

Introduction to Marginalized Discourse: Voices from the Critical Left in Cuba

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Collected, translated, and introduced by James Buckwalter-Arias, with contributions from Alexander Hall Lujardo, Lisbeth Moya González, Alina Bárbara López Hernández, Lynn Cruz, and Raymar Aguado Hernández

editors' note: On Wednesday, June 14, 2023, Alina Bárbara López Hernández, one of the contributors to this symposium, was detained and taken to the police station in Matanzas, Cuba where she was interrogated for more than twelve hours. She was detained by State Security because she refused to appear for an unlawful citation to be "interviewed," which is a method for threatening and pressuring citizens not to exercise their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. At the time of this writing Alina Bárbara is under house arrest or "reclusión domiciliaria."

Too many of us on the international political left who live outside of Cuba have not listened carefully enough to our homologues on the island—that is, to those on the political left who live and work and write outside the structures of political power. Many of us have been too willing to defer to Cuban voices that speak from positions of power, too willing to trust that these voices constitute an index of a collective will, too willing to identify revolution, government, and the Cuban people as parts of a coherent whole—even when our homologues in Cuba urge us not to do so.

While important exceptions abound, too many on the political left have been willing to concede that all dissent in Cuba emanates from the political right, that it is sponsored and orchestrated from abroad. There is, to be sure, a well-endowed media campaign against the Cuban government funded by the United States, authorized by the Helms Burton law, and administered by organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy and the United States Agency for International Development. Millions of dollars do indeed flow every year from the United States to oppositional groups in the United States and Cuba. It does *not* follow from this, though, that all dissent in Cuba is generated by these extraterritorial "democracy-building efforts," and if we make this assumption, if we ignore those voices that official Cuban discourse disparages and that U.S. funding organizations ignore, we deny political agency to many ordinary Cubans.

There *is* of course a Cuban political left that is critical, dissenting, disenfranchised, silenced, or ignored, that is *inconforme*, activist, sometimes but not always nakedly dissident, and that has no

reliable media platform either within Cuba or beyond—neither in the foreign-funded “independent” Cuban press nor in the “progressive” U.S. press. There is a pluralist Cuban left, a constellation of voices with no central organization, no organized political apparatus. The voices included here, then, do not speak for a single, coherent left. They simply articulate some perspectives from the political left as the authors themselves define the category.

When “progressive” publications in the United States and other industrialized nations fail to translate and disseminate the voices of those who are struggling to articulate a rigorous, sustainable discourse from the left—under much more difficult and dangerous circumstances than we can imagine—we effectively concede the realm of critique to the far right. We concede, in effect, that the only alternative to the existing Cuban model is Western liberal democracy, the *Pax Americana*, a wholesale capitalist restoration. We implicitly concede that the only voices authorized in Cuba to counter U.S. intervention are those speaking for the Cuban government itself. But the Cuban government’s primary objective, like that of all governments everywhere, including liberal democratic governments, is first and foremost that of self-preservation. This should surprise no one. So, it is with the voices of the disenfranchised, both at home and in Cuba, that we must actively seek to engage.

The progressive press in the United States has tended to counter hardline regime-change discourse with a combination of revolutionary apology and anti-imperialist discourse, but in so doing it excludes voices that reject the ideological binaries that have structured debates—this rejection being a philosophical imperative that Alina Bárbara López Hernández underlines in her reflection below. The progressive media exclude the voices that are best positioned to criticize *both* the authoritarian and repressive government at home *and* the hostile, interventionist government to the north, excludes the intellectuals who are most keenly aware of the limitations that their own government places daily on their own work, on their ability to function in professional settings, and indeed on their personal safety and freedom, and are much more aware than we possibly can be in the United States of the distortive mechanisms of U.S. funding and its economic incentives for writers and artists on the *archipiélago*—a dynamic Raymar Aguado speaks to in his text.

When the subject is Cuba, these writers have an irrevocable epistemological advantage, but too often we listen to U.S. leftists speak *about* Cuba—including its high-profile celebrities—rather than to the people who articulate leftist, anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberal or anti-capitalist, anti-racist, feminist, LGBTQ discourses from *within* Cuba. In this way the progressive media reinscribe a neocolonial dynamic in which U.S. intellectuals on the left arrogate the authority to speak about Cubans for an English-speaking readership or viewership to the detriment of those on the island who speak from outside the halls of power, most often in Spanish. The object of this piece, then, is to contribute to *visibilization* or *audibilization* of a small number of Cuban intellectuals who are not being widely read in English, to call for the translation and dissemination of longer pieces by these and other Cuban intellectuals in this category, and to contribute in this way to a more collaborative, *solidario* decolonizing project.

The following texts grew out of informal conversations in Havana, Cuba, in December 2022. Afterwards the contributors wrote brief reflections on the relationship between the critical left in Cuba and the international left. I translated these reflections to English.

This article is part of a symposium on the critical left in Cuba.

James Buckwalter-Arias, “Introduction to Marginalized Discourse: Voices from the Critical Left in Cuba”

Alexander Hall Lujardo, "The Historical Burden of Actually Existing Socialism"

Lisbeth Moya González, "Cuba and the World"

Alina Bárbara López Hernández, "The False Dilemma Fallacy"

Lynn Cruz, "The Cuban Reality"

Raymar Aguado Hernández, "The Cuban Left, More Critical and Decolonized"