



Josie Hollingsworth  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Journalism and Mass  
Communication  
Spanish Language and Culture  
The University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill

323 Lindsay St.  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516  
Cell: (919) 618-0157  
Email: [jchollin@live.unc.edu](mailto:jchollin@live.unc.edu)  
Website: [josiehollingsworth.com](http://josiehollingsworth.com)

November 24, 2013

Comunicar Revista  
Postal Box Office  
21080 Huelva Spain

To Whom It May Concern:

By way of introduction, my name is Josie Hollingsworth and I am currently a journalism student at UNC Chapel Hill. Here is my research article “Blogostroika: The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Cuba” for possible publication in *Comunicar*, the Communication Studies Journal for Latin America. I understand that your journal can have articles in English or Spanish, and I plan to translate my article into Spanish so it could be a bilingual portion of the edition.

This article analyzes the potential consequences of the rise of the blogosphere in Cuba. Following the introduction Web 2.0, the Internet became more of a conversation. This created an interesting opportunity for citizen journalism to evolve outside of the traditional Cuban, soviet-style communist model of the press. No longer needing accreditation, journalists can work send their opinions to outside bloggers and act as subversive, revolutionary actors against their government.

The “blogostroika” presents a critical study in international communication. I have focused on the future of the blogging community in Cuba looking at the work and fame of internationally-known Yoani Sánchez along with interviewing some of her blogging peers. These investigations speak to a larger “media literacy” that is changing with the changing mediums of communication.

If you have any questions, please contact me. I eagerly look forward to “next steps” in the publication process.

Cordially,  
Josie Hollingsworth

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josie Hollingsworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



# **Blogostroika: The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Cuba**

By

**Josie Hollingsworth**

Undergraduate Student

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Spanish Language and Culture

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

323 Lindsay St.

Chapel Hill, NC 27516

Cell: (919) 618-0157

Email: [jchollin@live.unc.edu](mailto:jchollin@live.unc.edu)

**BRIEF ABSTRACT:** This article analyzes the potential consequences of the rise of the blogosphere in Cuba. Following the introduction Web 2.0, the Internet became more of a conversation. This created an interesting opportunity for citizen journalism to evolve outside of the traditional Cuban, soviet-style communist model of the press. No longer needing accreditation, journalists can work send their opinions to outside bloggers and act as subversive, revolutionary actors against their government.

**KEYWORDS:** Citizen Journalism, Web 2.0, Blog, IP Address

**CITATION STYLE:** This article calls upon its sources using the Modern Language Association Guidelines for citation.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Josie Hollingsworth is an interactive multimedia journalism student at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has worked on award-winning documentary and web journalism projects such as Living Galapagos and Powering a Nation: 100 Gallons. Josie is also a student of Hispanic culture and Spanish at UNC, and has traveled and worked in elementary education in Colombia and Guatemala.

Header photo: "Translation Industry in Cuba." *Moravia Worldwide*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013.  
<<http://www.moravia.com/en/knowledge-center/regional-perspectives/translation-industry-in-cuba/>>.

## **Introduction**

New technology empowers bloggers to influence public opinion. How, in a restrictive media system, are blogs and citizen journalism providing social, political and economic news to the citizens and beyond? The advent of citizen journalism through the use of blogs in Cuba's communist government's strict media control is a phenomenon that is demonstrative for a social, political, and an already ongoing economic shift in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cuba.

My main subject of study is Yoani Sánchez, a blogger from Havana who has a background in library and computer science. Her blog, Generation Y has a national and international readership and serves as a powerful source of inspiration and activism among other bloggers in Cuba and abroad. From a study *Generación Y*, I will explore the longest-running example of a well-known blog gaining acclaim in the new "wired" Cuba. This occurrence in the activist blogosphere exemplifies the ever-changing nature of international communication. Her blog has transcended borders and, in some ways, has shaped the way the modern world views Cuban culture, politics, and economics. Exploration of the work of Sánchez against a backdrop of an isolationist country, Cuba, offers a unique opportunity to consider the power and process by which the Internet can shape public opinion.

There is no way to accurately measure Cuban citizen journalists' "impact" because of the current governmental barriers to communicating the population's true feelings and day-to-day realities. It is, however, possible to study news outlets as a particular form of eDemocracy, or the use of new technology to inspire political and social change, that has become prevalent in the past 8 or so years. I will look at Cuban access to the blogosphere, differences in citizen journalist blogs, and the nature of the conversation (via comments) that takes place in the forum of a blog.

This study is significant because an informed public is fundamental to an engaged and fairly-treated electorate. Citizen journalists in Cuba face potential repercussions and formidable dangers that include exile, imprisonment, torture and worse. With Cuba's turbulent past and passionate nationalists, a free press for Cubans is not the same assumed privilege that the free world takes for granted. Cuba is a republic with state-held news sources and little political or economic power.

I believe there were indicators to the rise of citizen journalism in Cuba. Given its relative isolation, I believe the small island nation must find some continuity with past journalistic styles to fit into the ever-changing world of communication.

### **Key Terms**

*Citizen Journalism*: "An alternative and activist form of newsgathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions, often as a response to shortcoming in the professional journalistic field, that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism" (Radsch). Yoani Sánchez, along with most Cuban bloggers who do not have formal journalism training or accreditation fit into the "citizen journalist" category.

*Web 2.0*: This style of the World Wide Web was popularized in the beginning of the 21st century by Google, Blogging sites, and other non-static web pages that allowed for interactive "conversation" between web users. Individuals began to connect with each other on social networking sites, and social bookmarking, and also interact with data through self-publishing platforms. Web 2.0 allows for unlimited collaboration between users, groups of people, companies, and other entities.

*Blog:* One example of Web 2.0 is a blog, in which a there is a conversation, first started by the blogger, then continued by readers through comments or “likes” on comments. Web 2.0 has allowed journalism, and all media, to transform into dialogues with active engagement of all users.

*Internet Protocol (IP) Address:* A number assigned to any computer network device (e.g. laptop, printer) that uses Internet Protocol for communication. It is the receiver for datagrams that the Internet Protocol relays among a network.

## **Background**

Serving as propaganda and ideological strongholds, news organizations have been key players in Cuba’s social dialogue. “Writer and journalist, Jose Martí founded the periodical, ‘Pátria’...while in exile in 1892 [in the United States] to lead the clarion call against Spanish occupation of the island” (Salwen, 73). This publication was fundamental for rallying support against an imperial power, much like Fidel Castro would go on to do with his printed publications during the communist revolution between 1953-1959. “Under the leadership of Castro’s confidante Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the newspaper *El Cubano Libre* was founded in 1957 while the rebels were in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.” (Salwen, 73). Since the 1959 Cuban revolution in which Fidel Castro and communist supporters successfully staged a government military takeover, Cuban media are openly acknowledged by the regime as an arm of the communist state (Salwen, 77). Senior management of newspapers, along with all positions in the news media, are generally party members (Habron, 449). An organization that is a loosely called a “journalist union,” la Union de Periodistas de Cuba (UPEC), maintains complete control over both working journalists and journalists in training and dominates major publications in Cuba including *Granma*, *Juventu*, and *Trabajadores*. “UPEC appears to exercise more direct

control over Cuba's journalists than do large state entities" (Harbron 450). The UPEC can withdraw a journalist's accreditation, remove members from prestigious positions, and downgrade or force reassignment of journalists and editors if it is deemed that they are wavering from party doctrine. (Harbron, 448).

The communist party controls an associated press, La Prensa Latina, which "rewrites and distributes news from foreign agencies within Cuba to conform with Cuban government political views" (Salwen 96). Granma, based out of Havana, is the largest news source in Cuba. The newspaper has a small staff, and contracts UPEC accredited journalists. Granma today is in six different languages online. The paper leans clearly to the far left, with a nationalist, anti-American twist unmistakable in headlines like "A tribute to Cuban culture" and "50-year-anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination." Granma covers a significant amount of international stories, and refers to the Latin American region as "Nuestra America," which is an allusion to José Martí's famous anti-Spanish and anti-United States document from 1891.

In his study of Cuban journalism education in the 1970s, Professor James Carty found that journalists and students of journalism believed their press system was free in the sense that the writers and photographers were "not enslaved by media owners, and that this liberty give them the right to publicize the positive and constructive [like they are in the US]" (Carty, 41). Cuban journalists in the years following the Revolution (and many into the 1980s) showed enthusiasm for working towards the betterment of the party by educating citizens about the communist government. Students are not trained in subjects other than journalism and "no courses are required in biology, chemistry, and physics, or mathematics" (Carty, 41). This creates an atmosphere in which journalists are trained to write the party's rhetoric, rather than to investigate, analyze and inform the public. In terms of attitudes towards the profession of

journalism, respect for the traditional communist-style has diminished significantly since the 1980s.

### **Literature Review**

There is little “common knowledge” throughout the rest of the world, especially not in the United States, about the everyday life of Cuban citizens. Cuba was a “black hole” of information from the beginning of the communist regime, a strategic move by leaders to avoid influence from “imperialistic” powers like the United States and parts of Europe. Apart from academic research done by Americans with special access to the country and individuals from other countries, life in Communist Cuba for the second half of the 20th century was more or less a mystery to the outside world. When Cuba did engage in an international public relations effort in the 1970s, it gave a narrow view of the newly communist nation. One Wall Street Journal correspondent said of the meetings: “the hospitality is tremendous – overpowering, in fact, if one doesn’t have a strong stomach for rum, lobsters and big, black Cuban cigars” (Salwen, 181).

The sources for this paper are academic articles about Cuban journalism and society by Cuban authors along with academic articles written from the outside looking into Cuban journalism. I use reports on Cuba from the Committee to Protect Journalists along with Freedom House evaluations of information freedom in Cuba. There are quite a few recent news stories about Yoani Sánchez’s spring 2013 tour that I use not only to paint a picture of Sánchez, but also convey the international attention she has received from her blog. After years of being denied a trip out of the country, Sánchez was granted permission to travel and receive an award in the United States and abroad. Once in the USA, she was active in press meetings and made noteworthy statements about her role as a citizen journalist.

Primary sources are important to communication research because it is vital to study original writings to find the rhetoric for or against certain Cuban government policies. There are diverse lenses through which readers view blogs: Cuban citizens, international readers, Cuban government officials, foreign government officials, party members, etc. I have conducted interviews with two current Cuban bloggers: political activist Rosa María Rodríguez Torrado and her blog “La Rosa Descalza” (the Barefoot Rose) as well as a blogger named Jorge Calaforra. For comparison, I have used primary sources from both independent blogs and from state sponsored journalists and publications.

## **Key Factors**

### **Access to the Blogosphere in Cuba**

In Cuba, access to balanced news, and even general person-to-person communication, is limited. In January 2013, only 19% of Cubans had access to a cellular phone (IRI, 25). Nine percent of Cubans use the Internet only for email, and only 4% use the Internet for sites other than email (i.e. for viewing blogs and independent news sources). Today in Cuba, there is an IP address for each 95 citizens, putting the country at number 169 out of 250 in the world for internet access (Calaforra). The Cuban authorities allow limited web use only in state-run spaces and tourist environments and “rely heavily on lack of technology and prohibitive costs to limit users’ access to information” (Freedom House).

Sánchez herself did not have access to her blog for a period of time in 2008 because of the quick widespread attention on Cuba her blog produced. She called herself a “blind blogger” because she emailed her blog posts to supporters in other countries, who then posted the entries and relayed Sánchez’s readers’ comments back to her (Miller). “In private homes, only registered journalists authorized by the authorities are allowed an individual connection.”

(Rubira, 155). Poor Internet on the island comes from the underdeveloped economic structure. In this environment, there are few loopholes to government barriers to the internet for an independent journalist. Yoani Sánchez's blog is broadcasted through a server based in Germany. This sponsorship, along with international anonymous funds, is crucial to her success as a disseminator of democracy from within Cuba. From 2008 to 2011, access to Yoani's blog was prohibited by the Cuban government but some individuals were able access the blog through outside servers or by other means (Rubira, 155). Freedom House gives Cuba a "Not Free" status and reports bloggers being arrested. "Cuba remains one of the world's most repressive environments for the internet and other information and communication technologies" (Freedom House). The limits on Internet use by the Cuban government only temporarily stagnated eDemocracy, or the harnessing of political tools for strong democracy through Web 2.0 and other new technologies.

Along with many aspects in current Cuban society, such as economic reform, recent developments have shown a possibility for more freedom of Internet use in Cuba. In January 2013, Venezuela began the first undersea fiber-optic pipeline to Cuba, which until now has used only satellites for Internet connection. A similar project was started in February 2011 by the Venezuelan government but abruptly halted for unknown reasons in November. The number of Cuban IP addresses was up by 4.8% between June 2012 and April 2013, showing slow but steady gains in connectivity through individuals' efforts towards a more connected Cuban citizenry.

### **Who is Yoani Sánchez?**

Sánchez describes her blog as an "exercise in cowardice" because it lets her say "what is forbidden to [her] in civic action" (Sánchez, profile). Sánchez does not feel she has ever used her

degrees in Spanish Literature or Philology from 1995, and, furthermore she finds the academic world “repugnant.” Upon her return from living for two years in Switzerland, Sánchez started working as webmaster, editor, and contributor for *desdecuba.com*. “I discovered that binary code is more transparent than affected intellectualism, and that if I’d never really come to terms with Latin, at least I could work with the long chains of HTML language,” Sánchez says in her profile. *Desde Cuba* serves as a portal of various citizen journalists that write from within Cuba about socio-political issues from a distinctly pro-democracy standpoint. The subjects range from freedom of speech to economics to a potential youth revolt, and the bloggers are from various regions of Cuba and from diverse academic and racial backgrounds.

Sánchez’s own blog, “Generation Y,” or “Generación Y,” is a play on words that comes from a cohort of 20-30 year olds in Cuba who are globally referred to as Generation Y but who, in Cuba, were named after characters from Soviet cartoons like Yoani herself. In the description of the blog, Sánchez says “I invite, especially, Yansisleidi, Yaondri, Yuimí, Yuniesky and others who carry their “Y’s” to read me.” By poking fun of the not-so-distant soviet-influenced past, Sánchez allows for a more playful, yet opinionated tone in her blog that has continued for the seven years of its



Yoani in her Havana apartment. This is the citizen journalist’s office from which she writes and publishes “Generation Y”  
 Source: Sanchez, Yoani. ""De Cuba, Com Cariño"" *Pra Você "De Cuba, Com Cario" Por Yoani Sánchez | No Mundo E Nos Livros. No Mundo Y Dos Livros*, 2012. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. <<http://bit.ly/jg4b11>>.

prominence. Sánchez's first-ever blog post is called "Posters yes, but only about baseball" and goes on to indicate Sánchez's style of pointed cynicism and sarcasm. The writing is both narrative and descriptive yet uses highly political subjects and a consistently critical tone for being critical of the regime. Yoani writes "I don't fail to note that during these days of baseball that plunge us into an unreal torpor, even the appearance of the tolerated posters is a parenthesis, a temporary permission, that we may not use for other themes. I can imagine what would happen if, after the final [score], I hung from my balcony a small paper that said: 'Yes to ethanol,' or 'Internet for all'" (Sánchez, April 2007).

By 2008, Sánchez had captured the attention of Western readers on a large scale. She was interviewed by major news organizations like the Washington Post, the LA Times, the New York Times, El Pais (Spain), and Die Ziet (Germany). "International media found in Generation Y a new phenomenon in the context of traditional ideological debates about Cuban reality and started paying attention to this blog as a potential indicator of the climate of public opinion among young adults in Cuba" (Rubira, 158). Sánchez's blog is a critical player in, and even catalyst of the "new Cuba."

### **How is Yoani's blog different from those of her peers?**

Financially, Sánchez is different from other bloggers in Cuba in that she is supported primarily from donations from outside Cuba. Other bloggers are supported by their spouses, a legal career, or some other form of income. To have a blog and access to the internet in Cuba is a rare privilege. The future of blogging in Cuba has exciting prospects for eventually exposing the plight and stories of people of lower socio-economic status... As it is, the blogosphere, while ideologically and racially somewhat varied, does not represent a wide socio-economic spectrum to any extent.

Author of “La Rosa Descalza” (The Barefoot Rose), Rosa Maria Rodriguez, is another outspoken advocate for free speech who more implicitly states her purpose in her blog and has a less prose-like style. “My country yearns for a democratic culture of dialogue and reconciliation. For that reason I write.”<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez was an active participant in the Movement for Human Rights in 1988 and since then has been a writer for various publications, from within and outside of Cuba. Rodriguez poses inflammatory statements in her blog, directly calling out government officials. A blog post from July 2013 reads “What leads a dynastic dictator to determine the dignity of another? Is it them or the foreigners to whom you can attribute the monopoly on dignity?”<sup>2</sup> (Rodriguez, July 2013).

Jorge Calaforra represents another side of Cuban citizen blogging with his blog, “Foresight Cuba,” a data-heavy, quantitative blog that marches to a more capitalistic drumbeat than anti-communism or political one. Calaforra is an engineer with no journalism training and says he “likes to see Cuba through statistics, and comment briefly on them with a blog”<sup>3</sup> (Calaforra, October 2013). He is a great example of a new-world Cuban blogger because he does not have a background in journalism, but expertise in engineering. Calaforra said in an interview that he tries to see the reality of his country through statistics. His blog posts are titled specific terms, like “Unemployment” and feature at least one graph per post. Calaforra says that his readership includes many party members, because in this time of economic change in Cuba, party members are more likely to be open to new ideas about the economy. He is most critical when he feels the government did not collect consistent data on the people. Calaforra’s numbers are his tool to influence policy. He directly links economic capitalistic reform with standard of

---

<sup>1</sup> “En mi país urge una cultura democrática de diálogo y reconciliación, y por eso y para eso trabajo.”

<sup>2</sup> ¿En qué se basa un dirigente y dictador dinástico para determinar la dignidad de un compatriota? ¿Son ellos o sus adeptos cubanos y extranjeros quienes les atribuyen el monopolio de la dignidad?

<sup>3</sup> Yo trato de ver la realidad de Cuba a través de las estadísticas, y las comento brevemente en el blog.

living increases and lower infant mortality rates. Calaforra's method of numerical rhetoric serves as an important part of the citizen journalism story in Cuba.

### **What are comments like on Cuban citizen journalist blogs?**

Blogs offer an exciting aspect to media through their social media feature of commenting. A blog is a conversation, and often the opinions posted by outside writers can be just as influential and important as the author's original post. Research has shown that blogs like Generacion Y and La Rosa Descalza, have not yet reached this higher level of a social dialogue (Rubira, 168). Likely, this is, at least in part, due to the audience of the blogs. Government officials may read the pro-democracy blogs, but they are not responding with their opinions. While the blogs pose an ideological difference, they are not considered an immediate threat to the current political order of Cuba, and therefore officials are not intervening. Through economic reform, Cuba has not capitulated itself into a fast-changing political culture. Change is slow, and accordingly blogs are slow to catch on and or gain popularity (Yoani's blog, along with the work of a lawyer named Laurizta Diversent, are the two blogs that seem to carry significant international attention on mainstream and social media). I hypothesize that if the political or social culture radically changes, either government workers will begin to post and comment on the blogs, or the blogs will turn into a more heated debate between party supporters and dissidents. The most noted comments the blog has received were from U.S. President Barack Obama in November 2009 responding to direct questions Sánchez posted on her blog. "It is telling that the Internet has provided you and other courageous Cuban bloggers with an outlet to express yourself so freely, and I applaud your collective efforts to empower fellow Cubans to express themselves through the use of technology" (Sánchez, Obama, November 2009).

Obama's responses in support of Generation Y have further legitimized Sánchez's blog and the cause for democracy soon in Cuba.

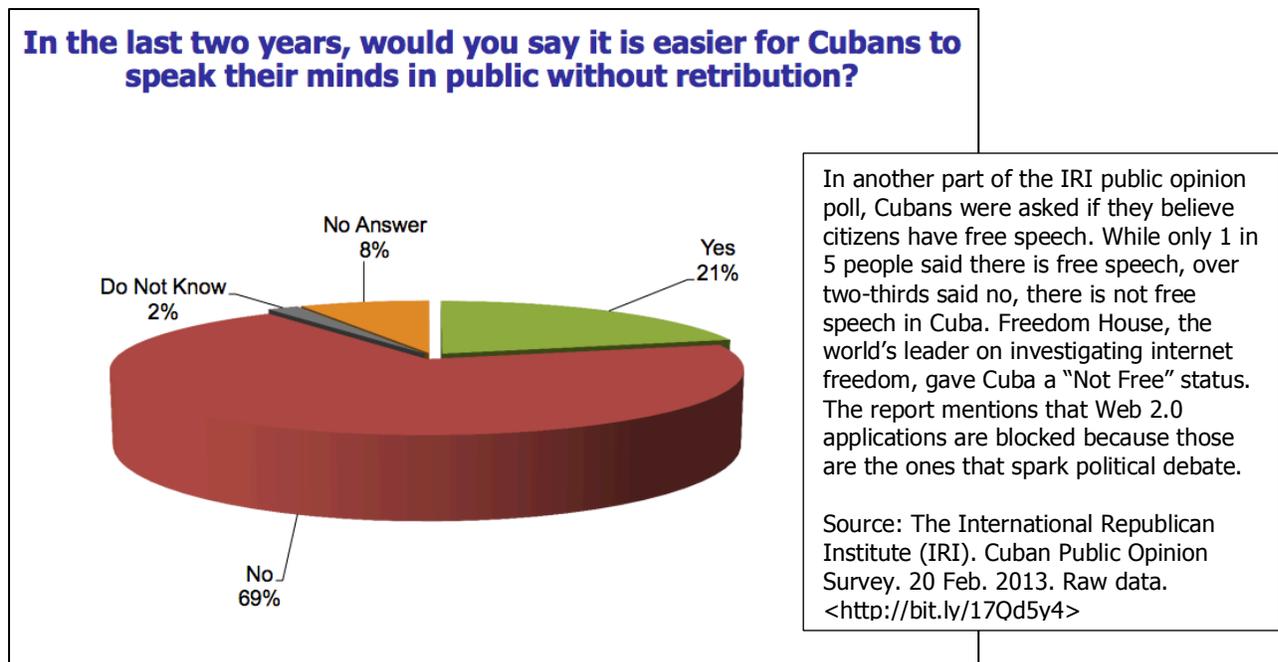
Criticism of Generation Y from far left-leaning individuals, and even Fidel Castro himself, are somewhat common. The leader "dismissed Sánchez, bloggers like her and their followers as mere pawns of old and contemporary imperialistic forces" (Rubira, 156). French academic and journalist Salim Lamrani wrote "The contradictions of Cuban blogger Yoani Sánchez" in 2009, an article that was later recirculated by other critics. Lamrani explains Sánchez's inability to blog without international financial support. "[He] pinpoints... inconsistencies in Sánchez's accounts of harassment by the Cuban government and accuses her of profiting from her critical position regarding Cuba's current affairs" (Rubira, 157). Research cannot be definitive in a dynamic cyber space like a blog. There is no doubting the exposure that Generation Y has provided for the quotidian Cuban life to the world beyond Cuba.. "In its current form and despite its limitations, Generation Y has value as a relatively plural space to vent and confront some of the deepest challenges faced by Cuban civil society" (Rubira, 174).

### **What do blogs indicate about the new Cuba, a changing population and government?**

Web 2.0 "provides tools for strong democracy and, like other media, can be valuable if harnessed for communicating a message" (Williamson, 322). The current independent blogosphere in Cuba is "unlike the independent press of the 1990s, which was composed mostly of opposition activists with strong political views, today's bloggers have established themselves as distinct from both the government and the dissident movement" (Lauría, CPJ). Within just DesdeCuba, a singular portal for about 139 Cuban citizen journalist blogs, the wealth of diversity in topic and leaning ranges from the economy to civil rights, from moderate to anarchist.

“Generation Y has made evident the strong ideological fissures of Cuban society, shattering the supposedly monolithic unity of the local polity alleged by the government. The very title of the site refers to the generational variable as one of the elements to take into account on the Cuban political scene, as evidenced by the contrast between two historical eras: the current one, and one closer to the past strong days of the Cuban revolution’s leadership” (Rubira, 154).

In today’s Cuba, citizens can buy and sell cars and property. They can acquire licenses to start their own businesses. Hand in hand with these capitalistic ideals are democratic ones that point towards a populous of curious and social-conscious individuals desiring more out of their socio-economic and political status in Cuba. Nevertheless, the government is not matching economic reform with democratic reform. In a recent public opinion poll, 53% of respondents said the Cuban government is repressive against its own people, with 20% giving no answer and another 20% saying it is not repressive (IRI, 29). This is a key indicator for how repressed the Cuban citizens perceive themselves with regard to free speech, movement, and ideals.



## Theory and Concepts

Following the Revolution of 1959, Fidel Castro wanted to design the Cuban media system in the after the Soviet Communist Model of the Press. Following the principles of Karl Marx and then later Vladimir Lenin, Castro and the Communist Party gave the Communist state absolute power to control information and the media. In Cuba, “there is the idea that individual rights must be subordinated to the larger goals of nation-building and thus must support authority” and, in fact, research suggests that many accredited Cuban journalists prefer to write for a non-corporate news organization (Ostini 46). “They charge that the journalists in the capitalist countries are not ‘free’ because they are ‘slaves’ of owners and must print or broadcast what the administrators direct” (Carty, 41). The Cuban constitution states that the mass media are property of the state (Salwen, 16). Under a communist theory of the press, journalists write for the benefit of society and there is no need for separation of media and government. This broad theory works to a certain point, but then becomes less effective when applied to diverse settings. As Ostini points out “socialism in China is very different from Cold War ideas about Communism” and, similarly, Cuban communism is very different from Soviet style or Chinese government. These distinctions apply to the media systems in Cuba as well. Cuba has a rich history of journalism and stylistically and at times ideologically, there were ways that a nationalistic, and less communist, news style could prevail.

Free speech is a universal quest for modern society. There were two indicators of the rise of current blogosphere that appeared soon after the Revolution of 1959: a small circulation of clandestine anti-communist publications as well as a powerful media hierarchy that would eventually age and fall to modernity and/or technology. These two factors were the reality of the Cuban media. In 1991, Salwen mentions that “a few crude clandestine newsletters and

magazines are occasionally published” (Salwen, 111). I believe that while those newsletters never truly achieved popularity, the nature of Web 2.0 and blogging culture has allowed for those old magazine cultures to blossom online, without government retribution. As early as 1980 that the current leaders of the media are cronies and close friends of Fidel Castro, and that in the future, as in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “age will compel both Castro and his associates in the media to give up control” (Harbron, 451). That is where the media stands today in Cuba, with Fidel Castro deceased and a new leader, his brother, Raul, already enacting Western (at least economic) reforms in Communist Cuba. These were predictions long ago that are gradually becoming a reality for Generation Y and younger people in Cuba.

### **Key Factors and Considerations**

The three factors that are just starting to take shape in order drive Cuban citizen journalism into prominence are (1) an existing Cuban “style” of writing that bloggers perpetuate with anecdotes and descriptive language, (2) growing internet access and (3) involvement of women in the creation of journalism content.

My research has revealed a distinctly Cuban style of communication that has pervaded since Jose Martí and has lasted throughout Cuban Communism and into the blogging citizen journalist movement. Narrative of news and storytelling in Cuba, despite wildly different government regimes, holds true to a manner of writing charged with opinion and propaganda. Ironically, the impassioned and one-sided style of journalism are shared “rules” of Cuban journalism, and tend to be followed by adversaries. Poignant stories are powerful tools to lead the reader to adopt the perspective of the writer. “Traditionally, writing style in Caribbean and Latin American periodicals has been more literary than journalistic” (Carty, 40). This is one explanation as to why the blogosphere today in Cuba has received much attention from inside

and outside of Cuba: the writing is appealing, especially to polarizing audiences. José Martí's "Nuestra America" (1891) is filled with bold statements like, "The national politicians must replace exotic ones" (Martí, 223). Newspapers and media in Cuba have never aspired to the standards of balanced views in the US, but rather take on a more British model of media in which news organizations firmly assert and make known their political and social leanings. This provides one voice that is clearly placed on an ideological spectrum and allows the reader to decide his or her opinion. One Cuban academic, María Pilar, writes in 1970 "It became necessary [after the Revolution] to elect representatives from the mainstream press, old and new, but with real impact to be able to transform into the future of the revolutionary dawn"<sup>4</sup> (Pilar, 9). As is the style of journalism under Castro, Pilar makes her opinion of the Revolution clear. On the other hand, "Sánchez's position of establishing bridges are premises for a possible consensual, democratic solution" to what she calls "the national crisis" (Rubira, 2013). Sánchez's blog has an undeniably narrative style, and the bridges she builds are to coalesce the readers on her humanistic side of the argument. In an October 2013 post, Sánchez begins talking about the problem of faulty public areas with a discussion of a personal childhood memory. She writes, "I'm in the same park where thirty years ago my sister and I ran and played. Two girls turning pirouettes similar to ours hide behind some bushes. However, there is something very different in this *deja vu*: missing is the fountain with its sound of rain falling on marble" (Sánchez, 16 October 2013). Rich, descriptive vignettes that can be seen in her work, and Cuban journalism at large, exude a passion and liveliness that is not present in other country's media but has existed in Cuba for many years.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Era necesario elegir representantes de la gran prensa, vieja y nueva, pero con repercusión real del mosaico de expectativas que acogieron, conformaron y se transformaron en el devenir de la aurora revolucionaria"

As a “major forum for discussing the Cuban political situation” Sánchez’s blog has received nastier comments with broader implications for the nature of current Cuban politics (Rubira, 156). “The polarization that affects most debates about Cuban politics compels any content about current events on the island to be seen through the lens of either a fervent and unconditional defense of the Cuban revolution or a rabid anti-Castro stance” (Rubira, 157). Much like American politics, Cuban politics are now highly polarized on blogs, bringing large society divides to surface and providing little grounds for hope for agreement between different groups. Nonetheless, now that the debate exists publicly on the Internet, weaker groups can be empowered with voice.

I propose that the rise of the Internet and a consistent journalistic style was not enough for the tipping point of eDemocracy in Cuba. Instead, voices of women in journalism will ultimately perpetuate large-scale social change. Bringing women professionals into the news media has always proven to push a social agenda to the forefront of the national conscience. Due to Cuba’s strict communist doctrine in the past, although women were writers, they were obligated to write solely party doctrine. This is shown in the career of Ofelia Domínguez, who established her career in the 1920s and 30s said “When I write, I feel a great need to destroy the old traditions that conform women. This, naturally, placed a certain aggressiveness in my journalistic work.”<sup>5</sup> Following the Revolution, Domínguez gained a high position within the Department of International Politics and Relations and discontinued her reporting. While Domínguez was welcomed into communist journalism institution, Sánchez is a subaltern voice that, now with the power of blogs, cannot be silenced. “[Sánchez] is not exactly the ambassador that Cuba — with a tight grip on dissenters — wants to present to the world. And yet, she

---

<sup>5</sup> “Cuando escribía, sentía gran necesidad de golpear recio contra las viejas tradiciones que mantenían a la mujer. Esto, como es natural, imprimía cierta tónica de agresividad a mis trabajos periodísticos”.

reasoned, permission denied might garner so much media attention as to backfire in a Cuba trying to present its more tolerant face” (Bonello). Women journalists promote social issues on which many groups can agree. In a year-long study of Sánchez’s blog post topics (July 2009-July 2010), over half covered non-political nor economic issues, instead focusing on civil rights, education, the media and culture. This may be the answer to some of the polarization that exists on the web and throughout international media. Also, these are some of the institutions that are suffering the most as Cuba enters a new period of policy change.

Key factors driving Cuban citizen journalism into prominence are a consistent Cuban style that is growing in popularity around the world, wider access to the Cuban blogosphere for foreigners and Cuban nationals and the inclusion of women in the writing of citizen journalism. These three together force Cuba’s socio-political dialogues – about democracy and revealing of injustices – into the public, international sphere. As far as further investigation into this topic, I think it is important to study actual social change as related to user activity on blogs. Only 4% of Cuban citizens have access to blogs. The Cubans, though, that read the citizen journalist blogs are the opinion leaders and educational elite putting this audience in a position to be important agents for change. The majority of Cuban dissident blogs are international, “free” (democratically) citizens of other countries, maybe with ties or interests in Cuba. What has to change for the blogs to influence the Cuban masses? With the ultimate goal of citizen bloggers being greater exchange of intellectual knowledge for all citizens, growing access to the Internet and blogs in Cuba will be the agent of change, not just their existence on the web.

### Works Cited

- Bonello, Deborah. "Cuba's best known blogger can't be silenced" *The LA Times: La Plaza*. The LA Times, 28 July. 2008. Web. 17 Sept. 2013. <<http://lat.ms/b0Gsnp>>.
- Bonello, Deborah. "Cuban Blogger Talks about Citizen Journalism Project and 'blogostroika'" *The LA Times: La Plaza*. The LA Times, 15 Apr. 2009. Web. 17 Sept. 2013. <<http://lat.ms/1bfMz2L>>.
- Calaforra, Jorge. "Home." *Foresight Cuba*. Web. 18 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.foresightcuba.com/>>
- Calaforra, Jorge. "Número de direcciones de IP" *Foresight Cuba*. 7 April 2013. Web. 20 Oct. 2013 <<http://www.foresightcuba.com/?cat=34&lang=es-en>>
- Carty, James W., Jr. "J-education Abroad: Communist Ideology Basic to J-education in Cuba." *Journalism Educator* October (1978): 40-42. Print.
- "Cuba: Freedom of the Net 2012." *Freedom House*. Freedom House, 2012. Web. 11 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/cuba>>.
- Harbron, John D. "Journalism and Propaganda in the New Cuba." *Cuban Communism*. Ed. Irving Louis Horowitz and Jaime Suchlicki. 9th ed. New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction, 1998. 446-58. Print.
- "Home - Granma." Online. *Granma.cu - Granma Internacional*. Granma, n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.granma.cu/>>.
- Lauría, Carlos, and María Salazar. "Special Report: Chronicling Cuba, Bloggers Offer Fresh Hope." *CPJ Online*. Committee to Protect Journalists, 9 Sept. 2009. Web. 18 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.cpj.org/reports/2009/09/cuban-bloggers-offer-fresh-hope.php>>.
- Martí, José. "Nuestra America." *Voces De Hispanoamérica: Antología Literaria*. By Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and Malva E. Filer. Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2013. 221-23. Print. Originally published 1891.
- Martínez, Alina Pérez. "La Comunicación Sobre La Salud En Medios Digitales Cubanos. (Spanish)." *Revista Cubana De Salud Pública* 37.3 (2011): 288-305. Academic Search Complete. Web. 21 Oct. 2013.
- Miller, Sara. "Meet Cuba's Best Known Generation Y Blogger." *The Christian Science Monitor*. N.p., 26 July 2008. Web. 18 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2008/0726/p12s01-woam.html>>.
- Núñez, Machín Ana. *Mujeres En El Periodismo Cubano*. Santiago De Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1989. Print.

- O'Reilly, Tim. "What Is Web 2.0." *O'Reilly*. O'Reilly Media, Inc, 30 Sept. 2005. Web. 20 Oct. 2013. <<http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>>.
- Ostini, Jennifer and Fung, Anthony (2002) Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A New Model of National Media Systems, *Mass Communication and Society*, 5:1, 41-56, DOI: 10.1207/S15327825MCS0501\_4
- Pilar, María, comp. *Prensa Y Revolución: La Magia Del Cambio*. La Habana: Editorial De Ciencias Sociales, 2010. Print.
- Primera, Maye. "El Exilio Cubano De Miami Se Reencuentra En Yoani Sánchez." *El Pais*. N.p., 2 Apr. 2013. Web. 18 Sept. 2013. <[http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/04/02/actualidad/1364868312\\_809332.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/04/02/actualidad/1364868312_809332.html)>.
- Radsch, Courtney C. The Revolutions will be Blogged: Cyberactivism and the 4th Estate in Egypt. Doctoral Dissertation, American University, 2013.
- Rodríguez Torrado, Rosa María. "Another business" *La Rosa Descalza*, Web blog. <<http://bit.ly/1c6Eq3f>>.
- Rubira, Rainer, and Gisela Gil-Egui. "Political Communication in the Cuban Blogosphere: A Case Study of Generation Y." *Global Media and Communication* 9.2 (2013): n. pag. Aug. 2013. Web. 7 Oct. 2013. <<http://gmc.sagepub.com/content/9/2/153.refs.html>>.
- Salwen, Michael Brian., and Bruce Garrison. *Latin American Journalism*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1991. Print.
- Sanchez, Yoani, and Barack Obama. "President Obama's Responses to Yoani Sanchez's Questions." *Desde Cuba*. Generation Y, 9 Nov. 2009. Web. 04 Oct. 2013. <<http://www.desdecuba.com/generationy/?p=1179>>.
- Sánchez, Yoani. "Havana, Havana, Your fountains are broken" Web log post. *Generation Y*. Yoani Sánchez, 16 October, 2013. Web. 20 October, 2013. <<http://bit.ly/IqAsqT>>.
- Sánchez, Yoani. "Posters yes, but only about baseball." Web log post. *Generation Y*. Yoani Sánchez, 9 April. 2007. Web. 9 Sept. 2013. <<http://bit.ly/1bkOgzX>>.
- The International Republican Institute (IRI). Cuban Public Opinion Survey. 20 Feb. 2013. Raw data. <<http://bit.ly/17Qd5y4>>
- Williamson, Andy. "Using Mixed Methods to Discover Emergent Patterns of Local EDemocracy." *Ai & Society* 25.3 (2010): 321-32. Print.
- Zanetti, Lecuona Oscar. *Isla En La Historia: La Historiografía De Cuba En El Siglo XX*. Ciudad De La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2005. Print.