

Dignity and Humiliation in Argentina

© by Maria Cristina Azcona

2005

1. History

Argentina is a huge country which has a very extensive territory divided in many provinces.

The main city of Buenos Aires conglomerates almost the 30% of the total amount of near 40 million inhabitants. It is sited in the province of the same name, one of the most crowded provinces in comparison with the others. Some of these ones are very poorly developed, and poverty reaches very high levels, especially in the north.

When Spain conquered the country, there was an established indigenous collectivity, spread everywhere. They had their own identity, cultural meanings and also languages, dialects, folklore and music. Art was expressed in many rich products like manufactures and clothes.

Spanish conquerors brought their own cultural growth and moral values, and also mixed with the local population. This was the birth of *mestizos and criollos*, the first Argentinians that were born in these lands.

Then, in 1810, the first autonomous government was settled, but only after many battles, in 1816 it was declared the Independence from Spain.

A new country was born, but new problems were growing too, at the same time.

In 1850, two million people from Europe, and especially from Italy, came to live in Argentina.

In those years, social discrimination and particularly humiliation was the common situation of the poorest sections of society. In the other side, the owners of the lands were descendants from the conquerors and the descendants from the indigenous were working in those lands: "*pampas*" in the lowest scale of manual works.

In the city of Buenos Aires, the industrialization produced a new social group of manual workers dedicated to the fabrication of goods.

These persons were submitted to a lot of pressure, because they had not reached, most of them, alphabetization.

In the last few decades, a middle class of professionals reached a good level of education. These were times of "*My son the doctor*" as every parent said proudly because immigrants from Europe and some *criollos* were able to obtain university studies for their descendants.

Nowadays, Argentina is divided in two huge social categories, since Intermediate classes were economically destroyed for the *Corralito*

This event, in 2001, was simply a strike that official Ministry of Economy in that time, perpetrated, taking for the State, the bank savings owned by mostly all the middle Argentinean citizens. Still they have not received any retribution and their impoverishment is not yet refunded. The deposits were in dollars and were returned in pesos, losing three times the value.

What can I say about Dignity and Humiliation in a country where millions of persons saved their unique funds, obtained from years and years of honorable work, then

deposited their confidence in official and private banks to see, one day, December 20th 2001, that they were not authorized to retire the money in the same coin?

When the new government arrived, after democratic elections, trials started against the corrupted functionaries, but they were not in jail more than a couple of years.

In 2005 we find the following situation:

Functionaries that were judged for corruption are exonerated.

Argentinean middle class is totally broke.

Most of the workable citizens are working “*en negro*” (in black). It means that they have not a receipt document of their payment and their jobs are unstable.

Most of the infants are under the line of poverty.

Most of the students don't finalize the secondary school.

60% of the newborn are born without a father.

Most of the university students abandon their careers.

Most of the secondary students that try to enter the University have not enough level of education to have their examinations approved.

What can we say about Dignity and Humiliation in a country where indigenous like features are synonymous of being discriminated?

What can we say about Dignity and Humiliation in a country where 30.000 missing youngsters yet are not discovered, or even their tombs?

What can we say about Dignity and Humiliation in a country where is improbable to find a good job or a job according to your level of studies?

2. Impunity

Every day somebody denounces a functionary. Every day this functionary laughs to him or herself, knowing that the situation is very far from an ending.

In December 2004, a pub called “*República de Cromagnon*” resulted burned. It was not an accident. Four previous firebreaks were produced in the same circumstances, while the musical group “*Callejeros*” were singing. But this was the last one, because the firebreak was so important that 194 youngsters and children died.

Who is guilty? The official permissions to have the pub opened were expired.

The inspectors from the government know about the other firebreaks, but didn't close the place. There were denounces of corruption. The attorney that defends the owner of the pub accuses the inspectors. The inspectors accuse the owner. But this mass of accusations will not bring those people to life.

What can we explain to the mothers of the victims? What can we say to them about Dignity and Humiliation?

In the last days of June 2005, the unique accused that was in jail was settled free, before oral judgment. There is a serious risk that he escapes from the trial, being accused of multiple homicides for negligence.

This man, the main accused for the fire, is now living in the islands and wants to move to a distant province...Is he planning to escape from the oral trial?

Rage of the familiars is producing thirst of violence against this man. They want him in jail.

They are suffering a lot. They feel that their children, their sons and their daughters are dying again, while seeing this man enjoying his freedom. He was present at the moment of the accident. He closed the exit doors with chains. He escaped from the firebreak scene for a hidden door. He did not help the victims to escape from the fire.

This man belongs to a high social class and visibly has many friends in the power.

On the other side, a girl of 14 years old was declared guilty of murder and must stay 14 years in prison. She is poor, she is almost illiterate, she is a single teenager mother, and she has indigenous features. She has no friends in the power. It's true, she killed her little newborn during an attack of puerperal psychosis but those characteristics could be the reason of going to jail so many years? We cannot be sure. Perhaps Justice in Argentina is perfect.

3. Children in the Streets of Buenos Aires

While roaming by Buenos Aires Santa Fe Avenue, the most important avenue of this beautiful city, we are able to see no less than ten poor children asking for a coin, after crossing a street and before crossing the other. You walk one block, you cross to the other block, and the situation does not change at all. If you sit on a chair provided for the customers, by the restaurants, near tables outside, under the trees, along the Avenue, you will see a spectacle of dozens of burglars asking for coins with open hands.

In the last months, they ask directly for food. Milk! Milk! They claim.

When I see this panorama, I ask to myself, What about Dignity? What about Humiliation?

Are there citizens of first level and others of second level in here?

Winter arrived on June 21. Coldness is here. Tonight a child will be sleeping in the streets.

He/She is, or will be an abused and maltreated child. She/he will be probably an absent pupil, a resented teenager, an early delinquent, a drug addict, and surely an abuser of his/her own descendants. This is the circle of Humiliation produced by poverty. This baby will never be able to escape from the jaws of poverty. That cold night will generate iciness in his/her heart and sooner or later he/she will probably become a thief or a criminal.

The circle of Humiliation is closing its walls encompassing our childhood.

What about compassion? What about solidarity?

Argentinean society has a good level of solidarity and compassion in front of the other's

suffering, but is not enough. Official funds need to be dedicated to childhood as the most important part of society.

4. Humiliation of Female in Argentinean TV

There are four air channels in Argentinean Television. Most of the programs are dedicated to show the female body, as it was merchandise. From 7 PM to 10 PM, already into the hour of protection for children, it is seen a continuum of naked women bodies, only covered by paint. Models offer their beautiful noble parts, most of them full of

chirurgical Silicon, only covered by paintings. They walk and move around the stage among the obscene comments of the males, who are the presenters of the so-called show. They are trying to maintain the audience because rating means money, because of the sponsors who sell their products in the cuts.

5. Humiliation of the Professionals

Most of the professionals who finished their university careers, are working “in black”, without a permanent contract and even not working in their special area. They need to eat and to maintain their families, so they simply accept any opportunity to work in a lower level of activity. We can see taxi drivers who are Architect, employees working as cleaners who are Professors, and Lawyers working as clerks. We can see that only 15% of the university students finish their careers although those students only represent 20% of the total population of youngsters.

ORIENTATIVE STATISTICS:

Total population 37.000.000

50% are poor

15% are extremely poor

16.000.000 are potentially workable persons

From them, only there is 60% working, but mostly sub-employed

(These statistics are partly taken from the National Direction of Censes and Statistics and partly taken from the direct observation)

6. Conclusion

Dignity is not merely the result of the application of respect. When I respect somebody's rights, I am recognizing him or her, a Dignity. In contrary, when I obscenely step on his/her rights, I am blind to their Dignity.

So, Dignity is the recognition and self-recognition of the value that a human being essentially has.

In Argentina, there is a lack of this recognition, which is seeable in the lack of equality of rights. After the *Corralito*, society is seeing its Dignity totally ruined and destroyed because it is more important to dedicate funds to other purposes, part to the pockets of the corrupted government functionaries in turn, part to the payment of the external debt, which has been

Created mostly by military governments, not voted by the Argentinean population.

The resentment of the poorest parts of the society is absolutely comprehensible and will surely terminate in a violent, vindictive explosion of rage, if the actual government doesn't

Produce a development of the Argentinean Industry to give work to the unemployed, and at the same time, the external countries and bankers does not listen to the reality of the situation in its entire crude panorama.