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Autocratic Cooperation: Power, Repression, and Propaganda
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Arendt in Havana: The Experience of the Hannah Arendt Institute of Artivism (INSTAR)

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On the morning of May 20, 2015, the artist and activist Tania Bruguera began reading the third part of the book The Origins of Totalitarianism".[1] The continuous reading, which lasted 100 hours, ended on the 24th, the day the artist was arrested by State Security.[2] Bruguera stated upon being released, a few hours later: This performance is part of the International Institute of Artivism project. I aspire to contribute to an understanding of the role that art plays and the effectiveness it has as an agent of social change."

In a telephone interview with Tania Bruguera, I learned that about fifty people took part in the reading: close neighbors from her home, opposition members such as the Ladies in White and Estado de SAT, Cuban specialists and artists living abroad, and foreign visitors who participated and were visiting Cuba on the occasion of the Havana Biennial.[3]

The procedure was as follows: each individual had one hour to read and comment on paragraphs of the third part of the text, which is devoted to Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism. They could read, and the comments were free, either on the text or on their personal experience in Cuba. Several neighbors and opposition members pointed out the coincidence between what they read and Cuban reality.

Tania Bruguera's prior knowledge of the figure of the philosopher Hannah Arendt, through another book by Arendt, The Promise of Politics", led her to decide to read The Origins of Totalitarianism" because of the force of the title itself, but also because of the situation of siege against her professional and personal work, which ended with her exile forced by the Cuban authorities. This performance served as symbolic protection for the artist, while at the same time it disseminated a valuable and almost unknown body of thought on the island; and, on the other hand, it served civic education, one of the declared objectives of INSTAR.

On the Documenta 15 website, one can read: The Hannah Arendt Institute of Artivism (INSTAR) emerged from an artistic action in Havana, Cuba, when, in May 2015, the artist and activist Tania Bruguera carried out a collective reading of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) at the current headquarters of INSTAR. For 100 hours, Arendt's classic study of totalitarian regimes, of great relevance to present-day Cuba, was recited and debated.[4]

There are relevant features of the totalitarian Stalinism described by Hannah Arendt that are present in current Cuban reality. We will describe 10 features and update them with data from the independent Cuban press, from international organizations, and from independent Cuban civil society organizations.[5]

1. Control over bodies

Arendt says:

The introduction of an internal passport in which all departures from one city toward another had to be registered and authorized... page 265, (Taurus, 1998)

In Cuba:

Decree-Law 217 of April 22, 1997, on internal territorial mobility, reproduced the same Soviet mechanism of control over citizens. Not only is a permit from the authorities necessary to reside in a territory of the republic and to have a ration book: visiting and staying at the home of friends is also an offense, so the citizen can be banished to his or her city of origin if he

[1]This exercise, which examines the reception of an author in a country different from the one in which the work was produced, and in a period different from the one in which it was written, is an exercise in the sociology of knowledge. Its purpose is to understand how an author is disseminated and interpreted in the country that receives the work. In a closed society such as Cuba, the arrival of any foreign author is monitored or denigrated by the authorities of the Cuban totalitarian regime.

[2]The arrest was reported by the independent Cuban press outlet Cubanet.com, https://www.cubanet.org/fin-de-performance-y-arresto-a-tania-bruguera-en-jornada-represiva/, May 25, 2015.

[3]Promotion of the Havana Biennial 2015. For its 12th edition, which runs from May 22 to June 22, 2015. At https://artishockrevista.com/2015/05/20/bienal-la-habana-2015-la-idea-la-experiencia/, May 20, 2015.

[4]DOCUMENTA 15 reviews the performance. https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/instituto-de-artivismo-hannah-arendt/#:~:text=Durante%20dos%20a%C3%B1os%2C%20Tretyakov%20vivi%C3%B3,censurados%20por%20el%20gobierno%20cubano. May 2015. ARCHIVO ARTEA expands on the civic education character of this institution. https://archivoartea.uclm.es/obras/instituto-de-artivismo-hannah-arendt-instar/ 2015.

[5]All quotations from Arendt's work are taken from the Taurus edition of "The Origins of Totalitarianism", Spanish version by Guillermo Solana © Grupo Santillana de Ediciones, S. A., 1974, 1998, Torrelaguna, 60. 28043 Madrid.

or she is a public dissenter. Many activists and independent journalists have been forced by the political police and the PNR to board public transportation to return to their provinces, without being able to carry out the errands that had led them to travel to other provinces of the country. The authorities also arbitrarily forbid activists and independent journalists from leaving their provinces of origin.

On the other hand, this decree and the creation of the Ministry of Physical Planning enable the eviction of families who have built "llega y pon" neighborhoods to flee the extremely poor conditions of survival in their provinces of origin. These vulnerable populations have no alternatives for staying and building, unless they are needed as labor in state enterprises. At times they are tolerated, at other times they are not. The serious housing problem accumulated over decades has led to the appearance of numerous belts of misery around the capital.[6]

Cuban totalitarianism also controls bodies outside the country.

The new migration law of 2013 eliminated an exit permit that cost 150 dollars and a permit for residence abroad that cost 900 euros in 1999, without which inherited family property and the right to it were lost. If this permit was not paid for, the property was confiscated by the State after 11 months. However, the new law requires a return to the country every 24 months, otherwise the property is confiscated.

The 2013 law leaves room to prevent human rights activists and independent journalists from leaving the country according to the public interest" and the criteria of State Security", two figures not defined in the law and used at the discretion of the totalitarian government, whose number of people regulated without legal reasons between 2019 and the first months of 2020 exceeds 240, most of them notified at the moment of boarding the plane.

Between 1960 and 1964, hundreds of peasant families were forcibly displaced from the Escambray mountains to Sandino City at the far western end of the island.

To prevent the peasants of the area from supplying food and help to the "insurgents" of the Escambray, a group of rebels who sought to overthrow Fidel Castro in the early 1960s, the revolutionary Government ordered the mass removal of the residents of those mountains in the center of the Island. Juan and his family were part of the deportees who in 1964 were taken to the captive towns, communities that one could barely leave or enter.

According to data revealed in publications of the Cuban exile, it is estimated that a total of 21 towns of this type were set up, surrounded by barbed wire and with permanent guards at the entrance. Residents could not leave or receive visits, and all correspondence was inspected[7].

2. Denunciation" and loyalty to the party", two mechanisms of totalitarian terror

Hannah Arendt says:

The atomization of the masses in Soviet society was achieved through the skillful use of repeated purges that invariably precede the liquidation of groups. In order to destroy all social and family ties, the purges are carried out in such a way that they threaten the accused himself and all his current relations, from simple acquaintances to his closest friends and relatives. The consequence of the simple and ingenious system of "guilt by association" is that as soon as a man is accused, his former friends immediately turn into his fiercest enemies; to save their own skins they voluntarily provide information and hasten to formulate denunciations that corroborate the nonexistent evidence against him. This is the only way of proving that they are worthy of trust... Since merit is estimated according to the denunciations of one's closest comrades, it is obvious that the most elementary precaution requires that one avoid all intimate contacts if possible... Thus, the Bolshevik leaders managed to create an atomized and individualized society such as had never been known before and which would hardly have produced by itself events or catastrophes. Page 266. (Taurus, 1998)

In Cuba:

Since 1959, Cuban opposition members have been treated as traitors", criminals" or non-persons" and have suffered the corresponding isolation from their friends, relatives and community. The dictator Fidel Castro declared them scum". Those who approach or are friends of opposition members suffer the loss of their jobs, permanent surveillance by the political police, harassment and intimidation by the political police of themselves and their families, the fabrication of criminal cases, prison or forced exile. For that reason, all Cuban independent journalists and all defenders of universal human rights are systematically watched, intimidated, and have their elementary rights eliminated.

[6]Marlene Azor Hernández, Totalitarianism in Cuba and institutional state violence, in Hypermedia magazine.com https://hypermediamagazine.com/sociedad/totalitarismo-en-cuba/?fbclid=IwY2xjawOUA_VleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe2z3YoHuQnAWOkKPKpMi0lIuednVS0PQbhfVE0bjVR8SAjxRty5BlpUisE18_aem_YE4RMlvxgT4LZglafS87Mg November 26, 2020.

[7]14 y medio, **"This was a town without a soul and full of memories"** https://www.14ymedio.com/sociedad/pueblo-alma-lleno-recuerdos_1_1052212.html February 1, 2019.

According to the NGO Prisoners Defenders, dedicated to monitoring Cuban political and conscience prisoners, as of October of this year, there are 1,179 male and female political prisoners in the country, in subhuman conditions and under different types of torture.[8]

3. The "crime" in Soviet totalitarianism

Arendt says:

The central presumption of totalitarianism that everything is possible leads thus, through the consistent elimination of all factual restraints, to the absurd and terrible consequence that every crime that the rulers can conceive must be punished, regardless of whether or not it has been committed. Page 343.

In Cuba:

The Cuban penal code contains the offense of pre-criminal security", described, with the corresponding penalties, in articles 73 to 84. According to this offense, the authorities define the accused by antisocial" conduct that offends "good customs". This loose definition allows the repressive organs to impose loss of liberty and confinement in special centers of work and study, for one to four years, on citizens who have not committed any defined crime, who will be monitored by the political police and the PNR.

Cuban human rights organizations have counted tens of thousands of citizens imprisoned under this criminal figure in the last forty years. Of course, it has been and is a criminal figure used to punish political dissent. As a corollary of the current legislation, the government has allowed itself to declare for more than six decades that ***there are no political prisoners in Cuba.***

In the new Cuban penal code of 2022, pre-criminal dangerousness" is eliminated, but the responsibility of drafting a warning letter, in which the demand to cease any political and civic activism appears, is transferred to the police investigator, in order to then declare the figure of contempt" (desacato"), a criminal offense, if the individual does not cease his or her activism. The penalties for contempt" range between six months and one year in prison.[9]

4. The totalitarian organization

Arendt says:

The professional organizations of the party (in Soviet Stalinism), teachers, lawyers, doctors, students, university professors, technicians and workers... were duplicates of the preexisting ones... but in a fraudulent form (the front organizations). Page 302.

Arendt also tells us:

Wherever totalitarian power arose, it developed entirely new political institutions and destroyed all the social, legal and political traditions of the country. Page 369.

In Cuba:

Fidel Castro suspended the Constitution of 1940 in February 1959 and imposed a provisional Fundamental Law that lasted until 1976. This law suspended all the civil and political rights of the Constitution of 1940, and elementary legal figures, such as habeas corpus or due process, had to be renewed every 45 days. They were never renewed. Even today, these two figures of protection for those arbitrarily accused by the authorities do not exist in the penal code. All civil society organized before 1959 was eliminated.

The mass organizations created by Fidel Castro since 1960, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, the Federation of Cuban Women, the University Student Federation, the Federation of Middle School Students, the Union of Pioneers of Cuba, the Union of Journalists of Cuba, the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), the National Union of Jurists of Cuba, among others, served to frame, regiment and subjugate each of the social sectors, financed by the party. These organizations are dedicated to passing down the party's guidelines to the masses, and above all to watching and punishing those who disagree with public policies in each social sector.

5. The role of the political police in Soviet totalitarianism

Hannah Arendt says:

Totalitarianism in power establishes the secret police as the executor and guardian of its domestic experiment of constantly transforming reality into fiction and, finally, erects the concentration camps as special laboratories in which to carry out its experiment of total domination.

In Cuba:

The **Military Units to Aid Production** (UMAP) were forced labor camps that existed in Cuba between 1965 and 1968. Although there are no verifiable figures, it can be

[8] Prisoners defenders.org https://www.prisonersdefenders.org/2025/11/06/11-nuevos-presos-politicos-en-cuba-hacinamiento-torturas-enfermedades-matan-cientos-presos/ November 6, 2025.

[9] NGO Cubalex https://cubalex.org/2025/10/13/desacato-y-advertencias-oficiales-nuevas-formas-de-una-vieja-represion/ 2025.

stated that more than 30,000 men were held there, basically young men of age to perform military service who for various reasons refused to do compulsory military service (such as, for example, members of some religions), were rejected by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, or because of their bourgeois" homosexuality or their clothing had to be reeducated" by the revolutionary government. Many of those interviewed in the documentary Improper Conduct" recount that the police picked up people directly from the street and put them on buses to be transferred to UMAP camps. This method of selection seems to have been more common among effeminate homosexual men and antisocial" people such as "hippies."

The writer and former collaborator of the Intelligence Directorate Norberto Fuentes estimated that of approximately 35,000 inmates, 507 ended up in psychiatric wards, 72 died from torture and 180 committed suicide. A 1967 human rights report of the Organization of American States found that more than 30,000 inmates were forced to work for free on state farms 10 to 12 hours a day, from sunup to sundown, seven days a week, with poor food consisting of rice and spoiled food, unsanitary water, dirty plates, overcrowded barracks, without electricity, latrines, or showers, the inmates receive the same treatment as political prisoners". The report concludes that the two objectives of the UMAP camps were to provide free labor for the state" and "to punish young people who refuse to join the communist organizations". The Cuban government maintained that the UMAP were not labor camps, but part of military service.[10]

Forced labor camps exist in Cuba today, using 60,000 imprisoned inmates.

Some 60,000 prisoners in Cuba, almost half of its estimated prison population, are subjected to forced labor, mostly without pay and in inhumane and exploitative" conditions for economic and punitive" reasons, the NGO Prisoners Defenders reported this Monday[11].

The First Comprehensive Report on Forced Labor in Cuban Prisons, 42 pages long, is based on standardized interviews with 53 former inmates, whose testimonies were contrasted with 60 additional interviews and externally verified documentary sources.

The text speaks of conditions of slavery" in an absolute and unpunished disconnection from international legislation and any labor right", and denounces that the island consolidates forced labor" as an economic engine" and exports its production to Europe. The document of this NGO, a reference in the registry of prisoners for political reasons in Cuba, states that the vast majority of those affected do not sign a labor contract or receive a salary, or it is merely "symbolic", as it does not exceed four dollars a month.

It emphasizes that prisoners, both political and common, work an average of 63 hours a week, mainly in the production of marabou charcoal, in the sugar cane harvest, in cigar making and in construction.

The vast majority declared that they worked without adequate tools, labor protection or sufficient rest, subjected to great risks, and that they suffered, as a consequence, "serious physical and psychological deterioration".

In addition, all those surveyed stated that they had been coerced into working through threats, physical violence or reprisals, and the vast majority indicated that they were forced to work regardless of suffering from chronic illnesses or injuries that made them unfit for those tasks.

The study also notes that Afro-descendants and women are disproportionately represented among the victims of forced labor in Cuban prisons and suffer aggravated forms of discrimination and violence (including sexual violence).

Export to Europe

The Prisoners Defenders report details that a large part of this forced labor production is marabou charcoal, an invasive weed whose woody branches are especially prized once burned under controlled conditions.

In 2023 Cuba exported a total of 61.8 million dollars of charcoal, which makes this item its sixth largest export line and the island its ninth largest producer in the world.

Cuban charcoal, the report continues, is exported to European countries, mainly to Spain, but also to Portugal, Greece, Italy and Turkey.

Spain, in turn, sells a large amount of this material to France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The Prisoners Defenders report calculates that for each 15-kilo sack sold in Spain, a Cuban inmate receives on average less than one cent of a dollar, while the marketers in Spain receive a little over 21 dollars and the Cuban Government about eight.

The NGO argues that the only motivation of the Cuban Government and the European marketers is an excessive profit motive", and urges the European Union (EU) to act with due diligence and ban trade in a product of slavery".

[10]Taken from Wikipedia. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidad_Militar_de_Ayuda_a_la_Producci%C3%B3n

[11]Complaint by the NGO Prisoners Defenders, as reported by https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/informe-de-ong-acusa-a-cuba-de-someter-a-unos-60.000-presos-a-trabajos-forzosos/90007586 September 15, 2025.

The study also cites 60 European companies that market charcoal of Cuban origin, of which a little over a third are Spanish.

The Prisoners Defenders report also denounces that 7.5 % of Cuban cigars have been made by inmates forced to work, including those that are exported to the rest of the world under recognized brands such as Cohiba.

Cuban totalitarianism does not need forced labor camps outside the Cuban prisons, today it maintains the second highest prison population rate in the world, second place, after El Salvador. Today 60,000 prisoners work in forced labor camps.[12]

6. The opacity of Soviet totalitarianism

Hannah Arendt says:

The only rule of which one can be sure in a Totalitarian State is that the more visible the organs of Government are, the less power they have, and that the less is known about an institution, the more powerful it will ultimately turn out to be. According to this rule, the soviets have less power than the Bolshevik party, the Party has less power than the secret police, and real power begins where secrecy begins. Page 326. (Taurus, 1998)

In Cuba:

Indeed in Cuba, all citizens ask ourselves who decides the public policies and the permanent changes of course (the permanent movement that totalitarianism imposes, according to Hannah Arendt), which place the population in increasingly precarious conditions. Until the death of Fidel Castro it seemed indeed that he concentrated all the power, but after 2016 the opacity continues as to who really decides the turns and the continuities of policies and of power. It could be the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, or the president and vice president appointed in Parliament, or the Intelligence and counterintelligence directorate of the political police. However, for more than 30 years there has existed a military conglomerate, GAESA, which does not appear among the public institutions of the country and, according to estimates by several analysts, controls 70% of Cuban enterprises and 95% of the foreign currency that enters the country. That is, a military economic power parallel to the government, which is not audited nor pays taxes, nor is accountable to the citizenry. An opaque power that controls national resources, appropriates them and is totally secret": which military officers run them, and who answers for these secret" businesses? Its existence is known through the independent Cuban press.[13]

7. On the unproductive economy of Soviet totalitarianism

Arendt says:

The multiplication of organs lacking any sense of responsibility and competence implies not only a tremendously overwhelming and unproductive increase of the Administration, but actually hinders productivity because contradictory orders constantly delay real work, until the order of the boss decides. Page 330.

In Cuba:

The centrally controlled economy administered by the State is maintained to this day. Monopoly of domestic trade, monopoly of foreign trade, monopoly of production, monopoly of the Central Bank, monopoly of the Tourism sector, and incipient private property has by law a subordinate role dependent on state enterprises. This totalitarian economic system has generated an army of parasitic political and economic officials to control production. There are three levels of control above each individual or cooperative producer: the Ministry, the Higher Organizations of Business Development, the union of enterprises of the same branch, and finally the basic state enterprises. In other words, each producer or cooperative supports three or four bureaucrats, officials of the party and the State.

According to the Cuban economist Ricardo Torres Pérez:

Based on centralized planning, the Cuban economy presents deep deficiencies: poorly developed or nonexistent markets, prices misaligned with real costs, lack of competition among state enterprises, and soft financial constraints in the state business sector. Although gradual reforms have been implemented since Raúl Castro's term, these have been insufficient to correct the structural distortions.

The system discourages exports through a scheme of state monopolies and a disconnection between domestic prices and export prices. The absence of a transparent exchange market

[12]Prison population rate in the world and Cuba. Revista árbolinvertido.com https://www.arbolinvertido.com/sociedad/cuba-segundo-pais-con-mayor-tasa-de-poblacion-penal-en-el-mundo January 31, 2024.

[13]Cubanet.com, https://www.cubanet.org/gaesa-el-imperio-economico-del-ejercito/ October 15, 2015, and more recently the discovery of a liquidity of 18,000 million dollars held by Gaesa, also through investigative journalism by the independent Cuban press. This information was replicated by INFOBAE. https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2025/08/10/gaesa-el-conglomerado-empresarial-de-los-militares-cubanos-que-concentra-miles-de-millones-de-dolares-mientras-el-pais-se-hunde-en-la-pobreza/#:~:text=Am%C3%A9rica%20Latina-,GAESA:%20el%20conglomerado%20empresarial%20de%20los%20militares%20cubanos%20que%20concentra,se%20hunde%20en%20la%20pobreza August 10, 2025.

prevents producers from responding adequately to international demand.

Furthermore, state-bureaucratic ownership and the lack of real incentives for efficiency perpetuate unproductivity. At the organizational level, institutional fragmentation and the existence of parallel structures, such as the military business apparatus (GAESA), hinder any attempt at economic rationalization. The lack of effective mechanisms for the entry and exit of firms has limited innovation and competitiveness, negatively affecting aggregate productivity.[14]

8. Totalitarianism destroys the Rights of Man

Hannah Arendt says:

The purpose of an arbitrary system is to destroy the civil rights of the whole population, which ultimately becomes as outside the law in its own country as a stateless person, and those who lack a home. The destruction of the rights of Man, the death in man of the juridical person, is a prerequisite for dominating him entirely. Page 361, and further on she points out: "Such power can only be asserted if literally all men, without a single exception, are reliably dominated in every aspect of their lives"

In Cuba:

Since the repression of the different types of economic, social, civil, political and cultural dissent is a State policy, the daily violation of fundamental rights is carried out by the authorities in arrests and in all the remaining judicial, labor and penal procedures.

The procedure is as follows: the police and the MININT Investigators have a catalog of common crimes in the penal code, from which they impose any of them for crimes not committed. The Prosecutor always confirms said fraudulent crimes, there is no review of the pertinence or not of the actions of the detainees and the crime attributed to them, and the process follows its course with as many other violations of the penal code itself and its regulations. The courts receive the information from the prosecutor's office and there are no defense mechanisms to challenge the results of the prosecutors' investigations. Defense attorneys also cannot challenge the results of the prosecutorial investigation and request an independent investigation. Defense attorneys have, by law, access to the prisoner's file five days before the trial, that is, the law includes them once the investigative process has ended; but since these can take eight months or more, prisoners may die in prison without ever having had access to a defense attorney (Agencia EFE, 2017).

Political dissent is not contemplated in Cuban laws as a crime; moreover, citizens' criticism appears as a right in the Constitution of the Republic of 1976; neither is the crime of peaceful demonstration contemplated. However, to make up for these absences, the PNR, the MININT investigators, the prosecutors and the court system impose with total impunity crimes not committed by the alleged offenders: assault on authority" when it is the detainee who suffers violent detention, illicit receiving of stolen goods" even when the documents that prove ownership of the seized goods are shown, usurpation of legal capacity" for independent journalists, public order disturbances" when there is peaceful demonstration. For that reason many Human Rights activists, independent journalists and political activists do not sign the detention records, because crimes that have not been committed appear in them (Azor, 2017).[15]

9. Propaganda and indoctrination in Totalitarianism

Arendt tells us:

The essential point is that the needs of propaganda are always dictated by the outside world... indoctrination (internal), inevitably paired with terror, increases with the strength of the movements or the isolation of totalitarian Governments and their security against outside intervention. Propaganda... is an instrument, and possibly the most important one, of totalitarianism in its relations with the non-totalitarian world; terror, on the contrary, constitutes the very essence of its form of government. The strength that totalitarian propaganda possesses rests on its capacity to isolate the masses from the real world. Page 288

Arendt also tells us:

The machinery of the State is transformed into a front organization of bureaucrats,... to spread confidence among the citizen masses and, outwardly, to deceive the non-totalitarian outside world. Page 332.

In Cuba:

The dictator Fidel Castro confiscated, starting in 1959, all the mass media: radio, television, press, printing presses, and

[14]Ricardo Torres Pérez, at https://horizontecubano.law.columbia.edu/news/la-crisis-economica-en-cuba-sus-causas-y-la-migracion May 3, 2025.

[15]Marlene Azor Hernández, Totalitarianism in Cuba and institutional state violence, in Hypermedia magazine.com https://hypermediamagazine.com/sociedad/totalitarismo-en-cuba/?fbclid=IwY2xjawOUA_VleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe2z3YoHuQnAWOkKPKpMi0lIuednVS0PQbhfVE0bjVR8SAjxRty5BlpUisE18_aem_YE4RMlvxgT4LZglafS87Mg November 26, 2020.

subordinated them to his personal direction and to his officials. For decades he managed to isolate the Cuban population from all international information and dosed and filtered each piece of national or international information according to his own personal interests. In the public libraries there was a yellow reserve" of books that Cuban totalitarianism forbade consulting without a special permit from the communist party (an identical mechanism existed in Soviet totalitarianism). In December 2018, Cuban totalitarianism allowed Internet on cell phones and with that broke the single party's monopoly over national and international information. Henceforth, Cuban totalitarianism has devoted itself to reputation assassinations" on national television against opposition members inside and outside Cuba, and against independent Cuban journalists who reside outside the island.[16]

How is totalitarian propaganda constructed in Cuba?

In addition to resemanticizing common words and making others disappear, the party's ideological apparatus represses the construction of knowledge about Cuban reality and the world.[17]

The gnoseological repressions that the totalitarian party imposes on the mass media and on the social sciences in Cuba include: concealing the economic, social, cultural, civil and political reality in the country; allowing an official history and repressing national history; absence of vital data for citizen information and social research; prohibition of evaluating public policies and ongoing government decisions, with reprisals of varying degree: from exorbitant fines to expulsion into exile or prison.

Comparison with the laws, institutions (organizations and rules of the game) and public policies of the most efficient countries of the world and the region in these aspects is forbidden. The analysis of Soviet "real socialism" and its copy in Cuba is forbidden, as well as of the Soviet-Cuban institutional framework currently in force in the country (Azor, 2018).

Other gnoseological repressions: imposing the single official discourse of historical, cultural and geopolitical determinism to justify the single-party dictatorship and endemic underdevelopment; the government's refusal to disseminate, teach and apply human rights and the International Covenants approved at the UN; the prohibition of disseminating political and civil repression, the arbitrariness of police and courts, and police brutality against the citizenry. (Azor, 2018).[18]

10. Official information is not reliable

Hannah Arendt tells us:

Some historians seem to think that the opposite method, that is, the exclusive use of all the material provided by the Russian Government, is more reliable, but this is not the case. It is precisely the official material that contains only propaganda. Footnote 29, page 265, (Taurus 1998).

In Cuba:

Official information is systematically refuted by experts and by the citizenry. Access to public information is subject to all kinds of prohibitions and reprisals for those who try to access it. The **Law on transparency and information** of Cuban totalitarianism, approved in July 2024, denies all the Latin American and international rights and standards for access to public opinion. The citizen must pay for this service, must explain why he or she wants this information, is required to present a written endorsement from his or her workplace or place of study, must sign a commitment not to disclose the information in an "inappropriate" manner, and is threatened with penal reprisals if he or she uses the information to criticize government management.[19]

Two recent events refute the official information:

The number of deaths from the Covid pandemic. While the official figures reported at the end of 2021 8,529 deaths from this disease, independent analyses confirmed, a year later, around 72,000 deaths from that disease. Cuban doctors were forced to conceal the cause of death by Covid on death certificates.[20]

The number of deaths in the current national epidemic has been concealed by Cuban totalitarianism, and social networks made it possible to approach a much greater number of deaths than those belatedly announced by Cuban totalitarianism.[21]

[16]This is what it has done against José Daniel Ferrer, leader of UNPACU, against the Ladies in White, against other young dissidents imprisoned in Cuba, and now it does so against the independent Cuban blog El TOQUE. https://eltoque.com/amenazas-de-extradicion-y-carcel-el-mas-reciente-acto-de-hostigamiento-contra-eltoque November 27, 2025.

[17]The description by the author George Orwell in his novel "1984" of **Newspeak** is exact, it is not a metaphor.

[18]Marlene Azor Hernández, Totalitarianism in Cuba and institutional state violence, in Hypermedia magazine.com https://hypermediamagazine.com/sociedad/totalitarismo-en-cuba/?fbclid=IwY2xjawOUA_VleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe2z3YoHuQnAWOkKPKpMi0lIuednVS0PQbhfVE0bjVR8SAjxRty5BlpUisE18_aem_YE4RMlvxgT4LZglafS87Mg November 26, 2020.

[19]Eloy Viera Cañive, in El Toque, independent Cuban blog. https://eltoque.com/aunque-haya-ley-no-habra-transparencia May 28, 2024.

[20]José Luis Reyes in the independent newspaper Diario de Cuba, https://diariodecuba.com/cuba/1656533065_40583.html June 29, 2022.

[21]Editorial of 14 y medio, independent Cuban newspaper. https://www.14ymedio.com/cuba/redes-sociales-revelan-muertos-virus_1_1121190.html December 2, 2025.

The National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) has concealed for decades the data on **poverty**, **the value of the basic basket, disaggregated minimum and average wages, and real unemployment.** These are indispensable indicators for citizens and experts to evaluate the results of the public policies of Cuban totalitarianism.[22]

Conclusion

The performance of the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera in May 2015 made it possible to socialize for the first time in Cuba the fundamental work of Hannah Arendt, "The Origins of Totalitarianism". One hundred hours of its uninterrupted reading allowed for an exercise in fundamental civic education in the context of Cuban totalitarianism.

We have contrasted 10 features described by the great thinker Hannah Arendt about Stalinist totalitarianism with the current and recent situation in the history of Cuba. It becomes evident that totalitarian social control, and the criminalization of citizen autonomy, are central features of really existing totalitarianisms.

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