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El Ejercicio de Pensar: The Rise and Fall of *Pensamiento Crítico*

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In 'El ejercicio de pensar' (the exercise of thinking), Fernando Martínez Heredia (*El Caimán Barbudo* 1967: 2–5) made reference to the words of Enrique Varona to describe what, in his view, was the appropriate role of the intellectual in the Cuban Revolution. Varona had argued that thinking was a rare human trait as it went against basic desires that preferred dogmas to ideas. Martínez Heredia's position on the role of the intellectual would have a prophetic character, for, soon after, given responsibility for the direction of the newly created Department of Philosophy at the University of Havana, he led a young group of academics gathered around the journal *Pensamiento Crítico*. In their heyday, both the group and their publication came to be identified with the concept of the revolutionary (and the Revolution's) intellectual. This article examines the formative process of this new, politically committed, intellectual in the Revolution and explores the role played by this group in the intervening years, including the special relationship it established with the European New Left.

Keywords: Cuba, the 1960s, intellectuals, Revolution, journals, Third World.

Introduction

One of the characteristics of the Cuban Revolution that did so much to attract the progressive left-wing intellectuals in the West in the early days was the special relationship that was perceived to have developed between the state and the island's intellectuals. The importance attached to intellectuals and their work was evident from the Revolution's search for the interest and support of the international 'established' intelligentsia and of the newly emerging student-based political class.[1] A number of authors have argued that Cuba's revolutionary leadership courted the international intellectual due to a pragmatic search for legitimacy and support abroad at a time of increasing international isolation

1 This process was inaugurated with the visits of Sartre and de Beauvoir in March and October 1960 (Sartre, 1961).

(Cabrera Infante in Guibert, 1973; Franqui, 1983; Cabrera Infante, 1992). This personal indictment of the revolutionary leadership is often supported by theories – often proposed by many of the same intellectuals who 'fell' for the charm of the Cuban Revolution – bemoaning the fact that in their haste to be participants in one of the defining moments of the twentieth century, they became 'tourists' of the Revolution, 'fellow travellers' or simply misled supporters (Radosh, 1976; Hollander, 1981; Enzensberger, 1988).

In personalising their vision of power relations, however, these positions do not often take into account that, during the 1960s, the Cuban Revolution effectively replaced the Soviet Union as the terrain on which opposing political ideologies were being contested. The Soviet Union's loss of prominence on the altar of revolutionary mythology had taken place after its less-palatable characteristics came to the fore in 1956 in the form of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's past crimes. In doing so, a new international intellectual 'class', a New Left – critical of the Soviet Union – came into contact with the Cuban Revolution.[2] It was in this encounter that fundamental redefinitions of the intellectual and of their role in society were 'enacted'. Thus, the revolutionary leadership's self-interested search for the support of intellectuals abroad ran parallel to a programme aiming to create spaces for the articulation of ideas inside the Revolution. From the cultural supplement *Lunes de Revolución* to *Pensamiento Crítico*, the Cuban Revolution followed a tortuous history between the ill-defined pluralism and exuberance of the early years and the militancy of the later part of the decade, between an initial new dawn of intellectual freedom and the high levels of political control of intellectual production characteristic of the early 1970s (Otero, 1999).

This process of negotiation between the ideas that explained what constituted an intellectual and the wider political circumstances that allowed these ideas to flourish or perish, has recently been explored most successfully using Bourdieu's conceptual base. Although the intellectual field and the creative possibilities offered by it in the Latin American case are different in nature to those of Europe for reasons explained by Miller (1999: 28–32), Bourdieu's theoretical framework has been successfully applied to the study of the Cuban intellectual field in the 1920s (Frenk, 1984; Núñez Vega, 1998). The intellectual field can be defined as the social space in which the producers of intellectual output are placed and also the system of agents or structures that shape this output. One of the characteristics of this understanding of the field is the idea of constant struggle for capital between the different agents. Thus, the individual players, their schools of thought, their power relations, their relative positions within the field and the varying amounts of capital (symbolic or otherwise) commanded produce dynamic, flexible and 'negotiable' spaces for the production of ideas.[3] This article explores the various notions of the intellectual that were dominant in the decade, focusing on the case of *Pensamiento Crítico*.

2 Numerous members of the European and the North American New Left visited the island in the 1960s and were attracted to the revolutionary experience there (Frank, 1997). For Robin Blackburn, Cuba was very influential in *New Left Review* because it was anti-imperialist and because it inaugurated a politics of direct action, key characteristics of 1968 (Blackburn, interview 14 July 1999).

3 For further elaboration of his theory, see Bourdieu (1977, 1993). In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988) puts some of these principles to the test with an exploration of the French intellectual field.

One of Bourdieu's contributions to the study of intellectuals is that his theoretical framework can help us 'capture' the historically situated meaning of the term intellectual. This dynamic understanding of the issues in question is qualitatively superior to that of debates in which authors attempt to give universal and ahistorical definitions of the intellectual. These debates have been dominated by views on intellectuals that emphasise the connection of intellectuals to either knowledge or power. The earlier group is represented by the work of Max Weber (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948), Karl Mannheim (1991) and others.[4] Focusing on the search for truth, these authors have been associated with a view of intellectuals that emphasises the 'otherworldly' detachment of the ivory tower. In life, this was a position most vehemently defended by Julien Benda in his *The Betrayal of Intellectuals* (1955) in which he lamented that intellectuals had begun a move towards ever closer involvement in the political sphere. This closer political role is precisely the position defended by those who argue that 'intellectual detachment' can be easily conflated to connivance with the abuse of power (Nizan, 1971) and deny the neutral, non-ideological claim to the *status quo* made by liberal authors. If the point is to change the world, Marxist traditions have always emphasised the role of intellectuals in this transformation.[5]

The two extremes of this continuum between the 'ivory tower' position of the politically unengaged intellectual and that of what we might call the 'pure actor' politician or revolutionary have traditionally lived side by side in Cuban history. If Cuba officially identifies with José Martí and with the intellectual traditions that produced the likes of Julio Antonio Mella and the student revolutionaries of 1933 and beyond, it also produced 'detached' intellectuals who gathered around publications of the level of *Revista de Avance* (1927–1930), *Orígenes* (1944–1956), *Nuestro Tiempo* (1954–1959) and *Ciclón* (1955–1957) (Masiello, 1993).[6] The Cuban Revolution of 1959 brought these two traditions together. Many of the debates that took place during this decade represented in fact the struggle for hegemonic levels of symbolic capital between various groups and the intellectual models they represented. This article uses the 'signposts' provided by 'key moments' in the 1960s in order to explore the changing nature of the positions, roles and dilemmas of the intellectual in the Cuban Revolution whilst outlining the formative process and contours of the groups and generations that constituted a Cuban 'intellectual field'. Always emphasising the connections that linked Cuban intellectuals to like-minded individuals abroad, the article begins by outlining the increasing radicalisation of a new

4 Notably, Coser (1965) and Shils (1972).

5 Marxist traditions have been represented in this topic by Gramsci's study of intellectuals and Lenin's *What is to be done*? During the 1960s, an important aspect of the self-definition of the New Left was about finding an intellectual role that was politically committed and free at the same time. In Europe, some tried to do so by keeping a distance from the parties of the left (i.e. Sartre); others attempted to do so from within the communist parties (i.e. Althusser).

6 The most important of these, *Orígenes* (1944–1956), was the journal of art and literature that dominated Cuban culture in the 1950s. It was edited by José Lezama Lima and José Rodríguez Feo and included collaborators such as Vitier Fernández Retamar, Alejo Carpentier and Virgilio Piñera. *Ciclón* – edited by Rodríguez Feo – appeared between 1955 and 1957 and occupied part of the space left by *Orígenes*.

generation of authors that emerged with the triumph of the Revolution and the eventual transition into a new '*post-palabras a los intelectuales*' (words to the intellectuals) period that brought about a different intellectual paradigm. The formative process of a Marxist intellectual 'class' is followed in relation to the Schools of Revolutionary Instruction as is the diversity of positions that existed in their midst. Sections on '*El ejercicio de pensar* in *Pensamiento Crítico*' and 'What was "critical" about *Pensamiento Crítico*?' examine the pre-eminent role of one such group, a group which, gathered around *Pensamiento Crítico*, exemplified the notion of revolutionary intellectual between 1967 and 1971.

Lunes de Revolución: The Early Days

The short but influential life of the cultural supplement of the 26 of July Movement (MR26) newspaper *Revolución, Lunes de Revolución* (henceforth referred to as *Lunes*) exemplifies almost perfectly the rapid transition undergone in Cuba between the exuberance characteristic of 1959 and the radicalisation dominant by the end of 1961. Having begun as part of the revolutionary commitment to culture, its beginnings have to be understood in the same context that gave birth to the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinema in March 1959.[7] It achieved a run of 100,000 copies and very soon it became identified with 'a space of expression for the exiled intellectuals' (Fornet in Rosquette Pulido and Moreno Ballesteros, 1992: 2).[8] However, its first editorial clearly stated that 'we do not maintain an *a priori* politico-philosophical or aesthetic position' (Editorial, 1959: 2). The magazine was organised loosely around certain key figures such as Carlos Franqui, Virgilio Piñera, Pablo Armando Fernández, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Antón Arrufat and Humberto Arenal. Thus, in the literary field, the range of interests was as wide as the list of participants. From members of the new emerging Cuban intellectual scene to international figures of high renown such as Sartre, Neruda or Camus, *Lunes* reflected the importance attached to the international contribution.[9] In the true revolutionary spirit of engagement with universal culture that stemmed from a diagnosis of Cuba's cultural situation as being highly deficient, almost anything found space in the pages of *Lunes*, from surrealism to existentialism (Editorial, 1959: 1).

From the very beginning, it was obvious that there was no single, coherent position in the magazine. A number of different currents were present in the *Lunes* group; most clearly writers who had belonged to the previous generation of *Orígenes*, *Ciclón* and *Nuestro Tiempo* and those who lived in exile in the 1950s had decided to return to Cuba in the wake of the rebel victory.[10] Signs of discordance were soon revealed when certain elements in the younger generation argued that 'literature and art have to come

7 The appearance of *Lunes* coincided with the publication of a literary supplement to the communist newspaper *Hoy*. However, *Hoy* never achieved the resonance of its counterpart.

8 All translations by the author.

9 *Lunes* played a key role in the visit paid by Sartre and de Beauvoir to the island in March 1960. An entire issue of *Lunes* was devoted to a historic visit that receives attention to this date (Sarusky, 1997: 12–17).

10 They represented on the other hand two distinctive intellectual generations.

closer to life, that is, to political, social and economic aspects of society' (Editorial, 1959: 2). This discordance was also clear from the continuous crossing of disciplinary boundaries that covered political as well as literary topics, a characteristic *Lunes* shared with European journals of the New Left such as *Les Temps Modernes* or *L'Observateur*.[11] Political themes being the second most numerous after the purely literary coverage, this feature gave the paper a markedly anti-imperialist character. As Ambrosio Fornet explained, 'we were the children of those frustrated by the 1933 Revolution; being anti-imperialist was something common to all Cuban intellectuals' (Rosquette Pulido and Moreno Ballesteros, 1992: 34).

This anti-imperialist stance became a clearer conviction as the Revolution embarked on its rapid succession of nationalisations in the summer of 1960 during a period of increasing confrontation with the United States. From August 1960, the emergence of single-issue editions 'unified' positions and added a certain common purpose to *Lunes*, breaking with the tacit political disengagement that had characterised Cuban letters during the 1950s and defining itself in revolutionary terms (Mesa, 1985: 193). The meaning of 'revolutionary commitment' divided the contributors along generational and personal lines between the 'young ones', among whom Padilla, Franqui and Cabrera Infante were the most outspoken, and the likes of Vitier, Lezama Lima and Piñera, who were the object of recriminations from the first group.[12] None of these 'internal divisions' mattered to the destiny of the publication and to the future prominence of the intellectual in the Revolution as both were to suffer a radical transformation in 1961.

The catalyst of events leading to the closure of *Lunes* began with the '*PM* affair' in which a film depicting Havana's nightlife was shown on a television programme commissioned by the magazine. The film was seized by the Cuban film institute and the fallout was such that a series of meetings was arranged between political and cultural leaders on the one hand, and members of *Lunes* on the other.[13] These meetings in the national library culminated in Castro's famous pronouncement on intellectuals on 30 June 1961 when the boundaries of intellectual expression in Cuba were drawn with a statement that has become famous since: 'within the Revolution everything; against the Revolution, nothing' (Castro, 1961: 12). The closure of *Lunes* followed soon after.

11 *Lunes* was also important because of its denunciation of the Algerian War and the publication of articles censored in France (Alleg, 1959a, 1959b, 1959c; Bouhaza, 1959a, 1959b). Other articles on this topic included Sartre and Mendès-France (1959), Sartre et al. (1960), Padilla (1959, 1960) and Leante (1959).

12 Apart from any truth in the position that *Orígenes* had lived in a glass bubble, without reflecting at all the political and social realities of its time, it is possible to understand this attitude as emerging from the need of a new group to assert its cultural dominance, a possibility that the Revolution had made a reality.

13 Carlos Franqui recalls one of the meetings: 'The library was like a courtroom: above, the presidential tribunal, with Fidel, Ordoqui, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Edith Buchaca, Dorticós, Hart, Alfredo Guevara, and a few comandantes and lawyers; below, the artists and writers' (1985: 131).

The wider political context that surrounded these events is revealing. By June 1961, the attack at Girón had already occurred, the socialist nature of the Revolution had been proclaimed and steps were being taken to unify all remaining political groups, with the old communist party (the former PSP) leading the process. The need for 'unity in the face of the enemy' had important cultural consequences. *Lunes*' closure became 'inevitable' once the decision to give culture a more institutional character had been taken. This decision came at the same time as the creation of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) was announced. The other literary supplements (e.g. the *Hoy* supplement) were also closed in favour of UNEAC-controlled new publications *Unión* and *La Gaceta de Cuba*. Not surprisingly, the responsibility for running the new body fell to a politically 'safe' writer, Nicolás Guillén, a life-long member of the PSP, marking the beginning of a new epoch of intellectual and political engagement and collaboration between the state and the intellectual through an official body in the style of the East European countries.

'*Palabras a los intelectuales*' did not represent a great advance for the definition of the intellectual because, in practical terms, the speech left the power to judge who was 'in' or 'against' the Revolution in political hands, not in artistic or intellectual ones. On the whole, this meant that the definition was likely to change, as it did, in parallel with an increasingly radicalised international political climate, bringing with it the end of a liberal concept of culture and intellectual work. This transformation did not necessarily mean a destruction of the creative, original potential of the intellectual nor of the importance that the revolutionary leadership attached to this figure. It was, however, accompanied by a redefinition of the intellectual in a way prefigured by Guillén's maiden speech to the First National Congress of Culture organised by UNEAC in August 1961 where he described the Congress as 'not a meeting of specialists but the mass contact of the average working man and woman, peasant, soldier, with an experience that up to then they had had to see from afar, as something beyond their reach' (Guillén, 1962: 2). The year 1961 brought about a transition to a Marxist paradigm dominated by a new type of committed intellectual and disciplines that favoured philosophy and history over literature.

Towards a new Cuban intellectual?

One of the reasons for the popularity of the Cuban Revolution among the intelligentsia of both Latin America and Europe was the perception that a special relationship seemed to have developed between the political and the intellectual vanguards. Yet, the belief that both could co-exist was as short-lived as the period in which Cuba was able to maintain a 'safe' distance from the Soviet Union. For it was the need to express the distinctiveness of the radical Cuban tradition that shaped to a large extent the characteristics of the new Cuban intellectual and maintained the interest that the western New Left showed towards the island. Furthermore, the formative process of this new Cuban intellectual after 1961 emphasised the

dominance of disciplines like philosophy and of the university as the central focus of formation and practice.[14]

Although small, Cuba's university student population had proved itself influential in the past. It was among this politically active mass that much of the Cuban tradition of dissent had flourished throughout the generations, where the Castro brothers began their political careers and where a number of the original *moncadistas* were recruited.[15] During the rebellion, the underground movement was fed through the university; it was, in the words of C. Wright Mills (1960: 48), 'the cradle of the Revolution', a Revolution led by a non-Stalinist intellectual New Left:

> Here were a few middle-class students and intellectuals in contact with the tragedy of Cuban poverty and corruption, responding to it in a very revolutionary way [...] we are, a new left in the world. A left that has never suffered from all that Stalinism has meant to the old left (Mills, 1960: 43).

Mills' understanding of the university as the repository of an indigenous and radical nationalist ideology would be tested when after the purges of *Batistianos* (Batista supporters) and of those who opposed the end of the university's autonomy in the summer of 1960 – leading to the flight of about two-thirds of the academic staff in total – the revolutionary leadership had access to a majority of students who shared certain revolutionary principles and who constituted the pool from which the often indistinguishable political and intellectual key names were drawn.[16] One such group of students was selected among graduates at the University of Havana for training in the special School of Revolutionary Instruction (EIR) called Raúl Cepero Bonilla.[17] This school had been created with the purpose of training lecturers in Marxism who were to teach at the existing universities, a step taken within the context of a new revolutionary unity and the consolidation of an official ideology. The choice of candidates was made

14 The historical importance of higher education in the Cuban intellectual context has been acknowledged and explored by others (Kapcia, 2001).

15 The term *moncadistas* refers to those who, led by Fidel Castro, took part in the assault on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba on 26 July 1953. The assault ended in failure but it symbolised the beginning of the rebellion that would deliver the Revolution six years later.

16 All interviewees in Cuba agree on the importance of the University of Havana as a focal point in the formative process of what in the 1960s constituted a very small and close student/activist community.

17 The Schools of Revolutionary Instruction (EIR) were set up for two purposes. One was to provide mass revolutionary education to large numbers of people with little education, as was the case with the Basic Schools of Revolutionary Instruction (EBIR), which educated more than 120,000 students between 1961 and 1966 (Fagen, 1969: 226). The second objective was to train specialised staff in a number of key sectors, including the academic staff necessary to extend the study of Marxism to the universities and centres of higher education (Silva, interview 13 May 1999).

by lecturers and the students' federation according to the criteria of academic excellence and revolutionary attitude (Chávez, interview 3 March 1999). The Raúl Cepero Bonilla functioned for two academic years (1962–1963 and 1963–1964) and many of its students were eventually transferred to the University of Havana where they constituted the newly created Department of Philosophy that same year. Although the original objective of this department was to deliver a curriculum which after the university's reform of 1962 included the study of Marxism as a compulsory subject in all programmes, in practice, the life and intellectual output of the first Philosophy Department exemplified many of the main issues related to the role of the Cuban intellectual in the 1960s.[18]

Given the high political priority accorded to the formation of this group, its peculiarities would be transferred with it to the University of Havana. With an average age of 25 or less, it was one of the youngest academic teams. In addition, in administrative terms, this new department was not accountable to the faculty to which it belonged but to the *Rectorado* (vice-chancellor's office) and, by implication, to the State Council (Veitía Leon, 1996: 43). The latter feature would account for the seemingly free hand enjoyed by this group to choose its own areas of intellectual concern and to shape the content of its teaching programmes. Their initial course, for instance, which reflected the training received (i.e. a 'Soviet' interpretation of Marxism), was soon dropped in favour of a course on History of Marxist Thought, fully developed and running by the academic year 1965–1966. It included a wide selection of original writings by the young Marx, Lenin, Lukacs and a series of contemporaries such as Althusser, Sweezy and Lowy (Gómez Velázquez, 1999). The section devoted to revolutionary thought in the Third World was particularly innovative and 'heretical', both because of the type of contributions (by Gunder Frank, Fanon, etc.), but also because, at a more general level, it would seem to provide evidence that, at this time, the Cuban Revolution had fully sided with the incipient revolutions of the Third World rather than with the Soviet Union (Departamento de Filosofía, 1968). More importantly, this group differed widely from the EIRs in that they clearly favoured a historical approach to the study of Marxism rather than a logico-deductive one. This, it was argued, would allow the students to understand the texts within the context of the conditions of production rather than at face value (Veitía Leon, 1996: 46). Although composed of ideologically divergent individuals, a global, coherent set of themes and intellectual positions (attitudes of openness and of critical thinking) can be discerned from their published material, especially in *Pensamiento Crítico*, between 1967 and 1971.

This intellectual attitude must be understood in contrast to the positions embodied by the EIRs. Although most of the staff at the new Department of Philosophy shared the 'Soviet' training characteristic of the EIRs, they reflected opposing intellectual

18 A real difficulty in documenting the life of the initial Department of Philosophy lies in the lack of archival material for the period 1962–1971. The building that housed the department in K and 27 Street in Havana has now disappeared and many of the materials also seem to have been lost. Thus, it is necessary to rely on personal accounts of the existing ex-members, many of who are still connected to academia.

positions. This became evident in 1966 during what in Cuba is referred to as '*la polémica de los manuales*' (the textbooks' debate) over the adequacy or not of using Soviet textbooks to teach Marxism. Their positions against (in the case of *Pensamiento Crítico*) or in favour of the *manuales* reflected in fact a much wider divergence of discourses or overall approaches to the role of the intellectual.[19] The resolution of the debate in favour of the young group of graduates seemed to augur a new dawn of original and creative search for solutions to Cuba's particular revolutionary path without recourse to outmoded and imported answers. The political leadership demanded the involvement of the new intellectual in search for a rationalisation of the Revolution that would permit analyses of Cuba's existing position in the world and the discernment of future ones (Rodríguez, interview 25 May 1999). This included an appeal to fellow Third World intellectuals, especially Latin Americans, but also to their progressive European counterparts. It was mainly through the journal *Pensamiento Crítico* that this objective was pursued after 1967.

Thus, the radical political tradition that had been the main ideological basis of the rebellion of 1953–1959 came to the fore again throughout the 1960s at a number of critical moments which opened a new period of intellectual searching and debate on all fronts. If 1961 signalled the end of the liberal intellectual paradigm and the beginning of the Marxist one, the period immediately after the Missile Crisis marked the beginning of a new period of debate that included both the economic and political directions of the Revolution and wider issues about the construction of socialism. For example, the Great Debate (1963–1965), although often narrowly seen as an argument over the relative merits of material over moral incentives for production, represented in fact two very distinct approaches to the construction of communism based on fundamental divergences on the question of human nature. The consequences of this debate were all-encompassing. Economically, the failed process of rapid industrialisation overseen by Guevara in the early days of the Revolution was substituted by a new reliance on sugar production that extended itself throughout the rest of the decade, culminating in the ten-million-ton campaign of 1970. Politically, the level of influence that members of the old communist party had managed to gain during the process of revolutionary unity begun in 1961 was redressed during the Escalante affair in 1962 in which pro-Soviet members of the revolutionary leadership were purged. At the level of international relations, 'official' recognition of the Cuban Revolution by the Soviet Union brought about by Castro's announcement of the socialist nature of the Revolution in 1961 was challenged by strained relations between the two countries in which Cuba deliberately pursued a policy of exporting Revolution to the Third World in general – as Guevara tried in the Congo – and to Latin America in particular.

This period of searching and debate also had important implications for culture and for the dominant definitions of the intellectual. Socialist realism was criticised by Guevara in *Man and Socialism* and never really gained an important foothold in Cuban society. More important, however, was the appearance of a new intellectual

19 The EIRs represented an anti-intellectual and unquestioning belief in Soviet dogma, whereas *Pensamiento Crítico* represented a more intellectually subtle search for answers that were seen as valid for the Cuban path of socialism.

group located in the Philosophy Department at the University of Havana that would gain notoriety from 1967 onwards. They represented a 'new intellectual' in a variety of senses. First, they were young enough to have been witnesses to, but not participants in, the rebellion that led to the revolutionary triumph of 1959. Second, they were politically committed in a way that only the generation whose political formation took place in the early 1960s could have been. Third, because of their age and unlike the *Lunes* group, they were unknown as intellectuals until the mid-1960s. Fourth, they were 'New Left' in their political outlook; that is, they had clear Marxist political convictions but were highly critical of the model of society offered by the Soviet Union and by the EIRs inside Cuba. Finally, they were, on the whole, academics and social scientists rather than writers. They were, in the words of Portuondo, the Revolution's 'organic intellectuals and the voice of a new understanding of reality' (Portuondo, 1964: 58–61).

El ejercicio de pensar in *Pensamiento Crítico*

The resolution of the debate between these competing discourses, exemplified in the intellectual confrontation between the EIRs and the young intellectuals located in and around the Philosophy Department of Havana University, signalled a renewed emphasis on the search for answers which did not necessarily follow 'imported recipes'. *Pensamiento Crítico* emerged in this context to play a prominent role in the transmission of new ideas at the end of the decade. Attempting to go beyond the politics of the Blocs, the intellectual current they represented aimed at creating an overall body of ideas that could explain the specific nature of the 'Cuban path to socialism', arising from its position at the heart of the emerging notion of the 'Third World'. The EIRs were unable to confront this challenge since, in Fagen's view, in 1963–1967, they reflected a disenchantment with the Soviet Union and the conviction that 'uncritical borrowing from Soviet and Eastern European practice would not answer Cuba's political and developmental needs' (Fagen, 1969: 128). The planned Institute of Higher Studies of Marxism–Leninism within the EIRs (for the study, research and clarification of ideology) was never created, in part because the EIR structure came to be seen by the leadership as an impediment rather than a facilitator in the search for 'the Cuban way'. The timing of their closure, 1967, is symptomatic and leads to the conclusion that *Pensamiento Crítico* filled the ideological vacuum left behind by the closure of the EIRs.[20]

20 The year 1967–1968 is significant because it represented the beginning of the Revolutionary Offensive, one of the most radical and largescale attempts at revolutionary societal transformation of the twentieth century. The disappearance of tried and failed ideologies that were represented by the EIRs – and by the official publication of the PCC, *Cuba Socialista* – is understandable as part of the logic of a revolutionary process that had sided fully with the Third World, was actively exporting Revolutions to Latin America and aimed to put into practice a unique developmental model.

This project was aided by the creation, in the same year, of the Instituto del Libro, the national publishing house.[21] The Instituto del Libro shared *Pensamiento Crítico*'s intellectual project. By 1967, 80 per cent of the editorial production of this institution was related to the social, historical and political analysis of Latin America and the Third World (Veitía Leon, 1996: 57). It also published many contemporary and rediscovered Marxist authors, such as Althusser, Marcuse, Gramsci and Wright Mills (Alonso, 1995: 37).[22] Thus, both *Pensamiento Crítico* and the Instituto del Libro were well-established players in the politico-institutional juncture of the Revolution between 1967 and 1971.

This political juncture had been established over the years by a combination of geopolitical factors that had seen Cuba isolated from the rest of Latin America – after suspension from the Organisation of American States – and become deeply critical of the Soviet model of development. These factors 'liberated' Cuba from the need to adhere to any specific system and gave the island a much greater voice in the 'world's periphery', an entity which included those sectors which were either seen to suffer the consequences of oppression – such as blacks in the United States – or actively campaigning against that situation, as was the case with the New Left intellectuals and student activists of the 1960s in the 'first' world. The specific Cuban context of this alternative system was marked by the celebrations of the Tricontinental in 1966, the Latin American Solidarity Organisation in 1967 and the Cultural Congress in 1968, as well as the first conference of the Continental Organisation of Latin American Students in the summer of 1968.

Pensamiento Crítico's intellectual leadership, from its inception in 1967, was defined by the attempt to rescue Soviet Marxist theory from its perceived state of dogmatism and the lack of explanatory potential it presented and to make it relevant to contemporary developments in Cuba and Latin America. According to the journal itself, its work developed 'from the point of view of the Third World, to incorporate the results of scientific research into the search for answers to the problems of the Revolution' (Editorial, 1967: 1). This intellectual domination was made possible, in part, by a supportive environment that guaranteed funding and distribution. The editorial board of *Pensamiento Crítico* received frequent and informal visits from the members of the political leadership such as Castro and President Dorticós (Chávez, interview 12 December 1998).[23]

The core group was mainly composed of Fernando Martínez, Aurelio Alonso, Jesús Díaz, José Bell Lara, Hugo Azcuy and Juan Valdés Paz. Many others (Angel

21 The Instituto del Libro was placed under the direction of Rolando Rodríguez, director of the Philosophy Department at the university until that moment.

22 In all, under Rolando Rodríguez in 1967–1980, a total of 480 million books and 15,000 titles were published in that period (interview 25 May 1999 and Rodríguez, 1997: 1).

23 Thus, *Pensamiento Crítico* found the space to become critical of 'Soviet' Marxist discourses in Cuba and beyond. As such, it was a fundamental part of the political project of certain elements in the leadership and its very existence in the long-term was subject to the continuation of that political project (Martínez Heredia, 1970a, 1970b).

Hernández, Jorge Gómez, Luciano García Garrido, Thalía Fung, Rolando Rodríguez, etc.) contributed on an *ad hoc* basis (Martínez Heredia, interview 7 May 1999). The group saw itself as representing the deepest ideological traits of the Revolution and a generation of defiance and searching, in which both capitalism and imperialism, on the one hand, and established forms of socialism, on the other, were the object of scrutiny and analysis. Fed by the pervading culture of protest of the 1960s, *Pensamiento Crítico* came to be closely associated with the wider global New Left. According to Jesús Díaz:

> Very soon we established correspondence and exchanges with our counterparts, the New Left journals of other latitudes: *Cuadernos de Ruedo Ibérico*, in the Spanish diaspora; *Pasado y Presente*, in Buenos Aires; *Quaderni Rossi* and *Quaderni Piacentini*, in Italy; *Partisans*, in Paris; *New Left Review*, in London, and *Monthly Review*, in the United States, among others. Friends like Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn, Javier Pradera, François Maspero, Paul M. Sweezy, K. S. Karol, Fernando Enrique Cardoso, Laura Gonzáles, Rossana Rossanda, Saverio Tutino and many others considered us their interlocutors. They all came to our office when they visited Cuba (Díaz, 2000: 68).

What was 'critical' about *Pensamiento Crítico*?

Two main elements are important in *Pensamiento Crítico*. The first, partially explored earlier, is that its intellectual project sought to theorise the reality of underdevelopment from the point of view of the less-developed countries. For this, it adopted a committed Third Worldist character, enlisting the collaboration of a growing number of foreign intellectuals from many of the journals listed above (Frank, 1968a, 1968b). This was fully in keeping with the declared objectives of the editorial group who stated that they would 'try to inform about the current debates and positions through previously unpublished articles by Cubans and foreigners and by means of the reproduction of selected articles of the most diverse publications world-wide' (Editorial, 1967: 1). Although its own contribution to the pages of the journal was rather thin, it set a clear pattern of themes, creating the necessary intellectual space for ideas that were shared with like-minded intellectuals elsewhere in the world. Although it used much 'recycled' material from international journals, it did so in a discerning manner and always accompanied by editorials that made clear the positions held by the *Pensamiento Crítico* group, regardless of the official line of the Cuban state.

The high point in this intellectual exchange between Europe and Cuba took place during the 1968 Cultural Congress that brought to Havana hundreds of the world's intellectuals. The heterodox range of participants, the openness with which the organisers asked the gathering to deal with the problems of the Revolution – stressing the role that, in their view, best befitted the revolutionary intellectual – and Castro's scathing post-Congress attack on a certain brand of Marxism, all contributed greatly to

increase Cuba's standing among the European New Left.[24] Moreover, revolutionary Cuba defined itself as being at that stage where the contradictions between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds were being overcome, a solution that demanded the collaboration of a new type of intellectual. In welcoming intellectuals to the Congress, President Dorticós clearly favoured this line of thinking by arguing that 'their presence here is an unequivocal sign of the political consciousness of the progressive revolutionary intellectuals, true defenders of the cultural values of humanity with regard to the drama of the underdeveloped world; that drama demands commitment' (Dorticós, 1968: 7).[25]

The second element that makes *Pensamiento Crítico* a key publication of the 1960s in Cuba, is that the journal's degree of collaboration with western intellectuals signalled its prevailing belief in the political role of the intellectual in society, a characteristic that was also a hallmark of the New Left. The belief in the need for intellectuals to participate in contemporary Revolutions inspired a mutual interest in revolutionary processes both in the West and in the Third World. *Pensamiento Crítico* devoted a series of issues to the study of the student revolts of 1968, referring to them as 'the new forces' of Revolution in what seemed to be a celebration of the overall voluntarism characteristic of the New Left (Editorial, 1969: 4).[26]

As for the role of the revolutionary intellectual in the Cuba of the late 1960s, the meaning of *Pensamiento Crítico*'s motto, '*pensar con cabeza propia*', had been spelt out by Fernando Martínez in 1967. For him, the Revolution had to think of practical ways in which to create a new society that was relevant to Cuban conditions (Martínez Heredia, interview 7 May 1999). This conviction had a very specific meaning which did not necessarily involve a 'fusion' of action and intellect like the examples of Guevara and Debray appeared to suggest.[27] Fernando Martínez argued that '... linking theory to practice is only possible if theory has practical objectives and if at the same time making theory is recognised as a practice in its own right' (Martínez

24 The list of guests included Russell, Sartre, Semprún, Milliband, Cortázar and Benedetti.

25 For an account of the 1968 Cultural Congress and reproductions of a large number of papers presented, see relevant issues of *Revolución y Cultura* (numbers 4–6). For a general account of the atmosphere at the Congress and much interesting, though often anecdotal, information see Salkey (1971).

26 These analyses were complemented by studies of revolutionary strategy in the various revolutionary situations of the Third World that were prescriptive in their identification of revolutionary classes – such as the peasantry (Alavi, 1967) – or 'appropriate' revolutionary methods – such as guerrilla warfare (Couret, 1967).

27 The logic of the Leninist theory of the vanguard mixed with Guevara's concept of the 'new man' meant that integration of intellect and action could be achieved in one. José Martí was, after all, revered both as the intellectual author of the attack at the Moncada Barracks and as the man of action who died fighting for the liberation of Cuba. This understanding sank any notion of difference between the intellectual as 'thinker' and intellectual as the 'man of action'. During the 1968 Cultural Congress that brought together hundreds of intellectuals from Western Europe, Guevara and Debray were heralded as the perfect synthesis of these two elements, as 'new men' and revolutionary intellectuals.

Heredia, 1967: 5). This view gave *Pensamiento Crítico* a role that was both committed to the advancement of the Revolution in its specific circumstances, yet one that respected their identity as thinkers (Rossanda, 1968: 7). This position was closest to the refashioned Leninist views on intellectuals that Althusser had proposed and represented in his own relationship to the French Communist Party whereby 'the object of the philosopher was to search for the true theory of revolution' (Althusser, 1970: 3). Yet, a sense of inferiority and awe pervaded this new generation as they accepted their role of playing second fiddle to the 'real vanguard' embodied in the figures of Castro and Guevara who were considered as intellectuals of the stature of Lenin (Editorial, 1967: 1).

In the same way as Althusser was eventually unable to maintain a position of independence within the French Communist Party, the ambivalence of the relationship between the political and the purely intellectual in Cuba was allowed to continue unchallenged only until the logic of international events and political needs forced a rupture. According to Otero, the alliance between the Cuban political leadership and the intellectuals, between the Third World and the European New Left, began to disintegrate only seven months after having been established during the Cultural Congress, when the leadership opted for supporting the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Otero, 1986: 7). From this moment on, once the inherent superiority of the political leader was acknowledged, there was no time for the 'philosopher' to regain the status lost.

Cuban intellectuals never had the power to set the political agenda inside the Revolution. They did, however, have access to the limelight for as long as their role served a wider political purpose. As a result, *Pensamiento Crítico*'s increasing irrelevance was reflected in the rapid change of concerns that filled the publication in the years immediately after 1970.[28] Alonso has referred to this period as 'the cancellation of every space for polemical debate in the terrain of ideas' (Alonso, 1995: 38). The structural reasons for this rapid ideological turn are to be found in the failure of the guerrilla strategy dominant in the final years of the 1960s – symbolised in the death of Guevara – the deep economic crisis that followed the 1970 *zafra* and Cuba's subsequent rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The latter had already begun in August 1968 but was deepened with the insertion of Cuba in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in 1972.

The consequences of tighter links with the Soviet Union for the ideas represented by the Cuban 'New Left' were devastating.[29] They were reflected in the hard line adopted in the 1971 Congress of Culture and Education, particularly against foreign

28 This irrelevance had consequences for the level of 'dialogue' between Western and Cuban authors. Whereas both 1967 and 1968 saw about 35 articles by Western writers published in *Pensamiento Crítico*, by 1970 this figure had been reduced to no more than ten.

29 They were equally devastating for the literary and art worlds as they inaugurated the beginning of what is now referred to in Cuba as the *quinquenio gris*, a five-year period in which a 'sovietised' approach to culture was responsible for a very poor intellectual output.

intellectuals.[30] For the intellectual group formed around *Pensamiento Critico*, the consequences were also noticeable. Having failed to establish a dominant ideological framework, the journal was closed down, the Department of Philosophy purged of all its most heretical members and their programme of study reverted to a 'safe' curriculum based on Soviet Marxist literature.[31] Perhaps the clearest indicator that Cuba was making the transition to a new phase where the relevance of intellectuals was seriously limited was that, following the closure of *Pensamiento Crítico*, the EIRs were reopened, this time under the name of *Escuelas del Partido* (Party Schools). As a result, the rift between the Revolution and the European intellectual universe, which had started to grow from the summer of 1968, was consolidated in 1971 during the famous 'Padilla affair'.[32] If *Pensamiento Crítico* had dreamed of the possibility of an equal relationship between the politician and the intellectual, the economic and political crisis of the early 1970s did away with that idea and re-imposed the same distance between politics and intellectuals that had given rise to the New Left in Europe more than a decade earlier.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Cuba offers an extremely useful example for understanding the role of the politically committed intellectual in the 1960s. Having been led by the young, educated classes, the Cuban Revolution shared, in its lack of communist leadership, an in-built critique of the orthodox Left which was also under fire in the West. This, and the seeming freedom with which the intellectual was co-opted to work inside the Revolution, made a Mecca of the Cuban Revolution for a large cross-section of the European New Left. Focusing on the relationship between the Revolutionary leadership and Cuba's new intellectuals, the article has followed the transformations undergone by the figure of the intellectual during the decade. This process of transformation was dominated by the transition from a liberal concept of culture and intellectual freedom during the *Lunes* period to a Marxist paradigm – where the intellectual served the political needs of the Party – that became hegemonic after '*palabras a los*

30 Thus, Castro's well-known tirades against European 'pseudo-intellectuals' took on an official status during this Congress (Verde Olivo, 1971).

31 Thus, Thalía Fung, who had never participated in the journal beyond mid-1968, was promoted in the department and the director, a member of the Editorial Board of the journal with which it had identified so closely, was replaced by Marta Pérez Rolo by the end of 1970.

32 In October 1968, the international jury of UNEAC awarded the annual Casa de las Américas poetry prize to Heberto Padilla. This decision was met with dismay by the cultural authorities who greatly disliked the young non-conformist. As a result, the journal of the armed forces, *Verde Olivo*, launched a campaign against intellectuals. This persecution was compounded when the poet was arrested in 1971 and subsequently forced to 'retract' his anti-revolutionary views in public. This infamous episode in the Cuban Revolution was met by an international campaign for Padilla's release and marked the moment of separation between many European progressive intellectuals and the Revolution.

intelectuales'. This paradigm was in turn dominated by positions that were critical of Soviet Marxism. The formation of what the political leadership described as a type of intellectual that was 'organic' to the Revolution has been illustrated by the case of the intellectual group formed around the creation of *Pensamiento Crítico*, their hegemonic intellectual domination after 1967 and their rapid demise after 1971.

The *Pensamiento Crítico* group offered a clear set of thematic concerns dominant during the period of 'the Cuban heresy', notably the search for theoretical frameworks that could, from a critical conception of Marxism, explain the uniqueness of the Revolution's path to socialism. This included a re-interpreted Leninist version of the role of the intellectual via Althusser. The *Pensamiento Crítico* group aimed to be politically committed *qua* intellectuals, thus breaking the continuum between the 'ivory tower' and the pure actor/revolutionary. The failure of this attempt to become politically committed intellectuals whilst free of interference from power took place at a time when Cuba's revolutionary unity could not be compromised by the diffusion of certain ideas that were becoming more and more irrelevant to the existing political and economic conditions of the Revolution. The disappearance of *Pensamiento Crítico* in 1971 symbolised the reaffirmation of Soviet economic and intellectual models, mediated by members of the former PSP, and brought with it a period in which the intellectual's ability to comment on the political sphere of the Revolution would be 'submerged' for almost two decades.

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