



Authoritarian Symbiosis: Political Power and Political Thought in post-Cold War Cuba

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AUTHORITARIAN SYMBIOSIS: POLITICAL POWER AND POLITICAL THOUGHT IN POST-COLD WAR CUBA¹

The nexus between social thought and political context is an intimate one. This connection is even more intense and complex among those who study and divulge their knowledge of political science, which can be largely understood as intellectual attempts at theorizing, explaining and predicting how political power takes form and is used, for power is both the subject and impediment to what political science does. Therefore, the crises that emerge from this relationship become both epistemic and civic problems.

Contrary to what has been traditionally divulged by the liberal mainstream in Western political science², authoritarian regimes do in fact develop a certain type of thought *about, from and for* politics, a kind of descriptive, analytic and prescriptive reflection about the forms and purposes of arbitrary and unrestricted power. This kind of political thought is pushed by thinkers who support, with their ideas and loyalties, forms of power that restrict the autonomy and agency of a given society.³

Consequently, in contexts where politics (both in practice and in its academic interpretations) is reduced to what a small, unrestricted and invasive elite deems fit, its characteristics and objectives will differ from the kind of political knowledge that is produced in open societies with pluralist regimes and the freedom to access, investigate and divulge information. That *other* philotyrannical political science has been conceptualized in recent times by certain authors who have done so using specific historical examples⁴. However, these philotyrannical attributes (with the exception of a few cases) travel across time and are reproduced in very different contexts.

Authoritarian political science is, therefore, a space—both intellectual and institutional—of thought and knowledge that is ingrained in power structures and dynamics, for the kind of knowledge it produces, and the disputes it analyzes within academia, are not external to power. With this established, and as long as there is no separation between power, academia and political economy, we can better understand how a non-democratic regime

¹This text is based on the paper prepared for presentation at the Cuban Studies Conference, Florida International University, September 15-17, 2022

²Samuel Huntington: *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma, 1991.

³Mark Lilla: *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals and Politics*, New York Review Books, New York, 2016.

⁴Paulo Ravecca: *The Politics of Political Science. Re-writing Latin American Experiences*, Routledge, New York, 2019.

can be involved in the production of knowledge while also considering that authoritarianism's survival relies on, and is responsible for, the loss of alternative ideas and voices.

AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE: A DECALOGUE

An analysis of authoritarian political science under the Augusto Pinochet military regime is useful to understand the characteristics of a certain way of conceiving and producing knowledge about and for non-democratic politics. In summarizing these characteristics⁵, we end up with a decalogue of sorts that is coincidentally applicable to other cases and contexts with regimes that are not necessarily a form of right-wing, gorilla-type praetorianism:

1. *It uses a language that is similar to that of conventional political science in democratic societies; however, it denaturalizes, distorts and manipulates its concepts.* One of its favourite recourses is to adjectivize democracy: it can be *protected* in Chile under Pinochet, *sovereign* in Russia under Putin or *participative* in Cuba under Castro.
2. *It identifies ideological enemies*—democratic liberalism, first and foremost—within its cultural-political project: one of *restriction and annulment of pluralism* (which is also reflected on the State narrative.) The resuscitation of Carl Schmitt by China or Iran—or Putin's continuous diatribes against open societies—point in this direction.
3. *It incorporates its opponents, which it moulds and restricts to its liking, for the sake of preserving a sense of order and stability.* Economic liberalism—neoliberal in its most extreme manifestation—can coexist with authoritarianism because the latter hinders democracy. This is exemplified by the presence of a technocratic discourse which tries, from Saudi Arabia to Singapore, to modernize authoritarianism without incorporating any elements of democracy.
4. *It is built from nexuses with the State's security apparatus.* The institutions that are in charge of repression provide academia with the authors, audiences and spaces for presentations and sponsorships through different sources of funding. During periods of intensified repression, these nexuses prevail, as has been the case with Dmitri Trenin, ex-director of the Carnegie Centre in Moscow.
5. *It uses a language that is quite nationalistic*, both in its left- and right-wing variations. The State is, first and foremost, the undisputed representative and sole guarantor of a country's sovereignty. The list of sovereigntist positions and arguments shown in interviews and texts written by Cuban, Iranian, Russian, Egyptian, Chinese or Venezuelan academics is unending.

⁵Ibid, pp. 55-81.

6. *It mixes scientific logic*—cushioning interesting and sophisticated debates about theories and methodology in political science—with *political functionality*, building a narrative to legitimize the authoritarian regime in question and the decisions made of the elites that rule it, which is reproduced on various forums and publications. Put another way: authoritarian political science produces sophisticated articles and debates about the history of political theory and the paradigms of IR; however, the dominant narrative reflects the philotyrannical interests of the government.
7. *It can be evaluated based on what it says, but also on what it does not say.* Silence prevails when it comes to rigorous scientific analyses and political positionings. In the case of Cuba, “pretending to say something,” as explained by political scientist Yvon Grenier, becomes the norm.⁶
8. *It possesses an interdisciplinary orientation* that transcends the traditional spaces of institutionalized academia. It places *special emphasis on the role of ideology and culture*, which are seen through the lens of power relations and the production/continuation of the existing regime’s hegemony. The fact that campaigns against Western hegemony are launched on national television (from Russia Today to Telesur) by countless journalists- and writers-turned-political-commentators confirms the aforementioned thesis.
9. *It gives special importance to the discourse pushed by intellectuals* (writers, jurists, government officials) *who are organic to the authoritarian system* and in charge of informing debates, legitimizing political decisions and supporting certain policies. See the work produced by think tanks such as the Valdai Club (Russia,) the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (China) or the International Policy Research Centre (Cuba) to find a recurring list of habitual experts, organic to the regimes that rule each of those countries.
10. *It is integrated into the international intellectual networks of allied regimes.* Suffice it to see the constant participation of scholars of Russia, Cuba and China in forums and publications that are part of diplomatic/foreign relations institutes with direct links to the governments in question.

The criteria to evaluate the performance of academia in any given country should be the production and dissemination of rigorous knowledge, as well as how useful said knowledge is in the public sphere—by international standards. Describing, analyzing, questioning and proposing something should be the goal of anything or anyone that calls themselves an “academic.” An analysis which uses scientific methods, and studies the social repercussions of the production of knowledge, is the bare minimum. But in recent years, autocratic regimes -as Russia, China and Cuba- have using academic spaces and subjects, through legitimization and manipulation discourses, as resources for the preservation of power.

⁶<http://www.remap.ugto.mx/index.php/remap/article/view/191>

“RECREATING” A “NORMAL COUNTRY”

These regimes recycle the old forms of classical repression, but combine them with disinformation, manipulation, and simulation, both in the physical space of institutions and squares and in the virtual sphere. Their discourse harbors a collage of ideas and lexicons: environmentalism and development, tradition and modernization, deliberation, and citizen consultation, all of which rhetorically draw a certain horizon of progress. These are a government's experts in the arts of manipulation, seduction, co-optation, and selective repression -calibrated coercion- or expanded repression, such as those deployed in recent times in Alma Ata, Shanghai, Havana or St. Petersburg.

These are regimes in which “the art of manipulation” are deployed, as described by Ivan Krastev, political scientist, and president of the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia (Bulgaria) and Stephen Holmes, professor of law at New York University. They have described a practice to legitimize the power of authoritarian states in the post-communist world against the backdrop of a globalized democratic rhetoric. Those charged with this task are called political technologists. Political technologists are a sort of hybrid between the position of court advisor in absolute monarchies, the propagandist of Leninist dictatorships, and the political marketing experts of liberal democracies.

They are specialists in manipulating public opinion to coincide with the objectives of the elites of the authoritarian system. Political technologists are not singularly brilliant minds who achieve their position strictly because of their own success. They acquire their role from multidisciplinary teams, headed by some authoritative figure. According to I. Krastev and S. Holmes, these political technologists are “intransigent enemies of electoral surprises, party pluralism, political transparency and the freedom of well-informed citizens to participate in the election of their rulers”.⁷ They disguise authoritarianism with democratic appearances. In a post-1989 world in which autocrats choose to prevail by incorporating (by perverting them) republican techniques and rhetoric.

Political technologists do “creative” work at sensitive junctures, elections, scandals, protests, constituent processes, for native authoritarianism regimes while helping to maintain the illusion of openness and pluralism within restrictive environments. In the popular series “The People's Servant,” candidate Vasily P. Goloborodko is besieged by a political technologist, who sells to him his offer that he is the only way to prevail within a competition falsified by the oligarchs.

⁷Iván Krastev & Stephen Holmes, *The Light That Failed: Why the West Is Losing the Fight for Democracy*, Pegasus Books, 2020.

The political technologist operates through an ecosystem of governmental NGOs (GONGOS), authoritative media and reformist intellectuals, all loyal to the elites and central narratives of the system. With their communication and intellectual resources, political technologists reinforce governance when excessive violence is not appropriate. Within the shelter of the authoritarian state, official ideology and political technology establish a division of labor. Traditional ideology is oriented to the masses, who are captive of mass media and information through state channels. At the same time, political technology seduces – through “alternative” media – connected segments of native elites and foreign publics.

Several political technologists are famous in countries and circuits of the global autocratic universe. In Russia, Gleb Pavlosvsky of the Foundation for Effective Policies, former Soviet dissident and advisor to Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, stands out. In Venezuela we have the sociologist Oscar Schemel, owner of the pollster Hinterlaces and member of the Constituent Assembly of Madurism. In China we find Eric Li, businessman, digital talk show host, and founder of the media conglomerate Guancha. The list is long.

However, to the extent that autocrats are challenged, with intelligence and commitment by their opponents, they tend to close the minimum spaces for dissent. This is what has happened recently in elections and squares in Hong Kong, Moscow or Managua. Then comes the moment of unbridled repression, the traditional practices of classic dictatorships. It would seem that we will increasingly see outcomes like these in the midst of the current autocratic wave. In these scenarios, the opportunity for political technologists tends to be reduced. The pure and hard propagandists of autocracies gain prominence, as we see today in the Kremlin’s media ecosystem after the drift provoked by the invasion of Ukraine.

Any form of thinking about politics is always embedded in specific power structures and dynamics. Insofar as there is no exteriority between power, academia, and political economy, it is possible to understand how a non-democratic regime can be involved in the production of ideas and discourses akin to its objectives. This structural overlap between state violence and authoritarian political science acquires an organic character in the nexus between power and knowledge, and it is embodied by political technologists. Within this trend, Cuba is no exception.

QUO VADIS, CUBA

The political conditions of present-day Cuba are not favorable for any kind of civic debate. Under the current regime, the state of the rights to information, free expression, organizing and protesting, put the country at a disadvantage

with respect to others in the region. When any form of spontaneous mobilization—including those with no party/political affiliations, such as communal environmentalism and animal protection—is subject to monitoring, co-opting and vetoing from the State, it becomes very difficult to sustain any kind of public debate. Then and there, those who are interested in participating in national politics actively and autonomously, are severely restricted.

With this in mind, one can see how the problems that arise from the kind of political discourse that reigns in Cuban academia—including that which emerges from state-affiliated institutions, as well as that which does not but is authorized by the state in order to pretend like there is some kind of pushback—are notorious. Some of these problems, their characteristics, contexts and interpretations, have been analyzed elsewhere.⁸ They can be summarized as follows:

- a. *Absence and manipulation of data.* There are no statistics/polls from non-state sources. State sources tend to be manipulated, thereby not reflecting society accurately.
- b. *Distance between “theory” and political reality.* This is exemplified by the constant mention of a ‘communist horizon’ and the ‘socialist/popular’ nature of the current regime.
- c. *Conceptual overstretching* which, in its extreme form, leads to emptying of meaning. The ahistorical, anti-Marxist use of the term “Revolution” to refer to the status quo and the use of adjectives (popular, socialist, participative) of a non-existing democracy.
- d. *Direct (in state-sponsored academia) or indirect (in state-authorized academia) justifications for the government’s decisions*, especially those pertaining to the persistent dynamics of the economic crisis and to the political repression of the last two years.

These characteristics heavily influence the dominant narratives in present-day Cuba, which permeate three kinds of academic communities that analyze the island’s socio-political context—and which can be categorized according to how close, independent and/or critical they are of the State. *Attached* academia (predominant in research faculties and institutions) operates under the ideological direction of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment. *Autonomous* academia (which is constantly harassed) survives in independent journalistic and educational programs, which are supported by churches, inserted in transnational networks, though often quite informal. Between these two, there is an *authorized* academia that acts through organizations in the cultural sector and through NGOs the government allows/tolerates.

⁸<https://www.iepa.org.pe/raep/index.php/ojs/article/view/104>

It is in this *authorized* type of academia that we can situate *Temas* magazine and its space for discussion, *Último Jueves*, a Havana-based project which has been led by essayist Rafael Hernández for over three decades. The magazine was Armando Hart's (then-Minister of Culture) idea, which he pitched to Hernández as a publication that would "be a space for the analysis of critical thought that would encourage reflections based on a reality we Cubans were living through at the time."⁹ Further down the line, in January 2002, *Último Jueves* emerged. *Último Jueves*' goals ("to encourage critical thought and a diversity of perspectives around specific topics; to examine present-day problems in the cultural, social and ideological realms, that impact Cuba and the rest of the world; and to facilitate agile and flexible discussions around these topics for a broad public, not just for specialists") are normatively oriented towards public, intellectual and civil deliberation, noble goals that, in order to be evaluated, must be contrasted with reality.

One must not assume that, just because the magazine was conceived and created by the State, that is it the State that determines the nature of the project. The history of the processes pertaining to democratic transitions is full of organizations which emerged in authoritarian contexts and were, over time, capable of evolving into more autonomous and belligerent projects. However, in the case of present-day Cuba—where authoritarianism and the repression of civil society are intensifying—the mere existence of spaces where one can discuss the kinds of topics that are brought up in *Temas* and *Último Jueves* has to be understood as a kind of State-tolerated exceptionality.

It might seem absurd to speak of deliberation in non-democratic regimes; however, these regimes have been increasingly promoting the use of small spaces and of deliberative practices to stabilize their authoritarian governments.¹⁰ This has been discussed in studies about political communication in autocratic contexts, which identify the existence of critical audiences as crucial to the development of policies and leaderships. Said audiences help autocrats with their tasks as governors, as do pseudodemocratic institutions, such as one-party parliaments and neighborhood assemblies.¹¹

⁹<https://www.cubaperiodistas.cu/index.php/2019/10/ciencias-sociales-y-medios-de-comunicacion-encuentros-y-desencuentros/>.

¹⁰B. He & M. Warren: "Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development", en *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 2011, pp. 269-289.

¹¹Florian Toepfl: "Comparing Authoritarian Publics: The Benefits and Risks of Three Types of Publics for Autocrats", en *Communication Theory*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2020, pp. 105-125.

It is under the logic of deliberative authoritarianism that these semi-public spaces appear, where the diversity of their participants, the variety and plurality of the events, and the political nature of the debates are very much determined by the State. The mere existence of these spaces does not mean that citizens have a right to create their own spaces, for the state model sanctions any kind of autonomous intellectual spaces, *ex ante*. The continued harassment of the Centro de Estudios Convivencia—which included the seizure by State authorities of its headquarters—and the forced closure of Cuba Posible—which resulted in its leaders being forced into exile—are just a few examples of the kind of treatment that those academics who participate in *Temas* have never received. It is also worth pointing out that the latter have never shown any solidarity with their repressed colleagues.

On the contrary, *Temas* has invited many figures who are responsible for censorship to its forums and spaces on numerous occasions, showing its authoritarian political science qualities¹²—built from the nexuses with the State’s security apparatus. In Cuba, the symbiosis between diplomacy and intelligence (which has its origins in the USSR) means that many of the experts that take part in academic debates come from the Ministry of Foreign Relations or are former spies. This results in the inclusion of chief veterans¹³ of Cuban intelligence and officials¹⁴ in charge of political propaganda and attacking independent academics¹⁵ and activists in publications that are run by *Temas* and *Último Jueves*. More recently, these spaces have witnessed the presence of a new type “academic”¹⁶: one who is in charge of defamation on disinformation programs which air on national television.

The persisting nexus between an authoritarian state and authorized academia does pose certain questions about what the role of the latter should be. Does operating exclusively (and in an exclusionary manner) under the rules of the State’s game contribute to the political socialization of an active citizenry? Does this not reproduce (and reinforce) the legitimation of the authoritarian regime in question? To what extent does having privileged access to semi-public debates ensure the supremacy of authorized academia, while excluding other non-authorized actors from participating (which should be their right)?

¹²<http://www.temas.cult.cu/catalejo/iroel-s-nchez-al-estado-socialista-le-conviene-una-sociedad-civil-activa>

¹³<https://temas.cult.cu/articulos-academicos/los-60-la-historia-no-contada/>

¹⁴<https://lapupilainsonne.wordpress.com/2020/02/17/un-premio-a-la-inteligencia-colectiva-por-iroel-sanchez/#more-69445>

¹⁵<https://lapupilainsonne.wordpress.com/2016/04/18/el-corrimento-al-centro-por-iroel-sanchez/>

¹⁶<https://temas.cult.cu/ultimo-jueves/deliberar-o-participar-sociedad-civil-en-un-socialismo-democratico/>

Does this not put in place a feedback mechanism between these intellectual projects/spaces and the governing elites, maintaining the status quo on what is allowed or censored?

Authoritarian political science has a tendency to *subordinate scientific logic to political functionality*, which manifests itself in debates that give the illusion of openness under a censoring State. If one looks under “civil society and movements” on the *Temas* website, one will find no reference to what has happened in Cuba from 27N to the present. Nothing about the spontaneous mobilizations that asked for food, services or rights—in isolated towns or on the nation-wide event that was J11—nor about the organized groups that, from the cultural sphere, have tried to empower citizens in public spaces.

Simultaneously, the debates that *Último Jueves* has hosted in response to the mobilization of artists, intellectuals and ordinary citizens have acted as a smokescreen for the repression launched by the State a few blocks away from the physical places where these forums have taken place. At other times, alternative voices that tried to speak on the state of repression, and questioned the forum’s narrative, were only able to do so from the audience, making those who were hosting the event uncomfortable, leading them to lash back. This exemplifies yet another characteristic of authoritarian political science, whereby one cannot evaluate it solely on what is said but on what is hidden or silenced.

These are, above all, vague (timeless and subjectless) opinions which authoritarian political science uses when it speaks a *language that is similar to that of conventional political science*, all while denaturalizing and manipulating its concepts. When the nexus between science and politics is discussed, it is done by reproducing the classic “timeless and subjectless” approach, characteristic of the dominant narrative in official and/or authorized academia. In other debates, when participants talk about the idea of a *hypothetical multiparty system*, they do not think beyond the existing model, for even limited pluralism is impossible under the current conditions.

A more recent session¹⁹ advocated for participative socialism and for a deliberative civil society, with numerous normative references to participation, decentralization and debate. However, these ideals are not contrasted with the real state of structures, actors and the concrete processes of the Cuban

¹⁷<https://demoamlat.com/el-rapto-de-la-participacion-el-ultimo-debate-de-la-revista-temas/>

¹⁸[https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/preguntas-de-periodistas-independientes-\(y-algunas-respuestas\)-en-un-foro-p%C3%BAblico-en-la-habana/259380.html](https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/preguntas-de-periodistas-independientes-(y-algunas-respuestas)-en-un-foro-p%C3%BAblico-en-la-habana/259380.html)

¹⁹<https://temas.cult.cu/ultimo-jueves/deliberar-o-participar-sociedad-civil-en-un-socialismo-democratico/>

regime. The analysis of the difference between deliberation and differentiation is empty; it is a forum that, showcasing yet another characteristic of authoritarian political science, *privileges the narrative of intellectuals that are organic to the system*. It is, allegedly, “for Cuba” but never “about Cuba.” There is no context or analysis of the current situation or the systematic crisis that we observe in the country.

For *Temas* and *Último Jueves*, State repression and its victims do not exist. Yet, after all of the documentation²⁰ that has accumulated about this subject, such denial and invisibility are questionable from an intellectual and civic standpoint. The systemic and structural problems are presented as “distortions” of the system; however, these are structural characteristics of the existing regime, which uses “deliberation” in rhetorical exercises while it suppresses, in practice, all freedoms. These concepts are not contextualized properly and are overstretched to a point where they no longer relate to the reality they are allegedly trying to explain.

The ‘systemic reformism’ narrative is sustained by Rafael Hernández, *Temas*’ director, and is combined with a *sui generis* interpretation of sociological data—debatable given that it is not available to the public—with constant attacks²¹ on alternatives to the status quo. This logic is seen in a recent event²² where Hernández makes a distinction between intellectual dialogue and popular uprisings, he celebrates Cuban authorities’ alleged willingness to enter a dialogue and criticizes the mistakes made by the persecuted opposition, without placing as much emphasis on State repression. From its classical approach as political technologists, he even goes as far saying that activists are responsible for the government’s unwillingness to implement a law allowing for freedom of association and protest (which it had previously taunted.) Hernández also argues that Cuba’s authoritarianism is milder—with regards to the treatment of journalists and dissidents—in comparison to that of two of its allies, China and Vietnam, which is empirically and normatively a discursive fallacy with a dubious democratic pedigree.

PERSISTENCE AND MUTATIONS

Cuban authorized academia did, at some point in time, serve a real yet modest role in the promotion of intellectual deliberation in the public sphere.

²⁰https://www.hrw.org/es/report/2022/07/11/prision-o-exilio/represion-sistemica-contra-las-protestas-de-julio-de-2021-en%20y%20https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yuKmBzW-oZ-zlCW7dBODh-hdrxhQpBJi/view?fbclid=IwAR0ZH8YVPuaXQ_ToOBh15RoEFV-JLpAvRp9Bw7qnlSqS4W4CPzuG5oLxbjM

²¹<https://temas.cult.cu/trick-or-treat-la-situacion-politica-cubana-en-2021/>

²²https://drive.google.com/file/d/112wUBtcnSutc1DRVO_XhChR1ePAuB8u/view

Two decades ago, *Temas* and *Último Jueves*, its space for discussion, helped shed light on relevant topics pertaining to civil society, citizenry and philosophy, all independent from the Marxist-Leninist dogma. Many of us—socialized intellectually and politically towards the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s—found in those spaces what seemed like a discourse that was foreign to the State’s orthodoxy, granting us access to different ideas, and the possibility to share ours. This experience, as those in other parts of the world, is not a fixed one. We should evaluate it, (self-)critically, on two levels: visualizing how much the country and us, ex-participants in those spaces, have changed since then.

As I have already mentioned, in Cuba, social changes and a persisting authoritarianism cannot be disentangled from one another. Within the regional context, Cuba is still an exception due to the closed and repressive nature of its political regime, who some still present as an exception that they describe as a “popular and participative democracy.” But the increasing diversity, stratification and belligerence of Cuban society against the ruling elites are neither unchanging or exceptional. This is Cuba: Soviet, because of its regime, and dynamically Latin American, because of its changing socioeconomic and cultural reality. It is in this context, one that combines stagnation and evolution, that authorized academia -with its political technologists - and authoritarian political science operate.

On the one hand, Cubans’ role as citizens of their country (with regards to information, communication and political education), at some point fulfilled by *Temas* and *Último Jueves*, have multiplied and diversified thanks to the work done by various independent outlets and projects ran by intellectuals and activists both in and out of the country. Since the migration reform and increased access to the internet—as well as the proliferation of platforms, audiences and topics—authorized academia’s role as the promoter/mediator has lost its relevance. Unlike in the 1990s, the production, broadcasting, and consumption of information and ideas have expanded across Cuba, where the public sphere is increasingly transnational—with multiplying nodes—and where interactions take place between people with different identities and political views.

On the other hand—and with regards to the ideas and motivations of those who participate in these spaces—these questions should go beyond what those who run *Temas* have to say. Those of us who ever believed—because of ideology, social origins or political calculations—that a democratic transition *within* the system was ever possible should recognize how wrong we were. We should recognize how unfair we were at the time with those intellectuals and citizens who were more censored and repressed than us. We held so many debates that were clearly lacking in pluralism—reserved for those who agreed with our vision of democratic socialism—for the sake of fulfilling our roles as intellectuals and citizens.

That all of this took place in a country that had not yet experienced the informative avalanche that was the internet, the new belligerent consciousness of thousands of citizens—previously disconnected or disenchanted—and the unfulfilled expectation of power ever falling on the hands of anyone but a Castro, does not exempt us from self-criticism. Self-criticism is even more important given what has transpired over the course of this past year, which has exhausted any reformist potential—both civil and intellectual—that came from the socio-political thought of intellectuals who came from *Pensamiento Crítico* and *Centro de Estudios de América*.²³ This makes it all the more necessary to think about politics, from both science and praxis, in spaces that are open to contingency and the irruption of subjects with ‘unauthorized’ demands and ideas.

What rules Cuba today—as is the case in many of its geopolitical allies—is a regime that is politically authoritarian, culturally conservative, economically exploitative and socially exclusive. It is a regime with hundreds of prisoners who participated in an uprising that was repressed, and who have since joined the thousands of inmates who come from the poorest sectors of Cuban society. It is a regime where State Security agencies—which are in no way hindered by a non-existent rule of law—have control over every institution and any social, cultural or communal project. It is a regime under which every academic and piece of academic work (whether it is attached, authorized or autonomous) is susceptible to pressures, more or less violent, exerted over them by the political police, something which those who read this text will be aware of by this point. It is a regime which, despite the official narrative, cannot call itself ‘revolutionary’ or ‘reformist,’ because it is nothing but reactionary. It is a regime where any rhetorical invocation of socialization, participation and political deliberation clashes with the reality of centralized, vertical and undisputable processes of political control and decision-making.

This regime is reinforced, directly by the shameless and vulgar propaganda that comes from attached academia, and indirectly by the generic critique and normative language that comes from authorized academia and its political technologists. However, as *The Politics of Political Science* points out: “a dictatorship can only subsist because it kills and represses, at the same time that it shelters loyal intellectuals who think and publish. The structural overlapping between state violence, which proscribes, and authorized reason, which prescribes, constitutes the most harmful expression of the nexus between power and political thought in present-day Cuba. It is a pairing from which an authoritarian political science is born, supported by political technologists; one which detests the full and foreign expression of human freedom.”

²³ I wrote about generational references and analytical/programmatic limitations to this historical perspective a few years ago (<https://cubaposible.com/neo-leninismo-cuba-renovacion-desde-la-izquierda/>).