

## TEMAS AND ANATHEMAS: DEPOLITICIZATION AND “NEWSPEAK” IN CUBA'S SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES\*

### *Temas y anatemas: despolitización y “Nueva Lengua” en las ciencias sociales y humanidades cubanas*

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#### Resumen

Desde el triunfo de la revolución, el gobierno cubano se han esforzado para despolitizar la sociedad, “achicando” el lenguaje utilizado para hablar de política. La intuición nos viene de la novela de Orwell *1984*, en la que la “neolengua” se explica como un proyecto a largo plazo de reducción del lenguaje y de disminución del alcance del pensamiento. El artículo examina una fuente estratégica de la producción del lenguaje, el ámbito académico, y analiza un ejemplo evidente de “reducción”: la terminación de la ciencia política como disciplina en Cuba bajo el régimen de Castro. Como sustituto a la ciencia política, lo que encontramos en Cuba son blandas ciencias sociales y humanidades que hablan de política y de administración pública, pero no de poder. Este artículo examina con detenimiento el trabajo del cientista social Rafael Hernández y de la revista *Temas* (1995- ), de la que es director.

*Palabras clave:* Cuba, intelectuales, universidades, ciencias sociales, dictadura.

#### Summary

Since the triumph of the revolution, the Cuban government has striven to *depoliticize* society, namely by “shrinking” the language used to talk about politics. The intuition for this article comes from Orwell's novel *1984*, in which “Newspeak” is explained as a long-term, problematical project to “shrink” language and narrow the range of thoughts. I look at one strategic source of language production, the academic field, and examine one glaring example of “shrinking”: the actual dismissal of political science as a discipline under the Castro regime. The case is made that in lieu of political science, one finds largely defanged social sciences and humanities that talk about politics and policies without actually talking about power. Illustrations are found in the work of social scientist Rafael Hernández and in the journal *Temas*, of which he is the director.

*Keywords:* Cuba, intellectuals, universities, social sciences, dictatorship.

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Cuando una sociedad se corrompe, lo primero que se gangrena es el lenguaje. La crítica de la sociedad, en consecuencia, comienza con la gramática y con el restablecimiento de los significados.

Octavio Paz, *Postdata* [1970], 1993:293

Since the triumph of the revolution, the Cuban government have striven to *depoliticize* society, namely by “shrinking” the language used to talk about politics. The intuition for this chapter comes from Orwell's novel *1984*, in particular its appendix, in which “Newspeak” is explained as a long-term, thorny project to “shrink” language and narrowing the range of thoughts, eliminating words that could threaten the utopian master plan (adding new ones too), and erasing some memories. Incidentally, Orwell's masterpiece is no longer censored in Cuba, at least officially (it was not available in Havana's bookstores in November of 2016), since the Feria Internacional del Libro of February 2016. In this article I look at one strategic source of language production, the academic field, and examine one glaring example of “shrinking”: the actual dismissal of political science as a discipline. In lieu of political science, one finds largely defanged social sciences and humanities that talk about politics and policies without actually talking about power. Illustrations are found in the work of social scientist Rafael Hernández and in the journal *Temas*, of which he is the director.

The appendix to the novel *1984* (1949), entitled “The principles of Newspeak,” explores in some details Orwell's most compelling insight on the inner-working and future prospects of totalitarian regimes: their use and abuse of language. This appendix is very much a part of the novel, though it is often unnoticed. In it, the narrator explains how the new language works and, in a futurist prediction post-1984 (the novel was published in 1949), the narrator speculates: “The final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050.” It turns out that “Oldspeak” (old English) is offering a formidable resistance, as it is being kept alive, one presumes, by writers such as the author of *1984* and *Animal Farm* (1945).

Newspeak, we are told, “was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum.” Furthermore, “it was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought—that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words.” The appendix explains that words come in three categories: the A vocabulary, the B vocabulary (also called compound words), and the C vocabulary. The A vocabulary consists of the “words needed for the business of everyday life.” The B vocabulary consists of “words which had been deliberately constructed for political purposes.” No word in the B vocabulary is ideologically neutral and a “great many” are euphemisms. “The C vocabulary was supplementary to the others and consisted entirely of scientific and technical terms.” The case of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in Cuba

offers a new twist to Orwell's scenario, bringing forward an official ideology, Marxism-Leninism or “scientific materialism,” that uses both a B and C vocabulary. “Scientific materialism” (also known as “historical materialism” [hismat] or “dialectic materialism” [diamat]) is an ideology that projects what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called an “*effet de science*”. This proximity between politics and science (i. e. the politicization of science and the scientific aspiration of politics) is key to understanding the relations between academia and politics in communist countries (Connelly and Grüttner, 2005).

The Cuban version of “Newspeak” concerns public expression in general, not just SSH. Severe but ill-defined limitations to public expression are a constant source of uncertainty for individuals and groups in Cuba. This is especially true in the educational and cultural fields.

The term *parameter* (also *parámetros*, *parametraje*, *parametración*, *parametrados*) has been commonly used in Cuba since the mid-1960s, to signify official restrictions to public expression, including the academic sub-field. In a few publications of mine, I propose to distinguish the more fundamental and rigid parameters, which cannot be trespassed without retribution, from the lesser, “venial” ones, which can be negotiated from a subordinate position. I call them, respectively, *primary* and *secondary* parameters (Grenier, 2013). The primary parameters shield the meta-political (foundational) narrative of the regime from cross-examination. It features three dogmas. First, the revolution is an ongoing process, not a past event, and it is irrevocably geared toward the “construction of socialism and the progress toward a communist society” (Art. 5 of the Constitution). To make that even more clear, Art. 3 of the Constitution was amended in 2002 to specify that socialism is “irrevocable” and that the country “will never return again to capitalism.” Second, the revolution is embodied in the persona of Fidel Castro and now, by extension, his brother Raúl. And third, the official narrative on the us “blockade” cannot be challenged publicly.

*Secondary* parameters delimit political participation within the regime; i. e. what can be said and done, how, where and when. To modify Fidel Castro's most famous admonition in his epochal speech known as *Palabras a los intelectuales* (1961): against the revolution, nothing is possible; within the revolution, it depends. Political institutionalization in Communist Cuba has been late developing, the first real communist constitution being adopted seventeen years after the triumph of the revolution. Furthermore, unlike the Soviet Union, China or, to use a Latin American “revolutionary” regime, Mexico, the Cuban revolutionary regime was never completely institutionalized. The Castro regime can best be described as a communist bureaucracy ran by a purely Latin American caudillo-type of leadership. Though there is a formal structure of state, with a Council of State, a Council of Ministers, a National Assembly of People's Power and a court system, it is clear that Fidel and then Raúl have been able to create, organize and manipulate these structures at will, using a political style reminiscent of Peronism (or fascism) more than Communism. In that sense one can call this regime “hybrid,” for it is both communist and personalistic (or “sultanistic”). Because the ultimate power to make and unmake laws rests not with precise institutions but with the leader and

his close collaborators, any discussion of the use of power in Cuba automatically butts against the primary parameters and the master narrative it protects. Policies are made and corrected by *La Revolución*; to oppose them is to stand against it, which nobody has the right to do—except Fidel or perhaps Raúl.

Within the realm of public expression in Cuba (this including the SSH), it is generally possible to publicly 1) deplore errors made by middlemen in the past (especially during the so-called *Quinquenio Gris*); 2) lament the poverty of criticism and debate on the island as a consequence of internal problems within the cultural and educational fields as well as the media; and 3) examine social problems in Cuba, especially if they have already been publicly identified as such by the political leadership, but without discussing their domestic political root causes. These are the main goal posts for the secondary parameters and they apply for the entire public space in Cuba. Beyond that, nothing is clear, and since the price of transgression can be very high, actors usually don't take a chance. Since the secondary parameters are both vague and unstable, it is always better to take no chance if one wants to keep “participating” and be in the game. This results, to repeat, in the startling situation where the political leadership needs to remind the media and academia to be more critical and to occupy all the critical space graciously offered by *La Revolución*. Self-censorship is always harsher and more efficient than censorship if the regime keeps people guessing about the lines not to be crossed, and if actors seek recognition and participation. In fact that could very well be a sound indicator of authoritarianism: when the government routinely complains about the docility of the media.

For work in SSH, it is necessary to *start* from Marxism-Leninism as a mandatory methodological and ideological foundation, one that is in fact enshrined in the Cuban constitution. From there one can explore Marxist, Leninist, Neo-Marxist theories (Gramsci is popular), even the occasional non-Marxist one, but carefully, without calling into question the mandatory foundation. Last but not least, SSH scholars should denounce dogmatism and celebrate criticism and debate, *as the political leadership does*, while making sure to espouse the official dogmas and to not debate anything shielded by the primary parameters. In other words, their main task and challenge for academics is to fake criticism.

Predictably, “debates” in Cuba feature ultra-cautious speakers who mostly agree with each other, all the energy being redirected toward safe jousting against officially sanctioned enemies and timeless scourges of the revolution: dogmatism, corruption, the ineptitude of the media, insufficient enthusiasm, youth disaffection, residues of sexism and racism from pre-Castro time, and of course US imperialism, the “blockade” and the capitalist world order. Everybody agrees that more should be done to “improve socialism.” Solutions to problems typically call for a stronger commitment to the dogmas of the regime in place: more participation, more commitment to *L'Etre Suprême* revolution, more “debates” on how to improve everything, and the like. And of course, to be on the safe side, criticism always goes down better with praise of Fidel and the revolution, solemn references to Fidel's epochal words, and comforting statements on how the situation has already improved. Critical thinking, understood as an area of informal logic, is not encouraged in academic circles.

Within such parameters, what can be said publicly about the challenges facing the country is limited, but not insignificant. Discussions of political issues can be found in highbrow cultural magazines (*Revolución y Cultura*, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, *Cine Cubano*, *Arte Cubano*), academic journals (*Temas*, *Criterios*, *Contracorriente*), and in well-monitored public panels, such as the ones taking place during international events (Feria del Libro, the Havana Biennial), with a special mention for the series of monthly “debates” called *Último Jueves* (2002- ), held the last Thursday of the month (except in August and December) and sponsored by *Temas*.<sup>1</sup> It can also be found in literature, cinema, music and the visual arts (De Ferrari, 2014; Grenier, 2015). Some “independent” groups and initiatives are currently emerging, such as the *Centro de Estudios Convivencia*, the *Club de Escritores Independientes*, or the *G-20* (a group of Cuban filmmakers). This article focuses on official spaces, however, in order to better understand the official culture, its contours and parameters. The emerging spaces of contestation respond to a different dynamic.<sup>2</sup>

#### POWER DOES NOT LIKE TO BE STUDIED

In a clear case of what Hegel called the “cunning of history,” the triumph of the Cuban revolution led to the end on the island of the academic discipline that critically examines the use of power in society: political science. In a rare article on political science in Cuba—published in a Chilean political science journal—by Cuban diplomat and scholar Carlos Alzugaray, a brief mention is made of the foundation of an Escuela de Ciencias Políticas within the Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad de la Habana, around the time of the University reform of 1961 (Alzugaray Treto, 2005:137). The directors were Drs. Raúl Roa García (History) and Pelegrín Torras de la Luz (Law), respectively Foreign Minister and Vice-Foreign Minister. It is not clear how distinct this Escuela was from the Escuela de Servicio Exterior, founded in 1960 by the same Roa García (Alzugaray Treto, 2005:141). If the Escuela continued to exist during the 1960s, as Alzugaray suggests, it did not leave a trail of academic initiatives to show for it. As “politics” became equivalent, both in theory and in practice, with “revolution,” “socialism” and “Marxism-Leninism,” the school and the discipline quickly disappeared, to be replaced by the teaching of Marxism-Leninism as an official ideology *and* as a mandatory paradigm in universities, schools and in the media. According to one source, the Escuela was one of the most dogmatic units within the university during the 1960s, following the *mot d'ordre* “La Universidad es para los revolucionarios.”

In a recent article Canadian economist Arch Ritter highlights some of the implications of this situation:

One consequence of the absence of the discipline of Political Science in Cuba is that we have only a vague idea of how Cuba's government actually functions. Who within the Politbureau

<sup>1</sup> Hernández (2004) presents them as a complement to *Temas* that is more frequent and more open to the public.

<sup>2</sup> For an insightful exploration of these “spaces” see Geoffray, 2015.

and Central Committee of the party actually makes decisions? To what extent and how do pressures from the mass organizations actually affect decision-making, or is the flow of influence always from top to bottom rather than the reverse? What role do the large conglomerate enterprises that straddle the internationalized dollar economy and the peso economy play in the process of policy-formulation? Is the National Assembly simply an empty shell that unanimously passes prodigious amounts of legislation in exceedingly short periods of time—as appears to be the case? (Ritter, 2013).

Then Ritter asks rhetorically: “Why is such political analysis essentially off-limits in Cuban universities? You can guess the answer.”

Well, we can: censorship, *pensée unique*, taboo surrounding the leader, and so on. But the full answer is not self-evident. Political science can exist under dictatorial rule, as it did (in fact it flourished) under Fascism in Italy, for instance (Ben-Ghiat, 2005:58). And again, it is worth exploring why a country so awash in “extensive politicization” (Dopico Black, 1989:133) where almost nothing happens without government intervention, is at the same time strangely apolitical. By apolitical I mean that for all the inflation of political symbols and the constant rhetoric, there is actually very little space for political discussions, debates, and analysis of the political process, and remarkably few reliable sources of information and data on “who gets what, when and how,” to use political scientist Robert Dahl’s definition of politics. As exiled Cuban social scientist Armando Chaguaceda points out, “the absence of substantial studies and the lack of public access to such key issues as the makeup of Cuba’s political elite and its real circulation and decision-making mechanisms maintain almost all production in the field at a superficial level.” (Chaguaceda, 2014; Chaguaceda and González, 2016). Politics is everywhere, but as a totem, not as an open and deliberative process. By political analysis I mean more than merely describing or praising the political system, all of which is copiously undertaken in the media and the education system. I am talking first and foremost about using analytical tools to find out how power is used, for what purpose and by whom, very much echoing Ritter’s set of questions.

The history of SSH in Castro’s Cuba follows the evolution of censorship more generally. At some basic level, the challenge for social scientists on the island is the same as the one faced by writers and artists: how to commit to a line of work that requires imagination and critical thinking, without scrutinizing the single most important organizing factor in Cuba: the regime in place. Academia occupies a special place in the field of public expression. It is not as tightly controlled as official media, but it is more so than the arts or literature. SSH does not reach the ‘masses’ like the media, so it can afford a bit more latitude, but unlike the artistic field, it deals with concrete problems and political issues, and it is very much used by decision makers, both for knowledge production and ideological reproduction. So it must be kept on a tight leash. One would think that SSH would be pivotal in a country engaged in a radical project of social engineering. Finally, the simple fact is that every country needs to train economists, statisticians, historians, sociologists, psychologists, and so on. Apparently, one can do without political scientists (sigh).

Both teaching and research have been tightly instrumentalized by the Castro regime since the early 1960s. As Fidel Castro said in December 2, 1960, in his inaugural speech for the creation of the schools of “revolutionary instruction”: “el socialismo también se construye en las aulas” (del Sol González, 2015). The current Cuban Constitution stipulates that “The state orients, foments and promotes education, culture and science in all their manifestations,” and that “its educational and cultural policy” is based on “the progress made in science and technology, the ideology of Marx and Martí, and universal and Cuban progressive pedagogical tradition” (Article 39). Since the early 1960s, SSH have evolved following the ebb and flow of official ideology. According to Cuban social scientist Fernando Martínez Heredia, social sciences almost disappeared during the most intense period of Sovietization, from 1971 to the end of the USSR (Martínez Heredia, 1995:21). They were replaced by the study of Marxism-Leninism and Soviet “manuals” (Konstantinov, Yajot, Makarov, etc). With the help of “diamat/hisimat”, there is no need for specific SSH disciplines, for it is a “scientific approach” that contains and supplants them all. Cuban scholars seem to agree that a “renovación” of sort started to take place during the second half of the 1980s, in the wake of Fidel’s “rectification of the errors” campaign.

Cuban SSH boasted significant achievements prior to 1959, but they were reinvented after 1959, to meet new academic and political objectives (Zamora, 2001; Alvarez Sandoval and Alvarez Hernández, 2002; Le Riverend, 1996; Guzmán, 2012). Two landmarks of the early 1960s were the Law for University Reform (January 1962) and the creation of a new National Commission (February 1962) to transform the Academia de Ciencias de la República de Cuba, created in 1861 (Sandoval and Hernández, 59). Nowadays, the University of Havana features three “carreras” in SSH that are germane to the study of power in society: Law, Marxist-Leninist Philosophy and Sociology. (The same model is replicated in provincial universities.) To repeat, there is no department of political science per se, but some faculty members (e.g. Daniel Rafuls) are entrusted to handle the political science-type of “subjects” (asignaturas) like “Teoría socio-política,” in one of the Faculties of the University. The “carrera” in Law appears to be part of the Facultad de Derecho, the Sociology “carrera” is part of the Facultad de Artes y Letras, while the Marxist-Leninist Philosophy “carrera” is part of the Facultad de Filosofía e Historia. Definitions of these options appear to be both concise and nebulous and they tend to highlight their political *raison d’être*. The answer to the question “Qué es la carrera de Derecho?” on the Facultad’s website, for instance, reads: “En términos generales, pretendemos un jurista de formación integral y básica, que sea capaz de desempeñarse profesionalmente en todos los campos de la acción jurídica y lo alcance sin limitaciones normativistas, sino como un científico del Derecho, pero además, *como un militante de un proceso político* que constituye un ejemplo y una particularidad en el mundo de hoy” (Universidad de La Habana, “Derecho”—my emphasis). Philosophy is taught as “Marxist-Leninist philosophy.” Finally, sociology is defined in a way that could include political sociology, because of its ambition to analyse the decision-making process. The discipline of sociology was abolished from 1980 to 1991, to be replaced by strict adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Soviet manuals. The University of Havana features several

major research centers working in and around the area of politics. Academic work and ideological training are not clearly separated activities in Cuba. Therefore, when looking at activities in SSH it is necessary to look at training schools of the ruling party. The Sistema Nacional de Instrucción Revolucionaria was created on December 2, 1960 by Fidel Castro, to train political cadres for the party (if we can call a “party” the group led by Fidel Castro in 1960), the government and the mass organizations. The “system” includes schools at the national, provincial and local (básicas) levels (“Fundación de la Escuela Superior del Partido Comunista de Cuba Níco López, 1960). The crown jewel of the system is the Escuela del Partido Níco López (called Escuela “Superior” since 1978). The Nico López is arguably the most important “political school” in the country, but it is not an academic institution. What is more, the party or group in power has had various units involved in preserving ideological purity, like the Departamento de Orientación Revolucionaria, and in more mundane information-gathering tasks like the Centro de Estudios Sociopolíticos y de Opinión. Ministries also have their own institutes, such as the recently renamed Centro de Estudios Hemisféricos y sobre Estados Unidos (CEHSEU), linked to the Department of Intelligence of the Ministry of Interior (Minint), the Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Económicas (INIE) linked to the Ministerio de Economía y Planificación, and most importantly for this paper, the Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales Raúl Roa García (ISRI)—which publishes the *Revista de Política Internacional*—linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the official website EcuRed, the ISRI “tiene sus antecedentes en la primera Escuela del Servicio Exterior, fundada en 1960 por el Dr. Raúl Roa García, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, con el objetivo de garantizar el conocimiento básico de la actividad diplomática a jóvenes revolucionarios que ingresaron al Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Minrex)”.<sup>3</sup> The Institute “cuenta con un claustro de profesores comprometidos con Cuba, la Revolución y el Socialismo.” Finally, it is important to mention that some of the research in SSH is performed by NGOs like Flacso (very close to the regime in Cuba) and perhaps more important, the Christian Centro Martin Luther King (1987- ), and the Centro Félix Varela (1993- ), which published some of the scarce books concerned with the discipline on the island (Duharte, 2000; Fung Riverón, 1998; Fung Riverón and Capote Padrón, 1999). For Chaguaceda, “the closest thing to a Cuban political sciences journal is *Espacio Laical* (“Secular Space”), a Catholic opinions and editorial journal” (Chaguaceda, 2014).

The number of academic or quasi-academic centers of one sort or the other is truly impressive. If no department or major research center is devoted to the study of the Cuban political system, it is not because of a lack of institution-building drive on the part of scholars and their government sponsors. All the units mentioned have in common

<sup>3</sup> This website further explains that in 1976 the Instituto Superior de Servicio Exterior was created, “adscrito al Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, bajo la dirección docente-metodológica del Ministerio de Educación Superior. Sus egresados recibieron el Diploma de Licenciados en Relaciones Políticas Internacionales.” In 1981 the ISSE became the Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales (ISRI) “Raúl Roa García”. Source: [http://www.ecured.cu/Instituto\\_Superior\\_de\\_Relaciones\\_Internacionales\\_Ra%C3%BAI\\_Roa\\_Garc%C3%ADa](http://www.ecured.cu/Instituto_Superior_de_Relaciones_Internacionales_Ra%C3%BAI_Roa_Garc%C3%ADa).



that they enjoy limited to no autonomy from the state, and their longevity depends on the political mood of the moment. Research centers and researchers can be terminated or fired for political reasons at any time, as was famously the case of the Centro de Estudios sobre América (CEA) in 1996, or more recently, in March of 2016, the *parametración* of economist Omar Everleny Pérez, who lost his job at the University of Havana but found refuge in Rafael Hernández's *Temas*.

Though social scientists sometimes present themselves (or are presented) as “political scientists”, neither their degree nor their academic positions indicate specific training in the discipline—that is, unless they received some training abroad, like Rafael Hernández, who received an MA in political science from the Colegio de Mexico. Armando Chaguaceda makes an interesting comment on this point: “a friend of mine at the time, reprimanded me for signing my first articles on Cuban politics with the epithet of ‘political scientist.’ ‘You shouldn't do that,’ he said. ‘Here, the only people who can call themselves political scientists are... “and he mentioned a number of authorized voices of the island's academia” (Chaguaceda, 2014).

To conclude this section, one can recall that Cuba invests significant resources and energy in education. Cuba continued to open its universities to students from all over the global south, cultivating the image of a country with advanced graduate programs. The country may not need SSH programs as much as it needs scientific and technological ones, but it still needs them. And more than any other academic programs, they need to be tightly monitored by the state. As Armando Chaguaceda wrote, recalling what his M.A. thesis advisor (he calls him a “devout Stalinist”) once told him: “Power does not like to be studied” (Chaguaceda, 2014).

#### A NOTE ON MARXISM-LENINISM AND DEPOLITICIZATION UNDER COMMUNISM

Officially Marxism-Leninism is one of the two pillars of the official ideology in Cuba. Cuban leaders, starting with the Castro brothers, routinely urge fellow Cubans to study Marxism and Marxism-Leninism. The Cuban Constitution of 1976 (amended in 2002) contains five references to Marx, Marxism and Marxism-Leninism—interchangeably. “Martian ideology” is the other pillar, but the musings and thoughts of the “apostle” are vague enough to be celebrated (selectively) by the entire Cuban “nation,” at home and abroad. Martí's thoughts are not free from intolerant and illiberal cravings (Van Delden, 2012), but they are mostly pluralistic and democratic, and his imprint on current political institutions in Cuba, beyond the anti-imperialistic rhetoric, is hard to find. In sum, one cannot underestimate the importance of what the journal *Temas*, in its choice of topic for its third issue in 1995 (July-September), called “La cultura marxista en Cuba”.

Marx wrote extensively about the structural failings of *capitalist* (and pre-capitalist) societies. Apart from nebulous references to the Commune of Paris and comments on revolutionary strategies in his Critique of the Gotha Program, Marx's analysis of communism (to be sure, still just a dream in his lifetime) is more teleological than political. Communism is what is left standing once class exploitation (from which all problems

derive) has been thrown in the dustbin of history by a successful proletarian revolution. The state is scheduled to disappear—no less.

Marxism-Leninism is a convenient ideology in Cuba for two reasons. First and foremost, espousing and studying its canonical texts numbs curiosity about actual decision-making processes under communism. Simply put, while it can be used to skewer capitalism and imperialism, it is inappropriate to hold communist leaders accountable. Second, Marxism-Leninism can be used as a theory or a paradigm in SSH, as it is in the West—nowadays more in humanities and cultural studies than in social sciences and not at all in economics. But in the West, Marxism and Marxism-Leninism compete with other theories and interpretations. In Cuba, it can only be paired with secondary theories and methods that do not compete for hegemony in the field. It is a *pensée unique*.

While Cuban political leaders and academics constantly glorify criticism and debate, they are in fact shrinking the repertoire of concepts and explanations available, making genuine criticism and debates, “within the revolution”, almost impossible. The examples of the Soviet Union, and especially Eastern Europe, suggest that to get out of this predicament, SSH will need some critical distance from the Marxist paradigm and a especially from its Blanquist version: Leninism, with its building kit of single-party state, terror, and control of media. It is easier to denounce “Soviet Marxism” than to explain why Cuba always adopted the most rigid and reactionary version of Marxism coming from the USSR, even after the collapse of European Communism. In Cuban SSH one can find tame criticism of “Soviet Marxism” or “Stalinism,” identified (rather than explained) as *deviation* from the Marxist-Leninist model, but no radical criticism of the model itself. One can bypass the celebration of the model by resorting to bland descriptions or loose discussions of issues, as it is often the case in *Temas*. In fact SSH often seem post-ideological, presenting signs of the fading away of the official ideology—a characteristic of “post-totalitarianism”, rather than vigorous engagement with it. Marxism-Leninism is still the official ideology in Cuba though, and with official ideology there is only one, and it cannot be challenged publicly. No wonder Cuba is arguably the most conservative country on the continent.

#### HOW TO FAKE CRITICISM

One of the effects of the “shrinking” of language in SSH is the presence of a certain style of communication that is bland, slippery and oblique, one that fakes complexity and multiply enumerations and causal arrows, ending up saying nothing, or not much. For instance, sociologist Aurelio Alonso, a recipient of the Premio Nacional de Ciencias Sociales, offers cryptic answers to straightforward questions by Trova singer Pablo Milanes, on the singer's blog *Segunda Cita* (2014).<sup>4</sup> The topic is a favorite one in Cuba: the debate about debate, i.e. how much debate there is, and how much more there should be. It is a tricky one because the debate is tamed by the absence of freedom of expression and

<sup>4</sup> <http://segundacita.blogspot.ca/2016/06/la-necesaria-apertura-un-debate.html>

by fear of *parametración*. But nobody can say that, so plan B is to look inside the cultural field for missed opportunities and marginal areas of improvement. Milanés asks: “¿En qué medida la política cubana actual identifica la necesidad del debate sistemático y público de nuestros problemas?” Alonzo's answer is a masterpiece of evasion:

Como sucede ante casi todos los problemas que confrontamos, la respuesta afirmativa o negativa en términos absolutos se haría simplista, y las dos se alejarían por igual de la realidad. Los espacios de debate para intercambiar criterios sobre los problemas de nuestra sociedad, y sobre temas teóricos que la trascienden, si bien resultan decisivos en la definición de caminos y opciones, se muestran todavía insuficientes, cargados de trabas e incomprensiones que debieran estar superadas. Aunque —hago un paréntesis— sería erróneo pensar que alguna vez desaparecerán las dificultades, y que la óptica política podría dejar de ser restrictiva del todo hacia el disenso teórico, ya que incluso en el seno mismo de la esfera de toma de decisiones creo sano que se reflejen mejor las diferencias y la discusión cuando se confrontan puntos de vista, como se supone que suceda. La unidad es señal de salud política, pero la uniformidad no puede serlo.

The Marxist-Leninist repertoire offers to users several false problems that provide fertile ground for apparently vital but in reality pointless (and endless) discussions and debates. For instance, the idea of “relative autonomy” of \_\_\_\_ (fill the blank: politics, the economy, culture) ostensibly countering “mechanical” or “rigid” interpretations, keeping in mind that neither “relative” nor “autonomy” are properly defined. Similarly, Marxism-Leninism breeds suspicion of both “subjectivity” (if not “objectively” grounded) and “objectivity” (if it means inattention to ideological or cultural factors), so debates on the “subjective” and “objective” conditions of \_\_\_\_ (fill the blank), and how the subjective and objective conditions must be discussed, can go on pointlessly and accomplish very little. How is one supposed to know the difference between critical and humanist Marxism, on one end, and rigid, mechanical Marxism, on the other, if they both lead to the same conclusions? How can the adoption of a Russian constitution in the Caribbean not be at least a *souçon* “mechanical”?

The same can be said about the dramatic but ultimately aimless use of terms such as “complexity,” “heterogeneity,” and even “plurality,” to characterize undefined phenomena and mask the monism of official values and institution. For example, Rafael Hernández, who is undoubtedly one of the masters of the genre, recently declared, in an article on the “political structures” in Cuba, that in his country one can find

[...] un consenso político alterado, contradictorio y heterogéneo, en cuya reproducción convergen viejos y nuevos sujetos sociales, que son los ciudadanos cubanos reales. Estrictamente hablando, estos no están repartidos solo en fábricas y campos sembrados, cursos universitarios y maestrías de negocios, hospitales y hogares de ancianos, cooperativas, talleres de equipos electrónicos, parroquias, sino en ministerios, oficinas del PCC, batallones de artillería, escuelas superiores para la formación de cuadros de dirección, y publicaciones estatales y eclesiásticas. Estos diversos sujetos sociales ejercen su condición ciudadana desde una inusitada pluralidad,

correspondiente a una gama de clases y grupos, ocupaciones, generaciones, géneros, colores de piel —además, naturalmente, de sus particulares ideas políticas (Hernández, 2014).

An excellent example of how Cuban scholars talk about politics without talking about power is a recent *Ultimo Jueves* “debate” held in February 2016 on a very rare and sensitive topic: “Cómo funciona el sistema político.” In 14 years of existence, this was the first “debate” on the political system organized by *Ultimo Jueves*. As was mentioned earlier, *Temas* organizes these events, which include panel discussions followed by Q&As. They take place at the Centro Cultural Cinematográfico del ICAIC “Fresa y Chocolate”, from 4 to 6. For this panel the guest-speakers were Andry Matilla, President of the Sociedad Cubana de Derecho Constitucional y Administrativo; Roberto Conde, secretario organizador of the Buró Nacional de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC); and Daniel Rafuls, a professor of the “asignatura Teoría socio-política” in the Facultad de Filosofía e Historia of the University of Havana. Cuban journalist and *Temas'* contributor Tania Chappi Docurro summarized the event on *Temas'* website.<sup>5</sup>

According to Chappi Docurro, all participants called for a “renovación de las relaciones ciudadanas para compartir espacios de toma de decisiones y trazar escenarios futuros”; por elevar la participación, la democracia y la autogestión; por una discusión pública sobre el sistema político cubano, previa al 7º Congreso del Partido.” “Cuando hablo del poder político,” said Conde, “no me refiero solamente al gobierno, hay una responsabilidad de todos los factores que integran el sistema; sería una responsabilidad colectiva, pero también individual de cada uno de los miembros.” He adds that in Cuba “no hemos sido testigos del pueblo desfilando con carteles frente a las sedes del Partido y el gobierno, reclamando que el sistema cese”. Signs of depoliticization are nowhere to be found in the country, according to Conde, and ever since the speech given by Raúl in 2007, he observes that “se han abierto más espacios de debate en los cuales participa y da su opinión todo el que quiera hacerlo.” He still thinks that there is room for improvement though. Chappi Docurro summarizes his views as follows: “[Conde] sí cree en la conveniencia de perfeccionar el sistema político, pues no funciona tal y como está diseñado, ‘debido al comportamiento de los representantes de los ciudadanos, quienes tienen que hacerlo funcionar.’ Asimismo, reconoció que ‘limitantes de carácter económico’ afectan a los cubanos y ‘cuando la gente no ve su problema resuelto pierde confianza en los mecanismos existentes para defender sus intereses y los obvia.’” On popular participation Conde concludes: “El espacio sí está creado, lo que tenemos que hacer es aprovecharlo.”

Daniel Rafuls formulates a criticism of the Communist Party for being “verticalist”, adding, prudently, that it is an accepted view in officialdom: “Esto no lo digo yo, los congresos del Partido lo reconocen cuando señalan que han estado usurpando funciones de otras instituciones”. For him, “en la medida en que las organizaciones (CTC, UJC, FEU, las cooperativas...) se vayan independizando y jugando su papel como autoridad, el

<sup>5</sup> See summary of the event by Tania Chappi Docurro, on *Temas'* website: <http://temas.cult.cu/noticias/c-mo-funciona-el-sistema-pol-tico>

Partido, que en la actualidad constituye el centro del proyecto político cubano, por puro sentido práctico debe irse alejando de esas funciones”. The fact that the party actually controls these organizations seems irrelevant. Also according to Rafuls, youth emigration is a problem that “claramente tiene que ver con el sistema político,” for “a pesar de ser un proyecto socialista y humanista no hemos logrado romper con la tradición de los países atrasados y subdesarrollados, de los cuales la gente emigra para buscar solución a sus problemas”. In other words, Cuban youth want to leave the country not because of the political system, but “in spite” of its benefits. For his part, Matilla defends the single party state, tracing its history back to José Martí’s Partido Revolucionario Cubano, as it is routinely done (misleadingly) in Cuba.<sup>6</sup> Before Rafael Hernández’ tedious conclusion on the need to “fomentar la cultural política, porque todos carecemos de ella, no solo los de arriba de la sociedad,” Matilla summarizes the big challenge facing the political system in Cuba today: “El liderazgo quiere que las masas apoyen el proceso y éstas desean que la dirigencia les dé mayor participación, eso es parte del proceso contradictorio que estamos viviendo.”

Two comments can be formulated on the event, before examining the journal *Temas*. First and perhaps most obviously, despite the title, there was no discussion on how the political system works in Cuba. Much of the time is spent praising the current institutions. When areas of possible improvement are examined, the best that could be formulated is the need to give more power to government-controlled mass organizations, and to make sure that the government’s goal for increased mass participation actually meets the masses’ identical desire for the same outcome. *La Revolución* does not “function”: it just *is*, by historical necessity, and everybody’s role is to embrace it as wholeheartedly as possible. All the concepts usually employed to describe and analyze power—starting with power itself, but also influence, public policy, resource allocations, types of authority, chain of command, division of power, possible checks on the executive power, the rule of law, etc—are simply elided from the vocabulary. This “shrinking” of the vocabulary reflects not only the prohibition to talk about certain things, but conceivably, the actual ignorance of how political decisions are made, since there is no discussion or clear information available on the subject. An official from the US Government Accountability Office told me that during the ongoing and multilayered negotiations taking place between Cuban and American officials, technical questions by Americans about issues like procedures, who is in charge of what, how terms are defined in Cuba and so on, cannot be answered properly by Cuban negotiators, apparently because they don’t seem to know the answer. In other words, the absence of political analysis illustrates the absence of transparency and due process. Second, there was some room for mild criticism of the political system in place in this “debate.” For instance, the participants could have talked about the problem of verticalism, beyond blaming the masses for not occupying all the available space for participation. Why is it a problem, fifty-six years after the triumph of the revolution? The theme of youth’s dissatisfaction could have

<sup>6</sup> Though José Martí did defend the idea of a single revolutionary party in the context of the war for independence, his writings do not lend support to the idea of a single-party state.

been explored at some critical length without blaming it all on the us. But the panelists didn't even try. They are correct on one point: Cubans often don't use all the space available; as a matter of fact, they didn't in this panel. They won't or can't say why they kept beating around the bush, and for good reason: it is not entirely clear what can be said, what is the right time and the right place to say it, who is entitled to strike a dissonant note, and last but not least, *how exactly the political system works*.

RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ (1948- ), GATEKEEPER

As director of *Temas* (described as “la revista referencial de las ciencias sociales dentro de la isla” by historian Rafael Rojas), coordinator of *Ultimo Jueves* and member of the communist party, Rafael Hernández is in a unique position to act as a gatekeeper within the cultural and academic field. His recognition inside the island has resonance abroad, and vice versa. In a Foreword to a collection of Hernández's essays translated into English and published as a book in 2003 by the University Press of Florida (entitled *Looking at Cuba, Essays on Culture and Civil Society*, collection Contemporary Cuba Series), Harvard scholar Jorge Domínguez, a leading Cuba scholar in the us, presents him as “one of Cuba's premier intellectuals today”.

Though he is now recognized as a political scientist, Hernández's expertise is hard to capture in a few straightforward lines. His first book appears to be a collection of poems published in 1974 by the Instituto Cubano del Libro (colección Editorial de Arte y Literatura), entitled *Versos del soldado*. Presented by Hernández as a “manual de poesía para el combatiente,” it was awarded the Premio de Poesía by the “Dirección política” of the Cuban Armed Forces. The poem entitled “Cueca del Che Guevara,” for instance, is emblematic of the kind of poetry sponsored by the Cuban Armed Forces during the *Quinquenio Gris*. The biographical note for this book presents a young man with an interest for and specialization in literature, not political science. In *Ensayo cubano del siglo xx*, a book he co-edited thirty years later with exiled Cuban historian Rafael Rojas, the biographical note mentions that he “studied” (no mention of degrees) philosophy, French literature and political science at the University of Havana, El Colegio de México and the UNAM in Mexico. In short biography in his book *Otra guerra*, it is mentioned that “se graduó de maestro en Ciencia Política en El Colegio de México”.

His tenure as a Director of US Studies at the Centro de Estudios sobre América (CEA) is a good place to start the analysis of his trajectory as a gatekeeper in the academic field. The story of the rise and fall of the CEA is relatively well documented (Giuliano, 1998; Alvarez García and González Núñez, 2001). Suffice to say that after it was victim of perhaps the most famous case of *parametración* in SSH, many of its members chose the path of exile (Ana J. Faya, Haroldo Dilla Alfonso). Others continued working as social scientists for a while in Cuba in some lower profile capacity (Pedro Monreal González). Luis Gutiérrez Urdaneta left academia to work for the tobacco and then the tourist industries, with great success. Finally, a fair number of scholars like Rafael Hernández, conceivably the most inclined to serve the regime, kept their mouths shut

about the experience and successfully pursued their careers as social scientists. Their signatures can be found regularly in *Temas*: Hernán Yanes Quintero, Carlos García Pleyán, Julio Carranza Valdés, Fernando Martínez Heredia, Aurelio Alonso, and of course Hernández himself. On the CEA affair Jorge Domínguez wrote: “Es la primera vez desde la constitución del régimen revolucionario que intelectuales acusados de un comportamiento aparentemente no aceptable”—indeed they were called traitors and agents of imperialism—“logran salir relativamente ilesos del incidente” (Domínguez, 1997:17). Domínguez had forgotten about the journal *Pensamiento Crítico* (February 1967-June 1971), which was terminated by the same general for the same reasons twenty-five years earlier. Several of the CEA's members had in fact contributed to *Pensamiento Crítico* (former director Fernando Martínez Heredia, Aurelio Alonso, Juan Valdés Paz, Ana Julia Faya and Rafael Hernández) and came out relatively “ilesos del incidente,” at least in the short term. Before *Pensamiento Crítico* there was the case of *El Caiman Barbudo*, parametrado in 1967 for the same sin of “diversionismo ideológico” (Díaz, 2000:110; Grenier, 2017). Its director, the novelist Jesús Díaz, became a prominent figure in *Pensamiento Crítico*, and then a refugee in ICAIC, where he developed as a filmmaker. What these successive cases of parametración/reintegration illustrate, as I argue in a forthcoming publication, is “the elusiveness of the parameters within which expression is allowed or tolerated, but also the capacity of the politico-cultural field to rehabilitate some of its lost sheep, as well as the writers and artists' enduring quest for recognition by the cultural and political leadership on the island” (Grenier, 2017). It is far from clear how any of these publications or groups, all entirely devoted to the regime, deviated in any significant way from what appeared to them as the official line. In any case, they transgressed the second parameters, not the first, so after some time in purgatory, they could be given another chance. As novelist Milan Kundera once wrote, “the arbitrariness of power can manifest itself in the form of mercy” (Kundera, 1967:139).

Chief among the former contributor to *Pensamiento Crítico* and CEA who were given a third chance is Hernández, a man who seems determined not to make the same mistake thrice. In exchange, the Minister of Culture (Armando Hart), along with the future Minister of Culture and President of Uneac (Abel Prieto), offered him what is arguably the top *political* position in the SSH field.

Rafael Hernández's academic output is modest. He is the co-author (with Dick Cluster) of *The History of Havana* (2006). Two other books came out under his name, but they are slim compilations of previously published articles: *Otra Guerra [Other War]* (1999), featuring articles on foreign policy and Cuba-US relations published in Cuba when he was at the CEA; and *Mirar a Cuba [Looking at Cuba]* (1999). Hernández published articles in semi-academic journals (working papers for the CEA, articles in the Uneac's *La Gaceta de Cuba*, and the like), but he is arguably better known abroad as editor or co-editor of eight multiple-authors volumes on Cuba and Cuba-US relations, mentioned above, half of them published in the US in co-edition with other prolific book “editors” like Joseph Tulchin (Wilson Center), Jorge Domínguez (Harvard) and John Kirk (Dalhousie). For the book entitled *Transformation and struggle: Cuba faces*

the 1990s, editors Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk acknowledge with thanks the “assistance of Rafael Hernández.” That is a good clue: for North American scholars kind-hearted toward the “revolution” (John Kirk, Max Azicri, Piero Gleijeses, Hal Klepak, Nelson P. Valdés), and for scholars not polemically engaged against the regime, or able to act that way for the benefit of maintaining the lines of communication with Havana (Joseph Tulchin, Jorge Domínguez), Hernández is as good a contact as one can have to cultivate scholarly collaborations with Cuban institutions, and maybe getting insider's information. Needless to explain, it is next to impossible to conduct research openly in Cuba without institutional contact and support, something you can obtain only if you accept to work within pretty much the same parameters compelling Cuban colleagues. Thus, SSH books published in the US with participation from Cubans like Hernández, typically refrain from expanding the language too far from what is permitted in Cuba. The inclusion of some Cuban authors in a collection published abroad, while (apparently) a normal overture to perspectives from the country being analyzed, could result, in fact, in the shrinking of the repertoire of concepts, theories and topics admissible for the analysis. Canadian economist Arch Ritter mentions an interesting anecdote that illustrates this point. He contributed to a book entitled *Debating U.S.-Cuban Relations: Shall We Play Ball?*, edited by Rafael Hernández and Jorge I. Domínguez (2012). The same collection of articles had already appeared in *Temas* in 2010 (no. 62, April-September). Ritter tells the story of how, to his surprise, his piece was not significantly censured. As he put it on his blog: “The vetting process that the article underwent was rigorous but surprisingly un-ideological. A long series of critiques were made of the draft that arrived in Havana by the editorial advisors of *Temas*. Some of the criticisms were useful, some were ideologically oriented and a few were neither ideological nor useful.” He did his best to address some of the issues raised, without compromising his argument. In the end, Hernández accepted his revisions. “One interesting change that the editors proposed and that I accepted,” he writes, “was to remove the name of president Fidel Castro who I had referred to in mentioning the ambiguity of Cuba's policies towards direct foreign investment” (Ritter, 2010).<sup>7</sup> The other anecdote is interesting since it consists of basically the same situation (publishing a collections of essays by Cubans and non-Cubans in the US), this time involving cultural studies scholar John Beverley, a very sympathetic observer of the Cuban cultural and political scene, who edited a special issue entitled “From Cuba” for the US journal *boundary 2*. “There was a moment, early on in this project,” Beverley writes, “when I wanted to include in the collection a piece by Fidel Castro himself.” He continues:

To have been able to list *el comandante* himself in the table of contents in simple alphabetical order was part of the image of Cuban intellectual life I was hoping to present: that there was not a single, monolithic voice, that Fidel's voice was certainly a commanding one, but not the only one. But that hope turned out to be illusory, like so many others connected to Cuba. My

<sup>7</sup> Also discussion with Ritter on June 15, 2016.



intermediary got wind of the fact that I intended to include a piece by a noted dissident (his characterization was stronger: a “counterrevolutionary”), and he let me know in no uncertain terms that it would be inappropriate for Fidel to appear in such company. He also withdrew his own contribution (Beverly, 2000:8-9).

*Otra Guerra* uses the language of Cuban diplomacy with ease but does not offer much by way of original analysis. *Mirar a Cuba/Looking at Cuba* is a better place to look for Hernández's distinctive voice. To begin with, Hernández presents these essays as “‘think pieces,’ not academic studies,” a characterization that seems appropriate for most of his academic output (Hernández, 2003:xv). The book features essays on recurrent themes in his work, such as the debate about the concept and theories of civil society, perceptions of Cuba abroad, the evolution of Cuban socialism and the need for criticism and debate on the island. What is striking in this collection is the lingering presence of a defensive and at times acrimonious tone against Cuban studies in the US and human rights/dissidents groups (one and the same for him) at home, and a polemical engagement with concepts (democracy, market, transition) or theories of “civil society” that are not sufficiently forgiving of the Cuban model. In fact, he seems to write as if his mission was to elucidate what fits “within the revolution” and what is “against” it—a pertinent mindset for a gatekeeper.<sup>8</sup>

It has been said that Hernández (and other CEA members) is influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci, a founding member of the Communist Party of Italy and prominent Marxist theorist who is often credited for fixing some of the rigidities in the Leninist theory of political change—by insisting on the importance of culture, hegemony and other “subjective” considerations for instance. Hernández mentions Gramsci here and there, and *Temas* (no. 10, April-June 1997) presents the texts of a conference on “Gramsci, los intelectuales y la sociedad actual,” organized by the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana ‘Juan Marinello’ and the Fundación Gramsci Internacional (18 April 1997). And yet, Hernández offers no systematic engagement with Gramsci's work. A possible indicator of his influence can be detected in the subtitle of *Temas*: “culture, ideology, society.” Culture and society are, for Hernández as for Gramsci, the place where ideological battles are waged. Hence the importance of “subjective” conditions, battles for ideological hegemony, and the like. His kinetic conception of culture is revealed in this rather clumsy passage:

From a political point of view, culture represents a system of resistance to forces that break down social cohesion. To borrow from the language of biology, we can say that such pathologies, both external and internal, grow more virulent in times like these. There are no more effective mechanisms for neutralizing the invasion of antigens of the (post)modern world, and for

<sup>8</sup> For insightful comments on the use of the concept of civil society in Cuba, see Marlene Azor Hernández, “El debate sobre la sociedad civil en Cuba: actores emergentes,” *Revista de Filosofía Jurídica, Social y Política*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2012): 19-48.

repairing dysfunctions in our own system, than those provided by the many facts of culture. In their response to foreign and hostile entities, cultural products act according to the principles of immunity, not as the kind of ideological condom whose ineffectiveness is well known. Culture can generate a more trustworthy system of antibodies and bodily repair (Hernández, 2003:51).

To be fair, the next sentence reads: “But this biological metaphor—which is just that, and should not be seen as a functionalist approach to culture—does not fully describe the intellectuals’ task” (Hernández, 2003:51). This throat clearing comment leaves intact the main thread though: that culture is where you can find the enemy and “neutralize” it.

One of his accomplishments as an academic is that he is, according to Beverley, “one of the intellectuals who opened up the influential discussion of the concept of civil society in Cuba” (Beverley, 2000:6). Cuba was lagging behind this discussion in SSH but also in the Latin American left during the late 1980s and 1990s. After the downfall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union (not to mention the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and the termination of Central American “revolutions”), a somewhat disenchanted left was rediscovering the unspoiled virtues of grassroots mobilization, social movements, coops, and identity politics. It is significant that Hernández wrote a negative review (included in *Looking at Cuba*) of one of the most discussed books praising this new turn in the Latin American left: *Utopia Unarmed* (1993), by Mexican author and politician Jorge Castañeda (Castañeda, 1993). In this book Castañeda takes issues with the Cuban model and offers harsh criticism of what he calls the “thirty-years war” (1960s-1980s) opposing Cuba-supported guerrillas to counter-insurgency forces in Latin America. For Hernández, there cannot be a contradiction between the new trends in the Latin American left and the Cuban experience. That is arguably what his opening up of the “discussion of the concept of civil society in Cuba” is all about.

If Hernández contributed to the effort of catching up with the discussion on “civil society,” he does not offer a “systematic analysis” of Cuban civil society, as he readily admits (Hernández, 2003:32). What he does, essentially, is tinkering with the concept of civil society to make it compatible with “Cuban socialism.” While recognizing the “specificity and autonomy of the *social*, as a factor that interacts with the *institutionally political*,” he creates a false dichotomy between the view (which nobody defends) that “state and civil society” are “paired in a mutually exclusive antagonism”, and a speciously more nuanced conception that quickly leads to the claim that in Cuba, state and society are in symbiosis. This being the case, he sees no reason to exclude state-sponsored mass organizations (or cultural institutions like his *Temas*) from Cuban “civil society.” This approach underpins the recent participation of representatives of government-controlled mass organizations at the “Civil Society” Forum of the Summit of the Americas in Panama (April 2015). The Cuban delegation, headed by former Minister of Culture Abel Prieto, was there to represent the “true” civil society, and to denounce (and harass) the small delegation of Cuban dissidents, better known in Cuba as the “mercenaries.” A common accusation was that contrary to misinformed or biased observers from abroad, dissidents do not represent anybody in Cuba, *ergo* they are false representatives of civil

society. This is textbook Rafael Hernández. Indeed, he repeatedly challenged the view that “to be credible, the author of a work on Cuba must be outside the country or be a ‘dissident’ within it” (Hernández, 2003:11). His essays in *Looking at Cuba* offer multiple iterations of this view: “For some, the concept of civil society is limited to describing the ‘human rights groups’ or ‘dissident organizations.’ Those groups unite and subdivide in such a manner that it is difficult to refer to them as a defined sector, much less discover their connection with sectors of Cuban civil society itself. Apart from ‘being against,’ their agenda does not reveal much ideological identity or organic relation to specific social components of civil society.” Or: “Insofar as it is possible to make an objective characterization of the so-called human rights groups, it seems evident that they should more properly be called political opposition groups. They form and divide in such a fashion that it is difficult to refer to them as a defined sector, much less to see any connection between them and Cuban civil society.” Or: “Their most common feature seems to be the contrast between their notoriety abroad and their lack of true presence in Cuban civil society itself” (Hernández, 2003:32, 95, 96). While Hernández is irritated by Cuban human rights/dissident organizations and by their high profile abroad, he is not particularly curious about them. He does not try to understand what they stand for, or wonder if their purported lack of popular support could be explained, at least in part, by their illegal status, their penetration by state agents, as well as the repression meted on them by police forces and their “civilian” allies during “Actos de repudio”.

For Hernández a good illustration of a vibrant civil society in socialist Cuba is the “debate spurred by the Call to the Fourth Party Congress in 1990—updated to some degree by the recent trade-union-organized discussion of the most pressing economic measures in the first third of 1994”. For him: “This civil society is definitely not mute. The differing projections of distinct social sectors in the spaces for political participation are significant in developing an understanding of the dynamic of civil society in Cuban socialism” (Hernández, 2003:31). Civil society is a reality only if defined as mobilizations sponsored or deemed acceptable by the Cuban government.

In his essay “The Second Death of Dogma,” published in *Mirar a Cuba/Looking at Cuba*, Hernández talks about how in Cuba the “unceasing U.S. siege narrowed the spaces for diversification of teaching, schools of thought, interpretations, and home-grown modes of viewing culture and ideology.” He blames the “deficient communication among fields of artistic-literary production, social science, higher education and political thought,” the “mutual suspicion between the realms of politics and culture,” the “paternalistic habits that have characterized some styles of leadership in many spheres,” and of course, the “bureaucracy” (Hernández, 2003:46). Finally, he argues the following: “Although the nucleus of Cuban revolutionary ideology has always been, to a large degree, antithetical to dogma, still there have been those who have tried to reduce it to a textbook of learned and immutable truths” (Hernández, 2003:48). Here the unimpeachable “nucleus,” we are forgiven to conclude, is represented by Fidel’s thoughts; “those” (plural) other “political figures” are the devious bureaucrats and officials. These are the operational parameters for Hernández, the space for a “debate”: on one side, “critical”

intellectuals who side with Fidel (and now Raúl), and who are the genuine custodians of the Cuban revolutionary culture, against dogmatists ensconced in state institutions. There is no debate to be had with mercenaries and pseudo representatives of civil society.

All in all, Hernández's discussion of key political concepts is consistently an exercise in shrinking or reducing their signification to remove their critical edge in the context of Cuban socialism. His writing is political in the sense of a quest to find a proper way of positioning himself politically, but he has very little to say about the political system in Cuba and how Cubans are ruled.

#### TEMAS, ANATHEMAS

The first issue of *Temas* (January-March) appeared during the Special Period, ostensibly to stimulate “discrepancia” and “intercambio” in the cultural and academic fields. In spite of penury of resources, the year 1995 saw launch of two other journals also dedicated to SSH and “debates” in Cuba: *Contracorriente* (created by the Ministry of Culture and associated with the Uneac) and *Debates Americanos* (University of Havana). Meanwhile, dissidents in Madrid created the Association Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana the same year. An earlier version of *Temas*, “primera época,” was published from 1984 to 1992. In Orwellian fashion, *Contracorriente* is not against the mainstream and *Debates Americanos* contains no real debate. Hernández considers journals like *Temas* “organs of Cuban civil society,” a “space” that “no ha sido graciosamente otorgado, como a veces se asume, sino acordado en sucesivos avances y asedios, defendiendo y acreditando su legitimidad, mediante el diálogo, la negociación, el entendimiento y, sobre todo, el reconocimiento de principios” (Hernández, 2004:9). In the transcription of a speech given by the Minister of Culture Armando Hart and published in the third issue (July-September 1995) under the title “Ciencia y política: un diálogo necesario,” Hart gives the tone of the new initiative: “*Temas* puede ofrecer un espacio para el desarrollo de la línea más consecuente y radical de la Revolución cubana. En este momento, la Revolución, quizás más que nunca, necesita de intelectuales orgánicos, como los llamaba Antonio Gramsci, capaces de recoger lo mejor de la tradición del pensamiento cubano” (p. 91). The journal contains a main section, “Enfoque,” on a special theme, followed by a section called “Controversia,” which since 2002 transcribes live Último Jueves “debates”, and two shorter sections entitled “Entremetas” (shorter articles on various topics) and “Lectura sucesiva” (book reviews). *Temas* does not read like an official organ of the regime, like *Cuba Socialista*, *Hoy* or *Teoría y Práctica*, nor is it a pure journal of opinions like *Espacio Laical*. It is a hybrid publication that is semi official. It is also a bridge to the outside world, if only because it regularly features contributions by non-Cuban scholars from abroad, even Cuban Americans who can be critical of the regime (though not in *Temas*), like Jorge Domínguez, Louis A. Pérez, Alejandro Portes, or Roberto González Echevarría. These scholars would not have been published as easily before: One of the official reproaches against the CEA was that it published American Cubanólogos like Jorge Domínguez, Wayne Smith and Robert White (See Guiliano, 66). Finally, its style is generally sober and academic.

Of the 60 issues published to date, only two issues are explicitly “focused” on politics in Cuba: issue no. 29 (2002) on “La política como conocimiento,” and issue 78 (2014) on “Hacer política”. Out of roughly 720 articles published from January 1995 to January 2015, only about a dozen explicitly concern the political system in Cuba or the study of politics in Cuba. The most common disciplines featured in *Temas* are history and sociology, and one counts many articles on visual art, drama and literature as well. In a way, one could say that articles on politics are many, if one includes all the articles on the Cuban revolution, Marxism, socialism, foreign affairs and politics in other countries (mostly the US and Latin America), or on policy areas like gender, inequalities, visual art, urbanism, etc. Again, the first impression when “looking at Cuba,” to use Hernández’s expression, is that everything is political in this country. But articles with a clear focus on how Cubans are ruled, how decisions are made, how the legislative process functions, how the branches of government interact, and so on, are very, very rare. There is only *one* article on political science, and it deals with political science in general, with no particular focus on Cuba. Significantly, a foreign contributor writes it: political scientist (and Cuban-American scholar) Jorge Domínguez. Only a few articles in *Temas* mention the fact that political science disappeared in Cuba during the 1960s.

Perhaps surprisingly, the name of Fidel Castro is not mentioned very often in *Temas*. This seems to confirm Hernández’s assertion that obsession with Fidel is a fixture of US Cubanology that doesn’t reflect SSH concerns on the island (Hernández, 2004:13). An alternative explanation is that given the primary parameters, very little can be said about Fidel or Raúl that is not strictly adulatory (e.g., Gorla, 2014). The safest strategy is to avoid the topic altogether. Significantly, the only two articles on “quien tú sabes” in twenty years of *Temas* are signed by foreign contributors: a book review of Leicester Coltman’s *The Real Fidel Castro* (2003) by John Hopkins University’s Piero Gleijeses (Nos. 41-42, 2005), and an unctuous article on Fidel’s “charismatic authority” by University of New Mexico sociologist Nelson P. Valdés (no. 55, 2008). Both of these authors are beyond safe for Cuban authorities. There is also an appreciative review of an inoffensive book by Canadian scholar Hal Klepak on Raúl and the Cuban military.

Based on what can be found in *Temas*, it seems fair to conclude that the quality of SSH is very low in Cuba. The overwhelming majority of articles are long “essays”—in fact many are *long-winded* essays: “shrinking” language is a qualitative process, not a quantitative one, based on scant empirical evidence beyond very basic fact-finding and descriptions. There is virtually no concern for, or discussion on, methodology in SSH. There was some interest for postmodernity during the 1990s, inasmuch as it can be mobilized to criticize the canon of modernity, such as the Enlightenment, liberal values and institutions, but that petered out quickly. Data collection is problematic in Cuba (especially political data) and *Temas’* output certainly reflects that. In sum, our Cuban colleagues work with very limited theoretical, methodological and empirical tools.

Though Marxism is the official paradigm used in SSH, the quality of discussion on Marx and Marxist works in *Temas* is surprisingly poor. After more than half a century of promotion of Marxism in the education system, the country doesn’t count a

single prominent Marxist theorist. *Temas* features more than 80 articles concerned with Marxism as a repertoire of ideas to interpret our time, but virtually none systematically examines Marx's (or Marxists) specific works, with rigorous content analysis. A special issue on "Marxist culture in Cuba" (no. 3, 1995) offers six articles that are mostly repetitive and thin in content. The only contemporary Marxist (other than Marx) routinely mentioned in *Temas* is Antonio Gramsci. And yet, one looks in vain for a scholarly article on his writings and ideas, even in a "Controversia" on Gramsci in issue 10, 1997. To be sure, Marxism and socialism matter a great deal for Cuban academics. It is the source of much anguish, but mostly as a lieu commun for ideological positioning. Furthermore, though *Temas* features many articles written by philosophers, as well as two "controversia[s]" on "La filosofía en Cuba" (no. 18, July-December 1999) and "¿Qué filosofía se enseña?" (no. 58, April-June 2009), there is virtually no serious discussion on philosophy as an academic or intellectual discipline, almost no reference to the Western philosophical tradition other than Marx, and no serious philosophical discussion of key issues—fairness, justice, freedom—beyond fairly basic ideological positioning.

Hernández frequently talks about how mistaken foreign observers are when they assume that in "totalitarian" Cuba, debates cannot take place (Hernández, 2004). *Temas* (and *Ultimo Jueves*) is the proof to the contrary. In fact, it is tempting to conclude that the mission of *Temas* is to prove to the world that Cuba is hospitable to debate and criticism. Nevertheless, there is very little debate either in the journal's pages or in the monthly "debates" it sponsors.<sup>9</sup> Other than the "debate" on how the Cuban political system functions, briefly discussed above, no more "Controversia" concerns the political system in Cuba, which is not surprising, since this cannot be a matter of public controversy. Reading this section of the journal one can conclude that there are many topics for *discussion* in Cuba (gender, youth, marginality, baseball, culture, religion, José Martí, etc.), but very little possibility of debate about any of them. One particular motif is striking: almost all contributors affirm their opposition to "mechanical" Marxism, often associated with the defunct Soviet Union and its manuals. This gives a polemical tone to many of the discussions. But since nobody actually defends this kind of Marxism in Cuba, least of all the political leadership, one cannot "debate" with an opponent that is absent, silent and mostly unidentified. One knows that bad Marxism is still peddled by some in Cuba, but not by Fidel, Raúl or any high officials still in power, even though Fidel (as well as Raúl and many of the current high officials) aligned the country to the Soviet Union, adopted a constitution modeled after the Soviet constitution (in fact Stalin's constitution of 1936), and set the tone for the *Quinquenio gris* in his closing speech to the 1971 Congress on Education and Culture. Criticism of the *Quinquenio gris*, the Soviet Union or the Soviet influence in Cuban SSH is not controversial in Cuba; quite the opposite, as long as it is a purely ex post facto exercise, condemning the excess-

<sup>9</sup> An exception that confirms the rule: in *Temas* 66 (April-June 2011), one can read a substantial essay by Rafael Rojas, entitled "Díaspóra, intelectuales y futuros de Cuba," followed by two very negative responses: "Para un diálogo entre sordos" (Arturo Arango) and "Cuba y las trampas del totalitarismo" (Iroel Sánchez).

es of Stalin and bad cultural bureaucrats in Cuba, not the Leninist model and especially not the Cuban leaders who were in power then and are still now (Dacal Díaz, 2007).

As a rule, *Temas* publishes only articles that scrupulously abide by the primary parameters, as defined above. It is quite possible that most of its contributors, and especially its director, do that freely. With regard to secondary parameters, one can occasionally find a statement, rather than a fully developed claim, that seems close to crossing the line, because it alludes explicitly to institutional limitations to free inquiry and political participation. Sociologist Mayra Espina Prieto, for instance, saved the day on two occasions by saying something straightforward about the issue being discussed. Typically, nobody (least of all the moderator Rafael Hernández) encouraged her or other panelists to explore this line of argument further. Political sociologists like Emilio Duharte, Julio César Guanache, and Juan Valdés Paz, can occasionally bump into a controversial issue and at least talk about the political system in Cuba, but they never stray very far from the pack. One sometimes detects a desire to take the discussion to the next level. *Temas* likes to adopt a critical stance (or to be perceived that way), but the ultimate goal is invariably to improve the existing system (“perfeccionar el socialismo”), from a plurality of expertises (with some rare and minor divergences emerging during the discussion), but without what academic, artistic and political public spaces need in Cuba and beyond: real pluralism of views and critical thinking. Opportunities to push the envelope, with controversial topics like the story of “Lunes de Revolución” (no. 30, 2002) or “Why Cubans emigrate?” (no. 31, 2002) for instance, are deliberately missed by completely depoliticizing the discussion and ducking the rather obvious opportunities to challenge official interpretations.

## CONCLUSION

One of the occasionally dissonant voices in Cuba, writer Arturo Arango, wrote: “La figura del intelectual clásico a lo Zola, o, en términos más contemporáneos, a lo Monsiváis, Poniatowska, Saramago, Benedetti, Galeano, entre los de izquierdas, o Paz, Vargas Llosa, entre los de derechas, creadores de opinión, poseedores de una vasta audiencia ciudadana, *no ha sido permitida en la política cubana*” (in Mirabal Llorens and Velazco Fernández, 2009:16). What is in fact “allowed” varies from one period, individual and context to the next. A certain amount of dissonance can be tolerated for recognized scholars and “intellectuals,” within the parameters described above and of course, at the right time and the right place, which basically means occasionally, in officially sanctioned (and controlled) venues like *Temas* and *Ultimo Jueves*, with very little (if any) spill over in the media. In a “nation” where perhaps 20% of the population lives in exile, the dissidents are few on the island, and they don't tend to be academics or “intellectuals.” What Maurizio Giuliano said years ago still seems valid: “En Cuba no existen ni *Havels* ni *Sajarovs*” (Giuliano, 1998:139).

Based on the case study of *Temas*, it can be concluded that to be successful as a scholar in Cuba, one needs to have the right mix of courage and pusillanimity, and to know when and how to deploy these attributes. There are obviously many social scientists

who are talented and who could do a good job if they had better tools to work with. The quest for participation and recognition, to emerge as a leading scholar with rights and opportunities to travel abroad, or simply to *stay in the game*, seems to be, by far, the most compelling motivation. For Cuba to become a “normal country,” as Cubans often say, even before it becomes democratic (if it ever does), it will need better data on how the political system actually works, better analysis of problems, and if not rule of law, at least what the Chinese call “rule by law,” lifting the veil of secrecy covering most political transactions in the country. Normalization of relations with the US, to give but one example, will require that (Bobes, 2015). For that important transition to take place, colleagues in SSH will have to play a crucial role.

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