

**Diverging ideals of autonomy:
Non-state media in Cuba challenging a broken media monopoly**

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Abstract

News outlets funded by actors other than the state are broadening the range of movement for journalists in Cuba. How are these non-state outlets affecting ideals of autonomy in the state media? Through qualitative interviews, this study finds an emerging generational divide in Cuba between journalism students and journalists in state media. A majority of students want to work in non-state media because it means they can choose their own stories, have a more meaningful work day and earn more money. Most journalists are, on the other hand, sceptical of private businesses entering the media sector, and refer to the importance of ideology.

Keywords

Autonomy, Cuba, journalistic roles, journalism students, normative theory, state media

Introduction

The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) had a near-monopoly on information in the country after the 1959 revolution, until the island gained access to the internet in 1996. However, limiting and controlling access to the internet has been an important concern for state authorities (Hoffmann, 2011: 6). The recent increased access to internet in Cuba has promoted the establishment of non-state media outlets and other actors filling information gaps left by the state media. This situation has resulted in fractures between different generations of journalists. This article explores journalistic ideals and perceptions of autonomy among journalism students and journalists in the Cuban state media. It seeks to answer two questions: How do research participants perceive the role of the state and non-state media in Cuba? And what do the participants evaluate as being important for professional autonomy?

Since the state media are to various degrees controlled by the PCC, journalists have found it difficult to create boundaries against external actors. Although journalists, academics and politicians have called for less censorship and institutionalism in the state press since the 1970s (Marrero, 2006), it has remained steadily resistant to change. A media policy, which has been in the making since 2013, was released in 2018. Journalists had hoped for the establishment of a framework that the profession was lacking, and a definition of the role of non-state outlets, currently operating in a legal vacuum. The policy document states that the media can only be 'state or social' property, and it can never be owned by 'private' companies. At the same time, the policy opens up the possibility of earning income from publicity, donations and 'cooperation

national and internationally' (PCC 2018: 14). How this policy document will affect journalists working for the state media, and those in the non-state media, is yet to be seen. While it does not seem to grant journalists working for the state media more autonomy, the document may nevertheless signal that the political leadership cautiously recognises that new digital platforms are in Cuba to stay.

The Cuban media landscape

Reporters Without Borders (2018) ranks Cuba 172 out of 180 countries on press freedom, observing that the Castro family 'maintains an almost total media monopoly'. It is, however, necessary to nuance this picture, hence the following overview of access to the internet and to different categories of media outlets in the country today.

According to official statistics, the use of the internet among the Cuban population rose from 23 per cent to 40 per cent in the years 2011–16 (ONEI, 2016a). Although Freedom House (2016) declares a similar increase, it considers that only 5 per cent of users have access to uncontrolled internet. Due to the state company Etecsa's deal with Google, the number of wi-fi spots has multiplied, and in May 2019 private internet connections were finally legalized (Reuters 2019). Internet access at state-run wi-fi spots costs CUC\$1 (US\$1) per hour. This is expensive considering that a monthly state salary is about CUC\$30 (US\$30) (ONEI, 2016b: 13). Most Cubans accessing the internet regularly do so at their workplace or as part of their study at universities. However, in August 2018 mobile users could connect outside wi-fi spots during an eight-hour test of free nationwide internet. The service was fully launched in December 2018, but as it costs about CUC\$7 for 600 MB it is not something average Cubans can afford. Access to free nationwide internet may, however, weaken government control over public information.

Statistics do not, however, cover the informal channels of internet connection, which can be quite inventive. Wireless black-market antennas, for instance, replicate internet signals for entire neighbourhoods. Still, the most important contribution to break the state information monopoly is 'the weekly package'. Every week, for a very low price, local dealers upload the newest entertainment shows from Latin America and the United States on memory sticks and distribute them to subscribers.

The Cuban media ecosystem

There is a diverse range of Cuban media outlets. Building on Henken (2017), I have chosen to organise these into three broad categories: state media, non-state media and oppositional media.

State media

The Cuban state funds television and radio, but it is the PCC or connected organs that fund newspapers. Therefore, 'state media' is a term that is disputed by some participants. As there is only one political party in Cuba, I consider state media to include both sources of finance. Before the 1959 revolution, the Cuban media were privately owned. The PCC was constituted in 1965, and in the following years the press became aligned with politics (García Luis, 2013: 81). For at least 40 years, the PCC had an almost complete monopoly on information, with the exception of publications from the Roman Catholic Church and academic outlets (Hudson, 2001: 268). Today, the most important national newspapers are *Granma*, *Juventud Rebelde* and *Trabajadores*. All are connected to sub-organs of the PCC and often publish the same stories, mainly reflecting an institutional point of view.

Non-state media

Some participants in this study differentiate between private media (funding from private companies) and alternative media (funded by NGOs, embassies and so on). The reason is that private capital is viewed by some participants as more threatening to the Cuban media system

than donations from organisations; however, many participants consider such categorisations irrelevant. Among many of the participants, and also among academics studying Cuba, various terms are used interchangeably.

In the literature, the concept of the 'alternative media' is used interchangeably to refer to alternative funding or alternative content. In the Cuban context, both types of non-state media outlets represent alternatives to state media content. As such, they could be designated alternative media; however, in keeping with the distinction that some of the research participants draw between different sources of funding, this study has opted to use 'non-state media' as a generic term for all such media in order to avoid confusion with the local usage of 'alternative media'.

Henken (2017) uses the term 'independent' to describe news outlets funded by actors other than the Cuban state. He breaks this into sub-groups such as digital millennials, critical digital revolutionaries, the digital diaspora and digital dissidents. Using these categories as a point of departure, I will briefly outline the make-up of these sub-groups.

Digital millennials refer to young Cubans establishing news magazines or websites to counter what they see as a lack of information due to the restrictive media policies of the PCC. These outlets are mainly apolitical, focusing on arts, music and entertainment. Journalism students in this study frequently mention a number of these. The entertainment magazine *Vistar*, sports magazine *Play Off* and fashion magazine *Garbos* are distributed on paper. *Cibercuba* and *Cachivache Media* are popular online platforms (Henken, 2017: 438). The funding for these projects varies. For instance, the online magazine *El Toque* is funded by RNW media, an NGO situated in the Netherlands.

Non-state outlets originating outside Cuba also have to be registered and accredited by the Foreign Press Centre (CIP) and may lose accreditation if seen to be too critical of the government (Marreiro, 2014: 29). *El Toque* was initially denied accreditation as a foreign press agency, but has been managed from within Cuba since 2016. Nevertheless, state media journalists collaborating with the magazine run the risk of permanently losing their jobs in state media (Henken 2017: 440).

Critical digital revolutionaries refer to outlets run by young Cubans who view themselves as revolutionaries, but who at the same time are openly critical of the Cuban government (Henken, 2017: 443). *Havana Times*, *La Joven Cuba* and *Periodismo de Barrio* are among these, with *Periodismo de Barrio* perhaps being the most prominent and visible actor. It is run by Elaine Diaz, a former professor of digital journalism at the University of Havana and earlier Harvard visiting fellow. *Periodismo de Barrio* is a crowdfunded website focusing on climate change and sustainability at a local level.

The *digital diaspora* is a group of news and entertainment outlets based outside Cuba – for instance, *Café Fuerte*, *Cubaencuentro* and *Cuba Net*. The hybrid *OnCuba Magazine* is funded by the Miami-based company of Hugo Cancio, a Cuban-American, but it is accredited as a foreign press outlet and has an editorial office in Havana.

Until recently, non-state media were characterised by a low degree of professionalisation and their content was more likely to be opinion pieces than journalism adhering to ideals of objectivity (Henken, 2017: 435). This group is, nevertheless, becoming more mixed, with a particular growth in the number of young journalist collaborators. A study of 142 journalism graduates between 2010 and 2014 showed that 55 per cent held a variety of jobs, both in state and non-state media. Of these, between 15 and 20 per cent worked exclusively in non-state outlets (García, 2016: 119).

Another group of outlets does, however, need to be distinguished from my definition of non-state media:

Oppositional media

Oppositional media, or *digital dissidents*, refer to a group of outlets that cannot be accessed through public wi-fi spots. The most well-known oppositional news outlet is probably *14ymedio*, initiated by citizen journalist Yoani Sanchez. Its collaborators are subject to harassment by the Cuban State Security (Henken, 2017: 437). When asking student and journalist participants about working in these outlets, the responses were laughter and headshaking. However, as displayed and elaborated in the methods section, a social desirability bias is not only likely, but almost certain, when it comes to oppositional media. If some of the participants indeed wanted to work, or were working for oppositional outlets, this is not something they would admit to, even if their anonymity were guaranteed. If one wants to keep a job in state media, collaboration with oppositional outlets is not really an option; therefore most collaborators of *14ymedio* are not trained journalists (Henken, 2017: 437).

Conceptions of journalistic roles

In the research literature, journalists with a similar set of professional orientations and self-images of their functions in society are often grouped in categories according to their perceptions of their roles. A multitude of comparative quantitative studies distinguishes journalistic roles, particularly through the Worlds of Journalism Study (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanitzsch et al., 2012). In this growing body of literature, post-authoritarian societies have also been examined (Andresen, Hoxha & Godole, 2017; Josephi, 2017; Tejkalová et al., 2017); however, few qualitative studies have been conducted on role conceptions with a particular focus on authoritarian or transitional societies. This study aims to contribute to a qualitative understanding of role conceptions, drawing inspiration from quantitative frameworks.

The four role conceptions defined by Hanitzsch (2011) are useful in assessing journalistic roles in Cuba and in countries with similar political systems. The detached watchdog plays an important role as an unbiased observer, scrutinising government and business elites, and is most opposed to supporting official policies or influencing public opinion. The populist disseminator is also oriented towards a role as a detached observer – albeit with a focus on soft news and entertainment rather than investigative journalism. The critical change agent sees advocating for social change and influencing the public agenda as important, but also has a critical attitude towards political and business leadership. The opportunist facilitator considers journalism to be a constructive partner of government with regard to development and political transformation. Among the 18 countries in the Hanitzsch (2011: 487) study, Indonesia, China, Russia and Uganda are particularly relevant comparisons to Cuba. In these countries, the opportunist facilitator dominates, leaving some room for the critical change agent and the populist disseminator, but almost suppressing the detached watchdog.

Applying the framework proposed for the Journalistic Role Performance project (Mellado, 2015), a comparative study of five Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Cuba) finds that Cuba ranks higher than the others in the interpretation and use of opinion. This is explained as being due to their historical tradition of militant and advocacy-type journalism. The watchdog role is hardly present in Cuba, while the loyal facilitator dominates (Mellado et al., 2017: 9–10). Complementing this, Olivera and Torres (2017: 143) find in an analysis of Cuban state media news articles (N=627) that the loyal facilitator role dominates in 75 per cent of the sample.

Theories about the ‘good society’

In viewing the emergence and circulation of norms in the Cuban media landscape, I aim to understand Cuba on its own terms rather than try to fit the country into an existing press system

model. Nevertheless, it is necessary to define normative theories and outline some influential frameworks.

Normative theories say something about what the press *should do*; they are closely connected to larger claims about the 'good society'. Such theories, although constructed and overlapping, are components when states or institutions shape media policies. These in turn influence both the teaching of journalism and journalistic behaviour (Benson, 2008). For Cuba, such theories are becoming important as the Communist Party no longer sets the political agenda on its own, and the makeup of the 'good society' is debated among journalists. In principle, there are as many theories of ideal functions of the press as there are political systems. Historically, the classic attempt at explaining press–society relations is perhaps the *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956). It distinguishes between four theoretical frameworks: libertarian, socially responsible, authoritarian and the Soviet model, of which two are democratic and two non-democratic. The book has been criticised for its reductionist and universalistic approach, and for being an 'Americanised' way of viewing the world (Christians et al., 2009; Waisbord, 2012: 506)

Hallin and Mancini (2004: 9) aim to give *Four Theories* a 'decent burial' by treating media systems as particular historical formations and not ideal-typical models. Nevertheless, their models, based on research in selected countries in Western Europe and North America, are not necessarily suited to understanding authoritarian contexts. As Zhao (2012: 143) notes, 'the Soviet communist model as described in *Four Theories* is still alive and kicking in a rising China'. In the discussion in this article, I draw on aspects from Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) in attempting to understand how Cuban journalists evaluate the journalistic profession.

Media systems in emerging democracies

Katrin Voltmer (2012: 235) suggests broadening the theoretical framework proposed by Hallin and Mancini to 'de-westernise' media studies. In emerging democracies, the media system goes through a transformation carrying norms and power relations of the past. This may create hybrid media structures that may not fit into categories based on Western democratic media systems.

In post-communist countries such as the former Soviet Union, the politicised media content of the past still shapes communication today. International media conglomerates seized ownership of newspapers in particular as the media industry became privatised, and these remain opinionated and politicised despite new ownership (Krishna-Hensel, 2017, Voltmer 2012).

In Latin America, military dictatorships dominated during the Cold War. The stability of these regimes was built on depoliticisation instead of ideology. A strategy for the media to survive was staying away from politics, instead promoting entertainment programs. When democratisation in these countries started during the 1970s, the media did not transform into democratic institutions because the Anglo-Saxon notion of independent media corresponds neatly with commercialisation (Matos, 2012; Voltmer, 2012).

In Africa, authoritarian developmental one-party states with weak state institutions have shaped the region. The media have largely been seized by a small group of political elites, leaving them vulnerable to political interference (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Voltmer, 2012)

Research on Cuban journalism

This section discusses Cuban scholars' views on the challenges and ideals of the Cuban media. I have limited the review to three of the most influential Cuban journalism academics: García Luis (2013), Elizalde (2013) and Garcés (2013, 2016). García Luis (2013: 21) worries about the 'inertia and dogmatism' that are impeding a change in the media that the younger generations especially demand and expect. García Luis believes that socialist societies are theoretically better suited than

capitalist ones to maintaining important functions of the media, although this has not been achieved in practice (2013: 35–46, my translation).

Referring to Marx and Engels, García Luis (2013: 34) asks: ‘What kind of press freedom is it that rests on depriving the right to possess and utilise the media for over ninety percent of the population, concentrating it in the hands of giant conglomerates and transnational monopolies?’ García Luis argues that the inability of socialism to create a better model has allowed the liberal model to be perceived as ‘common sense’. He believes the Cuban press should practise ‘universal functions of journalism’, albeit in accordance with Cuban values and interests. He sums it up in eight points:

- 1 Provide relevant, useful and timely information, with maximum objectivity.
- 2 Contribute to the interpretation of the main events in Cuba and the world.
- 3 Express opinions on matters requiring guidance and clarification.
- 4 Contribute to the goal of keeping alive the historical traditions of the people and link them to the present.
- 5 Sustain the continuity and development of our culture, education, ideology and values in all areas.
- 6 Participate in the establishment and conduct of the public agenda of our society.
- 7 Help social mobilisation oriented towards the main economic, political and social objectives of the country.
- 8 Investigate facts and contribute the results to the vitality of the political system, and to the production and reproduction of the same. (García Luis, 2013: 34)

Journalist and editor Elizalde (2013: 44, my translation) states that the five main obstacles for Cuban state journalists are: ‘1. Deficient connectivity and information technology. 2. Serious material and budgetary limitations. 3. Loss of professional culture. 4. Low salaries. 5. Incoherent application of information policy.’ According to Elizalde, a lack of resources and strict regulation of media content contribute to a deficient professional culture. With the loss of professionalism, other problems emerge, such as ‘a loss of credibility and trust in the sector and demoralisation and low self-esteem’ (2013: 76–86). Elizalde (2013: 111, 113) proposes that national media policy guarantees freedom of expression, universal access to information and the right of different societal groups to decide which models, institutions and communicational processes should be established. At the same time, she states that public policy should recognise the ‘role of the Cuban Communist party as a political vanguard’ and that the media should be social property with the ability to sustain itself.

Garcés (2016) points out the absurd contrast of a highly educated society and a media discourse ‘plagued with simplifications’. New generations will assume power in Cuba, and they have neither the ‘symbolic capital nor the legitimacy’ of the leaders of the 1959 revolution. To maintain the ‘anti-capitalist project of Cuba’, an immediate priority must be to give the youth influence in decision-making. Garcés (2013, my translation) considers that the Cuban press has replaced ‘reasoned judgement for propaganda, interpretation for numbers, news for events, arguments for adjectives, the richness of processes for a caricatured synthesis of its results’. He states that if the problems of the official media are not resolved, they will lose both credibility and persuasive power. The challenge of the profession, according to Garcés, is that only 50 per cent of the directors and editors in the state media have journalistic training, in addition to a general lack of editorial freedom and creativity.

Method

The study is based on qualitative interviews with 12 journalists in the Cuban state media and five focus groups with 19 journalism students. The interviews were conducted in Cuba in the autumn of 2016. An interview with a Cuban sociologist is included for an academic point of view.

Students were recruited through participation in lectures and through research assistants at the Faculty of Communication at the University of Havana. The groups ranged in size from three to eight students, which made the recruiting easy since numbers were smaller, but an obvious disadvantage is that small groups limit the range of experience and expressions accessed (Krueger & Casey, 2009: 69). Nevertheless, I generally found that group conversations brought up subjects and considerations unknown to me beforehand (Guldvik, 2002: 36). Since participation by students was voluntary and not decided through random selection, it may be that only a certain type of student was willing to participate. However, as the students showed varying points of view regarding where they wanted to work, and how they viewed the state-financed and private media, I believe the selection covers some of the possible groupings of opinion among students. Two focus groups did, however, distinguish themselves. In one of them, a research assistant ended up dominating the dialogue, to some degree suppressing the voices of the other students. In another group, the students had a very critical dialogue regarding the Cuban media system, yet also showing support for the same system; this group is therefore quoted frequently in the findings section.

Conducting research among Cuban journalists is ethically challenging. I knew that many journalists in the state media collaborate with non-state outlets, but I was not sure whether bringing this up in the interviews could put the participants in a difficult situation. It is my responsibility as a researcher to prevent harm to participants (NESH, 2016: Article 12). During the interviews, I asked such questions as: 'Have you noticed any change in Cuban journalism in the last five years?' And 'Are digital media challenging the traditional media?' I wanted to signal a neutral stance as a researcher, not implying support for one group or the other. Although most participants had critical reflections on Cuban media and their own role in the system, it is likely that the criticism fell within acceptable limits – what Dilla (in Alfonso, 2014) calls a 'consented criticism'.

Some degree of social desirability bias (Bryman, 2016) has probably played a part in the participants' answers. For instance, one journalist participant named a non-state outlet he considered threatening to Cuban sovereignty and said he would never work there. After finishing the fieldwork, I noticed that the same person had published an article with this very outlet. This discrepancy may have been affected by letting participants choose the place and time of the interview. As the journalist mentioned wanted to do the interview inside a state media newsroom, it may have promoted ideologically correct opinions, as open support for non-state outlets is not necessarily acceptable. This shows that although I had the impression that it was a relatively open dialogue, what affects participants' responses in an authoritarian context may be difficult for a foreign researcher to detect. This calls for a particularly careful approach in order to avoid causing any harm to participants.

In addition, a social desirability bias may complicate the analysis of participants' views on state/non-state media. It is by no means certain that I can trust their answers. At the same time, this uncertainty points to issues at the core of Cuban society. In an authoritarian society, where 'counter-revolutionary' activities can have repercussions, it makes sense to avoid exposure to subjects on the borderline of acceptable behaviour. I will base my interpretations on what the participants chose to say, and not what they possibly omitted. The consequence is that participants – particularly journalists in state media – appear to be quite consistent with state ideology.

I have translated the interview transcripts from Spanish to English and verified with a proofreader. For anonymity, the journalists have been given pseudonyms and placed within three

age categories of reporters: young (20–34), middle-aged (35–49) and senior (50+). Although the data are not generalisable to journalism students or to journalists in Cuba, it is a contribution and a starting point for research on Cuban state media, about which there is little previous literature.

Boundaries between state and non-state media

As a former media monopoly, the institutionalism in the Cuban state media has been almost unchallenged for decades. Now, the entrance of non-state outlets forces journalists in the state media to review their own practice. Of the journalists I interviewed in the state media, none mentioned collaboration with non-state outlets. Nevertheless, some participants are almost unconditionally welcoming of change. Young reporter Tania said:

The private media make us debate, alert us, and sometimes put us in embarrassing situations, because they cover things that we should have been covering. And I repeat, there are people who think this is a problem, and that we should diminish the importance of these people. I do not believe so. I believe the best way of confronting this is being better. (Tania, 2016)

Consistent with Tania's thoughts, many participants displayed ambivalence in the face of a changing media environment. Young reporter Carlos said the non-state media allowed journalists to express things that were unacceptable in the state media:

Think about it, it is positive that there exists a possibility of saying these things, but at the same time I am asking myself if it is worth it, do the means justify the ends? (Carlos, 2016)

Lurking behind this scepticism towards non-state media is the legacy of media monopolies dominating Cuban journalism before the 1959 revolution. While appreciated and admired for their storytelling and content, the non-state media are also feared, as they may signal a paradigm shift – the beginning of the end for Cuban socialism. Senior reporter Carmen claimed that non-state media were 'more inventive', but she also described the economic competition between non-state and state outlets as 'a fight between a lion and a tied-up monkey'. She said the interests behind non-state money were questionable:

As long as there is a country that wants to change the regime in Cuba, I mean, it would be naive to think that a private media network could be allowed here, the capital of course, where is it going to come from, to whose interests are they going to be subject? (Carmen, 2016)

Middle-aged reporter Roberto shared the same perception. He said of a market-driven press:

Private journalism is not independent, that's a lie, that's a great story, a myth. Their agendas and decisions may be subject to even more, less clear, less transparent mechanisms. (Roberto, 2016)

Most of the journalists view a system of *private* media as being just as harmful to the practice and function of journalism as the current dependency on the PCC. This weighing practice between corporations and the state was also displayed when Carlos talked about young journalists working for the non-state outlet *OnCuba*:

I find dangerous the fact that the young, talented, intelligent, clever are contributing to a project that does not necessarily coincide with what they believe ... Although those that work for Hugo may say that I am working for the Communist Party and that's the same just inverted. Yes, it's a big dilemma. (Carlos, 2016)

Not all participants worried about capitalism getting a foothold through non-state outlets operating in Cuba today. Middle-aged reporter Juan said the influence of the non-state media was exaggerated in the sense that they got more publicity than readers. Along with others, he merely dismissed non-state media as unimportant 'foreign constructs' due to the lack of Cuban visitors online. However, internet access is rapidly expanding and thus so is the impact of non-state media.

Senior reporter Carmen observed that the non-state media were drawing young journalists away from state media, but considered that changing rigid systems and media regulation was a political issue:

Because I want to tell you that what I am talking about, we discuss this every day in the journalist forums, in the conversations about the country's authorities, etc. But there has been a setback in this, in this situation that is a vision of economic delay, which is not so much the professional outlook as the political perspective. (Carmen, 2016)

Student perceptions

Most of the student participants, however, did not want to wait out a process of debate and political restructuring. One of the students had worked both for state and non-state media outlets, and saw the latter as the only real alternative:

In alternative [non-state] media I feel that I have more freedom, they do not impose topics on me. They do not add content to my texts, I write on the subject that I think I want to write. The journalists in the alternative [non-state] media are almost always journalists of my generation ... and I understand them much better. (SG 2, 2016)

According to the discussion in one of the groups, the way to keep the younger journalists in the state media was to give them space to reflect other stories, and let the media sustain themselves economically. For now, the restrictions were causing young journalists to look for opportunities beyond the state media. One said, 'It already seems a little late, the youth have found their own space, the youth don't want to be here anymore.' He continued by telling me about a friend who had published a sports article in the state-sponsored *Granma*:

And I had read the original, and I told him: "No, but now to the whole of Cuba you look like an imbecile who doesn't know how to write." They rip things apart and put it together as they like, and so what do the youth do? They leave. (SG 2, 2016)

The pay in the non-state media was also a big drawcard. Journalists in the state media make only about CUC\$30 a month, among the lowest salaries in the country. Almost all the student participants considered the state media salary the biggest disadvantage of becoming a journalist. Middle-aged reporter Roberto observed a large degree of apathy among his colleagues in the state media: 'Today many journalists are dissatisfied and tired. Those who have a greater commitment [to the revolution] believe in what we do and believe it is necessary. But we do not have the arguments to convince the new generation.' He seems to have been right, because non-state media are seen as very 'attractive' for the students. One student emphasised the greener pastures in the non-state media:

A lot of them do good journalism, journalism marked by all the things we learn in academia ... They have the possibility of paying you for the work you do. So, it's like, I don't think there is a confrontation between the conventional media and the alternative [non-state] media, but they do represent the places where everybody wants to go. (SG 4, 2016).

A few students were somewhat hesitant towards non-state outlets. One student said he identified with the political agenda in Cuba, 'therefore I do not mind putting my profession to the service of my nation, but that does not mean that I will defend a total standstill'. Another considered that it would 'give me an income, but it may be in contradiction to the ethical principles that I as a student journalist, as a journalist educated at a Cuban academic institution, should have'.

The majority, nevertheless, did consider the best opportunities for 'self-realisation' to be outside the state media. In contrast to the attitude of journalists considering the non-state media 'inflated', some of the journalism students were eager for the non-state media to shout louder and claim their space in the Cuban media landscape. One participant said, 'We could have been

much more critical, we are not.' (SG 2, 2016) One reason is that affiliation with non-state outlets can have negative consequences for those who hold multiple jobs, as another explained:

I collaborate with some of these media, and I have been in meetings, we meet with the other collaborators, and they have said: 'Do not publish strong articles now because he, and he, and he is here, and they are studying or working in *Granma*. We do not want to publish anything that could affect them, so let's lower the volume.' (SG 2, 2016)

A third considered it a problem that few Cubans currently had access to non-state media online: 'We think we are discussing, fixing the country, and in the end, we are listening to each other and reading each other. It is a circle and there is no feedback.' (SG 2, 2016)

Defining a broken information monopoly

Journalists agree that the state press mainly reflects political discourse and ignores citizens' right to information. A structural and economic change is what most participants call for, allowing the state media to be less dependent on both direction and funding from the PCC. Senior reporter Carmen wanted social ownership over the media:

No one wants the model to be like the one in Miami, any alternative but Miami ... So, what is it that we want? Well, the core values that has, eh, moved this society the last 50 years. That is the possibilities of access for the majority, to have social justice, to have opportunities for all. (Carmen, 2016)

Her point of view departs from a consideration that the media's function is to achieve the goals of the revolution, providing information people need – not just what will sell – with the goal itself not being democracy, but rather equality within a socialist system. Many of the journalists believe that advocating for a model of public media with 'real autonomy' should be done by working from within the state media apparatus. Young reporter Tania said:

I would not go to the private media and criticise the system that exists. I would not go to USA and criticise the system that exists. I have no right to criticise if I did not participate in its construction. (Tania, 2016)

The construction process may take many years. Middle-aged reporter Ernesto said he no longer believed in changing the frameworks piece by piece. He had recently lost his job in state media for stepping outside the limits of acceptable behaviour and said:

If there were many more journalists who, who were willing to look for trouble, maybe there would be a change of press in Cuba. But I do not think so, I do not think so, because people are very afraid.

According to the interviewed sociologist, what is at stake is the Cuban Revolution itself. He did not believe any individual journalist could change the structures of state media, and felt that the old men in the political elite needed to be replaced by more 'flexible generations'. In his view, if nothing happens, or the PCC takes a restrictive attitude, it may be 'fatal':

The consensus will be reduced, the unity of the revolution will be broken. I believe that they [the PCC] have no choice but to respond to the new social situation, the new generational evolution and the demand for a public sphere in a flexible, open, creative way (Sociologist, 2016).

Diverging ideals

This section turns to the second research question, focusing on what the participants view as important for professional autonomy. The only certainty for journalists in state media is that their points of view are divided. Although some welcome the journalistic mentality in non-state outlets, shaking up the 'inertia' from decades of state monopoly, most display some degree of indifference or ambivalence towards the non-state outlets. While non-state outlets are viewed as unimportant, they also threaten the social order created by the revolution of opposition to capitalism and

imperialism. The ideological perspective and the perceived threat of outside forces wanting to dismantle the revolution have played a central role in maintaining the function of the state media as organs of the PCC.

Hanitzsch (2011: 491) concludes that in state-owned media there is a 'substantial ideological pressure on the journalists to make a contribution to their country's economic development and social well-being'. This is partially in line with the argumentation of Cuban scholars Elizalde (2013), García Luis (2013) and Garcés (2016) that the PCC should have a role as 'political vanguard', and the media should serve as an upholder of tradition and ideology. At the same time, Cuban scholars also argue for the media to expose societal problems within the frameworks of the revolution. The ambivalence of journalists towards non-state media can perhaps be understood in light of this dual function served by the state media. Journalists consider the lack of an ideological foundation in non-state media problematic, as it may benefit forces wishing to undermine the system. At the same time, non-state outlets conduct the kind of journalism they would like to see in the state media. The journalists working for non-state outlets are to some degree seen as removing themselves, or perhaps even working against the common goal of preserving the revolution, while also contributing positively by shedding light on important topics censored by state media (see also García Santamaría, 2017: 234).

The partial opposition to non-state media may also be understood by examining the self-perception of state media journalists. They do not see themselves as victims, or as subjects controlled by a strictly censorial regime. Journalists view themselves as closer to a point made by Voltmer (2013: 123): they are beneficiaries due to being exempt from market competition and the volatile tastes of audiences, and see themselves as educators and mobilisers in a historical project.

At the same time, the structures of the state apparatus provoke a loss of professionalism, credibility and self-esteem (Elizalde, 2013). The Communist Party has for decades called for the media to be 'objective, constant and critical' (PCC, 2011: 23), but restrictions are never loosened; therefore, journalists seek change, but it is not their mission to criticise the government. They rather see it as their job to improve and perfect the socialist system. The ideal press for journalists in the state media is a 'public' system upholding values such as social justice and opportunities for all, as defined by Carmen. This means that journalists have some ideals connecting to social responsibility theory, but also a much larger emphasis on preservation, as found in the Soviet normative framework (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956).

It is as difficult to compare the media landscape in Cuba with that of other countries as it is to apply press models created in the West – or, more specifically, the United States – during the Cold War. Connecting Cuban media to the Soviet framework is a Western way of viewing the world, according to media scholar García Luis (2013: 42–65, my translation). To counter this, he has created three models founded on a Cuban perspective. The market model responds to US liberalism; the state press model emphasises ideology, and is publicly owned and responsible; and the Soviet model considers the press a tool for the bureaucracy. Commenting on these, García Luis firmly places the Cuban system within the state press model – while noting that the state media are currently far from achieving this. García Luis's models are interesting, as they propose a way of viewing media systems that Western theories perhaps fail to capture.

Autonomy ideals of state journalists in Cuba can be seen as somewhat similar to the goals of development journalism (apart from governmental independence) as defined by Xiaoge (2009) of working with the state in developing the country while also being critical of the same system. I consider the journalists in the state media to largely support the ideals of the opportunist facilitator role, while also drawing on aspects of the populist disseminator role when considering the 'ideal' Cuban press. They largely support official policies when these are seen as a public good and are positive towards influencing public opinion. At the same time, journalists maintain a critical view of their own profession, albeit within closed circles. The opportunist facilitator role

is exceptionally widespread among state media journalists in Uganda, China, Indonesia and Russia, mainly because this is a way for the government to exert control. While the legacy of dictatorial regimes has contributed to the dominance of the opportunist facilitator in Indonesia and Chile (Hanitzsch, 2011: 488), it is a combination of authoritarian leadership and the external threat of US intervention in the communication field that promotes this role in Cuba.

Hanusch and Uppal (2015: 573) find that being both a 'detached watchdog' and 'an advocate of social change' are indeed relatively common traits in non-Western contexts. Such ambiguous frameworks correspond with Cuban journalistic perceptions of wanting to promote a common good while also accepting the frames of the PCC's ideology. Journalists see autonomy as being partly free from the over-arching political framework, the goal being less of a shuttling between one's own journalistic expectations and those imposed by the PCC (Waisbord, 2013).

When consulting previous research, it seems that ten years ago student perceptions were closer to the opinions of journalist participants today. A survey of 198 journalism students in Havana (Estenoz & Martínez, 2006: 124) concluded that the ideal journalism was a 'press for the people, which alerts and denounces social wrongdoings'. Students also claimed that the principal strengths of Cuban journalism were 'the commitment to the Revolution, social responsibility, the social ownership of the media and the disaffiliation with commercial interests, and the educative function of the press' (2006: 124).

Today, students at the Faculty of Communication dress like average Miami students and watch the same TV series and movies. The static media agenda in state outlets does not reflect the world they see through the Weekly Package and in non-state media. From that follow other ideals. Students see freedom as more than merely an absence of censorship; they want to have a meaningful workday and a living wage. Working towards a common project under the revolution is not what journalism students in 2016 see as important, nor is independence from commercial interests. Students consider that making use of skills learnt at university and writing about subjects they choose themselves is what makes them function well as journalists. They get this in the non-state media, along with a better personal economy.

For most of the students, professional ideals are put first, even if that means seeing these through with private capital. Getting a message out that matters to people – not ideological belonging – is what matters. While students do not mention ideals such as objectivity or neutrality, they emphasise their desire to inform and criticise societal structures. Some want to go further than the current range of movement in non-state media allows, particularly in terms of criticising the political system. At the same time, the students are supportive of the Cuban system, and against US imperialism – yet they consider exposing problems without the static frame of ideology to be good for Cuba. For journalism students, the conception of the professional role is closer to the populist disseminator in wanting to write interesting and critical stories on subjects important to the people. This means students are willing to include aspects of libertarian and social responsibility ideals when conducting journalism (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956).

Student ideals of autonomy exist within a broader framework. Students do not make an evaluation of whether state or non-state media, or a mixture of these, would be the ideal model; rather, they want to be allowed creativeness and inventiveness, not just the opportunity to cover political acts. The non-state media are opening up a space where this is now possible, but students also express that the state press would be attractive if it gave journalists more self-determination on topics. Students thus have a pragmatic attitude, seeking the space closest to 'professional journalism' (Waisbord, 2013). It should not be forgotten that the students who are hesitant about the non-state media represent a group with ideals closer to those of established journalists. These nuances in opinion could have been elaborated in a study with more participants.

One may argue that students can uphold ideals that are difficult to maintain once they start working, and thus perceptions of autonomy become less divergent when internalised in the state

media system. However, as the study by García (2016: 119) demonstrates, more than 50 per cent of graduates hold multiple jobs, both in state and non-state media. It therefore seems that young journalism graduates who have completed their mandatory two- to three-year internship in state media continue to look for possibilities in non-state media. It should be noted, however, that the job possibilities for journalism students are greater in state media, and that short-term collaboration with non-state outlets continues to be more common than full-time employment. Young journalists working in state media who participated in this study did, however, claim to be uninterested in working for non-state media. This may be due to a small sample size, the composition of sources who were possibly more dedicated to the state system, a social desirability bias or a mixture of these.

Over the past few years, journalists in non-state media in Cuba have observed that their range of movement has deteriorated, and that harassment and censorship have intensified. Further, the UPEC has proposed restrictions on collaboration with non-state outlets for state media journalists. In a speech for the PCC in February 2017, Miguel Díaz-Canel, successor to Raúl Castro for the Cuban presidency, announced that the government planned to close the OnCuba digital platform (García, 2017). While the new press policy released in 2018 keeps the legality of non-state outlets an open question, the document includes 'donations' and 'cooperation nationally and internationally' (PCC, 2018: 14) as a source of income, something that may grant more room for manoeuvre for some of the non-state outlets. However, in his closing speech to the journalists at a UPEC congress, president Díaz-Canel spent a large part of his speech attacking outlets with financing from the United States: 'No matter how many attempts there are to return us to the past of sensationalism and private press under new masks, neither the Cuban official media nor its journalists are for sale' (Granma, 2018). It thus seems that the conditions for work outside the state media are facing an uncertain future.

If the spaces for expression in non-state outlets are closed, and state media are left unreformed, it is reasonable to believe that the worries of the sociologist (2016) and Garcés (2016) may prove true: frustrations among the youth may have a 'fatal' outcome for the support of the revolution. This point of view is also shared by Bye (2017: 111), who considers that the continuing low prospects for socioeconomic improvement in Cuba decrease public tolerance for living with restricted freedoms.

Conclusions

Diverging ideals of autonomy between students and journalists point to multiple normative frameworks currently interchanging in the Cuban media landscape. The PCC's broken promises of structural change in the media, along with new online platforms, have contributed to a generational divide between journalists in Cuba.

Among students, perceptions of autonomy and ambitions for different lifestyles have expanded with the non-state media. Ten years ago, Cuban journalism students claimed to be in opposition to private capital, considering the revolution to be the major strength of the media (Estenoz & Martínez, 2006: 124). In this study, the majority of the student participants looked towards non-state outlets, emphasising journalistic opportunities over ideology. This does not signal that students want the Cuban system to fail: they are merely pursuing their own professional interests. Drawing on Hanitzsch (2011), students appear to be closer to the *populist disseminator* role, while journalists in state media largely remain within the *opportunist facilitator* role.

Journalists in the state media uphold the belief that the media should be anchored within the ideological framework of the revolution, with the Communist Party as 'political vanguard' (Elizalde, 2013: 113). At the same time, journalists advocate for more autonomy than they are permitted today, and they worry about the loss of professionalism caused by restrictions. Still, non-state media are not considered a legitimate strategy to gain more autonomy. The

contradictions in how journalists view non-state media point to a profession in flux, where norms and ideals within the group are not cohesive. If the PCC chooses an unendingly restrictive line regarding both state and non-state media, it will likely provoke more conspicuous reactions than seen in previous generations.

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