

DAUGHTER, I HOPE TO SEE YOU WHEN THE

DAY OF LIBERATION DAWNS

By Luís Nieves-Falcón

A tall pompous man asks in a vulgar tone, "Do you know what color the brains of a baby are that is thrown against a wall?"

The woman being questioned is small and slender. She tries to force her way out of the tiny room where she is held.

Three men leap at her and throw her to the ground.

The pompous Yanqui screams at her, "Tell me where your beloved baby is? We are going to find her somehow. I swear to you that when we find her I am going to throw her against the wall until her brains are splattered everywhere. I am going to destroy your seed."

Thus began the interrogation of María Haydée Torres, Puerto Rican Prisoner of War, captured on 4 April, 1980.

In our 10 hour long conversation at Pleasanton, California, she recalls the events of her imprisonment. She is serving a life sentence for believing in independence, for fighting against colonialism. She believes that the desire to be an independentista comes from within. However the mentality of fear which we are subjected to by the oppressor, immobilizes us. She declares that armed struggle is the logical alternative because Puerto Rico is in a crisis --the dominating power disregards our legitimate demands. The alternative is either to fight or to be destroyed by the Yanquis. To fight is to defend ourselves. We did not begin the war. The colonialists did. They started it when they intervened militarily in Puerto Rico and almost decimated us. We have to fight so they do not take what little we have left. It is unavoidable. I think that were it not for the organizations which have confronted the United States with armed struggle, we would not have the little bit we still have. While there exists the threat that there are people ready to struggle, they are not to going to finish us off.

What is the price of holding these convictions? Without any hesitation she speaks to us. A hidden life. No stable living situation. Not to be able to enjoy those daily things that give us pleasure. Not to be able to smell a flower. Or contemplate the sea. That sea of vast blue that watches over Puerto Rico. Not to be able to share life with the wonderful people of our country, or my family or my comrades. It means also to discover the hidden brutality of the oppressor. His own savagery.

Two weeks before the trial the prosecutor, large and pompous, asked the court to grant an order to take samples of my fingerprints, my hair and my signature. The judge did so. I refused. They grabbed me. They threw me to the floor and took my prints by force. Later,

three agents and four women guards came with a brush, a small comb and plastic bags. I sat in a chair and held on. They came at me with force. They grabbed my arms and feet. And held me in the air. One woman ran the brush through my hair and then began to pull out hair. I resisted as much as I could. They began to twist my feet as if trying to break my ankle. One of the guards screamed: "You deserve more than this, you bitch." The tall pompous prosecutor looked on smiling. Suddenly they let me go. I crashed to the ground. I was knocked insensible.

In another hearing I was ordered to appear in a line-up and to look directly at a small window. The prosecutor asked me if I was going to cooperate. I told him no, and he said, "We are going to make it rough on you." I told the agents that they would have to do whatever necessary to make me cooperate. They chained my hands, feet and waist. Inside the tangle of chains I moved my chest and knees. I got out of the handcuffs because I am so thin that they were too big. They jumped on me. They put on 2 more sets of chains. They began to yank my hair. With each yank they pulled my neck back. When the agent saw the pain on my face he started laughing. "You're making me sweat; you're ruining my suit. Shit!" Then that big, tall man began to hit me in the chest with his elbow. The others just held me tighter. I fell backwards and lost consciousness. Enraged, the agent screamed at me, "Your aren't going to cry, you damned bitch?" I was telling myself: I'm not going to cry! I won't give them the satisfaction of seeing even one tear. They took a break. They didn't let me go to the bathroom. They didn't give me any water. When they came back they continued twisting my neck and hitting me in the chest for another 6 hours. The prosecutor finally said, "We're not getting anywhere this way." They took me back to prison. As a result of the beating my rib cage was dislocated and my back bone has curved. I suffer from sharp back pain. In my prison medical files there is no record of any of this. To recuperate they put me in the "hole."

The trial was a railroad. It lasted only 4 days. On the first day I turned away to talk to the Puerto Ricans in the courtroom. I ignored the farce going on. The prosecutor screamed like a crazy man, "Get her out of here! Get her out! She doesn't respect the court." They prohibited me from going back into the courtroom where they were trying me. They held me, handcuffed, in a room behind the court, with an agent and a loudspeaker. The jury never saw my face, nor I theirs. According to what I was told, they were shown an enormous photo of me. They judged my photo and found it guilty.

I was moved from jail to jail. They almost always moved me late at night. My health was getting worse. The prison doctor had said I had an infection. But they refused to give me the medications prescribed earlier because they said that they did not have any record that I needed them. I began to vomit. And vomit. "You look healthy. I don't know what you are complaining about." I became feverish. The vomiting continued. I began passing out. I fell on the stairs and blacked out. I was living at the toilet, throwing up. The other prisoners yelled for the guards to help me, that I was going to die. Even though I was constantly at the toilet not one doctor came to see

me. I couldn't open my eyes. Everything would go black on me. I was seeing double. "Nothing is the matter with you," one guard said. I threw up for 8 days. The other women helped me when they could. They called Chicago. A protest of letters and telegrams was initiated. My attorney came — the beloved Michael Deutsch. Then they brought a doctor to see me. "What is the matter with you? Couldn't it be something you ate," she brazenly said. Three days later they came for me at 1:00 in the morning. They took me to the control unit at Alderson, West Virginia. The few pieces of furniture were anchored to the floor. The cell had a wooden door and another one of metal. It had a very narrow opening through which only a very little bit of air could enter. When they closed the metal door no air could come in and I felt like I was suffocating. There was no natural light in the cell. They painted the outside of the window panes so that no light could get in. There was a microphone system which picked up any sound within the cell. I had to use the sink to bathe. I couldn't speak to anyone. The guards watched me constantly. Every 15 minutes they came to document what I was doing. They described my state of mind. I had to ask a male guard for whatever I needed — clothes, soap, sanitary napkins. I could not wash my clothes, nor iron them. I am certain that this was the beginning of the experiment that later was carried out in the prison at Lexington, Kentucky.

My health continued to worsen. They began trying to give me shots. They said they were to ease the pain. I refused them. I thought they were trying to get me addicted. My stomach had begun to swell and I was having breathing problems. Another public protest was initiated. My people came to protest in front of the prison. On that day they did not allow visits to any of the prisoners. People drove 14 hours to demonstrate their support. Finally they took me chained head to foot to a private gynecologist. They wanted me to be examined while I was chained. The male guards demanded to be present during the vaginal examination. The doctor objected. They did not take me back to see him. They put me back into isolation. They restricted my visits and limited my phone calls to my attorney. One day they came for me at 2:00 AM. They chained me. They drove me to a private airport and put me on a small airplane. They took me to the prison hospital at Lexington. They kept me chained in a room. One prisoner who came in to clean told me "We know who you are. Don't eat anything that does not come wrapped from the kitchen." She never returned. They took me to be operated on. They wanted me to be operated on while in chains. The doctor refused. They gave me the wrong anesthesia and I almost died in the hospital. I did not wake up from it for a very long time. When I did wake up they wanted to chain me again and the nurse yelled at them. "Can't you see she was just operated on?" They took me from the hospital the same day as the operation and took me to the segregation unit at Lexington. My attorney began to intervene on my behalf. They had to give me a liquid protein diet because I was throwing up everything. One day they told me to get dressed. Nothing happened. Seven weeks later they took me out in chains on another airplane. To my surprise, comrade Aldofo was among the prisoners who were on that same plane. You don't know how happy we were. We had not seen each other since the arrest. The guards prohibited us from talking. The other

prisoners protested. I travelled for many days, and didn't know where I was being taken. They didn't allow me to call my attorney. I arrived in California and knew I was going to Pleasanton. Here I am. Together with my other comrade combatants.

There is no doubt that life is hard. It is the path of the combatant. I have faith in my people. I hope one day to enjoy our liberated homeland with Viví, my beloved daughter who I last saw when she was 3 months old. She needs a homeland that is once again ours. For her I fight. And for all my people -- until liberation.