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Title: “Katrina” and “Filiberto”

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Who was Filiberto Ojeda Ríos? This writing is not based on a biographical account of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos. Not because it is unimportant or for lack of knowledge about it, but because I think it is much more relevant what his life represented and what his death underscores. All of this not in an absolute authoritative way, but as the one that writes remembers it, invents it to give meaning (although limited) to a collective memory that needs to shout and say pay attention to me World, I am a part and we want to be a part of a human walk/path where we re-vindicate those left aside. In this case we refer to the Puerto Rican people, which continues (we continue) to be under the U.S. colonial yoke.

In addition to a murder by the F.B.I., and the inhumanity that this bears, what happened last September 23, 2005 in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico emphasized and underscored the vulgar colonial yoke to which Puerto Rico as a people continues to be immersed, irrespective to what some political groups should prefer us to "believe". Many people will say that it is opportunist to comment on a loss and pain of a people. What I can say on this matter is that although lamentable, there are moments of calamity where it becomes possible, as a collective, to see with more clarity certain injustices.

Let's take as an example Hurricane Katrina and the devastation that it caused in the south of the United States (especially New Orleans). In addition to the sadness that such a calamity bears, what Katrina's aftermath showed was a clear and nude exhibition of a reality of racial and class repression that underlies the foundations of U.S. society. To underline such conditions is not for mockery purposes, but a necessity to be able to generate sufficient energy and will to change these structures of oppression that we do not want to see or that we do not notice during our respective routines.

Therefore, the same applies to the Puerto Rican case and the events of last Friday, September 23, 2005. Irrespective of what we think about the ideals and strategies of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, his last moments in this side of reality, ended up underscoring what he criticized during his entire life: the colonial Puerto Rican reality. And by “happenstance”, it happened on the 137th commemoration of the “Grito de Lares”. Day when a group of Puerto Ricans in 1868 undertook a rebellion against Spain's Empire and stated to the world and Puerto Rican society, we are here and present; when they stated that we do not have to be subjects, but equals. Such a movement failed from the point of

view that independence was not attained. Nevertheless, future conscious generations of Puerto Ricans have kept alive this self-esteem seed as a people.

Let's be clear, the elimination of or overcoming the colonial yoke does not mean or represents an earthly panacea. Why?; because the world that we inhabit and the history that we have inherited is replete with repressive structures of exclusion. And we must keep present these other forms of exclusion while we form movements of liberation and when we manage "to sit down" together to plan better futures without exclusion. Racism, machismo, homophobia, classism are only some examples of exploitation within which we found ourselves immersed. They are hierarchies which we have to/should repudiate/criticize and ultimately, overcome.

There are those that will label such lines of thought as adolescent, utopian, "unrealizable". I would say to these individuals that, before assigning such labels, we should think hard what they mean, they imply. Often we presume/assign slightly pejorative takes to such labels; but that is only true because we have given in our ability and power to imagine different futures. This is not only at the individual level, but also at the cultural level and in our institutional arrangements.

The Brazilian philosopher, and law professor at Harvard University, Roberto Mangabeira Unger, treats such limitations to our power of imagination (e.g., cultural and institutional) extensively and in detailed. Nowadays the use of the word imagination is associated with the "arts", the "humanities" which are presumed not to have anything to do with "reality", with our every day, with "economic development". The problem lies that the imaginative inhibition, at the individual and collective level, leads us to conclude that where and how we live today is the inevitable result of past interactions and therefore we have to venerate it and continue in the same trajectory toward the future. This way of thinking truncates the possibility to question how we arrive to where we are and it humiliates us to not thinking of different futures.

In other words: why not take the opportunity of what happened last Friday, September 23, 2005 for as a people to oblige ourselves to rethink and question how we arrive to where we are and of this process of collective catharsis to generate collective dialogues to emphasize that our current situation is not acceptable? This process of collective catharsis does not only concern Puerto Rico, therefore we are not alone (nor are we going to be alone) in this shout of not acceptance of where and how we are as a "global village". These words and exhortation do not presume the absence of conflicts, debates in the path of a project of liberation. We have to admit and accept conflicts, since fleeing from conflict simply will keep us in the status quo where exclusion (and hierarchy) prevails.

This collective invitation does not intrinsically imply outing guilty and innocent individuals because the problems that burden us as Puerto Ricans (and on a global scale) go beyond particular individuals, groups, institutions. These burdens underlie at the structural level. And as the Nobel Peace Laureate Nelson Mandela (or as he is affectionately called in his South Africa, "Madiba") indicates, "I am not truly free if I am

taking someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.”

We are all guilty and victims depending on the topic (and its extension) that we underscore, therefore the above mentioned conclusion must force us to dig deeper and more thoroughly the structural jumble where we are plunged and to have the courage of questioning the known for its injustice and proposing something different and better (more just) for the future. Although keeping present what Unger stresses, these future projections will always contain some shadow of the past, since we cannot imagine or project ourselves of, from nothingness.