

The politics of political science in Chile and Uruguay

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The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory

Antonio Gramsci

Mainstream accounts of the history of political science (PS) are descriptivist (atheoretical) and conceptualize the discipline as a self-contained reality (acontextual). In Latin America in particular the studies available about the development of PS tend not to explore its discourse and its content and what is definitely ignored in almost all accounts are its inner power dynamics and, therefore, the potential interconnection between them and 'external' power structures and social processes. In contrast, the *leit motiv* of this literature is the discipline's institutionalization, assumed as being our ultimate goal and generally measured in the number of programs, publications, graduates and so on. Almost every article, book, presentation or paper elaborates on this.

In this context, the external variable that is taken into account to explain the discipline's itinerary is 'political regime': "*There is no political science without democracy*", it is said once and again. Given this conviction it is not surprising that in the academic literature, in countless conversations and academic events it is argued that the incipient PS in the region was "terribly paralyzed", "abruptly interrupted" or "trumped" by the right-wing authoritarian regimes of the 1970s (Altman 2005; Bulcourf 2012; Buquet 2012, Garcé 2005; Viacava 2012). At the very least, it is argued that in this period social sciences were expelled from official universities and public institutions and had to migrate to private research centers (Lesgart 2007).

From this perspective the discipline can only flourish within democratic systems defined in (unquestionable) liberal terms. Only within liberal democracy politics *do not interfere* on science (or at least such interference is less threatening and damaging). Democracies allow people, including scholars, to talk about politics; the dictatorships do not: they *repress* knowledge. The dominant perspective, then, regards the relationship between power, political context and PS as an exterior one. This derives in a dichotomist analysis: there is interference and obstruction (dictatorship of some kind) or there is freedom and rule of law (democracy). Given that our job is to study and talk about politics it is only natural, then, that PS is conceived as the *knowledge of democracy*, developing a normative commitment with this regime: after all is the regime that allows us to exist!

The relationship between PS and politics looks pretty simple then. There is no space for confusing mingling between these two human activities. However, the output of this neat and unproblematic account of the history and the 'nature' of the discipline is awkward: PS is (perceived as) democratic *and* objective at the same time, being liberal democracy the natural field of politics as such. That mainstream PS *is liberal and thus objective* means that liberalism is the most objective and scientific... ideology (?) If we take this logic further, the support for liberal institutions becomes not a question of ideology or political views but of mental sanity: how is possible to question what gives us existence? What I fear of this mode of reasoning is that liberalism is a specific ideological perspective that, by being naturalized, becomes the only one possible.

The politics of PS is a project that challenges the mainstream approach to the history of PS, showing that political context shapes our discipline in intricate ways. I aim to show that what I call a "complex relationality" composed of the rise of the United States as the main global power, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its effects, the traumatizing dictatorships of the 70s, the experience of democratic transitions, and the hegemony of neoliberal discourse, among other things, has had a huge impact on PS's internal dynamics. *To put it simple: PS's changes in the region are a product of power relations. Or even more concretely: the changes within PS are political.*

Even though this project is theoretical at its core, it does provide a lot of evidence that supports its formulations. I will show that the relationship between authoritarian politics, democracy and PS is complex and deserves to be conceptually “re-described” (Shapiro 2005) and rewritten. The historical exploration focuses on PS during the right-wing dictatorships of the 70 and 80’s in Chile and Uruguay. The fieldwork has included 1) a systematic analysis of all the articles published by the main journals of both countries¹—163 of *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política* (Uruguayan Journal of Political Science, RUCP), 510 of *Revista de Ciencia Política* (Journal of Political Science, RCP) and 491 of *Política* (Politics)— using a SPSS data-base with 91 descriptive and conceptual variables; and 2) semi-structured interviews with more than 60 political scientists in both countries.²

The fieldwork took place from August 2012 to July 2013 and has been a fascinating process. The following is only one example of my findings. This picture emerges from the shadows of PS history...



Left: Photography extracted from “Memory of Activities 1983”, Political Science Institute, University of Chile. Right: Cover of Special Edition of *Política*, Chile 1973-1983. *Enfoques para un decenio* (Chile 1973-1983. *Perspectives for a decade*), Nov. 1983.

The man in front of the microphone (and who is noticeable for his brighter suit) is Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the authoritarian president of Chile (1973-1990) who, through a violent *coup de état* overthrew the democratic elected president Salvador Allende. The photograph registers the ceremony in which Pinochet received as a gift the first copy of a special issue of *Política*, the official publication of the Institute of Political Science (University of Chile). The publication’s title

¹ Up to 2012.

² The research has also included several other activities such as: a) seminars to discuss the theories that I employed; b) systematic analysis of the regional and global literature on the development of PS and other topics related to this investigation (over 1000 titles about the development of PS); c) production of 4 documents—summaries on the state of the art of the field of history and development of PS; d) in-depth examination of first issues of regional PS journals (with particular attention to Uruguay and Chile), syllabi and curricula, Program Directors’ documented talks or speeches at relevant events, institutional documents and other materials; e) description and analysis of the life trajectory of the first contributors to these journals; f) historical and contextual analysis of the academic units where these journals are located; g) complete digitalization of the material; h) analysis of visual archives and photographic registers; i) visits to academic departments and units in both countries; j) ‘participatory observation’ in seminars and conferences of PS in Chile and Uruguay; k) recollection, systematization and analysis of BA, MA and PhD curricula; l) recollection, systematization and analysis of faculty performance evaluation criteria employed by the academic units of both countries; ll) recollection and partial digitalization of MA PS thesis (University of Chile, 1982-2012); and writing of a Methodological Memory in which the slow and challenging process of construction of the data base for classification of articles is described in detail.

is “Chile 1973-1983: Perspectives for a Decade” and it pretends to analyze the first decade of the Military Government (as Pinochet’s supporters call it).

This picture is very revealing. First, and obviously, it plainly shows that, *in contrast with what happened in Uruguay, there was PS during the dictatorship in Chile*. How can we make sense of the sharp difference between these two cases? Second, the picture does “political theory” when we open the following question: *What does the fact that there could be PS under a dictatorship say about the discipline, liberalism and politics?* And what kind of PS are we talking about? In my view history and theory are inseparable, *so let us explore history to theorize about the complex relationship between PS, liberalism and democracy*.

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