

# A BLOGGERS' POLEMIC: DEBATING INDEPENDENT CUBAN BLOGGER PROJECTS IN A POLARIZED POLITICAL CONTEXT

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Based on more than 20 in-depth interviews with the principal members of Cuba's four most prominent blogger "collectives," *Voces Cubanas*, *Havana Times*, *Bloggers Cuba*, and *La Joven Cuba*, this paper attempts to draw a preliminary thematic map of Cuba's emergent "blogosphere."<sup>2</sup> Although each of these projects has its own unique history and personality, level of independence, type of critical content, manner of connecting to the Internet, ideological orientation, and editorial line (of lack thereof), all confront similar challenges in establishing their legitimacy, maintaining their independence, and connecting with both a national and international readership in a polarized domestic context where access to the Internet remains extremely limited.

In analyzing each one of these collaborative projects as they have emerged over the past five years (2007–2011), I focus on three key challenges with which each have had to contend:

1. How do you maintain an authentic, individual, and interactive voice—the characteristics that

most define a blog and differentiate it from the traditional mass media and web 1.0—while working within a collective project? How do you resolve the conflict between self-preservation and self-censorship—that is, the dilemma of the *doble moral* (duplicity)? In a blog, do you say what you believe? Do you believe what you say? And, do you say everything you believe or only what you can get away with?

2. How do you preserve an independent and critical-minded posture toward Cuban reality in a polarized context where all channels of mass media are under government control? How do you maintain such independence in a country where nearly all of the few Internet access points are mediated (and likely monitored) by institutions, by money, or by some other kind of control or censorship? How do you access the Internet in order to maintain your collective blogging project, who can revoke that access, and under what conditions?

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1. An earlier version of this paper is available in Spanish at *Nueva Sociedad* (Henken 2011).

2. I attempted to include as wide a variety of points of view as possible among my interviewees. Thus, I spoke with Yoani Sánchez and her husband Reinaldo Escobar (of *Voces Cubanas*) and with Elaine Díaz and Yudivian Cruz Almeida (of *Bloggers Cuba*). I interviewed a pair of quite hospitable graduate students from the University of Matanzas, Roberto González Peralo and Harold Cárdenas Lema, who founded and run the proudly revolutionary collective blog *La Joven Cuba*, as well as Erasmo Calzadilla and Alfredo Fernández, another pair of welcoming young bloggers who write for the more critical-minded *Havana Times*. I also interviewed the North American expatriate Circles Robinson, who founded *Havana Times*, which he continues to edit from his home in Nicaragua. I spoke with the Black feminists and gender activists Sandra Álvarez and Yasmín Portales, both associated with the *Bloggers Cuba* group, and with the independent journalist Iván García and the dissident lawyer Laritz Diversent, also Afro-Cubans, who are associated with *Voces Cubanas*. I interviewed Ernesto Hernández Busto who runs the blog *Penúltimos Días* from his home in Barcelona. Finally, I had fruitful exchanges with the writer and photographer Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo and the hard-hitting dissident journalist Miriam Celaya (of *Voces Cubanas*), as well as with computer programmers Alejandro Ruiz and Roger Trabas both of whom collaborate with *Bloggers Cuba*.

3. Who is your imagined or ideal audience and how do you communicate with a domestic Cuban reading public in a country where access to the Internet and social networks remains extremely limited?

After addressing these questions in my descriptions of each blogger collective below, the final section of this paper analyzes the on-going “bloggers’ polemic”—an unprecedented debate among many of Cuba’s leading bloggers themselves touching on many of the questions raised above. As part of this debate, many bloggers have described their own continual efforts to preserve their editorial independence and access to the Internet in a political context where being labeled *oficialista* (Cuban government propagandist) by some, or *mercenario* (U.S. government mercenary) by others, is constant. Thus, reviewing this series of more than 30 incursions into a semi-public “blogger’s polemic” can help us better understand this “brave, complex and emergent new world” of the Cuban blogosphere.

### THE CHALLENGE OF INDEPENDENCE AMID LOW ACCESS, HIGH SUSPICION, AND EXTREME POLARIZATION

I agree with you on one point and that is the absolute irony of understanding as freedom the ability to connect [to the Internet] from embassies. I would love to stop by the U.S. Interests Section and request time on-line [...] to declare my support for socialism in Cuba. [...] Therefore, if my connection comes from the government, which IS CERTAIN, their connection comes from another government. I do not judge them, it’s the same to me, but their freedom is just as limited as that of the bloggers they accuse of being pro-government propagandists [*oficialistas*].” (Fragment of a comment left by the blogger Elaine Díaz on Enrique Ubieta’s blog, *La Isla Desconocida*, May 23, 2011.)

The embassies that I connect [to the Internet] from have never questioned what I publish. They have never imposed doctrines on me, nor have they conditioned my access on my publishing or not publishing any particular content. In fact, I have been

invited to connect via the U.S. Interests Section (despite the fact that I have published texts and signed documents against the embargo)... The Dutch, Swedish, and Czech embassies [...] do not deny access to pro-government propagandists [*blogueros oficialistas*]. They are the ones who choose not to ask for it, and that is enough for me. (Fragment of a comment left by the blogger Miriam Celaya on Ted Henken’s blog, *El Yuma*, May 30, 2011.)

As the preceding pair of quotes incisively illustrate, accessing the Internet in Cuba today takes place in a context of extreme polarization and suspicion, where incipient Cuban “internauts” find themselves doubly blockaded: by the turbid and anachronistic U.S. embargo on the one hand and by the internal state embargo over the Internet on the other. Due in part to this more than 50-year-old political stalemate, Cuban political culture is rife with distrust, personal attacks, and defamation of those who think differently. Moreover, in the recent Cuban state television series, *Las Razones de Cuba* (and particularly in the “Cyber-War” episode),<sup>3</sup> the Cuban government attempts to isolate and alienate different groups of bloggers from one another, mining the emergent field of new information and communication technologies (NICTs) with the same polarizing propaganda that it employs in the traditional media: “In a state of siege, dissidence is betrayal”; “Within the revolution, everything; against it, nothing”; “If you are independent, you must be a dissident”; and “If you are not a revolutionary, you must be a mercenary”.

In a report on the status of the Internet in Cuba published in January 2011, Larry Press describes the current Cuban Internet as “slow, limited, and expensive” (Press, 2011a). He regrets that an island that had been a regional leader in information technology in the early 1990s has become among the least connected and most isolated in Latin America and the Caribbean today. In Press’ judgment, this drastic change is due to three main causes: the U.S. embargo, the chronic crisis in the Cuban economy, and the “dictator’s dilemma”—that is the Cuban govern-

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3. “Cyber-war is a war without bombs or bullets, but a war of communications, algorithms, and bytes. In 2009 the doctrine of ‘irregular war’ became official U.S. policy, and has been referred to as such by the Pentagon since 2003,” claims the episode which aired on Cuban state television on March 21, 2011.

ment's fear of freedom of information and expression. "The government was not willing to risk its political stability to achieve the benefits of the Internet," writes Press. Thus, these three factors have "deformed the Cuban web, leaving the island behind almost all other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean today" (Press 2011a).<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, there is no universal definition of the term "Internet users." In fact, being an Internet user in Cuba almost never means that you have open access to the web from home or from a "smart" phone, as is often the case elsewhere, but a tenuous, "slow, limited, and expensive" connection from a state institution or through the black market. For example, surveys done by Cuba's National Office of Statistics (ONE) in 2009 indicated that only 2.9% of respondents had direct access to the Internet during the previous year with almost double (5.8%) reporting even having used email (Press 2011a). Another survey by ONE from 2007 found that "only 5.2 percent of those questioned [...] had used a computer [typically without connection to the Internet] at home, while 88.8 percent did so in their workplace or school" (Acosta 2008).<sup>5</sup>

This data indicates that Cuba continues to live in a world of web 1.0, without the common use of social

networks and mobile technology. However, this does not mean that the most popular social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Wordpress, and Blogger are completely unavailable in Cuba. It is only that their use is still in its infancy and only an elite (the most privileged and/or adept) has been able to enter this "brave new world." Given the figures of low penetration and connectivity in Cuba, and thus the difficulty of setting up and maintaining a blog on the island, when it comes to the Cuban blogosphere, a first division should be made between blogs about Cuba maintained from abroad<sup>6</sup> and those done *desde Cuba*.

Although it is impossible to know with certainty the absolute number of Cuban blogs that exist, the website *Blogs sobre Cuba* contains a regularly updated list that included 1,191 blogs as of October 7, 2011. My own blog, *El Yuma* (<http://elyuma.blogspot.com>), features links to 179 other Cuba-themed blogs.<sup>7</sup> In addition, several Cuban media entities have published lists of blogs written by Cuban journalists. For example, *Cubaperiodistas.cu*, the official site of the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC), includes a directory with links to 188 blogs, among which are a variety of voices but most without much personality or upkeep. Exceptions to this rule are some of the most active and "official" blogs produced on the is-

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4. Using official data from each country, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) ranks Cuba in the last place in Latin America and the Caribbean when measured by the number of broadband subscribers for every 100 inhabitants (Cuba has zero while the regional average is 7.2). Cuba is also in last place regionally when ranked by number of secure Internet servers for every million people (Cuba has just 0.1 when the regional average is 172.7). And comparing the rate of "Internet users" for every 100 people, Cuba leads only six other countries (Belize, Bolivia, El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Suriname) with a rate of 15.9 in 2010, relative to a regional average of over 30 (Press 2011a).

5. In recent years there has been extraordinary growth in the use of cell phones in Cuba. For example, while there were only 22,600 cell phones in Cuba in 2002, this figure reached 330,000 in 2008. Even so, this still made up only 3% of the population, while the regional average was 93.4%. Since 2008, however, when the government recinded most legal and bureaucratic obstacles to the use of cell phones and began lowering prices (Miroff 2010), the number of users jumped to 621,200 by 2009 and surpassed a million in 2010 (ONE 2011).

6. Among these many Cuban "diasporic" blogs, the most well known is likely *Penúltimos Días*, founded in Barcelona on August 1, 2006 by the Cuban exile Ernesto Hernández Busto as a reaction to the announcement of Fidel Castro's grave illness. Other "diasporic" blogs are written primarily in Spanish and English and cover a wide variety of themes, including news (*Café Fuerte*, *Along the Malecón*, *Cuba Money Project*, and *Cuaderno de Cuba*), humor and comics (*Periódico Guamá*, *Garrincha*, and *El Blog de Varela*), politics (*The Cuban Triangle*, *The Havana Note*, *Machetera*, *Uncommon Sense*, *Babalú Blog*, and *Capitol Hill Cubans*), anthropology (*Ethno-Cuba*), economics (*The Cuban Economy*), the Internet (*The Internet in Cuba*), music and literature (*El Tono de la Voz* and *Enrisco*), and film (*Cine-Ojo*).

7. These are arranged under a variety of headings including the four collective sites described in detail below, another nine blogs which I consult regularly, 44 English-language blogs, 44 blogs written from within the island, 24 published abroad, 24 blogs by Cuban writers, as well as 14 news blogs, 11 focusing on photography, three on graphic humor, and two on film.

land, including those of Norelys Morales Aguilera, Manuel E. Lagarde, Enrique Ubieta, and Vladia Rubio, which are defined by their revolutionary stridency and nearly constant updating. There is also the *BlogCip* portal with links to 68 blogs and *Blogueros y Corresponsales de la Revolución* (ByCR—Bloggers and Correspondents of the Revolution), which features the blog of Cuban journalist Rosa Báez, *La Polilla Cubana*. Finally, there are the prominent and staunchly pro-regime blogs of Iroel Sánchez, *La Pupa Insomne*, and the mysterious “Yohandry Fontana,” *Yohandry’s Weblog* (an unknown blogger whose existence and very name seem aimed at mounting a reactionary defamation campaign against the prominent independent blogger Yoani Sánchez).

Cuban blogger and University of Havana journalism professor Eliane Díaz recently published a pathbreaking academic study focusing on the blogs of Cuban journalists with the provocative title: “Blogs and Journalism in Cuba: Between What ‘Should Be’ and Reality” (2009). She summarizes her findings as follows:

The reality of most of the blogs studied, many of which are out of date or were abandoned soon after being started, reveals the presence of a severe tone, with little openness to conversational exchange. These blogs serve a predominantly persuasive and propagandistic function more than they seek to engage in reflexive dialogue and analysis. They also serve as a virtual space for their authors to republish their journalistic work from the traditional print media where they work.

#### **FOUR TRIBES: VOCES CUBANAS, HAVANA TIMES, BLOGGERS CUBA, AND LA JOVEN CUBA**

##### **Voces Cubanas**

*Voces Cubanas* is a space open to all Cubans living on the island who want to have a blog on the Internet. This site receives no funding nor does it belong to any political organization [...]. We will reject only those proposals which containing material evidently pornographic, racist, or that calls for violence (Vocescubanas.com, January 27, 2009, “Who are we?”).

What is now known as *Voces Cubanas* began in December 2004 as a digital magazine named *Consenso desde Cuba*. It had the format of a traditional magazine and was hosted on the portal *Desdecuba.com*. It

was jointly run by Reinaldo Escobar, Yoani Sánchez, Miriam Celaya, Dimas Castellanos, Marta Cortizas, and Eugenio Leal, among others, who made up its editorial board. Since its inception, *Consenso* was established as a virtual space for the development of “citizen journalism” and gave visibility to points of view not found in Cuba’s official media or in other publications “conditioned by political requirements.”

In its first editorial in December 2004, the magazine declared its intention to maintain a moderate tone, distinguishing itself from the intransigence of both the right and left. With a serious, respectful, and pluralistic approach, the magazine rejected the use of insults and personal attacks so common in Cuban political culture. Its motto was “to come together, respecting our differences,” and it invited Cubans of all political stripes (and in all places) to renounce “verbal violence” and begin to learn to debate with civility. In an interview with Sánchez conducted in Havana in July 2008, she clarified, “[Our project] has as a fundamental premise to say ‘no’ to verbal violence, where our criticisms are justified with arguments, not insults, defamation, or incendiary adjectives” (Henken 2008: 88).

In early 2007, after a little more than two years of existence, *Consenso* was renamed *Contodos* and took on a profile more resembling a blog than that of a traditional magazine. In fact, it included a space for various “portfolios” where began to appear a growing number of personal blogs starting with Sanchez’s own blog, *Generación Y*, in April 2007. Up to that point, Sánchez had been involved in the magazine more as its webmaster than as a writer. However, the spark that set fire to Sánchez as a blogger was her frustrating participation in the so-called *polémica intelectual*,<sup>8</sup> a spontaneous debate that took place among a broad group of Cuban writers and intellectuals—both at home and abroad—in January and February 2007. Besides being the trigger for the emergence of *Generación Y*, this debate was truly a seismic event in Cuban intellectual life as it focused on the rigidness of Cuban cultural policy and the limits of artistic expression “within the revolution” and took place almost exclusively via email.

Since then, Sánchez and her husband Escobar, along with a growing group of more than 40 independent cyber-activists have gone beyond the limited world of email by taking advantage of the interactive social networks that define web 2.0. Focusing initially on the use of blogs and Twitter, their aim has been to use citizen journalism to expand the space for critical debate within Cuba. Thus, 2007 would become the start of a new phase of cyber-activism for this group with Sanchez becoming its principal protagonist given her self-taught knowledge of computing and her symbolic leadership as the pioneering author of *Generación Y*.

Over the next five years (2007–2011), this informal group of citizen cyber-activists would start six related social networking projects. These are:

- the “Blogger Academy,” a weekly workshop where blogging and tweeting are promoted;
- a semi-annual blogging contest known as *Una Isla Virtual*;
- the pair of collective voluntary blog translation sites, *Hemos Oído* and *Translating Cuba*;
- the new joint blogger portal *Voces Cubanas*;
- the semi-clandestine, monthly magazine in PDF format, *Voces*, edited by Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo; and
- a series of 30–minute independent videos aired via YouTube and Vimeo, *Razones Ciudadanas*.<sup>9</sup>

Appearing in early 2009, *Voces Cubanas* replaced the now discontinued virtual magazines *Consenso* and

*Contodos*. With the declaration of economic and ideological independence cited above, the portal has grown over time beginning with Sánchez’s *Generación Y* (April 2007), Escobar’s *Desde aquí* (December 2007), and Miriam Celaya’s *Sin EVAción* (which was initially written under the pseudonym “Eva” between January and July 2008). By October, 2011, the site hosted 43 different individual blogs covering a wide variety of themes and using a rich diversity of styles.<sup>10</sup>

However, it is unlikely that in 2007–2008 the government fully appreciated the power, scope, and effectiveness of this new use of social media, especially in the hands of a young, unknown woman unconnected to any state institution and unaffiliated with any existing dissident group. In fact, during this initial phase the government gave more attention to Escobar, who had a history as a dissident and independent journalist. “Machismo has only one positive side,” Sánchez has joked, “faced with the dilemma of who to arrest, they have always come for my husband Reinaldo, not me. My ovaries are guilty, but underestimated.”

Throughout this process of development, there has been a gradual maturation as the use of social media has evolved beyond a project of individual “exorcism” and “catharsis,” becoming a coordinated movement of citizen solidarity. We are witnessing an ever more daring effort to convert virtual spaces of dialogue and discussion, so far restricted to emails,

8. This debate erupted in response to the celebration of the past achievements of the cultural commissar Luis Pavón Tamayo on the Cuban television program *Impronta* aired in early January 2007. President of the *Consejo Nacional de Cultura* (CNC) between 1971 and 1976—a repressive period known in Cuba as the *quinquenio gris* (grey quinquennium) or simply as the *pavonato*—Pavón was the principal enforcer of a hard-line cultural and educational policy that established strict “revolutionary” parameters for writers and intellectuals.

9. The first four projects were launched between December 2008 and March 2009. The *Voces* magazine was launched in August, 2010, while the video series, *Razones Ciudadanas*, was begun in the spring of 2011.

10. The first ten blogs on the site, including those of Sánchez, Escobar, and Celaya, were those of Lía Villares, *Habanemia* (April 2008), Claudia Caudelo, *Octavo Cerco* (October 2008), Orlando Luis Pardo, *Lunes de Post-Revolución* (Oct. 2008), Iván García, *Desde La Habana* (January 2009), Eugenio Leal, *Veritas* (February 2009), Dimas Castellanos, *Blog de Dimas* (February 2009), and Ciro Díaz, *El Auditorio Imbécil* (April 2009). Additionally, *Voces* hosts photoblogs such as Pardo’s *Boring Home Utopics*; the journalistic blogs *Foro Cubanacán Press* by Guillermo Fariñas and *El pequeño hermano* by Ernesto Morales; blogs oriented towards religion like *Cubano Confesante* by the Baptist minister Mario Llorent, *Intramuros* by the Catholic lay activist Dagoberto Valdés, and *La Colmena* which focuses on the Masons. There are also legal blogs such as *Asociación Jurídica Cubana* by the jurist Wilfredo Vallín and *Jurisconsulto de Cuba* by the young lawyer Laritza Diversent; blogs by creative writers like *Los hijos que nadie quiso* by Ángel Santiesteban; and even a blog by a former member of Cuba’s secret service, *La Mala Letra* by Regina Coyula.

blogs and tweets, into real, physical spaces. That is, we see a gradual movement from cyberspace to public space, where the unified defense against a state of siege begins to give way to an open forum that reflects the many voices of a multicolored civil society. As a result, a government accustomed to citizen obedience, a monopoly over the media and public space, and increasingly concerned about its international image, has launched a campaign of insults and defamation against the bloggers of *Voces Cubanas*, dismissing them as “mercenaries in the service of empire” (Henken 2010).

### Havana Times

We try to promote a combination of conventional and new style journalism, as well as comments that reflect critical support for the Revolution, which is not necessarily synonymous with being in accordance with its leaders and their policies. [...] We want to distance ourselves both from the official monologue and the malicious imperial discourse. (Circles Robinson, founder and editor of *Havana Times*, “How Havana Times Began: Open-Minded Writing from Cuba,” April 2011.)

Founded in October 2008, *Havana Times* is an independent media experiment begun by the American expatriate Circles Robinson. Invited to work in Cuba in 2001 after 17 years of residence in Nicaragua, Robinson began working in Cuba as a translator-corrector first for *Prensa Latina* and later for the state agency, ESTI (Team of Translation and Interpretation), translating and correcting different articles for the official Cuban media. Robinson came to Cuba with great enthusiasm at the opportunity to help the revolution resist the U.S. embargo and recover after the fall of the Soviet bloc. Also, for Robinson it was quite exciting to witness “the ability of Cubans to endure extremely difficult times, especially during the early nineties,” after having witnessed first hand what he calls “the failure of the Nicaraguan revolution.”

During his eight years in Cuba he felt an increasing sense of frustration as he became acquainted with the poor quality of the work he had to translate. He says:

In general, Cuban journalism avoids any public debate or even the least bit of controversy. [...] In informal discussions with friends and colleagues, on this subject, they advised me, “this is how it is done here.” I noticed that these sites had little appeal for

readers outside the country to whom they were supposedly directed.

In response, in 2005 Robinson began writing his own blog *Circles on line*. However, hearing only his own voice was not enough for him and he began to look for a medium that could reflect the many Cuban voices he was hearing around him everyday but that never seemed to be included in the official press. “The more I adjusted to life in Havana and the more developed my informal contacts with Cubans became,” says Robinson, “I came to realize that there was no forum to really reflect what I was seeing. Nor were there any media outlets for the new generation of independent writers and thinkers.” The Internet was his answer.

In October 2008, while vacationing in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, Robinson launched the *Havana Times (HT)* website with the help of a Cuban who resided in Spain and a small group of young Cuban writers on the island who provided most of the content. From the beginning, the project was intended to be an alternative to the official media while avoiding falling into the trap of fierce criticism or uncritical praise. For this reason, the site proudly declares itself: “An independent source of news and opinion about and from Cuba.” I specifically asked Robinson about the meaning of the word “independent” and he replied: “Independent of both the Cuban government and the U.S. government and Cuban exile groups in Miami and all programs that they fund directly or indirectly. Independent of any political party, organization, or movement.”

However, after *HT* appeared in cyberspace it was soon confronted with a number of challenges. Robinson had to recruit writers “in a country where working for an independent digital medium is considered taboo by the government and most citizens.” All those interested in participating had to be “willing to take the risk of possible persecution in their personal and professional lives,” he explained. At the same time, to maintain his editorial and economic autonomy, Robinson had to secure financing independent from both Cuban and U.S. governments, which he was able to do by using his own savings and with family financial support. “There’s a lot of mistrust and suspicion of funds that could have originat-

ed with the U.S. government or the extremist Miami exile community,” he clarified.

Robinson insists he never asked anyone’s permission to start *HT* and that no one from the Communist Party or the government has censored it directly. “I personally have never received a critique of the site by a Cuban government official,” he said, “neither privately nor publicly.” But that does not mean he has not had to navigate a series of bureaucratic and ideological obstacles. Although *HT* has been well received by readers and Robinson continued to work at ESTI, editing the site in his spare time, he was able to maintain this delicate balance for just nine months. In the spring of 2009, he had a conflict at work related to corruption by his immediate supervisor. Although this conflict had nothing to do with *HT*, when Robinson refused to remain silent about his boss’ lack of ethics, his work permit was not renewed and he was forced to return to Nicaragua, where he continues to run *HT*. Since then, Robinson has returned to Cuba three times but these visits have not been hampered by Cuban authorities.

Since its original purpose was to talk about Cuba to the world “without prejudice” and “with an open mind,” according to the welcome statement on the site, during its first year *HT* existed exclusively in English. By its first anniversary in September-October 2009, however, the site had become bilingual in English and Spanish, now with a growing domestic readership despite the lack of Internet access for the vast majority of Cubans. Ironically, most of those who write for *HT* do not have easy access to the web themselves and have to utilize their sporadic access to email to send their posts to Robinson for him to upload. And while these Cuban writers’ blogs (or *diarios* as they are called at *HT*) offer readers the opportunity to post comments, a truly dynamic exchange with writers is minimal given the fact that they cannot enter, read, and respond easily. As Robinson describes it, “only a couple of *HT* bloggers have regular access to the Internet. Most of the others can gain access seldom or never, and so have to use email to read the articles and comments [...]. Internet access at work depends on where you work or study and the position you have. In these situations Internet use can be

monitored and revoked if they don’t like the sites you visit or the emails you receive.”

In one of our conversations, Robinson responded to my question about *HT*’s “editorial line” with the following statement: “Our main line is to have a broad spectrum of views that are both respectful and focused on serious issues without resorting to defamation, a common habit of both Cuban government apologists and rabid anti-Castro exiles. From the beginning, I think we have critically supportive of the revolutionary process. However, since many Cuban conservatives do not accept this concept, they would say that we are only giving ‘ammunition to the enemy.’”

This position of *critical* support for the revolution from an independent, non-governmental source has attracted a good number of young autonomous activists to *HT*, many of whom advocate in their *diarios* for a diverse group of causes including LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights, anti-racism, and environmental protection. Moreover, they fight to establish a political culture predicated upon broad participation and protagonism from non-governmental groups in civil society. They reject the use of violence and are fed up with the official governmental monologue.

In an interview in Havana with Erasmo Calzadilla and Alfredo Fernández, two of *HT*’s most incisive and original diarists, I asked about their motivations. “I had a desire to write for several reasons,” said Calzadilla, “but I was very afraid because I was teaching at the university. [...] So I figured I might have problems, conflicts with writing, because I knew that things were getting hot. Anything you write can be dangerous. Either you write what you please and accept the consequences, or you write what they tell you to.” Then Fernández, Calzadilla’s friend and former co-worker at the university, weighed in. “[When Erasmo invited me to] contribute to *HT*, I loved the idea from the start,” he admitted:

I hardly even thought it over. I had already been reading snippets of Yoani’s blog from friends. I really liked the idea of narrating a version of Cuba without resentment, but telling what really happens here. I have spent all 34 years of my life suffering from the Cuban press does not report anything.

And [I jumped at] being part of a project where I would be able to speak without censorship, without an intermediary, without being pushed by anyone... And I love the fact that Circles has never tried to censor me: “Don’t put this because it’s going to cause problems,” or “It’s not convenient for us to publish that...” He always speaks of his desire to avoid having the site shut down or blocked in Cuba, as happened with *Generación Y*, but very subtly.

Many of these young bloggers want to use their voices to have an impact on the reality of their country but because of their political positions, their young age, or their not being members of the Party or belonging to some other official organization, they are excluded from the the official media. Robinson explained that “many of the writers want *HT* to be a protagonist in debates about how Cuba can move forward leaving behind its current state of paralysis and institutional sclerosis.” In addition, Robinson worries whether “the writers on the site, many of whom have jobs in the public sector... in the field of education and culture, would be endangered by collaborating with *HT*.” Some whom Robinson invited to join him have declined, typically saying that they had no time or simply not responding at all. But in other cases, “after visiting the site,” Robinson explained, “they likely concluded that writing for an independent website [...] was something potentially damaging to their careers.”

In fact, both Calzadilla and Fernández eventually lost their jobs at the university but continued to collaborate with *HT*. Although they suspect that their collaboration had an influence over their loss of employment, they could never verify it. When asked whether he feared the potential consequences for openly expressing himself, Fernández replied:

I, at least, am very afraid. But [...] I refuse to be complicit in making my country’s tomorrow the same as its today. There are many people working: There is Yoani and her people. There are the dissidents. There is the *Observatorio Crítico*. All with the same goal: We have to get rid of the state of mediocrity that has rooted itself in Cuba. ... This hope has helped me overcome my fear. So far I haven’t had any problems with the state security. I know they will come, that they could show up at any time. They know perfectly well what I am up to. But there comes a point when fear loses its grip, be-

cause being afraid only prolongs this state of deterioration. But of course, I am very afraid.

For his part Calzadilla adds:

This pressure that makes you remain silent eventually fills you with the desire to speak out and when you have an opportunity such as *HT*, it is a tremendous relief. Your fear depends on what you have to lose. Initially, I was very afraid because I worked at a university and I realized that if they found out [about my activities in *HT*] my job would be at risk. But eventually I was kicked out of my job. The fact is that you end up without much fear because you have nothing left to lose.

### **Bloggers Cuba**

Bloggers Cuba [is] fundamentally marked by the dichotomy between the experience of life on the island and its scant reflection in either the national or international media. We believe in the diversity of voices, in the construction of a future Cuba based on inclusion and participation from a pluralistic consensus, in the right to self-determination and national sovereignty, and in social justice and equality. Bloggers Cuba is reborn once more, deeply spontaneous and free. (Editorial, “Bloggers Cuba: A space to think and live the island,” July 8, 2011.)

The group *Bloggers Cuba (BC)* was born in fits and starts between June and September 2008. Its original web-presence lasted until December 2009, when it inexplicably went off-line. After a year and a half in the dark, the *BC* community reappeared on July 8, 2011, back at its original domain [www.bloggerscuba.com](http://www.bloggerscuba.com).<sup>11</sup> This time around, the group made more explicit its purpose by including the declaration of principles cited above on its renovated site. The most interesting aspect of this new statement (especially when compared with *Voces Cubanas* and *Havana Times*) is its criticism not only of Cuba’s “national media” for its failure to reflect Cuban reality, but also of the foreign media for presenting a distorted image of that reality. Likewise, the group is at pains to clarify that it believes in pluralism, diversity, and inclusiveness on the one hand, and “the right to self determination and sovereignty, social justice and equality” on the other. In other words, *BC* attempts to establish its independence and credibility by taking both the domestic state media and the foreign corporate media to task, and by trying to simultaneously recon-

cile the goals of democracy, nationalism, and socialism.

As with the *Voces Cubanas* portal, the *BC* site highlights the most recent entry posted by any group member at the top of the page. The site also provides links to the individual blogs of each of the group's fourteen members, many of whom remained quite active on-line on their own blogs during the 18 months that their collective site was down. There is also a very useful archive of all entries and comments posted on the site dating back to June 2008, when it was first launched. The group's best known blogger is the previously mentioned University of Havana Professor of Communications, Elaine Díaz, whose blog is entitled, *La Polémica Digital*.<sup>12</sup> Also active are the race and gender activists Sandra Álvarez (whose personal blog carries the provocative name, *Negra cubana tenía que ser*—"It must've been a black Cuban woman") and Yasmín Portales, as well as Portales' husband, Rogelio Díaz, whom I quote at length below.<sup>13</sup> Another very active member of *BC* is Roger Trabas, a programming fanatic and addict of heavy

metal music—a passion he shares with the French expatriate and Cuban resident David Chapet.

In fact, *BC* had its roots in the friendship between Trabas and Chapet. As a foreigner, it seems that Chapet was initially able to provide the financing and logistics for the site's Spanish host.<sup>14</sup> On June 2, 2008, Trabas left the first post on the blog which read simply: "This blog has been created with the intention of uniting all Cuban bloggers residing on the island." By the autumn of 2008, a sufficient number of bloggers had responded so that the group's first physical meeting could take place. Taking a nod from the island's long-suffering independent entrepreneurs, known as *cuentalpropistas*, Trabas and Chapet half-jokingly billed their gathering *el primer encuentro de bloggers por cuenta propia* (the first meeting of freelance bloggers), which took place, somewhat ironically, at the state-run Palace of Computing and Electronics in Central Havana on September 27, 2008. Eleven people showed up at that first gathering, which had a fairly straight-forward purpose: to encourage the use and development of "weblogs" within Cuba "as a form of free expression."

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11. While "off-line" during these 18 months, *BC* continued to exist through periodic informal gatherings. Between April and July 2010, the group also produced four editions of their own 14-page PDF "magazine," entitled simply *BloggersCuba en PDF*. The magazine included selections from members' blogs on culture, poetry, sports, photography, investigative reporting, and snippets of readers' comments. The editorial in the magazine's first edition began: "*Bloggers Cuba*, or better yet, the cyber-space that represented the group of friends who share common ideas and efforts has not been available. There are many reasons behind this and it is unlikely that they can be resolved in the near future. Nevertheless, during this time we "*BCers*" have continued producing on-line content and getting together to party and, theoretically, save the world." Additionally, the members of *BC* were active participants in #TwithtHab, an informal gathering of Cuban Twitter users organized by Leunam Rodriguez (not affiliated with *BC* or any other blogger collective described here) that took place in Havana on July 1, 2011.

12. While Díaz has had a number of quite heated exchanges with some of the members of *Voces Cubanas* over the issues of independence, control, and state sponsorship (see the epigraphs at the beginning of the first section of this paper for a good example), there have also been some efforts at bridge-building. In September 2009, Díaz's blog was awarded an honorable mention by the jury of *Voces Cubanas*' first blogging contest, with the explanation, "her work demonstrates that it is possible to be valiant, critical, and honest [when blogging] from institutional spaces." The *Voces Cubanas* group also invited Díaz to be interviewed as part of the "Cuban blogosphere" episode of its video series *Razones Ciudadanas*, in the late spring of 2011. However, she declined to participate.

13. Portales and Díaz jointly maintain a number of blogs, the most polemical of which is *Bubusopia*.

14. The temporary closure of the *BC* portal in December 2009 seems to have been partly due to the withdrawal of Chapet and the lack of funds to continue paying for the server. However, a clear explanation as to why he felt the need to withdraw from the group and how that was related to the suspension of the site was never forthcoming. Between 2007 and 2010, Chapet also maintained a very rich personal blog, *Journal de Cuba*, which was published in French. While this blog is no longer active, Chapet still lives in Cuba and continues to operate several other quite active web-based projects. In December 24, 2009, he left the following note on the site as a partial, if rather cryptic, explanation of his departure: "I also take this opportunity to announce that today I have decided to leave the *Bloggers Cuba* community. The project, first of all, is for Cuban bloggers. I started the project with Roger, organizing *el primer encuentro de bloggers por cuenta propia*, and I tried to give the necessary impetus to the project so that it could become well-known. Today, I consider that my role has come to an end and that the project should continue under its own steam and as the wishes of its members decide. I hope and trust in the members of this group so that *Bloggers Cuba* continues."

Although *BC* has much in common with *HT*, the majority of the members of *BC* have a job in the state sector (as journalists, programmers, writers, professors, etc.), an advanced technical knowledge of computing, and institutional access to the Internet (some more than others), which can be an incentive for them to moderate their critical language. Still, at times members of *BC* have been sharply critical of various aspects of Cuba's current social and political reality and especially dismissive of certain officials and journalists whom they see as decidedly opportunistic or demagogic, as has been the case with the official journalist and blogger Enrique Ubieta. At the same time, in their criticisms they always attempt to remain clearly "within the revolution," justifying their arguments with references to socialist principles and the various reform-minded statements from government leaders starting with President Raúl Castro.

Shared among most members of *BC*, there seems to be a profound belief in the ideals of socialism and in the good faith of some of the country's leaders, mixed with a growing frustration over the often insurmountable state bureaucracy, the opportunism of many Party and government officials, and the limited means available for open, honest debate. This is combined with a constant negotiation with authority in order to safeguard their access to the Internet and their ability to express themselves with relative freedom. They are particularly critical with regard to issues of age, gender, race, the environment, sexual diversity, and greater access to information and freedom of movement, association, and communication within and outside Cuba, but in essence they are supporters of the Revolution. For example, in *Jóvenes con matices* (Youth with nuance), one of his many recent polemical essays posted on the blog *Bubusopia* on June 11, 2001, Rogelio Díaz described *BC* in the following way:

It turns out that *BC* is anything but institutional. Those of us who comprise it work in various unrelated professions, universities, hospitals, publishers, etc. We are interested in science and its social applications; issues of gender; denouncing all forms of discrimination; culture, sports, and, naturally, our lives and our future, as well as that of our country. Moreover, we dare to speak about these things with sincerity and frankness, a habit that has cost us not a

few bumps on the head. Since we are blessed to work together with Elaine, we appreciate that among her many redeeming qualities is her principled rejection of all kinds of manipulation, like that of Ubieta. She also resists the attempt by others to present her as some kind of political idol, a plan that already failed when they tried it with Yohandri.

Their nuanced position of safeguarding their hard-won independence and rejecting the willful misunderstandings and malicious manipulations from demagogues and opportunists is quite similar to the attitude of "critical support" for the revolution voiced by Robinson and many of the diarists at *HT* noted above. This struggle to resist cooptation by or identification with either government propagandists (the so-called *oficialistas*) or anti-regime dissidents (the supposed *mercenarios*) is quite evident in the following statements from several members of the *BC* community published on their first anniversary in November 2009:

- "What brought us together [was the desire] to do something for our island, to share our dreams, ideas, and realities. To see Cuba from the heart and fight for it."—Roger.
- "The best [thing is] nobody appointed us, nobody asked us to do this, nobody checked to see if we had 'completed our assignment.' Never before have I felt so free."—Boris.
- "Before *BC*, the world was divided between the CIA and the G2. When I got over the paranoia of trying to figure out to which of the two sides these 'self-employed bloggers' belonged, I finally understood that there was still space for spontaneity."—Elaine.
- "*Bloggers Cuba* confirmed for me that not all 'worms' are bad and not all 'revolutionaries' are good, and vice versa. *BC* has opened a door for dialogue and inspired new blogging platforms managed from within Cuba: *Voces Cubanas*, *Blogcip*, etc. *BC* was a pioneer in that."—David

### **La Joven Cuba**

*La Joven Cuba* is not an official blog, we defend the good things about the Revolution and criticize the things we think are negative, that go against and affect the country we dream of and want to build. The Blog was created through our own initiative and desires. We did not ask permission from anyone. We

do not clear what we publish with anyone. *La Joven Cuba* enjoys total freedom to do what it does. This is a fact and will continue. The day that this changes, we will end our existence as *La Joven Cuba*. (Roberto G. Peralo, *La Joven Cuba*, “Reflections on a controversial meeting,” May 5, 2011.)

When I visited the founders of *La Joven Cuba* (*LJC*) in Matanzas in late April, 2011, they received me with cordiality and good humor. During our very frank and respectful four-hour conversation and mutual interview on my visit to Matanzas, I noted in the founders of *LJC* both a curiosity and capacity for dialogue and a fervent conviction in their own identity as “young revolutionaries.” In essence, theirs is a project that defends the revolution, socialism, and Cuba’s national sovereignty, while at the same time attacking many self-described “alt-bloggers” such as Yoani Sánchez and Miriam Celaya (of *Voces Cubanas*) frequently and fervently. The site’s creators are three graduate students and professors at the University of Matanzas (Harold Cárdenas Lema, Roberto Peralo, and Osmany “Tatu” Sánchez—the last of whom I was not able to meet).

Founded in April 2010 with the conscious purpose of not only “defending the Revolution but also [of facilitating] an internal debate about its present and future,” the site aimed to give a different take on what its creators saw as the “unjust manipulation of the facts about the Internet in Cuba” both in the international press and on popular dissident blogs. Still, in a post from April 4, 2011, commemorating the blog’s first anniversary, Cárdenas, Peralo, and Sánchez admit that they have been at a clear disadvantage in trying to defend the revolution when: “Each time something new appears that could be seen as a potential threat (in this case the Internet), the response is prohibition and limitation instead of its utilization in our favor. Recently, this view has changed for the good and *La Joven Cuba* is proof of this.”

Apart from these three administrators, the site often incorporates posts by some of their undergraduate students at the University and by a handful of foreign collaborators including the Spaniard Josep Calvet and the Cuban-American Max Lesnik. To its detriment, *LJC*’s blogroll long referenced only the most staunchly official, pro-regime blogs and news sourc-

es. In response to their request for suggestions about improvements to their site that would help them be taken more seriously as independent bloggers, I advised them that they could be more diverse in their links to other blogs and not simply highlight the most pro-regime sites with which they sympathize. In the six months since our meeting, their set of links has expanded only very slightly to include a few more moderate voices, but none that could be classified as “outside” the revolution (or much less “against” it). The irony inherent in the fact that this section of their site is labeled “alternative blogs” seems to be lost on them. However, they would likely argue that their blog, as well as the many fiercely pro-regime blogs referenced on their site, are indeed “alternatives” to highly popular and deeply critical blogs such as *Generación Y*, which to them highlight only the most negative aspects of Cuban reality and purport to speak for an entire “generation,” their generation.

In contrast to their blogroll, one of the richest sections of *LJC* is the normally diverse, respectful, and extensive chain of comments which quickly appear after each of their posts. Often growing to more than 50 entries, these exchanges sometimes become real debates that extend far beyond the content of the original post and include a group of quite faithful and tenacious visitors. In my interview with Cárdenas and Peralo, I learned that a majority of their visitors are Cuban exiles, some of whom even claim to be former “freedom fighting” members of hard-line exile groups like Alpha-66 (Cárdenas and Peralo would likely call them former “terrorists”). In fact, statistics published on the portal indicate that of the 107,000 total unique visitors to the site in its 18 months of existence, the largest number are from the United States (23,533 or 22% of the total), followed by Mexico (15,288 or 14%), and Spain (9,975 or 9%). Thus, while *Generación Y* and *Voces Cubanas* are often criticized for having no following in Cuba and catering to an exclusively international audience, *LJC*—like *Havana Times* and *Bloggers Cuba*—also has far more international than domestic readers. *LJC* has only received 5,078 unique visitors from within Cuba, ranking seventh and comprising just 5% of the total.

The majority of visitors clearly do not share the pro-government orientation of the blog's administrators, often openly and eloquently critiquing their arguments. However, they leave comments on a regular basis engaging with the authors of each post in a respectful tone and a spirit of free debate. "It is with this spirit," argue the administrators, "that we will continue promoting debate (not arguments) and we will accept here all who are interested in the future of Cuba regardless of their ideology." As with the other bloggers described above, the administrators of *LJC* say that they do not censor comments but do moderate them in order to screen out intolerant, aggressive, and insulting language. They have even blocked some frequent early visitors from leaving new comments with the justification that they did not stay on topic or take seriously others' point of view.

While there was only very limited dialogue among these four blogging enterprises between 2007 and 2010, since my late-April 2011 visit to Cuba and the publication of my interview about the Cuban blogosphere with Luis Manuel García at *Cubaencuentro.com* in late-May 2011, there has been quite an explosion of debate between them. This "bloggers' polemic"—whose outline I describe below—has often been quite heated but just as often has exposed clear signs of solidarity among some of these independent "internauts." In either case, this ongoing polemic has revealed a hunger and capacity for serious debate, as well as a variety of competing arguments and positions vis-à-vis the role of the Internet and blogs in Cuba.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION: CAUGHT BETWEEN ELAINE'S "ATTRACTORS" AND MIRIAM'S "IRRITATIONS"

There is little left for those who believe in socialism in a sublime act of honesty or ideological suicide, or simply because it is their sovereign and democratic right. Celaya's monochromatic map purposely leaves no space for anyone to authentically agree with the government out of an intransferable personal choice. You must either be a student of Yoani Sánchez or Tato Fontes [Yohandry Fontana] or you cannot be at all! (Elaine Díaz, "Strange Attractor," *La Polémica Digital*, August 4, 2011.)

It is equally valid to apply [Elaine's] classification back on herself, but in the opposite sense. Why can't I be selflessly against socialism or against the Cuban government (which, of course, is not the same thing) out of a simple honest choice and without my being paid for it by some foreign government? I am not a socialist or a Marxist, but that fact neither makes me a mercenary nor an annexationist (with my apologies to those who choose to be so). (Miriam Celaya, "A response to Elaine's irritations," *Sin Evasión*, August 15, 2011.)

On Wednesday, May 4, 2011, a week after returning from Cuba, I published on my blog, *El Yuma*, a rather long message entitled, "This will be your last time." The post explained the purpose of my trip—doing interviews with some of the protagonists of the Cuban blogosphere—and chronicled the interrogation I suffered upon leaving the country. To my surprise during the next two weeks I received dozens of both public and private messages of solidarity from my readers. But what is most significant in my view is that many of these messages came from the same Cuban bloggers whom I had interviewed just weeks before while on the island. Indeed, the first of these messages arrived to my in-box from a member of the *Bloggers Cuba* collective who, while wishing to re-

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15. One such fascinating and unprecedented debate began in March 2011, prior to my visit, and continues today. It is between *LJC* and Regina Coyula, a former state security agent who is now the author of the blog *La Mala Letra* (which is linked to the *Voces Cubanas* portal). On her own blog, Coyula labels each new post in this exchange "LML en LJC," with the latest entry (the 18<sup>th</sup>) on October 19, 2011 focusing on the proper role of the intellectual within a revolutionary society. Soon after the exchange began, Coyula described her approach with these words: "Not too long ago I began visiting a blog run out of the University of Matanzas. I was drawn to it because even though we see reality from different angles, I thought we could build a space for a respectful and sound debate, [something] sorely needed in Cuban society. [...] Someone asked me why would I want to draw attention to a blog that would not do the same for me. 'You have a good point,' I said, 'but that difference is very important to me. I can talk about them without having to consult with anyone else first.'"

main anonymous, made the following declaration: “A million thanks for posting your text, ‘This will be your last time.’ Your complaint is a great support to all Cuban bloggers and can even be a ‘little grain of sand’ in the ‘unification’ of the different ‘sides.’ What happened is being denounced by almost everyone you interviewed, and that common position could constitute a step forward for us all.”

Other bloggers, such as Orlando Luis Pardo, Yoani Sánchez, Ivan García, Alfredo Fernández, Erasmo Calzadilla, and Elaine Díaz, also denounced my interrogation and ban from returning on their own blogs or via Twitter. In addition, some of them made the point that my effort at “building bridges” and speak respectfully with bloggers on all sides is what most provoked the Cuban authorities, who derive much of their power from keeping people frightened, uninformed, and thus isolated from one another. Ivan García, who blogs at the portal *Desde La Habana*, summarizes this strategy in his ironically titled post, “Yankee, go home!”: “It is well known that the regime views part of the alternative bloggers as a commando of cyber-warfare capable of causing more damage than an Al-Qaeda cell. [...] And we have to find new enemies to repress in order to keep the masses frightened. [...] It does want pro-government bloggers to have words like dialogue and reconciliation echoing in their heads.”

It was during these early days of May that I received an email from Luis Manuel García, the editor of *Cubaencuentro.com*, asking me for an interview. Within a couple of days I had in my hands seven incisive questions about the Cuban blogosphere. A week later our interview was published under the title, *Cartografía de Blogolandia* [Map of Bloggerland]. Because the interview was done in Spanish and freely accessible on the web and via email to *Encuentro*’s many subscribers in Cuba, I thought—much like the chronicle of my interrogation (also written in Spanish)—it might resonate with the domestic blogosphere. However, I never imagined that it would provoke a true, and to my mind very healthy, avalanche of replies, arguments, dialogues, and debates among Cuban bloggers of all stripes.

Many of the Cuban bloggers whom I had interviewed in Cuba the previous month began to criticize, eulogize, or otherwise respond to my analysis via their own blogs, Twitter accounts, email messages, and commentaries left on others’ blogs. Some responded with their own analyses and arguments using on-line magazines and news sites such as *Kaos en la red*, *Observatorio Crítico*, *Voces*, and *Espacio Laical*, producing what I have labelled a “bloggers’ polemic.” While this ongoing debate is far too extensive to analyze in any great detail here, the single overarching issue under debate is that of independence vs. legitimacy. In other words, bloggers such as Elaine Díaz and blogs like *LJC* insist that their close relationships to state institutions (universities, in their cases) does not compromise their independence or automatically make them *oficialistas*. Moreover, they argue that the fact that they are not dissidents does not necessarily make them government propagandists or apologists.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, self-described independent bloggers such as Miriam Celaya hold that their staunch autonomy from and criticism of the state and its institutions should not be used to dismiss them as *mercenarios*, precisely Celaya’s point in the second epigraph cited above.

This same issue of independence vs. legitimacy has been debated in an even more extensive series of posts and counterposts featuring the official journalist and blogger Enrique Ubieta as the primary antagonist and whipping boy. Both on his blog, *La Isla Desconocida*, and in other more institutional contexts such as the newspaper *Granma* and in the Cuban TV series, “Las Razones de Cuba,” Ubieta has alleged that Yoani Sánchez and other alternative bloggers are in fact acting at the behest of Cuba’s foreign enemies. He has also been a pioneer in the attempt to drive a wedge between the various groups in the emergent Cuban blogosphere by embracing and sanctifying some young bloggers as model revolutionaries (Elaine Díaz and the founders of *LJC*) while demonizing others. However, this demagogic tactic seems to have backfired at least in the short term since his baseless attacks against me and especially against the blogger Erasmo Calzadilla (of *Havana Times*) have only had the effect of provoking a firestorm of criticism against him and solidarity for autonomous

bloggers and projects like those of *Bloggers Cuba*, *Havana Times*, and *Voces Cubanas*.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, one comment I made about the Cuban blogosphere in my interview with García is patently no

longer true: “There is little communication, few bridges, and not much desire to dialogue among one another.” Although this controversy starkly reveals the great differences of opinion and ideology among

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16. Díaz has made this point many times. She and exile blogger Ernesto Hernández Busto have engaged in a number of rounds of heated debate on this very subject in the past. Here is a selection of their past exchanges: Díaz, *La Polémica Digital*: “La rebelión de Gasset,” May 9, 2008; Hernández Busto, *Penúltimos Días*: “El blogueo como tarea partidista,” November 17, 2009; Díaz, *La Polémica Digital*: “23 y G: Viernes 5:00 p.m.,” November 21, 2009; Hernández Busto, *Penúltimos Días*: “Lo que pasó con Reinaldo Escobar, y lo que dice que vió Elaine Díaz,” November 21, 2009; Hernández Busto, *Penúltimos Días*: “Elaine y la inmunidad,” April 1, 2010; Díaz, *La Polémica Digital*: “Blogger y punto,” May 3, 2011; Hernández Busto, *Penúltimos Días*: “Blogosfera y libre expresión, según Elaine,” May 3, 2011; Díaz, *La Polémica Digital*: “A Radio Martí, n-u-n-c-a,” May 4, 2011. This same debate has been extended, this time in a particularly rich and revelatory exchange of posts between Díaz and Miriam Celaya (all dates are 2011): Díaz, Twitter message: “Cómo llenar de comillas un texto y no morir en el intento,” May 23; Díaz, comment left on Enrique Ubieta’s blog, *La Isla Desconocida*, May 23; Celaya, “La Polémica ‘Blogotal’: Una nota esclarecedora,” email message sent to Ted Henken, May 30, published at *El Yuma*, June 12. These last two messages are quoted in the epigraphs at the beginning of section 1 of this paper. Díaz and Celaya’s polemic heated up further in August 2011 with this series of posts: Celaya, *Voces Magazine* (August 1) and on the blog *Sin Evasión* (August 8), “Blogosfera cubana: Picaduras y escozores de la Internet en Cuba”; Díaz, *La Polémica Digital*, “Atractor extraño,” August 4; Celaya, *Sin Evasión*, “Una respuesta a los escozores de Elaine,” August 15. Other related incursions into this same debate include Ellery Biddle, *Global Voices*, “Cuba: Activists, Bloggers on the Cuba Money Project Vimeo Channel,” June 13; David E. Suárez, *La Polémica Cubana*, “La blogosfera cubaine,” June 28; Jeovany Jiménez, *Voces Magazine*, “Cubanos y punto,” August 1; Osmany Sánchez, *La Joven Cuba*, “Los Amigos de Miriam Celaya,” August 11; and Josep Calvet, *La Joven Cuba*, “Cuando nace la blogosfera cubana? Primeras notas,” September 4 and “La blogosfera cubana (1era parte),” October 20.

17. Unless otherwise noted, all dates are for 2011. See Enrique Ubieta, *La Isla Desconocida*, “La confesión Hanken” (sic), May 21; Ted Henken, *El Yuma*, “Ubieta responde: ‘Soy absolutamente libre, no dependo de estados extranjeros.’” May 22; Haroldo Dilla, *Encuentro.com*, “¿Qué pasaría si los blogueros oficialistas cubanos defendieran al socialismo?” May 30; Ubieta, *La Isla Desconocida*, “Los nuevos Quijotes matanceros,” June 1; Erasmo Calzadilla, *Havana Times*, “La familia de La Joven Cuba,” June 9; Ubieta, *La Isla Desconocida*, “El falso mapa de Ted Henken,” June 9; Calzadilla, *Red Protagónica Observatorio Crítico*, “Ubieta quiere dividir y no lo puede conseguir,” June 24; Yusimi Rodríguez, *Havana Times*, “Un artículo, mi colega y los abusadores,” July 2; Ubieta, *La Isla Desconocida*, “Erasmo Calzadilla y el anarco-capitalismo,” July 16; Santos Pérez, *La Isla Desconocida*, “La nueva izquierda esclarece,” July 12; Rafael Rojas, *El País*, “Cuba sin embargos,” August 21; Ubieta, *Kaos en la red*, “Quiénes son los amigos de los anarquistas cubanos (y como defienden al pueblo),” August 28; Calzadilla, *Havana Times*, “Soltemos la metralleta y conversemos Ubieta,” September 12; Darelía Aquique, *Havana Times*, “Los cubanos y el blog,” October 6. Some of the fiercest and most sustained criticism of Ubieta and defense of the right of autonomy have come from the blog *Bubusopia*. See Rogelio Díaz, *Bubusopia*, “Jóvenes con matices,” June 11; Yasmín Portales, *Bubusopia*, “De cómo Teddy y Enriquito se pelean en el ciberfango y me salpican sin yo pedirlo,” June 12; Rogelio Díaz, *Bubusopia*, “Polémica sobre alineación política entre quienes bloguean desde Cuba,” July 17; Rogelio Díaz, *Bubusopia*, “Mas todavía sobre una polémica y unos anarquistas de los que se habla mal o donde esta el verdadero enemigo,” August 29. Dmitri Prieto, a writer active at *Havana Times*, the *Observatorio Crítico*, and *Espacio Laical*, has taken part in this debate in the role of an interviewer. His three interviews are with Yasmín Portales: *Havana Times*, “Yasmín, una multifacética activista y bloguera cubana,” August 10; Circles Robinson: *Espacio Laical*, “Un reflejo de Cuba en el ciberespacio,” No. 143, September; and Rogelio Díaz: *Havana Times*, “CheHo: A Doubly Controversial Cuban Initiative,” September 13. Also see these two posts in support of Calzadilla from the *Red Protagónica Observatorio Crítico*: Julio Tang Zambrana, “Respuestas a los consejos y diatribas de un ‘camarada,’” July 19 and Marcelo “Liberato” Salinas, “Respuesta al Doctor Enrique Ubieta de un anarquista del Observatorio Crítico,” August 12. Finally, *Havana Times* blogger Armando Chaguaceda sums up the struggle over new media and the public sphere in his recent article in *Espacio Laical*, “Medios y esfera(s) pública(s) en Cuba: entre los malestares y los sueños,” No. 147, October. For more information on the background to this bloggers’ polemic, readers should consult three key videos: “La ciber policía en Cuba,” February 3, 2011 (<http://www.desdecuba.com/generacion/?p=4553>); “Ciberguerra,” March 21, 2011, in “Las Razones de Cuba” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r6fXWI98HU&feature=related>); and “La blogosfera alternativa,” May 16, 2011, episode #5 in the “Razones Ciudadanas” video series (<http://vocescubanas.com/razonesciudadanas/2011/05/16/razones-ciudadanas-5-la-blogosfera-alternativa/>). Four other important background texts are: Enrique Ubieta, “Yoani Sánchez: Hija de Prisa,” originally published on January 3, 2009, on various blogs and republished by *Granma Internacional*, November 28, 2009 (<http://www.granma.cu/espanol/2009/noviembre/sabado28/Yoani-Sanchez.html>); Haroldo Dilla, “Algo mas que un simple chancleteo,” November 8, 2009 (<http://www.7dias.com.do/app/article.aspx?id=63092>); Erasmo Calzadilla, *Havana Times*, “Insuficientes argumentos contra Yoani,” December 18, 2009 (<http://www.havanatimes.org/sp/?p=1847>); and Yoani Sánchez, *Penúltimos Días*, “Generación Y: El making of...,” January 19, 2010 (<http://www.penultimosdias.com/2010/01/19/generacion-y-el-making-of/>).

the protagonists of the Cuban blogosphere on the island, they are no longer so isolated or ignorant of one another's points-of-view as before. Moreover, as a result of this debate that continues to develop, members of all four blogging collectives presented above

have gone on record about their common struggle to establish their legitimacy, preserve their independence, maintain their access to the Internet, and engage in a dialogue with the public, despite obstacles both foreign and domestic.

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