

## **We are all Migrants**

with Moisés Castillo

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Writer Eduardo Galeano states that migrants are people who are tired of waiting for so long and, that with no hope left, they flee. That is the reality of those “without papers”. There are those who go in search of the “American Dream”, but there also exists the drama of those left behind or those who couldn’t cross the Bravo River.

In the midst of this global issue, artist Tania Bruguera began a project seven years ago that would give visibility to and protect the human rights of migrants. This is how *‘Immigrant Movement International’* was born, presented by Creative Time and The Queens Museum of Art. This is a long-term art project that initiates a sociopolitical movement.

Parallel to this, *The Migrant People Party (MPP)* will be created in our country, a party that will break into the Mexican electoral process on May 29. Setting out from the migration phenomenon, the party has among one of its main priorities to direct its steps towards a borderless world: where dignity has no nationality.

The *PPM* presented by the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros (SAPS), will hold a series of conversational forums with citizens, open to the general public and focused on the complex migration issue in Mexico.

Tania says that her inclination towards political art was natural: “I’m Cuban and was born in 1968, what do you expect? Having lived a revolution branded me for life.” She works between Cuba and New York. She travels constantly and tries to understand social environments. From her perspective, art needs to be real and not a representation. She explores and analyzes the relationship between art and power in her work.

Performances such as “*Auto-sabotage*” (2009) shook the audience of the 53rd edition of the Venice Biennale, when she read a few political considerations while playing Russian roulette.

That same year, in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, Colombia, she asked a member of the paramilitary, a leader of the displaced, an ex-guerrilla member and a family member of one of the disappeared: “*What is a hero to you?*” A tray with cocaine suddenly started circulating and was offered to the spectators. This action generated indignation among mass media and the students.

“I was very interested in the way the Colombian guerrilla is portrayed in mass media, and how for example, the guerilla “Che” Guevara is seen through the eyes of history. What interested me about this piece was that the audience had the option of becoming a hero or not, to guide them to a public behavior that would reveal a stance toward reality.”

The **MPP** idea emerged in November of 2005, when she witnessed in Paris, France the violent upheavals of that agitated the depressed neighborhoods of the Parisian outskirts and other regions. The upheavals started with the death of a teenager of African descent in Clichy-sous-Bois. Witnessing the indignation of the marginalized shook her up: “How could this possibly happen in France, a society that boasts freedom and brotherhood?” She was crushed by the idea that the only language that migrants had access to was violence, due to the lack of options among lies and the lack of legitimacy of political parties.

Tania presented this project to different pro-migrant cultural institutions until Creative Time, The Queens Museum of Art in New York, and the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros Mexico City supported the Cuban artists’ project. Such projects do not fit into a traditional exhibition format to display a work of art. It is a work of processes and social experiences where people live and take part in the construction of political representation.

Migrants have been shunned and manipulated by political parties in order to win votes. When they reach power they are forgotten. Now with the creation of the MPP, presidential candidates will be demanded to include in their electoral platform the concerns of those who are evicted of their land due to lack of opportunities.

## **Why create a *Migrants People Party* in Mexico?**

To me, it was very important to initiate the project in Mexico, after getting it going in New York. The United States is a country that sells itself as a place where people “are welcome”. People think that it’s a country that gives opportunities for excellence; the famous “American dream”. Immigrants know that it’s not that easy. In my projects, I’m interested in presenting contradictions between reality and government discourse. We will discuss “the breach between what you actually are and what you say you are”. Mexico is the country that has the most impact with regard to migration to the United States. Its history is also complicated because a big part of its territory was taken from it. The large amount of Mexicans that are in Arizona, Texas, how much of that is Mexican territory? We might as well think of it as a repopulation of their territory. Perhaps we should think about the relevance of concepts like nationality and of borders in a globalized world. But ironically, Mexico also reproduces some of the same injustices with migrants that are passing through their territory, similar to those suffered by Mexican immigrants in the United States.

## **How to convince people to join the *MPP* with the loss of credit towards the political class?**

We are holding a silent campaign and afterwards we will intervene in public spaces where we invite all those who want to join the party. We will constantly work with social networks due to the lack of funds, and the lack of visibility that traditional political parties have. But above all, we will work with the great sense of dignity Mexicans have. We want to work with all those who want to be identified with an attitude toward migrants that is different from the political parties that are engaged in these elections. Our idea is to change the way in which migrants are perceived because they always seem to be portrayed as delinquents. The first campaign that we have planned for May 29 and has been a collective creation and effort that parts from the idea of a young Mexican named Germán who is part of the project. It will be the image of a person riding a bike that says: “It takes me 30 minutes to get to work.” Another person riding a car: “It takes me 2 hours to get to work”. And, a third person riding the train known as “the Beast”: “To go to work, I lose my rights.” We want to create awareness that these people are just seeking work. We need to stop seeing migrants as ghosts and understand that they are an active and positive part of our society. The temporality of migrants is complex and is generally associated with a type of unstable compromise because one might think: “I’m going to stay a year” and it becomes 5 or 10 or they need go back. But what happens with all their work and all the help a migrant has accomplished in the host country? After many years, some of them go back, disconnected and rooted in the air. Meanwhile, politicians think that migrants can be used as bait. How can it be possible that in the XXI century there are still people that think they can treat other people as slaves?

### **Do you plan to take your proposals to the presidential candidates?**

We have seen that there are a lot of people in Mexico that address the rights of immigrants, but they are civil society institutions, the Catholic Church and/or international organizations that are addressing something that is the duty and obligation of the government. These citizens and associations have limited possibilities of making the rights of migrants' permanent and extend them to a national level; they are putting a bandage over a hemorrhage. Mexico has the opportunity to lead others in terms of migratory issues, if they were to seriously include it in their political platform. To all kinds of migrants: those who left, those who came back, those who are passing by and those who have stayed. What we discuss in our meeting is to talk more about the Mexican immigrant that has left, the one that sends money back to their country. We think about and give value to the money that creates a parallel economy of survival for the country. But who is responsible for the migrants in transit? And the Mexican migrants that had to come back? These are people that don't fit in, here or there, that have to readapt to a new reality, strangers in their own land. How are we going to treat them now that they are not sending money? We also visited la Casa del Migrante San Juan Diego (Saint Juan Diego's Migrant House) in Lechería and many told us that they wanted to stay due to violence risks and the North American economic depression. How will we treat those migrants from Central America that stay in Mexico? How will the government treat them?

### **Have you convened with other people that are fighting towards the migrant cause?**

We have had meetings with father Alejandro Solalinde, with researchers from the Center of Border Studies, with José Jacques Medina. We have listened to different stances and are sure that this is the time to do something concrete in favor of migrants.

### **How will you evaluate if the *MPP* project worked or failed?**

I think that this project has different stages. This first stage is institutional. We are fighting against institutional limits. Although the SAPS have cleared our way, we find ourselves in "electoral closure". I think it is already a success to have opened a space in Mexico and that we've started a conversation with those who are interested. The second stage will be a conversation with those who are not interested. To talk about success or failure now, does not seem relevant. How do you assess the political imaginary of a human being?

## ***Political Art and Havana***

Tania Bruguera has fair skin and almond colored eyes. She is convinced that artists must have social commitment. She states that there is a new generation in Cuba that has different interests because an incipient capitalism has peeped in. Because of the Castro regime, her generation had no opportunities, nor the means to launch change on the island, but that desire is still floating in the air.

“If I’m part of this world, I need to be in constant dialogue with what is happening, I can’t shut myself off and I can’t think of indifference.”

Her father was a distinguished diplomat and her mother a sociologist and translator. She remembers that when she was a child, there were always political discussions, which were inevitable: the Cuban revolution boom. Due to ideological differences and opposing visions of Cuba’s political situation, her parents divorced. Tania defines herself as a migrant with privileges, due to her work as an artist and as a professor, she travels to different places and moves like any professional. But she would like that what today is a privilege of a few migrants, becomes the right of all migrants. Her political art is a task of much research and a constant and severe self-criticism.

In 1998, she was selected as a Guggenheim Fellow and in 2008 she received the Prince Claus Prize. A year later, she was the first resident of the Neuberger Prize and finalist of the Ordway Prize. She is the founder and director of “arte de Conducta”: the first study program in political art and performance. She currently teaches at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and Advisor in the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

“People have gotten used to the idea that contemporary art is art that pleases. Where rebellion is even held comfortably. I am not interested in that. We have to be honest with ourselves, as a friend constantly reminds me, we have to be brutally honest. I can only understand what happens in my life and around me through my artistic work.”