A prisoner of hope

A charge of Òmnium invited me to meet Jordi Cuixart. The visit to Lledoners prison was set for July 13.

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More than 170 years ago, in July 1846, Henry David Thoreau left the cabin where he lived, on Lake Walden, and went to the city of Concord, Massachusetts. At night, after refusing to pay the tax to vote as a protest against the war between Mexico and the United States, he was locked in the prison of Concord. That night, according to history, the philosopher and American educator Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Thoreau in prison. Emerson looked at Thoreau and asked: "Henry, why are you here inside?" And Thoreau replied: "Ralph, why are you there?" What this story teaches us is that sometimes human beings accept the difficulties and prison privations to fight for their right to have rights or, as Hannah Arendt says, "have the freedom to be free." Having said that, Acting with moral integrity to have the freedom to be free is not something that is given to you, but it is the end result of a long introspective process and of civic conscience. As such, this examination of consciousness and the consequent transformation of oneself are the most powerful weapons we can use to change the world. As the famous statement by Mahatma Gandhi says: "Be the change you want to see in the world." Thoreau, Arendt, Gandhi ... all of them also referents of Cuixart and present in his latest book, As the famous statement by Mahatma Gandhi says: "Be the change you want to see in the world." Thoreau, Arendt, Gandhi ... all of them also referents of Cuixart and present in his latest book, As the famous statement by Mahatma Gandhi says: "Be the change you want to see in the world." Thoreau, Arendt, Gandhi ... all of them also referents of Cuixart and present in his latest book, We'll do it again.

Jordi Cuixart is, without a doubt, a man who has made this examination of conscience and this self-transformation. Their civic action and their imprisonment demonstrate their moral integrity and their epistemic humility. As a Catalan of heart (although not of birth), I was impressed by the strong and solid character of Cuixart, and his
unequivocal and resounding words struck me. During my last trip to Barcelona I was lucky to meet a representative of Òmnium Cultural who attended my talk at the Ateneu Barcelonès and invited me to meet Jordi Cuixart at the Lledoners Penitentiary Center. With the friendly help of my friends and editors Antoni Munné and Montse Inglà and the attentive mediation of the wife of Jordi, Txell Bonet, the visit was set for July 13, 2019.

On the 13th at 9 in the morning, along with Toni Munné, I took a taxi to go to the Catalan prison. And earlier than we thought we were close to the prison. We had time for a carving with a quick gel, before meeting the Txell in front of the jail. We met two Latin Americans who were riding and they indicated the way to the nearest restaurant. From the restaurant the penitentiary was seen, and there were a few people making a great breakfast, completely indifferent to the unpleasant and unbearable landscape that was under his. Immediately, I came to Evin prison in Tehran, where in 2006 I spent 125 days of my life confined to an isolation cell. Surprisingly, Evin is close to a recreation area where young Tehran people meet at night to eat and to smoke in narghile. For a few minutes I returned to Evin prison, with the bad feeling of having suffered enormous injustice, as in the case of Jordi and all the Catalan political prisoners. It is incredible that, despite the differences, all prisons in the world are so similar. All are desolate places.

It was already two-fourth-eleven and we were late in our appointment. We asked the driver to leave breakfast for later and we rushed to jail. La Txell awaited us at the downtown parking lot. He was accompanied by his father and his young son, and the cousin of Cuixart and his wife and another young child to meet him. After the first security check, they took us to a room where all the families were waiting for their turn to see the prisoners.

After about a quarter of an hour's wait, we went through the next automatic door and the metal detectors and went to the locutorios penitenciarios. We left behind the Toni, since the visits can not be more than four people. Once in the showroom, we waited for Jordi Cuixart to arrive. After 10 minutes the prisoners arrived. The two Jordis, Cuixart and Sànchez, arrived together and hurried to the locker room. Cuixart greeted
us with his hand and sent his wife and child kisses. He had a drawing by illustrator Ignasi Blanch, with whom he prepared a future children’s book project, and continually taught his son through the window of the showroom. I stood behind his family, waiting for my turn to have a brief talk with him. Because I knew I speak French, Jordi continued the conversation with his cousin in a language that I could understand. After a few minutes I had the opportunity to sit in front of the glass and talk to him through the barrier.

Honestly, the positive spirit of Cuixart surprised me very pleasantly, as if it were he who gave us hope about his future and the political future of Catalonia. Cuixart seemed to me an immensely empathetic person, an individual with a vision of the future. In the short time we had to speak, I shared with him my personal opinions about the non-violent movement of Catalonia and the moral and political importance it has for the rest of the world. I told Jordi that, to all of us who promote democracy around the world and struggle to democratize the liberal democracies of Europe, Asia and North America, the Catalan non-violent movement offers us invaluable lessons. To put it simply in the words of Camus, Catalans do not want to be victims or executors. What interests them is living with dignity. For civic activists such as Cuixart it is up to them to make Catalan aware of their own greatness, which they sometimes do not know. As Cuixart told me, the non-violent movement of Catalonia does not have to do with self-determination but also with another, more important thing: the human interrelation.

These valuable words from Cuixart continued inside me as he said goodbye and left the showroom with his family. I know he has many friends around the world, including myself, and I am almost sure that his fight, like those of Václav Havel and Nelson Mandela, will be unforgettable. As I left behind Jordi Cuixart and the claustrophobic atmosphere of Lledoners prison, my friend Toni Munné approached me. "How has the visit gone?" He asked curiously. "Jordi Cuixart is a prisoner of hope," I answered. Our world needs more Thoreaus as he does ". 