment to the matter. In the meantime, Cuba justifies and continues with the persecution and harassment towards those who think differently as an argument to protect the independency, sovereignty and the progress achieved.

"In a besieged fortress, all dissidence is treason". The quote from the religious leader San Ignacio de Loyola was used by Fidel Castro (1959-2008) in an interview given to the Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet, published in 2006⁹. The leader would use it to justify the conviction of 75 members of the peaceful opposition to 30 years in prison in 2003. The episode would become known in history as the Black Spring. The same attitude was showed by Raúl Castro¹⁰ (2008-2018) in 2016 when during the visit of the American President Barack Obama (2009-2017) to the island he denied the existence of prisoners of conscience in front of hundreds of journalists, claiming that they were common delinquents presented as opposition.

After Raúl Castro became president, a few structural transformations in the economy took place with the approval of the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution for 2016-2021¹¹, in 2011. The modest economic steps were received with excitement after the 17th of December 2014, when the presidents of Cuba and the United States agreed the reestablishment of their diplomatic relations.

7- High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018. <<http://indicators.ohchr.org/>>, accessed on 5th November 2018.

8- High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018. <<https://www.ohchr.org/SP/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/CurrentMembers.aspx>>, accessed on 5th November 2018.









9- Ramonet, I. Cien Horas Con Fidel. Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 2006.

10- Press conference with President Barack Obama and Raúl Castro, 21th March 2016. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slj4klATQsQ>>, accessed on 5th November 2018.

11- Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution for 2016-2021, 2017. <<http://www.granma.cu/file/pdf/gaceta/Lineamientos%202016-2021%20Versi%C3%B3n%20Final.pdf>>, accessed on the 10th November 2018.

In December 2015, PIN published the report “One Year After the Historical Change”¹², calling out the Human Rights violations that still persisted during the time of economic and diplomatic openness. The report identified the inconstant repression strategies which already had a strong psycho-social aspect: “The strategies of repression have become more subtle these days, but they are still quite harsh. (...) Since the Black Spring of 2003, when the international community rose up against the disproportionate sentences imposed on 75 dissidents, the government has been more cautious about the political cost of similar measures. It has adapted its repressive methods in order to make them invisible to the scrutinising, judgmental eyes of the international community, but it has not reduced the level of pressure or control over the opposition. (...) Activists are illegally kept in cars that circulate around the town to let some time pass before they are released, or just parked out in the sun. After an hour or sometimes even after several hours, the activists are usually taken to the outskirts of the city or town where they live and are abandoned there with no means of getting back home.”¹³

In November 2017, two years later, the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement was applied provisionally, allowing the Caribbean nation to amplify their relationship with the European Union. Therefore, Cuba was able to continue to foment the feeling of change which was again accentuated on the 19th April 2018, with the election — for the first time in nearly 60 years — of a candidate who did not belong to the historical generation of communist, military leaders. The new President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel, announced the beginning of a process of constitutional reform which will result in the Carta Magna¹⁴, due in February 2019. For its implementation, over 50 laws in Cuba will suffer modifications until 2021. Nevertheless, the possibility of political openness — which could put an end to the intimidation, threats, harassment and other techniques which enforce social control and cause psychological damage in the island — seems to be diluted ever so quickly.

 <p>Constitution of the Republic Recognises the single party system. Restricts freedom of association and the press. Non-existence of the Constitutional Court and absence of judge's independency.</p>	 <p>Penal Code Severe sanctions against independent associations. It includes the crime of "pre-criminal social dangerousness"</p>	 <p>Access to justice There is no independence of Court, nor of the judges or lawyers. The judicial system can easily be breached by the State Security.</p>	 <p>Communication Policy In July 2018 the first Communication Policy of the State and the Government was approved. It does not recognize the plurality of media in the country.</p>
 <p>Law 88 or "Ley Mordaza" Penalizes those who accumulate, reproduce and disseminate materials critical of the system; whoever collaborates with radio and television stations, newspapers, magazines or other foreign media.</p>	 <p>Law of Associations Gives the competence to the Ministry of Justice to approve or reject civil society organisations. In practice, all independent initiatives are blocked.</p>	 <p>Decree Law 349 Artists are prohibited from operating in public or private spaces without the prior approval of the Ministry of Culture of Cuba.</p>	 <p>Constitutional Reform It gives prerogatives to the military powers and strengthens the capacity of the State to impose its will expeditiously.</p>

12- People in Need. One Year After the Historical Change, 2015. <<http://cubalog.eu/wp/espanol/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CUBA-2015-Un-a%C3%B1o-despu%C3%A9s-del-cambio-hist%C3%B3rico-informe-sobre-la-situaci%C3%B3n-de-los-derechos-humanos.pdf>>, accessed on the 10th November 2018.

13- Ibid.

14- The project grants constitutional rank to the changes deployed by Raúl Castro; emphasizes the superiority of the Communist Party of Cuba against the Law; it grants prerogatives to the military powers and strengthens the capacity of the State to impose its will expeditiously. Recently, the article that endorsed gay marriage was deleted from the draft Constitution.

METHODS OF SOCIAL CONTROL APPLIED BY THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE REPRESSION

The society and the ways of living and thinking are structured by the mechanisms of social regulation against the alleged defence of the besieged fortress from the “imperialist enemy”¹⁵. This alleged purpose legitimates all the actions of the Cuban State.

The forms of repression in Cuba have distinct purposes: to bend free will, to discourage criticism and demoralise critics, to cause damage to social and individual structures and — by playing up with emotional factors such as ire and vengeance — simply make the opponent suffer. All these purposes, without exception, intend to cause psychological effects: modify behaviours, cognitions, desires and yearnings. “In the island, the psychological consequences suffered by the people are not far away from those described internationally within countries with more visible torture techniques. The repressive techniques in Cuba cause depression, anxiety, paranoia, eating and sleeping disorders, substance abuse — alcohol, benzodiazepines and psychiatric medications in general — and impulsiveness. The objective of the repressor is to inflict fear on the victims and that this fear paralyses them until they’re no longer causing bother”, explains the specialists from the Psychology Without Borders foundation, who have supported victims of the repression in Cuba since 2014.

The presence of psychological damage and mechanisms of psychosocial control from early on

The people interviewed agree that even though the repressive techniques and their psychological consequences are more visible when suffered by journalists, human rights defenders and political activists, the issue is actually more complex. Over the years, Cuba has engrained a whole system of psychosocial control which generate effects in the early stages of life. “Before the day we begin to understand our place in this planet and in the universe, the reason for our existence, the possibilities of the afterlife, the complexity of our bodies and our soul, we learn to distinguish the authorities, the service to the public power, the nation’s heroes, the slogans, the truths no one wants to hear, the hypocrisies, the admiration to the leader and the respect for the State”, recently described the Cuban lecturer Juan Antonio Fernández¹⁶ for Cuba Posible¹⁷.

15- Ramonet, I. One Hundred Hours With Fidel. Cuban Council of State, 2006.

16- Juan Antonio Fernández Estrada had his contract as a lecturer of Law at the Universidad de La Habana suspended for collaborating with the OnCuba magazine, a medium vastly diffused in the island.

Information available in: Penton, M. ‘No es porque escribas, es por lo que escribes’, le dicen a profesor despedido en Cuba. La Habana 26 de octubre de 2016 <<https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article110541172.html>>, accessed on 11th November 2018.

17- Estrada, J. Cuba Posible. Testimonio razonado de un revolucionario inutilizado. 6th May 2018 <<https://cubaposible.com/testimonio-razonado-revolucionario-inutilizado/>>, accessed on 20th November 2018.

The teenagers and adults in Cuba — the ordinary people — have to learn to live in fear inside an extremely politicised system. According to the Director of the Centre for Political Studies and Alternatives to the Democratic Transition in Cuba, Énix Berrio, “it’s not only about the criminalisation of the opposition with common offences, but also the way in which all the life processes are politicised, turning into “culpable” those who demand reforms, even when they don’t distance themselves from the socialist rhetoric¹⁸. In Cuba everyone in one way or the other lives in the middle of a ‘war’ against imperialism. As a citizen, all our notions of politics and society are limited”.

Some people won’t even recognise themselves as victims of this psychologically oppressive system. The “witch hunt”¹⁹ is not limited to those who maintain links to international actors, Human Rights groups and international organisations such as the United Nations or the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The machinery that controls the public opinion and self censorship has established a hermetic society in Cuba, described recently by International Amnesty as a mental prison²⁰.

Thus, the Cuban State inflicts psychological pressure over the entire society when they regulate daily life, jobs, transport and the access to basic needs. This is complemented by the exaltation of political leaders with a hierarchical authority; the excessive use of propaganda; and effective surveillance techniques applied by agents of the Department of State Security.

The misinformation about the exterior and the persistent need to defend themselves as a “fortress besieged”²¹ have generated a feeling of moral commitment, which intends to present the idea of an ideological unit.

“A lot of people are convinced that their situations are much better than in the rest of the world, precisely because they don’t know any different. Human Rights are not understood as such, but as gifts from the Revolution. It’s a vicious circle. You live in your own prison. Each Cuban is their own cell. And to break away from that is difficult. It requires questioning everything that you’ve known

18- Starting in 1959, the country was restructured in a process named “socialist emulation”. For instance, for many years those who finished in the highest ranks of this emulation within their workplace received “awards” (that is: white goods, holidays and cars). But the emulation doesn’t take place for labour reasons, but political ones. Thus, the more they integrate themselves with the political system, the more benefits they receive. According to the Collaborative Cuban Encyclopedia at RED (ECURED), the socialist emulation “is presented as a way in which the creative, conscious and free spirit of the broad masses of the people is developed, enabling them to manifest their aptitudes and their talent” <https://www.ecured.cu/Emulaci%C3%B3n_socialista>, accessed on 11th November 2018.

19- The term, popular in Cuba, refers to the way in which the Department of State Security, the officials of the Communist Party of Cuba and other structures control all life in the country, from publications to artistic creation, picking out those that can represent a danger to the system, simply by expressing their ideas.

20- Amnesty International report in 2018. Cuba. Mecanismos de control de la libre expresión y sus efectos Intimidantes en la vida cotidiana. <<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR2572992017SPANISH.PDF>>, accessed on 30th November 2018.

21- Ramonet, I. One Hundred Hours With Fidel. Cuban Council of State, 2006.

since you were little”, explains the journalist Rafael Gordo, after being questioned by the political police for 6 hours without a court order or criminal proceedings, in July 2018.

« *The system crushes you. It makes you feel like a traitor, guilty for not feeling grateful for your free health or education. Your friends and neighbours view you as a plague. But they are also victims without comprehending it. You feel like you don't fit in your own country* »

The citizens are victims and at the same time accomplices of these mechanisms of social regulation. They operate in the entire social web and abruptly attack those who decide to openly show opposition in the workplace, community or public spaces. This social contract offers them rewards in exchange for support to the officialism.

According to Karla María Pérez²², a student who was expelled from the Universidad Central de Las Villas Marta Abreu for belonging to the political opposition group Somos+²³ in April 2017, “the hardest part is that sometimes people don’t want to have a position. The indoctrination begins as soon as one is able to think and express themselves. People know what has happened historically with the Cuban dissidence²⁴ and would rather avoid it. Neutrality is a lie. They always end up in a demonstration for Che or shouting ‘Viva Fidel’ on the 1st of May.”

The former lecturer from the Universidad Central Marta Abreu de las Villas, Julio César Fariñas²⁵, who was expelled for organising a local independent initiative in favour of self-employment, agrees: The saddest thing is that these repressive techniques take place in Cuba on a daily basis, but when you are inside the official structure you don’t even notice it, until it happens to you”.

22- As a consequence of the harassment by agents of the Department of State Security, Karla María Pérez González had to leave the country. She is currently studying journalism in Costa Rica.

23- A political movement founded by Eliecer Ávila. In February 2008, this young man directly confronted Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power, during a meeting when he was a student at the Universidad de Ciencias Informáticas in Cuba. Later he founded the organization Somos +, a political movement that currently seems disjointed.

24- It is a popular expression in Cuba. It refers to the way the opposition has been traditionally repressed.

25- In May 2017, the then lecturer Julio César Fariñas was also expelled from the same university. After developing an independent project to support the self-employed union with overseas fund, Julio was summoned to an expedited meeting in the presence of his co-workers and agents of the Department of State Security.

“ They convince people that you are a mercenary, or any of the other adjectives that you hear since you are little, without realising that all it takes to be seen as such is to attempt to take the reins of your life.” »

Faced with the inability of having an open dialogue about the conflicts in society, the Cuban State immediately silences any symptom of critical thinking and thus maintain a firm psychosocial control. It is the case in the workplace, schools or in the neighbourhood. Therefore, as explained by Carlos Viltre, who develops projects focused on afrodescendants, those who “decide to raise their voices using the named ‘correct channels’ and end up seen as ‘conflicting’ also suffer. At times they suffer just as much as those who demonstrate in the streets and get beat up. You can’t compare. These are different contexts. But the suffering is the same because the damage is psychological. They risk losing everything. Cuba works with social communities. The neighbours are at times family. You can’t say: I’ll move away because I don’t like it here. You are forced to stay. And this in the long run will destroy you inside.”

In June 2016, for instance, a group of young journalists, during a meeting at the Union of Cuban Journalists, read a document in which they denounced the persecution they were suffering after their collaborations with alternative non-governmental media outlets whilst working with the Vanguardia newspaper, an organ of the Communist Party of Cuba in the province of Santa Clara. In an interview to the newspaper 14yMedio²⁶, Carlos Alejandro Rodríguez, one of the signatories of the document, stated that “ the structures of the Communist Youth Union harassed us at municipal and provincial level and tried to persuade us to sign and publish a mea culpa.” After that, the other reporters would walk away when running up to them in the corridors or looked at them with a look of fear in their faces.²⁷

After decades of propaganda and defamation against the dissidence, the idea that journalists, human rights defenders and activists are “counterrevolutionaries” has been incorporated in Cuba. Claudia Padrón, a journalist graduated at the Universidad de La Habana, says that she never dares to present herself as an independent journalist: “People have it as a stigma because giving a statement can cause them trouble.”

26- Escobar, L. Los medios independientes “abren las puertas de la imaginación y la creatividad”, Miami, 11th November 2018 <https://www.14ymedio.com/entrevista/Vanguardia-prensa-medios-independientes-periodistas_0_2544945485.html>, accessed 20th November 2018.

27- Ibid.

Pressure and emotional blackmail based on the ideology of the victims

Specialists from the Psychology Without Borders argue that one of the most common questioning techniques — through which they intend to bend the victims and create emotional alterations — is the identification of weak links in their philosophical, moral and ideological opinions. This means attacking those being questioned using their own discursive systems, be it via a simulation of an ideologic conspiracy or calling out hypocrisies in the victim's criteria. In Cuba, this can be described as the popular phrase “play the enemy's game”.

For instance, it has been observed that the term “centrism” was quickly diffused to marginalise the new group of Cubans who were critical of President Barack Obama's visit to Havana. Several articles in various Cuban newspapers used the term “centrism” as a new stream that sought to achieve “ideals of annexation to the United States” by using “false left-wing ideologies”²⁸. Spokespeople from the Communist Party of Cuba such as Enrique Ubieta²⁹, Elier Ramírez³⁰ e Iroel Sánchez³¹ spread the idea of a new political enemy. Consequently, this has facilitated the harassment and intimidation of parts of the population who did not seek to change the political structure but did want concrete changes in areas such as economy, culture, or in specific laws.

“This violence leaves no visible footprints, it comes from the progressive manipulation of feelings. I suffered severe psychological damages and they led me to deep depression. ‘You have 2 children, a family, a job, a house’ — they reminded me. You realise how your privacy is always exposed. They watch you, persecute you and question those who visit you, including friends of your children, who are completely innocent”

This was corroborated by Ileana Álvarez to People in Need. She is a writer who in 2016 decided to undertake the Alas Tensas project, the first independent feminist magazine in Cuba. It is interesting to remark that the magazine collaborators were in no way linked to the opposition, but to official institutions like the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and the Union of Historians. Nevertheless, the writer has stated that “left-wing feminists from other countries, who identify themselves with the Revolution — one of which was questioned after leaving my house — couldn't understand why they were attacking a project whose tradition was linked to the progressive left-wing.”

28- Mederos, L., Ramos, J. Cuba Posible. Introducción a un debate en torno al “centrismo”. <<https://cubapossible.com/introduccion-debate-centrismo>>, accessed on 22nd November 2018.

29- Following several of his articles on CubaDebate, a crucial battle was unveiled by the authorities against the new wave of left-wing and centre-left wing voices in the country.

30- Canedo, E. La tercera vía o centrismo político en Cuba. La Habana, 30 de mayo de 2017 <<http://www.cubadebate.cu/opinion/2017/05/30/la-tercera-via-o-centrismo-politico-en-cuba/#.XAEod2hKJIU>>, accessed on 11th November 2018.

31- Journalist and spokesman of the Cuban government. He has made public his link to Cuban intelligence. He publishes his articles on the blog “La pupila Insomne” <<https://lapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/>>, accessed on 11th November 2018.

Over the past 5 years, the Cuban media context has become slightly more diverse and plural with the appearance of some media outlets known as “alternatives”³², the peak of independent artists and the irruption — even if slowly — of the internet in the country. Nevertheless, the optimism generated seems to crumble as the harassment and intimidation are extended to other minimally critical sectors.

In an interesting analysis about this panorama published on the Cuba Posible website in May 2018, the lecturer Juan Antonio Fernández wrote: “Somehow, we have come to the point where all sins can be committed against the socialist tradition but the only one that is punishable is the ‘meddling’ with politics. In Cuba, in 2018, you can be a racist, homophobic, sexist, and even an embezzling communist militant with inclinations towards capitalist countries. But the only thing that can’t be overseen is the political doubt, the awkward question about an issue that everyone knows is ‘delicate’.”

In summary, the fact that one cannot express an opinion different to that established by the State has promoted a unilateral vision in Cuba, which endangers not only democratic aspirations but, most importantly, it brings psychological consequences through the intimidation and repression of those who dare to think differently.

Job loss and the psychological consequences

On 7th June 2014, the Official Record of the Republic of Cuba published Law 116 of the Labour Code.³³ The document touched on modern aspects like gender and sexual orientation discrimination. However, it did not include discrimination for matters of opinion. In all interviews conducted for this report, it was agreed that job loss is one of the means through which many people in Cuba are subjected to psychological pressure. With losing their jobs comes the loss of a salary and the possibility to access other jobs.

Even though the project of constitutional reform³⁴ recognises the private property for the first time, it does not mention the right to strike nor does it favour the freedom of association. State jobs continue to make 70% of the labour force in the country. However, those who move from State jobs to the private sector are also harassed by the political police. They pressure business owners to fire anyone who are politically persecuted or their families. This emotionally destabilises human rights defenders, political activists and those persecuted as they are forced to remain in a limbo of unemployment and illegality which makes them prone to economical and social marginalisation.

32- Between 2012 and 2018 various new media outlets appeared in the country. They gradually began to be known as “alternative” due to their refusal to be named as “independent”, a term journalists of political opposition are regularly associated with. The alternatives, on the other hand, constitute a force located within what is known as the “grey area”, those who do not adhere to traditional dissident groups but also do not carry out political activism.

33- Labour Code of the Republic of Cuba, 2014.

34- New project for the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 2019 <<https://www.cubanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Constitucion-Cuba-2019.pdf>>, accessed on 18th January 2019. The project grants constitutional rank to the changes deployed by Raúl Castro; emphasises the superiority of the Communist Party of Cuba against the Law; it grants prerogatives to the military powers and strengthens the capacity of the State to impose its will expeditiously. Recently, the article that endorsed gay marriage was deleted from the draft Constitution.

The political activist from Holguín, Marlon Martorell, affirmed that he has suffered different forms of harassment. He has been jailed in several occasions and has been physically abused in the detention centres where he was imprisoned. Besides, both he and his family suffered the emotional consequences of job loss. "In 2010 we were fired from our jobs as teachers. My wife and I are licensed in Education".

« *We were prohibited contact with children and adolescents due to the political ideas we profess. This has impacted our family, with all that it entails in the social, political, cultural and economic aspects. Beside the personal difficulties, you also have to explain to your children when they grow up that you can't work* »

Something similar happened to Mariño, a collaborator for the La Hora de Cuba³⁵ magazine at the province of Camagüey. "Intolerance is intensified today. I lost my job as a lecturer at the Academia de las Artes Vicentina de la Torre." Her son was a student there and for that reason the psychological consequences were even bigger for her. "How do you explain that to your son? It's an unbearable agony."

Between July and August 2016, the journalist Ramírez was fired from the Radio Holguín radio station after publishing in his blog the transcription of the words of Karina Marrón, the subdirector of the Granma newspaper. She had warned during a meeting of officials that similar protests to those of Summer 1994 could take place in Cuba if the cuts to electricity returned³⁶. "Every one at the radio started to see him negatively, because he was described as someone who had been paid by 'the enemy'. This is very difficult in Cuba, because co-workers will destroy your whole life and your emotional stability. And not because they think differently to you but because they want to stay out of trouble", informed in an interview a former colleague of the journalist José Ramírez, who did not want to reveal his identity due to his workplace links to the government.

It has been identified that the dismissals or contract cessations generally have as a common key point the presence of officials from the Department of State Security in the workplace. According to the biologist and environmental activist, Isbel Díaz, "if the directors are pressured, they generally give in and fire or punish workers claiming administrative causes [almost never political]. These procedures are usually done behind the workers' back. It is about preventing them from going to labour trials, which are also manipulated by the administration".

35- The magazine La Hora de Cuba is an independent project of local circulation that is published in PDF and circulates in USB devices amongst the inhabitants of the island.

36- 14yMedio, José Ramírez Pantoja, journalist (Holguín), Havana 27th December 2016 <https://www.14ymedio.com/destacamos/Jose-Ramirez-Pantoja-periodista_0_2131586827.html>, accessed on 14th November 2018.



The educator and activist against racial discrimination, Carlos Viltre, presented an application for employment to the Department of Human Resources at the Universidad de La Habana at the end of the 2017-2018 academic year. Days later he was denied the position under the argument of not admitting “counterrevolutionaries”. “It became clear that because of that I wouldn’t be able to return to any universities in Cuba. This changes your whole life.”

An artist who has asked to remain anonymous was also pressured to leave the gallery where he used to work. “They interpret my work as defying and they don’t allow me to sign up to the Creators Registry, and for that reason I can’t legally sell my work or promote my artistic creation. This affects you financially, but it also affects your family, it causes a disunion. Others will make you feel responsible for it and in the long run a feeling of guilt takes over your mind.”

Frequent psychological damage, due to repressive techniques:

Psychopathologies manifested in the form of:

Stress and anxiety: When one lives in a context of unpredictability one expects a threat occur at any moment. This is the named “expectation anxiety”; nothing is happening right now; but something could happen at any moment.

Depression: When an individual is subjected to a prison from which they cannot escape, the individual gets depressed, regardless of the situation.

Somatisation: The manifestation of physical illnesses originated from psychological stress including stomach problems, alopecia, heart conditions, dyspnoea, sweating, mouth dryness and gastrointestinal pains.

Sexual dysfunctions: They result in the deterioration of relationships and the matrimony. They are linked to sleep and eating disorders which then affect the quality of life.

Emotional, cognitive and personality manifestations:

Deep emotional inhibition; deep personal segregation and social rejection; overexcitement, irritability or explosions of anger; difficulty to concentrate. Hypervigilance, exaggerated responses of shock.

Another one of the techniques consists in giving victims a feeling of guilt for not demonstrating gratefulness for the benefits given by the Cuban system when it comes to education, culture, etc. This was done to Julio César Fariñas during a questioning at the José Martí International Airport after returning from an overseas trip, in April 2018. “It’s devastating. They mentioned my student life, what I achieved professionally thanks to the education I received from the Revolution. They told me I deserved to be expelled from the university. You know that’s not how things are but they manage to make you feel bad about yourself. It takes you days to re-stabilise psychologically and understand that you’re not guilty, you’re a victim.”

An anonymous independent journalist who graduated in sociocultural studies and used to work in a gallery in Havana, exposed that she was called into a meeting and analysed for several hours: “I spent days without sleeping, depressed, without knowing how to organise my life. I felt like everyone was looking at me like I was a weirdo. Little by little colleagues from work stopped calling me. It was terrible.”

Citations, interrogations and arbitrary detentions

The inclusion of the Habeas Corpus procedure in the country's new constitutional reform project is highly positive. However, the deliberate questionings and short-term detentions without record or the notification of a crime not only constitute a violation to the fundamental principles of a legal process, but also inflict severe psychological effects. Similarly, the lack of a constitutional court, the little independence of judges and the impunity of agents from the Department of State Security blatantly violate legal proceedings.

According to the report of the Cuban government for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, “since November 2014, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic established alternative ways of serving citizens, with the purpose of expanding the mechanisms and channel the concerns and/or complaints of the population.”

“However, neither the Habeas Corpus nor the mechanisms to serve the citizens are granted to those who suffer persecution and harassment for their activities related to independent journalism or Human Rights. Neither does the existence of these procedures compensate for the psychological consequences of being persecuted in Cuba. In fact, in innumerable occasions those who suffer intimidation by agents of the Department of State Security do not recourse to these mechanisms as that would generate stress and more intimidation if that was used against them.”

One of the most common methods of psychological pressure is the use of official citations. These are regularly executed by dependencies of the Ministry of the Interior such as the National Revolutionary Police and the Directorate of Immigration of Cuba.

These receive instructions from the Department of State Security, an entity which uses these dependencies to cover up their operations. At times, the citations are delivered in front of neighbours or acquaintances with the intention to cause social rejection which destabilises psychosocially those who will be interrogated. The objective is to generate constant concern amongst the victims so they consequently cease their activities as journalists, human rights defenders or political activists.

Street artist Yulier Rodríguez from Havana, who has been summoned for interrogations several times, was arrested in August 2017 and threatened to be taken to trial if he did not destroy his murals. Yulier says:

« *the interrogatories affected me psychologically, causing me to have a breakdown, anxiety and obsessive disorders with severe effects to my sleep cycles. I had to make use of psychiatric medication for a long time in order to gain back stability* »

Ileana Álvarez explained how she suffered the consequences of the interrogatories undertaken with women involved in her project. “Your feelings of guilty increase when you find out the magazine collaborators were also questioned. They were asked to stay away from Alas Tensas, they were threatened with their jobs, they were prevented from leaving the country. There is a moment when you don’t trust anyone, you doubt the few who get closer. You isolate yourself and feel fear.”

Besides, there is a demonstration of excessive force by the police when they carry out search operations in the homes of artists, journalists and political activists. It is common the use of riot police, dogs and departments specialised in the search for drugs, terrorism, etc. The authorities resort to fear through violence, given their inability to convince them using other methods.

Having belonged to the opposition movement Damas de Blanco, Magaly Otero worked in the independent news agency Hablemos Press. In 2017, she exiled herself in Miami where she currently resides. She says about the abuse she suffered: “At times they showed me a draft file with my picture on it to threaten me with prison. I’ve been in cells for over 24 hours without a toilet. At times they had me for hours in a fully enclosed patrol car under the sun and in deserted places, where I would then be abandoned.”

The oppositionist Marlon Martorell has been arrested several times in over 10 years. He said that in the majority of cases excessive force was used. The activist has been beat up in front of his daughters and wife: “In November 2013, I was mistreated in front of my daughters, which caused them problems to sleep at night. I had to give them medication from that day on.” The arbitrary detentions not only affect the trust in the justice system but also brings psychological consequences, promoting episodes of stress, anxiety and fear, aside from socially stigmatising the victims.

In July 2018, after doing an internship organised by the Universidad EAFIT in Colombia, the journalist Rafael Gordo was interrogated at the Department of State Security in the province of Camagüey. Two officers pressured him by telling him that “I was on the wrong side and I would regret it if I

didn't apologise." The journalist said: "In Cuba when this happens a lot of people in your circle disappear forever. Your family pressures you. Overseas friendships start to slip away and they ask you not to publish pictures with them on Facebook, because they fear being linked to the dissidence".

In September 2016, Tania Reyes, a coordinator for the community project Nueva Esperanza in the province of Cienfuegos, travelled with her husband to the province of Pinar del Río to take part in a training course at the Centro Convivencia, a space for dialogue amongst citizens directed by Dagoberto Valdés. "They waited for us at the coach station in Pinar del Río. They forced my husband to call the Convivencia to inform them that we had been detained. They took us to the police and then to the national highway. Then the police stopped two lorries. They took me to one and my husband to the other. They told the drivers to leave us in Havana. I suffered terrible agony on the way." She argues that she has suffered from stress since 2003:

I even had medical treatment. I started having unbearable chest pains 5 years ago. Then I developed digestive disorders. I felt shortness of breath and fatigue. My heart rate was constantly on the limit with constant taquicardia. I started feeling dizziness and losing my balance. I lost weight uncontrollably

In November 2017, a couple of agents from the Department of State Security reported at Carlos Viltre's house. "My mother was present. They told me that all the harassment to my wife at work was related to my independent studies on race in Cuba. On that same day, the agents from the Department of State Security and the director at her workplace had called her in. They ended up causing our divorce."

Another intimidation method observed is the use of common police cases. In Cuba, many people are forced to take part in "illegal activities" to survive, for instance to make purchases in the black market. In Cuba, the legal economic activities are the ones proposed by the government or authorised by it, anything else is considered to be illegal. Therefore, in several occasions the police turns a blind eye to the informal markets, except when it comes to dissidents, journalists and Human Rights activists.

Blackmail and recruitment attempts

The intelligence institutions in Cuba make use of emotional blackmailing, promising tranquility in exchange for the victims showing regret and deciding to cooperate. It is interesting to mention that 6 of the 24 people interviewed, who self-denominate as "alternatives", will not go into certain wi-fi spaces with other people of their unions or their former circle of friends to avoid endangering them.

The situation is more difficult for intellectuals, who find themselves unable to receive benefits like training and prebends for work materials, as well as the possibility of publishing material. By means of "salvation" the political police offers guarantees of normality in exchange for guilty plead.

For this reason, Alejandro Hernández, who writes for several independent media outlets, often has his home under surveillance. He has been interrogated and detained in several occasions:

« In December 2017, I was detained at the offices of the PNR at Zanja Street in Central Havana by someone who was allegedly named Jorgito and was the head of the Section 21 of the Department of State Security. He referred to himself as 'the diplomat of the 21'. I was blackmailed and threatened by him and his assistant Camilo, who explained that if I didn't work with him I could end up in jail. »

However, Karla María Pérez remarked that when it comes to women there is greater manipulation, since "sexism is engrained in the officialism. They believe that because you are a woman you might give in easily or even kneel." She continues: "The 'comrade who took care of me' was effectively a young male who tried to become my friend. In our first conversation he greeted me with a kiss. Details that one later analyses and finds it's a barbarity."

Likewise, it has been identified that in certain locations in the country the psychological consequences can be worse. If one lives in Havana, where the environment is more cosmopolitan, one would probably find greater popular support, which gives psychological resilience to society in face of the intimidation and blackmailing coming from the State.

Intimidation to family members and close friends

The psychological consequences for families are ultimately manifested through the suffering caused by their emotional link to the victims or because they are directly abused themselves. According to Yulier Rodríguez, this is one of the most difficult aspects: "my mother suffers from schizophrenia and all the actions against me have destabilised her psychologically. Each time something happens to me, she becomes depressive and suicidal."

For women it is even worse, given the fact that they are generally the ones to carry greater responsibility for bringing up the children. Tania Reyes explains: "My children were discriminated in school. The other parents and teachers were told that they were children of 'counterrevolutionaries'. My daughter had all the skills to be a gymnast and she wasn't accepted. They argued that she could not represent the school as a pioneer."

Something similar took place with the daughters of Magaly Otero. "My daughter Juliette, only 14 years old at the time, was expelled from her pre-university school simply for being the daughter of a 'counterrevolutionary'. Doris, my other daughter and single mother, couldn't work anywhere for the same reason. My family, my daughters and my mother suffered each time I was arrested, which most times happened in front of them. I would never tell them, despite their insistence, where I was conducted or the reasons for my arrest. It's something truly destructive."

Due to the pressure and intimidation his wife suffered, Carlos Viltre found himself forced to leave the family home in April 2018 so he would not cause problems to his daughters. He says that he has suffered from anxiety, insomnia, nervousness and symptoms that required psychological attention.

The journalist Alejandro Hernández had been granted custody of his daughter, however due to his activities as a journalist his two children were taken away from him in October 2008, as means of coercion:

« The 1st Lieutenant Flores, along with a social services officer, introduced himself and told me: ‘you either hand your children over to social services or I’ll accuse you of child kidnapping »

Months later the court ruled in his favour for the children’s custody but he was never allowed to have them back. “At first I was allowed to see them at their mother’s house, where the court had taken them to. But since 2010 I’m not allowed to see them. I was always told that this decision could be changed if I wanted, but I would have to collaborate with them”, he comments. Besides, Alejandro does not know where his own mother is buried. They convinced her that her son was “a scum, a worm” and she did not speak to him for years.

In several occasions, agents from the Department of State Security make use of the families in which there are pro-revolution members so the family members themselves harass the victims. The father of Iris Mariño shouted at her: “violence was never used in my house but in March 2017 my father threatened me. He would rather recur to violence than to recognise a different way of thinking. What greater psychological damage than this?” She went through 10 interrogatories and one detention. “The pressure is always towards my son’s stability. One time, 8 officers arrived on my son’s birthday. The house, prepared for the party, became a place filled with uniformed officials.”

In 2018, the independent press reported on how the Cubanet reporter Augusto César San Martín suffered the effects of the pressure against his wife and mother. Amongst the threats to his wife was the imprisonment of the journalist, “which would bring a lot of suffering” to her little son³⁷. One of the agents said he had the power to deny entry in Cuba to the mother and sisters of Augusto César San Martín, who live in the United States.

In April 2018, the daughter of Cubanet journalist Gladys Linares, Yudania Moné, was summoned to the Immigration offices in the city of Diez de Octubre where an officer ordered her to persuade her mother to stop writing.

37- Cubanet, 8th July 2018 <<https://www.cubanet.org/destacados/seguridad-del-estado-cita-la-madre-del-periodista-augusto-cesar-san-martin/>>, accessed on 25th November 2018.

What happens when the interrogatories, detentions or the pressure to the families have no effect? The government then makes use of the acts of repudiation against the opposition. The acts of repudiation are how the government reacts by encouraging violent demonstrations, intimidation and humiliation when someone or an organisation disagrees with the action or the understanding of the government actions.

Independent journalists who preferred to remain anonymous exemplifies: “generally, it can be done via clashes in public or in your own home, or making use of the named quick response brigades. That is, people recruited by the repressive apparatus or soldiers dressed in civilian clothes who are willing to beat, paint offences on the facades of our homes, remove opposition posters, or shout insults in any demonstration no matter how peaceful they are,” she comments.

Abel Hernández, an environmentalist from Sancti Spíritus, had similar experiences when “people would stop responding to our greetings and started looking at us with hatred and silence. Others laughed and said we were crazy. A while later they shouted scoundrels, bandits, mercenaries and traitors. After that, they would shout loudly that we were villains and that we were wasting our youth.”

As for Tania Reyes, she feels that one of the main consequences of the defamation and the acts of repudiation is the paranoia you carry for life. “They start the war in your own family, using the people who surround you (neighbours, friends, acquaintances) and this makes you doubt everyone. You don’t know if those by your side really support you or if they’re being used so at any moment they incriminate you for something you’ve not done.”

One day, the front wall of Iris Mariño’s home was painted with phrases like “dissident, oppositionist, mercenary”. She has also had animal excrement thrown at her door. “It’s difficult. Our sleep has turned into a permanent watch.”

In April 2018, the legal advisor at the Asociación Pro Libertad de Prensa, Odalina Guerrero, received a notification from her landlord to leave the house as soon as possible. In May 2018, the journalist at La Hora de Cuba, Sol García, was ordered by her landlord to leave the house where she lived with her little son immediately. The Cuban government uses defamation as ways of persuading landlords to evict the dissident families from their properties. The independent voices of the civil society coming from other provinces are prohibited from living in Havana, as a consequence of the deliberate use of the Law 217 from 22nd April 1997 which establishes the Internal Migratory Regulations for the City of Havana and its Contraventions³⁸.

38- Decreto Ley de Regulaciones Migratorias Internas para Ciudad de la Habana, 1997

Social and electronic media harassment, censorship and control of public information

In 2018 the process of computerisation of Cuban society and the implementation of the electronic government have been priorities of the current President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel. However, there is not a Public Information Access Law which entitles people to access data from the public administration transparently.

The harassment on social media and with the use of electronic media have become more present in Cuba with the increase of access to the internet and the growing interconnection of the citizens and social media. The independent Cuban media outlets report on hacking and censorship. People denounce the hacking of passwords, profile duplications and the blocking of accounts for internet provider Nauta. The Cuban authorities spy on communications to look for weak links and favour the invasion of people's privacy with the objective to cause them emotional conflicts with their partners or loved ones, as well as to provoke rejection and social isolation.

In November 2018, the independent artist Luis Manuel Otero showed evidences of a campaign against him on his Facebook account. His neighbours received text messages in which he was accused of "dishonouring San Isidro [his neighbourhood]" and of "making a bad name for their neighbourhood and putting it in the hot zone with the police".

A couple of journalists who preferred to remain anonymous saw their relationship threatened when their private communications were invaded in December 2017 and January 2018. They both received emails with false evidence of cheating. They also had their identities stolen on Facebook. "This leaves you absolutely paranoid. Everyone is an enemy. You doubt your cousins, friends of a lifetime. You find out that by violating all privacy laws all your calls have been heard and your conversations were read for months.", one of them explains.

Not even private medical records are protected. For instance, in 2018, at the service of the Cuban government, bloggers published the medical records of the opposition leader Manuel Cuesta's mother. There is also concerning reports about the use of medical records to blackmail several people in interrogatories and police citations.

Regulations or restrictions to leaving the country

In January 2013, with the changes to the Immigration Law in Cuba, the Cuban government recognised the freedom for all Cubans to enter and depart Cuba. In 2018, the law was updated with the elimination of the requirement of "avecindamiento", allowing under-18 children born overseas to Cuban parents to obtain the Cuban citizenship. The "qualification" of the expats' passports was also suppressed. Recreational boats and those who left the country illegally were also allowed entry in Cuba.

However, the requirements for entry are discretionary, with no legal basis. There are certainly cases where the Cuban government has not allowed people to leave the country to take part in activities or events overseas.

On 11th May 2018, the spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ravina Shamdasani, stated the concern with the deliberate ban on 14 civilians from leaving the country. “These cases suggest that additional controls are being deliberately used as a form of intimidation, pressure and harassment against certain people.”³⁹

The data obtained by the EYE on CUBA platform regarding this topic indicated that 188 complaints related to freedom of movement violations were made in 2018, which represents 35% of total cases received.

The restrictions on movement occur frequently and their effects on people’s lives are not limited to economical matters or the impossibility of taking part in events. They also represent a violation to the rights of freedom of movement from and to the State of which they are citizens. “One does not know if they’re regularised until they approach the borders”, explains one of the journalists interviewed who wishes to protect her identity. She has been prohibited of leaving the country twice, one of these times she was travelling for family reasons.

“ You spend hours in the airport. People look at you. I’ve had no sleep for a week because of this. ”

In March 2018, the government denied the departure of José Ernesto Morales, a representative of the Consejería Jurídica e Instrucción Cívica, a project created by independent lawyers in Pinar del Río. The Immigration authorities at the airport retained his documents when he tried to travel to Trinidad and Tobago to take part in a Human Rights event. In February, he was prevented from travelling to Bogota, Colombia, to watch a thematic hearing at the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.

The designer Yaudel Estenoz collaborates for several independent media and used to work for the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba in the province of Ciego de Ávila. In April 2018, the Cuban authorities did not allow him to fly to the United States to take on a masters scholarship. He had been previously summoned to the local offices of the Directorate of Immigration. Until nowadays he is a target from the State Security and cannot leave the country.

In the same month, the director of the same media outlet, Ileana Álvarez, was removed from the airplane shortly before take off whilst travelling to a gender and journalism event in Panama City. Months later, she was again stopped from taking a course on feminism organised by the Simone de Beauvoir Institute in Mexico City.

Shamdasani, R. Press release about Yemen, Cambodia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Montenegro. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 11th May 2018. <<https://www.ohchr.org/sp/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23071&LangID=S>>, accessed on 15th November 2018.

During interrogatories in 2018, Iris Mariño was blackmailed with immigration restrictions that had been imposed upon her. “They told me that it was under investigation and that it would be removed at some point. But they threatened me by saying that I would get into trouble.”

The case of Niober García is probably one of the most emblematic. In May 2017, the immigration authorities at the José Martí International Airport stopped him from leaving Cuba. The activist was travelling to Panama to take part in a journalism course and commented during an interview:

« *When I was about to enter the boarding room, a couple of immigration officials approached me, took me to an office and told me I couldn't leave Cuba, and that that was the order they had.* »

The fact he was not able to leave the country brought him many problems, for instance, the loss of the plane ticket and the accommodation reservation in Panama and he also had to wait for his checked-in luggage to be returned for several days. In another occasion, in November 2017, he had to travel to Ireland to take part in the Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders. When he attempted to go through the Department of Immigration at terminal 3 of the José Martí International Airport, the officers stopped him by claiming that he had a restriction upon him that banned him from leaving the national territory.

Retentions and additional control in airports

The retention and controls in airports also share a strong correlation with the violation of freedom of movement and the due process of law. In Cuba, people never know if they will be permitted to leave the country without hassle which promotes a feeling of uncertainty, anxiety and stress. Most people who travel to the island, do so with big luggages carrying food, home utensils, shoes and clothing due to the economical difficulties in the country. Customs impose specific rules for importation and if this is already a complex process for the citizens in general, it is even more difficult for the people who have been targeted by the government at any point in time.

In April 2018, Alejandro Hernández was detained for several hours upon entering terminal 3 of the José Martí International Airport in Havana. “According to officials, I had problems entering the country because I was “circled”. I was searched from head to toe and interrogated for at least 2 hours whilst another official checked my bags,” he comments.

That month, Julio César Fariñas was exiting the airport after collecting his luggage when a customs officer requested that he left the queue. After having his bags exhaustively checked by dogs, Julio César Fariñas was interrogated by a covered up officer. “I was visibly ill, because I’d had an allergic reaction to a medication the day before, and they still kept me for several hours asking me each and every detail about my life abroad and threatening me. You feel like these hours never end.”

The director of the publication *Árbol Invertido*, Francis Sánchez, was interrogated and retained at the airport in March 2018. The authorities seized his laptop “and then checked his personal files and found a publication on the elections and sexism in the history of Cuba”, the publication stated. Sánchez was returning from Trinidad and Tobago and he said:

« *My laptop was opened and this man asked me to put in my password and then started to rummage through my personal files.* »

Likewise, in November 2019, when trying to fly to Miami, the Cuban artists Luis Manuel Otero and Yanelys Núñez were retained at the José Martí International Airport and for that reason they lost their flight. On their return, several of their belongings were retained.

The trips to and from Cuba are stressful for the Cubans who were identified as critics of the regime by the country’s authorities, turning the experience of travelling into a traumatic one due to the insecurity and fear, as well as the economic losses.

Confiscation of work materials

The confiscation of work materials, not only in airports but also through home raids or in-public detentions, constitutes one of the techniques to intimidate those who need to generate income through their personal work materials. Magaly Ortero comments: “In 2 occasions, my home was raided by over 20 agents from the Department of State Security and the police, where they seized all my work materials like my computer, printer, cameras and mobile phones.”

In May 2018, a group from the political police, the National Revolutionary Police, a couple of witnesses and a doctor, invaded the home of José Antonio Fornaris and Amarilis Cortina, which was also the headquarters of the Asociación Pro Libertad de Prensa. They took printers, computers, data storage devices, documents, José Antonio Fornaris’ personal mobile phone and other objects.

A similar action, of which there are plenty of images⁴⁰ in the press, was taken by the police at the headquarters of the independent lawyers office Cubalex. During the raid, they took computers, printers, hard drives and client files.

40- Diario de Cuba, Cubalex: 'Está en riesgo nuestra libertad e integridad personal', 30th September 2016. Disponible en: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfsTbOLEbIQ&feature=youtu.be>>, accessed on 11th November 2018.

Frequent psychological damage, due to repressive techniques:

Emotional, cognitive and personality manifestations:

Linked to depression: Generalised anxiety, feelings of low self-worth and excessive guilt, difficulty to maintain attention, concentration or memory, thoughts about death, suicidal idealisation or intentions, damaged self-esteem and hopelessness.

Control of impulses which manifest themselves in emotional explosions and wrath, facilitating behaviours like abuse of alcohol or drugs, gambling, etc.

Problems linked to social isolation:

One of the most common methods of repression is usually the attack to the social sphere of those affected. All the areas that can be damaged are attacked in order to alter the wellbeing of the individual.

The repressed individual tends to gradually isolate themselves by staying away from family to protect

them from pain and suffering, which at times result in the complete break up of family relations.

They also do not have a support network which would be essential for the recovery from the psychological disorders aforementioned.

The damage to their social skills and relationships which then hinder potential future social relationships.



“I’m a Human Rights activist but I’m also a mother. I have a 17-year-old soon and I don’t want anything to happen to him. When it comes to women, the first thing they do is to attack their children”⁴¹, said the director of Cubalex, Laritza Diversent to the El Nuevo Herald newspaper. In the end, Laritza Diversent and the other lawyers from the office ended up exiled in the United States, between April and May 2017. “They threatened me with accusations of forgery and bribery if I return to Cuba.”⁴²

41- Penton, M., Activistas de Cubalex, el principal grupo legal opositor de Cuba, se marchan al exilio, 4th May 2017, <<https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article148713874.html>>, accessed on 11th November 2018.

42- Ibid.

Discomfort caused by the exile

As was seen with Cubalex, the exile is the last resource the Cuban journalists, human rights defenders and political activists end up having. According to the report on immigration from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)⁴³, published in 2014, Cuba is the 4th region with most expats in absolute terms.

It has been identified that even those who live abroad prefer to avoid political themes. Others also fear for their families in the island. For instance, Edilberto Reyes, a Cuban exiled in Miami for the last 10 years, explains that those who have families in Cuba will not give out statements when travelling to the island because of fear of retaliation. Yamir⁴⁴, a Cuban legally settled in Lima after leaving Havana, explains: "At times you catch yourself speaking quietly. It's like a fear that is incorporated into your life. You are careful on social media. In Cuba we say that we have a police officer inside of us."

Those who decide to emigrate due to political persecution feel that exile is a difficult experience, as it implies leaving behind their life projects. Karla María Pérez González faced exile when she was only 18 years old. "Leaving Cuba was and is, a year and a half later, a painful exercise. Especially for those who had decided never to leave. With the exile came family separation. It's the hardest thing one can face." Magaly Otero has been in exile for two years, a difficult experience for her:

« *Living in exile is like being reborn, facing new customs, learning a new language. You leave behind your whole life, your friends, your family. You do not know if you will ever see them again.* »

In August 2018, Francis Sánchez and Ileana Álvarez left Cuba to move to Spain with their youngest son. They do not know how long they will live in Madrid for, or when they will return to Cuba. "As the days go by and you make decisions you didn't want to make, the crack in your mind, emotions and body won't close up. The damage is permanent."

43– ECLAC. Tendencias y patrones de la migración latinoamericana y caribeña hacia 2010 y desafíos para una agenda regional, 2014.

44- For security reasons, his name was not disclosed.

Approach to women and the LGBTI+ community

Even though repressive methods are used with no distinction, there are social groups which are particularly harmed by them. Often, women and the LGBTI+ community receive a harsher treatment based on their condition as mothers or because of their vulnerability.

Ileana Álvarez explains: "The political system is macho in a structural way, from the top down. Therefore, any feminist act, and even more an alternative journalistic medium, will be questioned first, then discredited, and finally it will be "invited to disappear" by the forces that protect that power.

« *I was successively interrogated and abused with phrases of sexual connotation by 4 agents of the Department of State Security in police quarters. I'm always interrogated by groups of 2 or 4 men and they dare to film me or even greet me when they see me in public.- explains Iris Mariño.* »

In September 2017, journalists Maykel González and Carlos Alejandro Rodríguez, who are a gay couple, were arrested in Isabela de Sagua, Villa Clara "whilst conducting interviews with people living in the area about their experiences of hurricane Irma and other cyclones," according to the Periodismo de Barrio publication⁴⁵.

Their equipment was confiscated and they were strip-searched by officers. In November 2016, Maykel González had also gone to prison in Guantánamo where he was mistreated because of his sexual orientation. This same month, journalists from the Periodismo de Barrio were detained for several hours. In an editorial, they stated: "The 3 women who are part of Periodismo de Barrio were physically searched for potential equipment hidden on their bodies, a treatment given to pre-criminals. The men were not searched."

45- Periodismo de Barrio, La Habana 16th November 2016 <<https://www.periodismodebarrio.org/2016/10/quienes-tienen-derecho-a-contar-un-pais/>>, accessed on 10th November 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To the State, Government and the National Assembly of People's Power:

1. Endorse the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.
2. Endorse the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
3. Invite United Nations special rapporteurs to visit the country, including those in charge of the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly and association, and the situation of the human rights defenders; as well as the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions.
4. Grant the Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which visit those detained for political reasons or against security in the whole world, access to the country.
5. End the surveillance policy, the short-term arbitrary detentions, the confiscation of work means, the restrictions on freedom of movement, the physical attacks and the intimidation against independent journalists, young bloggers and reporters from the named “alternative media”, which shows a plural, original and objective view of the reality in Cuba.
6. Immediately put an end to the extrajudicial interrogatories by agents of the Department of State Security, in clear violation of the current legislation.
7. Immediately eliminate all the forms of emotional blackmail and psychological pressure upon women who are mothers.
8. Respect the rights of children and not to discriminate, abuse, or endanger the psychosocial stability of the underage population whose parents are dissidents, journalists or Human Rights activists.
9. Establish legal mechanisms to judge crimes committed against women and people from the LGBTI+ community, for reason of gender identity or sexual orientation.
10. Abolish the laws which legitimate censorship as an official mechanism of political persecution. Namely, article 53 of the Constitution which only recognises “the freedom of speech and press according to the objectives of the socialist society”; articles 72, 73 and 74 of Penal Code in Cuba which allow the “the pre-criminal social danger”; and Law 88 of the Protection of Cuba's National Independence and Economy through which the work of the press is criminalised and presented as a service to the enemy.

11. Ensure the right of access to the internet according to the international norms which protect the right to search, receive and diffuse information and ideas.
12. Put an end to online censorship.
13. Protect the private data of online users and eliminate all forms of vigilance through Nauta user accounts which allow intelligence agencies to monitor citizens in real time (specially journalists and activists), steal their identities and invade their private lives.
14. Modify the Law of Association of the Republic of Cuba to eliminate the requirement for authorisation by the Central Administration of the State and the Ministry of Justice. And allow the legal recognition of independent associations through an inclusive official registration system.
15. Stop house searches without court orders, selective interrogatories, restrictions upon leaving the country without a pending cause and other forms of harassment against non-official journalists and political activists.
16. Stop the different forms of psychological torture against journalists, Human Rights activists and defenders who are constantly attacked through subtle interrogation techniques, emotional blackmail, defamation campaigns in their local area, involvement of their loved ones, amongst others.
17. Ensure access to work for all the people without discrimination of political ideology, immediately ending the surveillance against those who think differently in the workplace.

To all Governments:

18. Establish a permanent dialogue on Human Rights matters with the Cuban government as part of the bilateral relations with the island.
19. Accompany the Cuban government with its gradual economic recovery, considering that improvements in the economy positively affect the life of the citizens.
20. Monitor the Human Rights situation in the country through reports by international NGOs and independent activists in the island.
21. Recognise the progress of the Cuban government in Human Rights matters and continue to demand the compliance to international standards.
22. Encourage exchanges, during official visits to Cuba, with members of broad sectors of civil society, including people of different political tendencies.

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It helps the dissemination of information
about Cuba. # Gender # DD.HH #Journalism



<http://www.cubalog.eu>

Support for dialogue between Cuba and
Europe. Space for articles without censorship.



People in Need - Cuba

Active citizenship is the basis of a
democratic society. Global support network.



<http://www.eyeoncuba.org>

Interactive map where the violations of
Human Rights in Cuba are monitored.



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