



Interview with Fusser Martinez by Daisy Nunes

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Fusser Martinez is a 31-year old Cuban citizen, living in Oslo since 2000. I met him through a common friend some years ago, and since we have had some long conversations about the big issues in life: love, cinema, human rights, Fidel Castro, George W. Bush, Lula, Hugo Chaves and Carl I. Hagen, among others. This interview was made on a hot day in August, 2006, at Fusser and his girlfriend Guro's apartment in the district of Kampen, Oslo. Here is the result of an afternoon with music, coffee, laughs and some serious talk.

Daisy: What do you think is the greatest difference between Norway and Latin America?

Fusser: Look, this is a very deep and wide question... In Cuba, for instance, our society is very much defined by the absence of freedom. It's impossible to compare. But besides that, people act very differently. In Norway, you may live in a building for ten years without ever meeting your neighbors. This is quite strange. My neighbors are physically closer to me than my family, and I don't know who they are.

Economically, the difference is also enormous. Norway is a rich country, and richness transforms people. I have only been here for six years, but as far as I know, this country has changed incredibly during the past twenty years.

What has changed?

Among other things, consumption and ostentation have increased enormously. But anyway, it's not interesting to me to talk about how Norway was twenty years ago.

What do you want to talk about, then?

I'm concerned about what is happening now. Norway is known as a willing peacemaker, the awardee of The Nobel Peace Prize. But recently we got to know that this image is false. Watching the news recently, I heard that the Norwegian company *Aker Kværner* sold material used to build up the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Besides, they send soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq without a proper definition of their role in these countries. Many images from Iraq prove that Norwegian soldiers are actually helping the occupants.

Tell me what you think about the situation of the immigrants in Norway.

I heard something interesting recently. Norway is one of the countries with the highest educated immigrants in Western Europe. But even so, it is one of the countries where the immigrants face most difficulties getting integrated into the society. When I say "integration", I mean more than eating hot dogs and dressing up on May 17th [the Norwegian Constitution Day, ed.]. Integration has to go both ways: it is about the immigrant learning the language and the social codes, but it's also about receptiveness, acceptance and warmth from the new home country. It is incredible, but a great part of those immigrants with high education never get a job compatible with their qualifications.

Do you think the Norwegian society is still very segmented, without a common, multicultural social arena that might foster a relationship based on mutual trust?

Yes, absolutely. My opinion is that Norway is now where England was thirty years ago concerning this question. You cannot call this posture other than backward. Another concrete example is when an immigrant calls an agency, searching for an apartment to rent. The accent does something to the agent's good will to help you. It happens every day. I feel we have this unspoken, hidden hierarchy here: people are rated and classified according to their citizenship. First you have the Norwegians, then the Danish and Swedish citizens. After them, you see the Germans, the Austrians, the French... Somalian people are the last ones in this line. It's hard to specify, but there is a hierarchy.

So you are saying that some immigrants are "more accepted" than others in the Norwegian society?

Definitely.

Do you think this is true even among the so-called non-Western immigrants?

I certainly do. The situation I am about to describe has surely happened to you several times: a Norwegian person asks you the classic question: "Where are you from?" You answer: "Brazil", or I answer "Cuba". The reaction will sound like "Oh, so exciting!" Now imagine the same situation with a Somalian. The reaction is a completely different one. In reality, most of the Norwegian people don't think they have anything to talk about with a Somalian.

So, Fusser, what do you think may be our role as immigrants in Norway?

First of all, we got to care more about Norwegian politics. We don't demand anything from this society because we are far more interested in reading the news from our home countries over the internet. The truth is that most of us are here either because of marriage or political problems. We didn't choose to come to Norway out of curiosity about the country and the people. We got to be aware of the game and focus on the life here. There are more and more Norwegian people interested in these questions, and this is a good starting point.