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RANT OF R.K. ABOUT THE DISSIPATED LIVING OF CUBANS IN HER NOVEL
'TELEX FROM CUBA'

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Abstract

'*Telex from Cuba*' is a remarkable novel from a young writer where Rachel Kushner focuses on the lives of expatriates neo-colonial American's in Cuba's Oriented Province a place where they run the country's nickel mine and the American fruit company and focus on their relation with the native Cubans and amongst each other. Even within there groups there are various classes and unique tensions simmering just below the surface and this has been largely told from the view points of two children K.C. Stites and Everly, who are reared in an affluent enclave reserved for families of an American business specializing in sugar production and export.

Most of the story is revealed over time as the two protagonists approach puberty and are exposed to familiar dysfunction, neighbourly drama and other ugly reality behind their island's idyllic beauty and family's secrets. Besides their family and friend, which are mostly other co-workers, employers of the fruit company, the other leading characters are a shady French arms and beautiful cabaret dancers who doubles as a liasion for the rebels.

Through the character voices, the author expresses extraordinary insight into the causes of revolution, the dangers of imperialism, the muddle line of expatriates and their children and the love hate relationships of those who inhabit countries not their own. The author does a good job of intersecting their lives and co-mingling their adventures as she leads the reader through the ensuing revolution the decapitalisation of president Prio and Batista, and eventual evacuation of America from Cuba.

In short the story provides a unique view into the long-standing complexities, illegalities and maltreatment of workers which was deeply rooted in racism, classism and sexism and that the author has ranted here.

Keywords: Expatriates, luxurious, revolution, inequality

Rachel Kushner who is basically an American author lives in Los Angeles reputed for her novels '*Telex from Cuba*', '*The Flamethrower*' and '*The Mars Room*' has also won several dignitary honours and awards for her works. Her novels are apart from fantasy as she has written them based on

real incidents from the past and by enhancing research in person about the theme and sketches with fictitious characters.

'*Telex from Cuba*' can be called as one such book based on the subject matter that she heard from her mother's experiences growing up in Cuba.

Kushner's grandfather worked for a nickel-mining company was a figure not dissimilar to the key players of the nickel-mining companies in Nicaro depicted in the novel. Kushner first researched her family history using archival materials that her grandparents accumulated and preserved. She then turned to write the fiction using the history leading up to the Cuban revolution and the expulsion of American expatriates in 1958. Her six years of research ultimately culminated in a several months long visit to Cuba.

Despite this extensive investigation and the personal impetus initially inspiring Kushner to pursue the project, the final product presents highly fictionalized characters. Quite the opposite of restricting her story to a factual retelling of her family member's experiences, Kushner embellished and imported new characters through which she has ranted the bitter experiences of Cuban and the discrimination in their own land has been portrayed here.

The story is largely told through the experiences of the children of the leading American businessman, primarily Everly Lederer and K.C. Stites. This strategy of focusing on the lines of children imbues the story with a sense of innocence. Presenting children learning about the blending of Americans and Cuban customs and politics for the first time also relays information in such a way that encourages the reader to think independently from the mainstream, if waning, imperialistic attitudes of the United States in the 1950's. These children brought to Cuba by their parents and raised in colonial outposts, never actively decided on this life of imperialism. In fact, this questioning of norms and divides between Americans and darker skinned Cubans and Jamaicans render these children as more reasonable from their adult counterparts.

"If you are democracy, why do whites and blacks eat at separate lunch counters?" (117)

The above interrogation in the brochures raised against the American expatriates has no definite straight reply through which the author has audaciously brought out the inequality among the classes that existed in the nation during the period of time.

"Everly's mother arranged a kid's party to debut the Du Mont television – Nicaro kids, the Stites boys, and a few other from Preston. The Allain children were not invited, and Panda cried because she wasn't allowed to come". (131)

The author in these lines shown the readers how painful it would be for the people who face such maltreatment on their own lands. Invading the thoughts of variation in the minds of innocent children is not a good sign of humanity. The American expatriates who enjoyed each and every resource of Cuba and Cubans and lead luxurious life as their own cannot be considered as humans with conscience.

The expatriates were keen in handling every point of the nation to be under their control where the author has illustrated through the character called Willy smart houseboy of Lederer's by stating that American's ally Batista, President of the country has taken the media under his control by not letting people to get aware of the slavery or discrimination that exists among the people in a cunning way.

"It's what President Batista wants people to hear the explained that Cuba didn't really have a free press, that the newspapers were all censored try the government, and any news that made the president look bad wasn't printed" (130)

In the perception of Everly Lederer and Willy's conversation Kushner has thrown light on the unfair treatment for the workers in the Nicaro-mining company where the workers have to face disaster if they raise their voices for rights or fair wages.

Willy, said the mine employers wanted fair wages, fair treatment, and that's what the rebels were promising. She herself has seen how the miners worked, seven days a week under the boiling sun, a labor boss with a gun in the shade of the only free. The mine, in as a dirty secret that made the young and handsome men in the photo – seen like heroes (211)

The last line is actually super revolutionary and it's an appreciable one and admirable part of the author's writing. She has simply outraged her own natives by loyally expressing that the hero looks are gained by tormenting innocent people of the other natives in their own soil who seems like blood suckers.

For American expatriates, Cuba is a 'loser's paradise'; many of the adult characters are escaping difficulties and failures at home. They advertise for light skinned servants but not albinos and play at being snobs, with golf courses, swimming pools and polo grounds, and all the preserving coldness much of it from woman that snobbery requires. There is also the brutality of the mine and of the sugar mill, the injustices suffered by the indentured workers and the atrocities committed on those workers by America's ally, Batista.

"It was almost Christmas time, one woman notices over her cocktail and there were human beings hanging in the trees beyond the security fence". (214)

The American expatriates who enjoyed all the luxuries in Cuba failed to treat the natives in a dignified manner which was the root cause for the revolution. In spite of knowing that there are groups of rebels up in the mountains plotting to change government, but it doesn't worry them unduly. United Fruit has worked with every government before but aren't with Castro and his brothers the sons of a wealthy Cuban landowner where the author has anguished the sufferings of the slaved inhabitants right from the view of Castro during a mass gathering on addressing his citizens after attaining republic.

"Invited to lose an arm feeding the crushers at the mill. Invited, most graciously, to be fleeced by the company store, whose prices were unspeakable exploitation, invited into a modern and more efficient version of slave labor. But you and I were not allowed beyond those gates over there," he pointed, "where the managers lived. 'La Avenida,' with, take note, the definite article. The avenue, but, of course, only for some. You could not walk down it. You were not allowed to swim in the

company pool, go to the company club, use the company's beaches. You could not fish in their bay, Saetia, or go to school with their children, or date their daughters, or God forbid, should you get sick, be treated at their hospital. You could not own your home, which you yourself had built, own your own plot of land, which you worked with your own shovel, your pick, your hoe." (288)

It is notable and appreciable where Kushner has brought out her rant in a modest way of expression by creating the novel in the view point of adolescents. Being an American she has intellectually pointed out the colonial bias made by her natives against other inhabitants which would not harm the patriotic feel and also make the readers to understand the justice that every human should keep in mind.

Through Kushner's precise descriptions unexpected metaphors capture the tropical environment of Cuba and the worry that the climate and other unfamiliar aspects of the country inspired in Americans. The swampy humidity is almost overpowering and attributes to the sense of escalating tensions as revolutionary groups nestled in nearby mountains plot assaults on the sugar plantations run by Americans. Cuba's sweltering tropical climate, drastically different from that of the hometowns of the American business men in the novel, is the defining quality upon which the success of the greedy managers is predicted, since they own plantations harvesting tropical products. This climate is one among many foreign aspects of the country and importantly, it is one unfamiliar characteristic that provokes uncertainty and anxiety in the adults relocating to the region. The wives of the executives constantly whine about the heat. The residents of manager's row, the gated and guarded area where the Americans live, come together for sophisticated events at the Pan-American club, the conversations among women after tending to the topic of their shared frustration over the inaccessibility to the luxury goods in vogue in the United States. One wife is so concerned about the unfamiliar conditions of the tropics and the access to her favourite produce and food products that she

packs as many earned hams and as much fancy silverware as she can before here move to Cuba.

These scenes, made memorable and thought provoking through Kushner's attention to visual details, are among many others that enable Kushner to tackle small bits of U.S. foreign policy. Collectively these instances of evocative behaviour of the Americans serve to call attention to the nature and extent of the U.S. involvement in Cuban society, economics and politics.

The familiar trope of forbidden love appears in the novel when an adolescent Everly, begins to fall in love with her family's houseboy, Willy, a relentlessly energetic character and overall positive influence on the culture of the household conscious of class convention, Everly doesn't dare mention her affection for Willy to anyone. Her endearing love for Willy prompts her to refuse to reciprocate the affection K.C. expressed towards her, despite the fact that K.C is a well-liked friend of the family and a more suitable male companion. The subversive tendencies of the children older brother figures as the most radical of the American youth running away to join the Castro brother's scheming hint to the changing attitudes of the nation, the imminent Cuban revolution, and the decline of power of the Americans in Cuba.

The children provide a nearly unfiltered view of life in the bizarre, isolated colonial enclaves in Cuba, and at moments, share sentiments more insightful than their parents express. The overall effect of the novel is to challenge common notions of U.S. foreign policy in this Cold war era, shedding a new light on a period of history that isn't frequently retreaded in contemporary culture. Rachel Kushner to her possibility has enchanted the sufferings and worries of the Cubans who has been invaded by the Americans and later on ended the novel in a pleasant way leaving out her rants but bringing up the beautiful emotions of both Cubans and Americans by using the language in an extraordinary way.

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