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The Media's Construction of Cuba. An Analysis of the Journalistic Discourse of The Washington Post

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Abstract: The article presents the main findings of a qualitative piece of research based on a unique, inclusive, descriptive case aimed at critically analysing the journalistic discourse of American newspaper *The Washington Post* about Cuba in two significant moments of the island's recent history: Fidel Castro's Proclamation in 31 July, 2006, and Raúl Castro's Presidential election in February, 2008. The study examines the main topics, discursive strategies, and linguistic resources prioritised by the newspaper to portray Cuba during that period, and reveals several converging points between the newspaper's discourse and Bush Administration's political discourse about Cuba.

Keywords: discourse analysis; journalistic discourse; media construction; The Washington Post; Cuba.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. 2.1. Sample. 3. Discourse. 3.1. Journalistic Discourse. 4. Media, Ideology, and Power. 5. Findings. 5.1. The Castro Brothers. 5.2. Reading Raúl Castro. 5.3. Keys to understand Cuba's model. 5.4. A Monitored Society. 5.5. Stage in Transition. 5.6 Cuba's Puzzle. 5.7. Framing Cuba: systematizing arguments. 6. Conclusions. 7. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

Days after the Cuban government celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its arrival to power, in January 2009, The Washington Post, one of the most influential mainstream newspapers in the US press and central axis of this study, published an article about one of the journalists who has covered the longest the relations between Cuba and the US: Ann Louise Bardach. In her commentary, Bardach highlighted the biggest winners and losers of the conflict.

In the first line of comment, there was a name: Fidel Castro: "He's the Cuban Marathon Man, refusing to surrender, retreat or die. His botched surgeries and illnesses would have felled any other mortal, but through sheer grit and vengeance, he lives on" (Bardach, 2009: B03).

The second winner for Bardach is Raúl Castro: "While Fidel remains the wizard behind the curtain, Raúl is front and centre as Cuba's new head of state, and it will be under his watch that the five-decade U.S. However enters its death spiral" (Bardach, 2009: B03).

Two and half years before, the two men identified by the *Post* took the cover of the newspaper when on the night of the 31st of July 2006 an statement from Fidel Castro was released to notify that the president of Cuba for almost half a century was moving away from his position due to an illness that put him between life and death.

The analysis of the Post's discourse departs from this event that shocked the island. In the minds of those who thought the government's survival was associated to the life of its leader, the quitting and possible death of Fidel Castro supposedly would mark the end of the Cuban Revolution or at least the beginning of a transition.

The images of the celebrations of Miami-based Cubans, the statements made by the spokespersons of the George W. Bush administration, the security measures taken in southern Florida to prevent a possible mass exodus from Cuba, and ideas on how to simplify the process of transition on the island occupied a central space in various media in the US, among them, the *Post*.

Nineteen months after the public statement, on Sunday 24th of February 2008, the National Assembly of People's Power –Cuban legislative body– elected Raúl Castro as President of the Councils of State and Ministers.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the construction of the journalistic discourse in the *Washington Post* around Cuba in the two periods mentioned. The specific objectives are to identify issues related to the island, prioritized from the newspaper's editorial viewpoint, to analyse the possible variations of journalistic discourse between the two events and, finally, to examine the relationships between the Post's journalistic discourse and the George W. Bush Administration's foreign policy.

As the premise it was recognized that the journalistic discourse of a mainstream medium like the Post showed a high degree of correspondence with the Administration's political discourse; whereas the objections to the policy made by the US government were focused on the little pragmatism that led to inefficiency in achieving a transition in Cuba.

The study exposes the points of convergence between power, media, and ideology. It also analyses the approaches of scholars such as Pamela Shoemaker, Stephen Reese, Stuart Hall, and John B. Thompson, and reviews the models focused on the press-power relations of Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, Daniel Hallin, Lance Bennett and Piers Robinson.

The exposition of the research results is divided into seven sections, based on the analysis of the 91 articles published by the Post about Cuba during that period.

2. Methodology

As a category of analysis it was used the construction of journalistic discourse. According to Miguel Rodrigo Alsina (1993), the journalistic discourse is a social discourse embedded in a production system and the result of a process of three phases: production, circulation and consumption.

Perelman conceptualizes it as a form of construction of reality, based on historical determinants and the formal aspects used by the media in such process. In this conceptualization, language is not just a means of communication, but also a means of influencing people, a means of persuasion (Perelman, 1989, Litz, 2005). On the other hand, Teun Van Dijk (2005) and Gaye Tuchman (1972) do not consider the journalistic discourse as a mirror reflection of reality, but a framework through which the social world is routinely constructed and in this construction the relationships that exist in society are reproduced and the sender expresses his or her subjectivity.

It is accepted, then, that the construction of the discourse is a specialized, mediated, socially legitimized and institutionalized process in which a certain reality is constructed through a symbolic system that produces meaning accordingly with the interests of the sender and through an specific treatment of the discourse.

It is important to note that there are three possible levels of depth and complexity of the features in which this construction moves: a level more focused on the linguistic elements; another level addressing the more discursive aspects –the most–dealt with– which is translated into what has been the medium's coverage of a given subject (e.g. genres and sources), and a third level focused on the institution and the historical context that finds expression in the discursive features.

The research used a qualitative design because it is closer the objectives proposed. "The fundamental characteristic of qualitative design is its flexibility, its ability to adapt at all times and circumstances according to the changes occurring in the reality being investigated" (García et al, 2004: 91).

This single, inclusive, and descriptive case study made assessments in unaccountable, immeasurable and unverifiable terms through statistical monitoring of the status of a particular phenomenon (the construction of journalistic discourse) in a specific scenario (a newspaper, The Washington Post).

The techniques used included literature and documentary reviews. The rigour of a qualitative research process has, as one of its main points, a previous approximation to the reality to be analyzed and that is why the literature review was crucial for the development of the study.

Discourse analysis was the fundamental research technique. Because of its methods and techniques, the discourse analysis has become a way to evaluate the texts to identify their characteristics with a transdisciplinary approach that far surpasses the traditional linguistic approaches (Galindo, 1998, in Celecia and Pérez, 2008).

Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak (2000) defined this technique as the examination of the relationships between the discourse itself and the social practices that surround it. For researchers, the discourses can be understood as a particular way of representing the world (physical, social and psychological) in correspondence with the different social positions of the groups or individuals that support them. Discourse analysis allows establishing inferences about the ways in which symbolic forms help sustaining relations of domination.

Several authors (like Thompson, 1993; Fairclough and Wodak, 2000, Van Dijk, 2005) have examined the links between discourse and ideology, identifying multiple strategies usually employed by the media to serve the power, either explicitly or through of linguistic practices in disguise.

2.1. Sample

The research sample included all editions of The Washington Post, obtained online, from August 2006 until February 2008. The unit of analysis used 91 items, including news, reviews and editorials published in the print edition of the Post that addressed the subject of Cuba, from Fidel Castro's proclamation on 31 July 2006 until the election for the National Assembly of People's Power of the new Council of State, with Raúl Castro as president in February 2008.

The selection of the sample took into account that, after the proclamation, the subject of Cuba received more coverage by U.S. media. Supposedly, the illness of Fidel Castro marked the beginning of the end of government, so the analysis published in the press about how to deal with the island made even more visible the discursive strategies that contributed to the ideological reproduction within a journalistic discourse that has stereotyped Cuba for half a century.

The selected newspaper, The Washington Post, is part of the mainstream press. Following Noam Chomsky's perspective, the mainstream press is understood as a media type with sufficient resources to impose, in conspiracy with political elites, the items of the public agenda. The mainstream newspapers and television stations tend to be, according to Chomsky, powerful companies allied to corporate power, which by extension guarantees strong alliances with the political power too (Garcés, 2007).

3. Discourse

This research does not aim to take a theoretical tour through the various ways of understanding discourse, but it is essential to work with the concept. Two discourse scholars, Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak (2000), define it as an interactive process that includes, besides the text, the production process of which the text is a product, and the process of interpretation of which the text is a resource; while Van Dijk (2005) –proposal considered valid– proposes that the discourse is a communicative event that happens in a social situation, presents a scenario, involves participants who played different roles, and determines some actions.

3.1. Journalistic Discourse

The reporter uses the discourse to report events; to describe situations, characters and scenarios; to narrate the events; to evaluate and comment on news events (Gonzalez, 1999).

According to Miguel Rodrigo Alsina (1993) it is vital to note that we are talking about a social discourse and, as such, embedded in a production system. In principle, we can say that the effectiveness of the journalistic informative discourse does not depend on persuasion or manipulation, but simply in informing, letting people know, in their own communicative activity. The construction of the journalistic discourse is a process composed of three interrelated phases: production, circulation and consumption or recognition. This study focuses on the first one of the stages proposed by Rodrigo Alsina.

The journalistic discourse is not a homogeneous type of discourse in its structure: it is formed by a set of discourses with different logical and grammatical structures; however, all these specific forms of discourse imply the journalist's knowledge that individuals who receive the discourses are particular types of people, who live in a particular epoch, with specific beliefs, behaving with adherence to certain social values, and possessing a peculiar way of knowing their world. In short, they are people who share the same culture (González, 1999).

Van Dijk (1996), Rodrigo Alsina (1993) and Tuchman (1972) share views on the journalistic discourse, not as a mirror reflection of reality, but as a framework through which the social world is routinely constructed. This construction reproduces the relationships that exist in society and the sender reflects his or her subjectivity.

“Journalists rarely present the cold facts, and rarely in the order they happened. What appears as a reality in newspapers, radio and television is inevitably a reconstruction of reality to suit the needs and requirements of journalism” (Altschull, 1995: 30).

The construction of the journalistic discourse is a process that has been studied from different points of views and positions. The vision of this discourse as a construction leads to the work of two sociologists, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2006), who in their work *La construcción social de la realidad* (The social construction of reality) argued that reality is socially constructed and, secondly, that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes by which this occurs.

4. Media, Ideology and Power

Through denominations like “the generators of social consensus”, “the reproducers of the symbolic power”, different theorists have approached the links between media, ideology and power in contemporary societies. This section discusses the proposals of scholars like Thompson and Stuart Hall, and then examines the works of Noam Chomsky, Lance Bennett, Daniel Hallin, Piers Robinson, Stephen Reese and Pamela Shoemaker.

Antonio Gramsci considered that because the media have a relative autonomy, the dominant powers cannot directly supervise this important cultural apparatus. Media organizations play a hegemonic role by continuously producing a cohesive ideology, a set of values and norms that serve to reproduce and legitimize the social structure, through which the subordinate classes participate in their own domination (Gramsci, 1971, in Reese and Shoemaker, 1996).

Manuel Martín Serrano viewed the media as institutions producers of consensus and socializers of stable meanings to interpret the world. Through their views on the social order, Martín Serrano indicates, the media provide the public tools and frameworks of meaning, even able to integrate emerging conflicts and contradictions within the discourses of dominant ideologies (Martín Serrano, 1993).

Stuart Hall (1981) offers a more complex view of the media in contemporary societies. According to him, the media perform the ceaseless work of “classifying of the world” within the dominant discourses. Hall considered this work as contradictory, partly because of the internal contradictions between the different ideologies existing in the dominant ground, but even more because these ideologies battle for dominance in the field of practice and class struggle. The media maintain the tendency to reproduce the ideological field of a society in a way that also reproduces the structure of domination.

Reese and Shoemaker (1996) developed a hierarchical model of the factors that influence the content of the media and among the five levels examined the ideological subsumes the others and, therefore, is the most macro of levels. In the model proposed by these authors, the outer level would be the individual, which includes the characteristics of the

communicator, like gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and also his or her personal background and professional experience.

The following level consists of routines, understood as the repeated, modelled, and routinized practices and forms that the media workers use to perform their work. The next level is of organizational influences that seek to explain the variations in media content that cannot be attributed to individual differences or routines. A fourth level consists of the influences the media content receives from outside and this includes the sources of information, sources of income, other social institutions, the economic environment and technology, etc.

The ideological level differs from the previous levels in the sense that all the processes that occur at lower levels are considered as working for a model ideologically related of the messages and in defence of the central higher powers of society. "This ideological level examines how power is executed through the media" (Reese and Shoemaker, 1996: 223).

Reese and Shoemaker (1996) assume that the ideas have links to interests and power and that the power to create symbols is not a neutral force. This ideological level also examines how the sources operate in their own interests, not as individuals but as a class, transcending any organization, industry or place. The ideological level seeks to predict when the media and the political elites will intervene against normal journalistic routines and professionalism.

According to John B. Thompson (1993), the media represent privileged institutions in the socialization, on a massive scale, of certain views of reality. As integrated areas for the reproduction of the symbolic power, the media greatly expand the scope of the operation of ideology in modern societies.

The media seem to be part of that "symbolic power" in some way related to a concept introduced by Thompson. According to him, in modern societies the symbolic forms (axis of their way to understand the ideology) are increasingly mediated by the mechanisms and institutions of mass communication, a phenomenon that is a central feature of social life and that he calls "the mediation of modern culture."

From the mediation of modern culture, Thompson (1993) criticizes several of the positions taken by contemporary theorists who addressed the ideology and that, in his opinion, have failed in appropriately addressing the development of mass communication and its role as a channel of ideology in modern societies.

Based on his analysis, Thompson (1993) proposed a set of theoretical guidelines that would allow the reorientation of the analysis of ideology in the media. His first theory suggests that the analysis of ideology in modern societies should give a central role to the nature and impact of mass communication, although this is not the only site of ideology. This analysis should guide, fundamentally, towards the multiple and complex forms in which the symbolic phenomena circulate in the social world and intersect with the power relations.

His second theory addresses how the development of media has allowed the expansion of the scope of the operation of ideology since the symbolic forms reach growing level of audiences. In the explanation of this theory Thompson argues that advances in the media have further accentuated the character and the massive potential of ideological phenomena. This theory was published in 1993, a year before the appearance of the first online version of a medium in the Internet. Therefore, one could conclude that with the advent of Internet the users increased by hundreds of millions, so the ideological phenomena now have a multiplied audience.

Thompson's third theory specifies that the ideological character of mass communication cannot be analyzed only based on the features of the media institutions or the messages sent by them. It is imperative to analyze the messages in relation to the specific contexts and processes in which the individuals who receive them appropriate them.

"The number of books, essays, monographs, and chapters that have flooded the market testify to the broad public interest on the question of how much power the media have and if it is so great as many people seem to think, how could that power be used differently and perhaps better and more wisely. Most of this production is originated by people directly involved: the journalists and the powerful they write about" (Altschull, 1995: 365).

According to Jarrett (2008) we can distinguish three different paradigms that explain the relationship between the media and the power: the redistribution of powers, where the media emerge as the fourth power, domination and dependence of the media on politics and vice versa; while the third would be the paradigm of interdependence or symbiosis of the media and the power.

For Ignacio Ramonet there are three fronts shaping globalization. The first is the financial front, followed by the military one, and the third, considered by the director of French newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique* as the central front, is ideological. "This front tries to convince everyone that globalization is the best thing that can happen to the planet. Who works in this front is the media, which have become in our time in the second power. For a long time people have spoken of the three powers. Today I would say the first is the economic power and the second is the media. Political power comes much later" (Ramonet, 2006: 191).

In order to fulfil their role, the media need to develop a systematic propaganda. Based on this affirmation, Herman and Chomsky developed the propaganda model, formed by five filters. From the moment it was released (1988) the model aroused controversy. However, although the criticism of the model is extensive, the five filters it identified are still taken into consideration. These filters are: the ownership of the media, advertising, dependency on official sources, the flak or

countermeasures to discipline the media and the demonization of the enemy or, as Pedro (2009) call it, “convergence in the dominant ideology.”

The model assumes that the media suppress and distort, defend and promote a consensus in the interest of an established ideology that will legitimize and facilitate the interests of the corporations and the government (Klaehn, 2002).

While Herman and Chomsky focused their analysis on the U.S. media, the tenets of the propaganda model can be extrapolated to any context where the logics of commercial media prevail (Garcés, 2007). Joan Pedro (2009) agrees with this view: “At a basic structural and organizational level, the media of other Western countries operate under the restrictions of elements of the propaganda model. In the U.S., as hegemonic centre of the world system in which capitalism and the mechanisms of power are more developed, the influence of these filters is greater, but in other countries occurs too.”

The propaganda model was criticized by several theorists, including Holsti and Rosenau, who referred to it as almost a conspiratorial view of the media and criticized the model's exclusive focus on media content, instead of expanding its reach directly to the study of media effects. They also indicate that the model does not examine current beliefs or motivations of media staff or seek to investigate the possible range of effects on audiences and government officials (Holsti and Rosenau, 2001, in Klaehn, 2002)

Responding to this last criticism, Herman and Chomsky agree that the model is not designed to explain everything, but that “it is a general framework from which to understand and analyze the media, which needs to be expanded or contextualized to each particular case. A model is a representation of a part of reality therefore it necessarily must be an oversimplification” (Pedro, 2009).

We agree with the conclusions of Pedro (2009) when he asserts that the propaganda model is even more valid today than twenty years ago. “It is a research tool well suited for the analysis of mass media, but that, by promoting an analysis contrary to the interests of elites, tends to be institutionally marginalized.”

From the “manufacture of consent,” theorists like Lance Bennett and Daniel Hallin prepared their own accounts, not free from criticism and reinterpretation. Hallin, in what Piers Robinson (2001) called “elite version” of the Propaganda Model, proposed in his book *The uncensored war*, an analysis of media coverage of the Vietnam war, three areas in which the media operate and, according to Reese and Shoemaker (1996), maintain the ideological boundaries. These areas are the consensus, the legitimated debate and exclusion.

The realm of legitimated debate is where the search for objectivity and balance is: this is the area of electoral contests and legislative debates. In the centre is the sphere of consensus. Within this region, journalists do not feel obliged to either present opposing viewpoints or remain as disinterested observers. By contrast, the role of the journalist is to serve as an advocate or celebrant of generalized values (Reese and Shoemaker, 1996).

Beyond this area is that of exclusion, the ground of people and ideas outside the mainstream society. Here, according to Hallin, journalists dismiss the supposed neutrality: they play the role of exposing, condemning or excluding from the public agenda those who have violated or challenged the political consensus (Reese and Shoemaker, 1996).

Lance Bennett published in 1990 what Robinson (2001) called “the executive version” of the Propaganda Model. Bennett called it indexing hypothesis. In it, the author argues that the news in the media are implicitly indexed to the dynamics of government debate. When media coverage reflects the problems of the executive or policy failures, which is the same to saying that is criticism of the policies of the executive power, this simply reflects “a professional responsibility on the part of journalists to highlight important conflicts and struggles within the centres of power” (Bennett, 1990 in Robinson, 2001: 526).

According to Bennett, the media can give voice even to groups highly critical of the establishment, but often do so by associating them with protests or civil disobedience actions unfavourable to the image of those groups. The pejorative way in which they are presented regularly ends up demonizing them, in contrast to the aura of authority and prestige that systematically baptizes the official sources (Bennett, 1990 in Garces, 2007).

Both the elite and the executive versions received criticism from Robinson (2001), although he takes elements of both proposals to complete his model of interaction between media and politics.

The first criticism of Bennett's theory is related to the link between journalists and official sources. Robinson does not agree with the passive nature assigned by Bennett to the reporters in this relationship. In his view, theorists should go beyond the sources of information and move to a content analysis of media and its influence in the political process.

The propaganda model assumes that journalists tend to replicate the views of the elites, therefore they cannot play an independent role in the discussions between these; but journalists should not be considered passive recipients of official information, but active participants who work as a political institution with their own rights (Robinson, 2001).

In his model of interaction, Robinson starts from the three areas already mentioned by Daniel Hallin, but enriches them with a more active position of the journalists. He identifies three stages that are reflected in the following table:

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Level of Consensus in the Elites	Press-government relations	The role of media
Consensus in the elites	The media operate within the "Sphere of consensus" (Hallin)	The media "produce" consensus according to the official policies (Chomsky and Herman)
Differences in the elites	The media operate within the sphere of "legitimated debate" (Hallin)	The media reflect in their debates the differences among the elites (Hallin and Bennett)
Differences in the elites plus political uncertainty and critical coverage from the media	The media take side in the debate and becomes an active player	The media can influence the direction taken by the government policies

Source: Robinson (2001)

In times of political uncertainty, the power elites are often more open to the recommendations made by journalists in their columns and editorials. With its arguments, the press mobilizes the public opinion, the people who design the policies, and even the public relations managers in charge of finding, also in the media, attractive criteria to orchestrate their campaigns (Garcés, 2007).

After reviewing several of the most cited and contemporary theories about the relationship between media and power, the question of who influences who may seem answered. Considering the mass media as simple reproducers of the ideologies of the elites in power would be naive.

Another aspect that cannot be overlooked is the economic and political pressures surrounding the media constantly and that limit their aspirations to provide a more pluralistic view of the society they happen to reflect. The answer given by Ignacio Ramonet, in an interview that appears in the ALBA Cultural Fund version of his book *Propagandas silenciosas* (Silent propagandas), summarizes several of the ideas presented here: the media power today combines economic power and ideological power (Ramonet, 2006).

5. Findings

On Monday, 31st July 2006, sometime around nine o'clock at night, the "public statement of the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro" was released. As the text progressed and everyone understood that the health of the historic leader of the Cuban revolutionary process certainly was much affected, perhaps many internalized that from that moment complex times began for the island.

After the declaration, the Washington Post journalistic discourse focused mainly on the reactions of the Cuban-American community based in South Florida. Doubts within the Cuban population about their future, the massive waves of immigrants who would begin to reach U.S. shores, along speculations about power struggles between various government personalities played a central role in this discourse.

In Miami, there were celebrations for Fidel Castro's illness: "In South Florida, which with Castro's rise became in many ways the capital of the Cuban exile, thousands of people spilled into the streets for an impromptu euphoric celebration. People in the crowd shouted "Cuba Libre!" "This is freedom for us," said Heydee Zamora, 49, the owner of a small business who was parading with a flag out her window" (Roig-Franzia, 2006a: A14).

Another way of presenting the Cuban political and social environment in the Post's journalistic discourse was the broad reference to a possible mass exodus from Cuba that would flee from the instability that would start in the nation after the death of Fidel Castro: "Federal and state officials said they are preparing to block mass migrations into the United States. Florida Governor Jeb Bush said a plan is in place to not allow for mass migration into the country at a time when the net result of that is it creates tremendous hardship and risk for people that could lose their lives" (Whoriskey, 2006: A08).

Besides the danger of mass migration, U.S. authorities also got ready to prevent "anti-Castro fighters" –a euphemism– would attempt armed attacks against Cuba: "The U.S. Coast Guard and Navy were preparing to block any effort by exiles to storm the island as uncertainty mounted over Castro's condition, according to Senator Mel Martinez, who said he had been briefed on the plans. He compared the situation to that of Spain during the protracted death throes in 1975 of dictator Francisco Franco, whose demise sort of trickled out day after day" (De Young y Roig-Franzia, 2006: A01).

From the proclamation onwards, speculations increased about the possible reversal of the Cuban government and the Post, in comments and its editorial page, made suggestions about the role of Cuban-Americans and so-called dissidents in Cuba should play.

"A dictator who has deprived his able and culturally rich nation of freedom and prosperity for five decades may or may not finally be on his deathbed. But his country is clearly ready to move on" (The Washington Post, 2006:A14).

The resignation of Fidel Castro would open the doors to a power struggle between different generations of people with important positions in government and in particular, the confrontation between military and civilians. The belief system, nurtured over nearly five decades, about a divided Cuban society, only waiting for Castro's death to "jump over the gap" was present at the Post's journalistic discourse since the first day of August 2006.

In fact the announced power struggles did not occur. On 18th February 2008, four days before the elections for the

Council of State by the National Assembly, a message from Fidel Castro announced to the whole country that he did not aspire to the position of President and Commander in Chief.

From these words reappeared in the Post's discourse the celebrations in Miami and speculation about the generational struggles for power; although hopes for change toned down, perhaps because in the 19 months that has passed since the announcement, the interim government kept the path initiated in 1959.

"But in Miami there were none of the massive street demonstrations that have erupted here over other events in Cuba, or during the custody battles over Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy who was found floating on an inner tube off the Florida coast. "I was expecting more people here," said Richard Valdes, 23, a construction worker whose father came from Cuba. Valdes Recall the reaction to rumors two years ago, that Castro had died: "When they said I was dead, it was really big here. But I do not think this news will really change anything" (Whoriskey, 2008: A13).

The discourse of the Post in its editorial again showed points coinciding with the demands of the administration of George W. Bush on Cuba: "The changes in Cuba will set off renewed debate over U.S. Policy toward Cuba. While the discussion is appropriate, it's important to remember that, by the measure of the most fundamental goal of U.S. policy – that Cuba become a democracy that respects human rights– nothing has changed with Mr. Castro's retirement" (The Washington Post, 2008: A16).

Many commentators dismissed the possibility of a shift towards Cuba by the U.S. government: "Those hoping for a new U.S. Policy toward Cuba have waited nearly 50 years for Fidel Castro to step down. But they will have to wait at least one more year, after President Bush leaves office, to see any Possibility of change in the hard-line U.S. position that has Transcended nine administrations" (Abramowitz, 2008: A13).

The spectacularization of politics, according to Garcés (2007), is the tendency to describe political events as a game, built over the basis of the scandal, the confrontation between opponents and the merciless invasion of private spaces, and it has spread as a resource to increase the attractiveness of media coverage. This spectacularization was visible in the Post's presentation of the alleged infighting in Cuba.

The attempts to show a divided government –the fragmentation as the way ideology operates, mentioned by Thompson (1993)– in two different generations became more visible after the message of resignation of Fidel Castro. Among the members of the government considered most likely to come to power, besides Raúl Castro, were Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez Roque. They were not part of the "generation of the historical ones", a metaphor used by the Post to refer to those who rose to power by their early and active support for the Revolution.

The Post's discourse presented a distorted picture, fragmented and full of clichés about the young generation: the historical context in which they had lived separated them from their parents, their material advantages and contacts with ideas from other places made them more likely to accept reforms, first in the economy that would eventually lead to political reforms and the end result of the equation would be the creation of a new Cuba.

The elections on Sunday 24th of February 2008 ended the speculation. The Post sent to Havana his journalist specialized in Cuban subjects to cover the National Assembly elections. The next day, on the cover of the newspaper, appeared the note sent by Manuel Roig-Franzia, "Cuba's revolutionary old guard consolidated its hold on power Sunday when the National Assembly bypassed a younger generation of politicians and named Fidel Castro's brother, Raúl, president and a hard-line communist first vice president" (Roig-Franzia, 2008b: A01).

5.1. The Castro Brothers

"Nemesis of ten administrations", "icon of socialism in the world", "dictator, and "deteriorated despot" were some of the negative descriptions employed by the Post to refer to the figure of Fidel Castro. In addition to the distorted language treatment, the uncertainty in which Cuba would live in after the resignation of its president for nearly half a century was also present in the discourse of the daily.

The negative description of the man loved-hated by his people, the comparisons with other Latin American presidents, remembered because of their ferocious dictatorships, and the alleged negative legacy left to future generations was highlighted, especially on two occasions: after the proclamation in July 2006, and the message of resignation in February 2008.

"Fidel embodies the Cuban persona: bright, scrappy, intense and shrewd. He is hated and loved precisely because he is Cuban. Cubans Love Fidel. Cubans also hate Fidel, and with good reason. Love plus hate, Cuba-style, equals ambivalence" (Wixon, 2006: B06).

The Post went further and drew a parallel between Fidel and the dictatorship of the Chilean Augusto Pinochet: "The parallels are striking: Two ruthless dictators who sacrificed human rights for political aims. Two men idolized by their followers and despised by the exiles they drove away" (Shifter, 2006: B02).

In short, the Post framed the legacy of Fidel Castro around three main lines: the continuing economic crisis in Cuba; an obsolete foreign policy followed by very few –Venezuela among them–; while, the advances in health and education in the island pursued solely "to buy the loyalty of many Cubans."

5.2. Reading Raul Castro

“Man of the transition”; “a reformer”; “willing to talk with the United States”, “a bloodthirsty general”, were some of the phrases emphasized by the Post discourse about the Army General Raúl Castro. In the 19 months he held the position of interim President until his election in February 2008 as President of the Councils of State and Ministers, the figure of Raúl acquired a higher profile and comparisons with his brother Fidel, both in the form of government and economic policies and his image within Cuban society appeared repeatedly.

The Post discourse presented an old man, sick, with great influence over the military, defending a one-party country, with a history full of blood, but at the same time, a paternal man that could introduce reforms to the economy and thus bring it close to the operating logics of capitalist society.

“Raúl lacks his brother's public flair, but he is known as a deft consensus-builder who has developed a large cadre of loyal followers during the past four decades” (De Young y Roig-Franzia, 2006: A01). “He is a poor public communicator, feared more than admired by the populace, and has never managed a major national crisis. But his critics should consider that he may be a transitional figure, possibly laying the foundation for moves toward a more participatory Cuba” (Latell, 2006: B01).

The Post's discourse emphasized the alleged differences in approaches and concepts between the two brothers. By highlighting the idea that Fidel still exercised control over Raúl and the government policies, the Post tried to show that future changes in Cuba would only be possible after the death of Fidel. Raúl's new economic liberalization policies –that Fidel halted, according to the Post– would gradually alienate Cuba from the “decadent socialist system” implemented by Fidel in his 47 years as leader; at the same time, the dialogue proposed by Raúl to the U.S. government set him apart even more of a brother who always maintained an anti-American rhetoric.

The “olive branch” offered twice by Raúl Castro –on 2nd December 2006, in the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the *Granma* yacht and then in the discourse of 26th July, 2007– were a hot topic in the notes from Cuba by the reporter Manuel Roig-Franzia; though the Post had reported earlier portions of the interview Raúl gave to the *Granma* newspaper, which was published on 18th August 2006.

“But the interview sent a clear message that Raúl Castro shares his brother's distaste for the U.S. government and his penchant for rhetorical broadsides against Bush” (Roig-Franzia, 2006b: B13).

The expectations about structural and conceptual changes that Raúl might introduce in his new position, especially in economics, began to be reflected in the Post the day after the Proclamation and continued during the next 19 months. The idea of Raúl as a reformist and open to dialogue with the United States appeared repeatedly in the opinion pages of the newspaper.

“He has raised expectations that he will tackle chronic problems: excessive centralization; broken-down state enterprises that cheat consumers and breed corruption; low farm output; severe income inequality; and a generation of young people that has known nothing but shortage and sacrifice” (Flake y Rangel, 2007: A19).

5.3. Keys to understand the Cuban model

A failed economic system and a closed society, without access to information, were the approaches repeated constantly in the political discourse of the administration of George W. Bush and reflected in various ways by the discourse of the Post.

The Cuba built by the Post is an island frozen in time, where people are still transported in horse carts, old American cars roaming the broken roads, and the salary is barely enough to live on the first half of the month.

The Cuban economic collapse appeared in journalistic discourse a rationalization –the term is taken from one of the discursive strategies suggested by Thompson (1993)– full of stereotypes in which a militarized economy paid low wages to their workers, which triggered the emergence of a thriving illegal black market and annihilated the desires of the population to work with the State which, at the same time, did not allow people to have independent businesses, and therefore the Cubans were tired of the hardships, and decided to leave the island.

The conversion of the wages received by workers to dollars sought to show, once again, the inefficient system. “Cuba's dual currency system - workers are paid in pesos, which do not have the same buying power as the hard currency used by tourists and members of the Cuban elite” (Roig-Franzia, 2008a: A01).

In the second part of the economic equation of the Post, material shortages have forced the Cubans to turn to the left to survive: “Observers say it may be the precursor of a push for a market economy, one that could accelerate after President Fidel Castro dies; on the other hand, they say, the black market may simply be the byproduct of a system that rewards the wily and well-connected” (Roig-Franzia, 2006c: A14)

5.4. A monitored Society

The administration of George W. Bush decided to call the 21st of May 2008 the Cuba Solidarity Day. “If the Cuban regime is serious about improving the lives of Cubans, it will take important and necessary steps to introduce significant changes. Now that the Cuban people can use mobile phones, then they should be allowed to speak freely in public. Now that the Cubans are allowed to buy DVD players, they also should be allowed to watch films and documentaries produced by Cuban artists who are free to express themselves. Now the Cubans have access to computers, they should also have access to the Internet” (Bush, 2008).

The Post's discourse built the image of a country very similar to that described by Bush. "Some Cubans don't join or don't participate, but at great risk of being labeled an enemy of the Revolution. CDR presidents can organize "acts of repudiation," in which neighbors stand outside the homes of those suspected of illegal activity and scream insults, sometimes for days" (Roig-Franzia, 2007: A10).

So, before this vision of repression and poor access to information, it was valid, according to the Post's discourse that the George W. Bush administration invested millions from the federal budget to try to bring the Cuban people the information that their State denied it.

"TV Marti's stated objective is to break Cuba's "information blockade" by offering its own current affairs shows as alternatives to state television programming, the only thing Cubans receive if they don't have TV satellite dishes. The U.S. government's Office of Cuba Broadcasting on Saturday unveiled a G-1 twin turbo propeller plane that is increasing the transmissions from one afternoon a week to six. The privately owned plane was set to go up in mid-August, but TV Marti pushed the date forward after Castro's surgery" (Snow, 2006: A20).

According to the newspaper, in a society so closed, full of prejudice and discrimination, with state control over every step of its citizens, the possibility of an open debate would seem impossible, but the Post found that during the presidency of Raúl Castro maybe sometime in the future the island could enjoy "freedom of expression."

"The notion of freewheeling political debate is almost unheard-of in Cuba, where many residents fear repercussions if they criticize the government. But it is not without precedent. At one time, Raul Castro encouraged open debate, including criticism of the government, at Cuba's military college. Such debate has been reined in over recent years, but some experts say they think Raul Castro could one day introduce a similar system of free speech in Cuban society" (Roig-Franzia, 2006d: A21).

Cuba, impoverished by an inefficient economic system where dissenting voices were silenced in different ways, looked doomed to remain unchangeable in time, hopeless to ever recover its heyday, according to the Post, it had half a century ago.

5.5. Stage of Transition

The embargo, considered by some as the fundamental axis of pressure against the Cuban government or an outdated and clearly failed mechanism that only functioned to justify the inefficiency of the socialist system by others, the embargo [euphemistically called so throughout the research because it is the term employed in the Post's discourse] officially imposed on the Administration of John F. Kennedy, though it had become operational from the time of Dwight Eisenhower, was a central piece in the daily analysis of the possible scenarios of the "Cuba in Transition".

Roger Kagan, an associate member at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote a commentary in the Post, the day after the message of resignation of Fidel Castro was known, in which he defended positions very similar to those of the Bush Administration on the embargo: to condition the Cuban government, to force it to introduce reforms, to dismantle its political system, to organize elections and only then, the Administration will assess the relevance of raising, gradually, the embargo.

"The United States will have only one chance to lift the embargo. Once lifted, it will be almost impossible to reimpose. It is important, therefore, that the United States play this card in exchange for the only meaningful prize: a Cuba that, after all these years, is both independent and democratic" (Kagan, 2008: A17).

However, the Post's journalistic discourse, at various points of the period studied here, seemed to be critical of the embargo, not as illegal or because they had caused losses of tens of billions of dollars to the Cuban economy in its four decades of existence, but because it was ineffective.

"Beyond the White House, however, a vigorous debate has been proceeding over whether the U.S. approach makes sense. Farm-state lawmakers in both parties have wanted trade sanctions lifted to permit agriculture trade, while other politicians have questioned restrictions on travel and on the amount of money Cubans living in the United States may send back to their relatives" (Abramowitz, 2007: A10).

Two of the most active legislators in the U.S. Congress in the creation of proposals to modify the embargo, Charles Rangel (Democrat from New York) and Jeff Flake (Republican from Arizona), published a commentary in the Post in which they related the policy towards Cuba with the demands of Cuban Americans in South Florida and the electoral and financial support provided by these individuals to candidates with tougher positions towards Havana.

"For too long, our approach has been guided by electoral considerations. Ever-tightening sanctions have won votes in Florida for both Republicans and Democrats. But these sanctions have done nothing to promote change in Cuba, and they have kept American strengths—diplomacy and contact with American society—squarely on the sidelines" (Flake y Rangel, 2007: A19).

Another problem presented by the Post and that was closely associated with the embargo, was the monetary compensation that U.S. companies continued to demand for property nationalized after 1959.

In the journalistic discourse, the issue of resolving the claims was related to the trials to the Cuban government, conducted in U.S. courts and in which a judge ruled in favour of the families of the pilots of the organization "Brothers to

the Rescue" that were shot down by a fighter jet after flying over Havana, in 1996; also in the case of an American citizen who died in Cuba in 1960. At the trial, the government was accused of murder. In both cases, Cuban funds in U.S. banks were used to compensate these families.

"Eventually, U.S. officials and lawyers say, Cuba will have to account for the lawsuits and claims. It may not be possible to kick people in Cuba off farmland seized decades ago, but a system should be created to satisfy those with a legitimate case, Nilo Perez said. "Otherwise, all hell will break loose. There would be claims on all forms of commerce coming out of Cuba. The U.S. government will have to step in and negotiate to resolve these claims in an orderly fashion, he said" (Anderson, 2007: A14) [According to the newspaper, this man is a former political prisoner who sued Cuba for \$ 50 million dollars for alleged torture]

5.6. Cuba's Puzzle

What would happen in a Cuba not ruled by Fidel Castro? What would be the role of the Cuban-American community in South Florida? How the U.S. could influence more effectively that Cuba, supposedly in transition, after the proclamation? The possible scenarios were analyzed from various viewpoints in the Post's discourse; although there was consensus on the need for changes in policies towards the island, changes that would come with the next president [Obama] and would be beneficial in the short and long term for the United States and, according to the newspaper, also for Cuba.

One expert on Cuban issues, Julia E. Sweig, from the Council of Foreign Affairs, suggested approaches towards the Cuban government and criticized the immobility lived with the Bush administration: "Continuing the current course and making threats about what kind of change is and is not acceptable after Fidel, Washington will only slow the pace of liberalization and political reform in Cuba and guarantee many more years of hostility between the two countries" (Robinson, 2006: A29).

According to Rangel and Flake the U.S. government "should begin by ending its insistence that it will respond only to Cuba's complete conversion to democracy and free markets. Cubans surely would welcome incremental reforms that improve living standards, not to mention economic and political freedom" (Flake y Rangel, 2007: A19).

A key piece to redoing the Cuban puzzle was the role to be played by those who opposed the government from within island. The emergence of independent movements within Cuban society and their unity would open new possibilities. "Many Cubans are indeed restless for change. There are focal points around which a kind of civil society has started to coalesce—the black-market economy, the Catholic Church, the Afro-Cuban faiths, the arts—and the government has had little success in co-opting these independent movements" (Robinson, 2006: A29).

However, the alleged changes in the so-called civil society in Cuba, the Post's discourse acknowledged at multiple times that Fidel Castro's absence from his post did not mean the end of the government, although it marked the beginning of a long period of changes, not without difficulties.

One of the main columnists in the Post, Eugene Robinson, concluded in her article on the possible scenarios for the "Cuba in Transition" with a statement that summarizes the consensus of the Post about the future of the island after the proclamation of resignation: "Fidel's revolution won't survive forever, the tide of history is flowing in the opposite direction. But surely it will survive the old man's death" (Robinson, 2006: A29).

5.7. Framing Cuba: systematizing arguments

Studies on how the media frame reality according to certain cultural, political, and ideological dominant patterns have been approached by various theorists of communication (Semetko et al., 1999; Scheufele, 2000).

"By framing we understand the way the media determine the framework of thought and public discussion about the events, a double framing both in cognitive and pragmatic terms, aimed at providing the reader with the elements necessary to ensure the intelligibility of events—key concepts, paratextual relations—, in addition to focusing attention on a particular aspect of the informative object—excluding others—, while strategically confronting and refuting prejudices that lead to strange and "aberrant" readings and establishing a coherent field and interdefinable of discussion" (Lorente et al, 2009).

According to Garcés (2007) the framing effect is associated with the ability of the press to socially construct reality and establish useful frameworks of reference for the discussion and interpretation of public affairs by the audience.

During the studied period, the Post's discourse was consistent with the tradition of the American press in addressing the issue of Cuba, although it should be noted that this discourse also reflected the disagreement between the elites of power over how to deal with the island after Fidel Castro's illness. These conflicting positions were more evident in the presidential race, which since mid-2007 involved the different Republican and Democratic nominees.

The Post framed the Cuban reality around several ideas. Firstly, there was a discourse that tried to demonize, once again, the Castro brothers. With subtle differences, the two men were considered by the Post as major impediments to the dialogue and the eventual normalization of relations between the two countries.

The negative presentation of Fidel Castro as one of the "most bloodthirsty dictators" and whose "instability put the world near a nuclear catastrophe" was not innovative because his figure has been constructed in a similar way for five decades by the U.S. media, but now his resignation from power by the sudden illness allegedly opened new doors to

the understanding between the U.S. and Cuba, which was seen as a positive element for the Post.

For the newspaper, with the arrival to the presidency of Raúl Castro, also “a man with a bloody history”, but “more pragmatic and architect of some changes in the nineties who put Cuba closer to capitalist commercial logic”, the Island could enter a period of slow transition without major political, but economic changes.

The expectations about who would occupy the seats on the Council of State, from the elections of February 2008, led the Post to present a clash for power between two groups: the “Moncada generation”, all military, and the “generations of young people who grew up without much ideological influence.”

In addition to the generational conflict, the Post emphasized the differences that could be appreciated in history and the development of Fidel and Raúl Castro, differences in both perspectives and concepts.

The election of 24th February 2008 closed some of the doors for dialogue with the United States, when the “Moncada generation” reached the top government posts. This election, according to the Post, limited the options for dialogue and strengthened the positions of those who defended the hard line towards Cuba within the American power elites.

A second general approach was related to the future of relations between Cuba and the United States. Although the discourse used several strategies to involve a certain elite consensus on the possibility of a different political rapprochement with Cuba, in fact there was no substantial criticism to the George W. Bush administration’s policies.

This low level of challenge towards those policies dictated by the power contrasted with other positions where the Post discourse invoked pragmatism, recognized as one of the most important values of the belief system of American journalists, to propose new ways of dealing with the Island.

The possible normalization of relations needed, in the first place, signs of change by both governments. The Post’s discourse showed several ways to understand the friendly steps. Some comments focused on the mandatory release of “political prisoners” and the “call for free elections” on the Cuban side, to move towards a table of negotiations and gradually lifting the embargo, while other commentators, known as more pragmatic, argued that the same end could be achieved if the new government [of Obama], since it was not possible with the Bush administration, lifted some restrictions, though not necessarily the embargo.

These positions of the journalistic discourse had a high degree of correspondence with the various discourses of the major political elites, especially during the presidential race between John McCain, who supported negotiations only in the case of an “opening of the regime”, and Barack Obama, willing to “dialogue with Cuban authorities and freeing the travels of Cuban-Americans and the sending, without limitation, of family remittances.

The third line identified in the Post’s discourse was the presentation of a community of interests between the so-called dissidents in Cuba and Cuban-Americans in South Florida, union considered by the newspaper as one of the main ways to shape the “new Cuba”. This presentation does not seem accidental, but reinforces the idea of a Cuban problem that should be solved only among Cubans; but this discourse is out of context, most of the time it did not include key issues that did involve the interests of U.S. companies and Cubans who acquired their citizenship and who continue demanding the return or compensation for properties that were nationalized after 1959.

According to the Post, in a “society in transition”, the dissident organizations increase their role as the atmosphere of uncertainty in which the Island was living would allow them to present different views on how to improve the economy through changes in the political system, but the approaches to the unity of the exile with the so-called dissidents were also marked by criticism, at various times, to the proved deviation (theft) of financial support that the U.S. federal budget granted to such groups in Cuba.

The fourth axis around which various approximations of the Post revolved was devoted to “the failed Cuban system”. The Post presented this system as the cause of “poverty of all cities in the country” and a “state of collective despair” that led the Cubans to embark on “the adventure of the sea” to the United States.

Several of these views certainly reflected real problems of the economy and society, but they were addressed out of context, without mentioning the American embargo as a major cause of Cuba’s economic difficulties, nor the Cuban Adjustment Act.

The failures of the system were extended to the total economic dependence of the island within the past five decades, to the aid from other countries, first from the Soviet Union and now Venezuela. This statement implied the fragility and the inability of the system to meet the most basic needs of the population.

The use of euphemisms as a resource of ideological domination was considered by one of the most cited authors in this research, John B. Thompson (1993), within the linguistic tricks to reproduce the dominant ideology. In the Post’s discourse was appreciable the continued use of certain euphemisms to refer mainly to the hard-liners in Miami, called by the newspaper as “anti-Castro fighters”, “Miami-based warriors”, “anti-Castro cruzaders”.

However, the Post also expressed criticism against the release by the George W. Bush Administration of Luis Posada Carriles, euphemistically presented as a “suspected terrorist” and “militant”.

Nineteen months after the Proclamation of Fidel Castro was known, the Post concluded that the Cubans had not met

the challenge, i.e., there was no such transition, but, as they called it, also euphemistically, a succession.

In his first discourse as the forty-fourth president of the United States on the 20th of January 2009, Barack Obama had words for "those who cling to power". It was not said openly, but the sentences were directed, among other nations, to Cuba: "And to the other peoples and governments who are watching us today, from the big cities to the small town where my father was born: know that America is a friend of every nation and every man, woman and child who pursues a future of peace and dignity and we are ready to take the lead once again. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and suppression of dissidents, you must know that you are on the wrong side of history; but you can reach our hand if you are willing to open yours" (Obama, 2009).

6. Conclusions

In a context in which symbolic forms are increasingly mediated by the media, a phenomenon Thompson (1993) calls a "mediation of modern culture", is necessary to examine in depth the long and complex relationship between the press and power. This is a not relationship without its struggles, which were recently moved to the symbolic field, where the media plays a strong role, by appearing recognized as an integrated space for the reproduction of symbolic power and that expands the scope of ideology in modern societies.

This study analyzed the features in the construction of the journalistic discourse of the influential American newspaper *The Washington Post* and the various discursive strategies used by the newspaper with intentions of ideological reproduction to address the issue of Cuba, between two moments that have marked the more recent history of Cuba: the resignation of Fidel Castro, on the 31st of July 2006, and the election of the new Council of State in February 2008.

The analysis allowed the identification of several points in common with other historical approaches to the Island: the demonization of the Castro brothers continued, the usual triad –a multiparty system, free market and free election– continued to be demanded to the country; the so-called dissidents remained suppressed, the "anti-Castro militants" in Miami continued seeking unity with the dissident movement; while the Cubans continued trying to survive "on the left" in the face of the "oppression of a system" that, instead of beginning the transition, was planning a "succession".

However, in the Post's discourse also showed significant break points with previous positions, which reflected the disagreement between the elites of power, starting from Fidel Castro's illness. The main identifiable rupture was the one that called for pragmatism to request a change of tactics in politics that could produce more effective results in dealing with the Cuban problem.

The separation from the hard line, put into practice not only by the George W. Bush Administration, was going through the lift of the ban on travel by Cuban-Americans and, later, by U.S. citizens; a second idea involved the granting of greater facilities in trade, although this did not mean the complete lifting of the embargo (blockade) but at least a step towards eventual normalization.

These breaks proposed by the discourse –which showed the contradictions among the elites after decades– opened new approaches in the relations between Cuba and the United States. The objectives of these changes analyzed by the Post's discourse did not differ from those advocated by successive administrations that have occupied the White House; but the changes also represented new challenges for Cuba.

The possibilities for increased trade with the world's largest economy and the increase in the number of tourists would allow raising the revenues and financial reserves of the country; a challenge because the elites who sponsor the projects in the U.S. Congress to free travel and trade are confident that the exchange country-to-country will achieve what decades of embargo and open conflict have not been able to achieve: to dismantle the Cuban government. Both sides in the dispute seem to be aware of the potential profit and losses in the approach and seem ready to accept them. And this is not little.

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