

Old and New Directions in the 20th Century Cuban Printed Press Historiography. A Cartography of the Press History Field¹

Viejos y nuevos rumbos en la historiografía del periodismo impreso cubano del siglo XX. Una cartografía del campo de la historia de la prensa

Velhos e novos caminhos na historiografia do jornalismo impresso cubano do século XX. Uma cartografia do campo da história da imprensa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2023.8516>

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The article analyzes the historiographical production about the Cuban printed press of the 20th century. The documentary review confirmed a diversity of theoretical-methodological approaches. From volumes attached to anecdotes, one goes on to texts that try to explain the interdependencies between journalistic production and the context of the complex Cuban 20th century. The still incipient state of studies on the history of the press on the island is confirmed. This review makes it possible to publicize the most important works carried out in recent years and suggest topics that urgently need to be investigated.

KEYWORDS: Cuba, history of print journalism, historiography, historical communication studies, 20th century.

El artículo analiza la producción historiográfica acerca de la prensa impresa cubana del siglo XX. La revisión documental constató diversidad de enfoques teórico-metodológicos. De volúmenes apegados al anecdotario, se pasa a textos que intentan explicar las interdependencias entre la producción periodística y el contexto del complejo siglo XX cubano. Se constata el estado aún incipiente de los estudios sobre la historia de la prensa en la isla. Esta revisión permite dar a conocer los trabajos más importantes realizados en los últimos años y sugerir temáticas en las que urge investigar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cuba, historia del periodismo impreso, historiografía, estudios históricos en comunicación, siglo XX.

O artigo analisa a produção historiográfica sobre a imprensa escrita cubana do século XX. A revisão documental confirmou uma diversidade de abordagens teórico-metodológicas. De volumes anexados a anedotas, passa-se a textos que tentam explicar as interdependências entre a produção jornalística e o contexto do complexo século XX cubano. Verifica-se o estado ainda incipiente dos estudos sobre a história da imprensa na ilha. Esta revisão permite divulgar os trabalhos mais importantes realizados nos últimos anos e sugerir temas que precisam ser investigados com urgência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cuba, história do jornalismo impresso, historiografia, estudos históricos da comunicação, século XX.

How to cite:

Salazar Navarro, S. (2023). Old and New Directions in the 20th Century Cuban Printed Press Historiography. A Cartography of the Press History Field. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, e8516. <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2023.8516>

¹ This work was supported by the Research Foundation of the University of New York City, which granted research funds through the Cycle 51 PSC-CUNY Research Award. I appreciate the reading of the researcher Edel Lima-Sarmiento, whose contributions considerably enriched the final version of this article.

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Submitted: 05/31/2022. Accepted: 09/14/2022. Published: 03/15/2023.

INTRODUCTION. LOOKING FOR REFERENCES FOR A “GENERAL HISTORY” OF 20TH-CENTURY CUBAN PRINTED PRESS

Cuba has a relevant tradition of print journalism among the islands of the Hispanic Caribbean. Consequently, it is the nation with the most significant bibliographies on these topics. This diversity of sources is an advantage and, simultaneously, a challenge for the researcher. It also demands greater interest from communication specialists, historians, and other social scientists. Lent (1992) includes in his bibliography of mass communication in Cuba a hundred entries dedicated to the history of insular journalism. The catalog has increased significantly since the publication of that book. That is due to the incorporation of academic papers and some works published inside and outside Cuba. The challenge is not only to locate some of these sources scattered in libraries on the island and in countries like the United States and Spain. The problem is also its *decantation* within a universe that could sometimes be overwhelming. It is then a matter of identifying those texts considered “essential,” which resist the passage of time and contribute to a general perspective of the phenomenon. This article deals with this issue.

This work continues other approaches to the historiographical production of communication in Cuba. The researcher Mena Méndez (2016) analyzes some approaches from the academy to the subject. This author offers considerations about its advantages, limitations, and perspectives. For their part, Amaya and Velazco (2007) analyze how Cuban communication research has focused on the work of Manuel Martín Serrano. These studies have fixated on recent works, all from the academic field. These are primarily undergraduate thesis at the Faculty of Communication of the University of Havana.

This critical review aims to look for references to write a pending but essential “general history” of Cuban print journalism of the 20th century. As in other nations in the Ibero-American environment, Cuban historical studies in communication have detailed catalogs of publications and analyses of significant figures in journalism, institutions, paradigmatic stages, and even (to a lesser extent) some regional histories (Lima-Sarmiento, 2017). However, there are few studies focused on the Cuban

20th century. The Cuban history of journalism could take for itself the exhortation made by the Spanish researcher Checa-Godoy (2008):

(...) We advocate the construction of a history of communication systems at each stage, applicable to the different media in their general schemes and many specific ones, a history enriched with peculiar aspects of each medium studied. Moreover, embracing these media histories, that general history of communication includes everyone with its peculiar incidence at each moment, all coming together in that search for the public and in that influence on it (pp. 48-49).

The bibliographical analysis below focuses on the past 20th century. That is due to the need to reduce the sample to a manageable volume. However, it does not imply ignoring the imprint of the colonial period, which is extremely valuable in terms of communication practices, regulation, and censorship³ mechanisms. Either the actions of the alternative or independence press, among other processes linked to journalism. These lines focus on the past century, whose study allows tracing the most direct precedents of the current Cuban communication system and its projections in the medium and long term.

The Cuban “historical” 20th century almost coincides with the “chronological” century. The largest island in the Caribbean declared its independence on May 20, 1902, after four years of military occupation by the United States. A period of republican government begins, not exempt from political and economic upheavals, military coups, *caudillos*, revolutions, and popular uprisings. The first half of the century was finished in 1959 with the arrival of Fidel Castro to power. Concerning public communication, there was a gradual dismantling of the information model of the republican period and the adoption of a single-party press system inspired by the information organization chart of the former Soviet Union (Salazar, 2017).

³ We recommend reading the book by Basail Rodríguez (2004), titled *El lápiz rojo. Prensa, censura e identidad cubana (1878-1895)* [*The Red Pencil. Press, Censorship and Cuban Identity (1878-1895).*]

A “general history” of Cuban print journalism of this “historic” 20th century is still pending. However, essential works can serve as sources for researchers interested in the subject, an issue we will address in the following pages.

THEORETICAL REFERENCES FOR A CUBAN HISTORY OF THE PRINTED PRESS

This article analyzes the theoretical and methodological foundations that have supported the historiographical production of the Cuban written press. To do so, we study some “histories of the press” in recent decades, especially in the Ibero-American sphere, to which Cuba belongs. This analysis aims to determine from what perspectives the object of study has been approached and how these theoretical and methodological approaches have influenced the interpretation made in the historical evolution of journalistic production.

As we will see below, in the works that make up the sample, there is a transition between descriptive approaches (cataloging of authors and publications) to works that seek to visualize the relationship between print media and the economic, political, and social context. In the diachronic analysis of print journalism, various disciplines of the social sciences converge, especially history (general, political, economic, social, of ideas...) and communicology (studies of actors, practices and communicative institutions, audiences, regulatory mechanisms, among others). It is necessary to define, and therefore delimit, the specific field of the history of the press and its analytical categories to trace the theoretical production around the subject. That made it possible to select the sample for this analysis and operationalize the dimensions that support the study.

More than a consolidated scientific discipline, the generic denomination of the *field of historical communication studies* refers to the practice of a scientific community that is systematically interested in investigating these issues. Briggs and Burke (2002) affirm that these investigations try to show the relevance of the past in the present. They introduce history by studying the media and these in history. Researcher Amaya (2010) defines it in these terms:

(...) our proposal to assume the denomination of the field of historical studies in communication is directed primarily toward the *generic identification* of a research tradition that has focused its fundamental attention on the analysis, from a historical perspective, of the practices, institutions, and systems of communication. It refers, in short, to the *scientific practice of historical research in communication*. This precision is necessary as our analysis focuses on a specific subfield within what has been defined as the *scientific field of communication* (pp. 150-151).

This article intends to identify some referents from which to build a “general history” of Cuban print journalism of the 20th century. In other words, an approach to journalism historiography is proposed based on reviewing a significant sample of intellectual production on the subject. In order to obtain a manageable sample, this analysis includes only publications in book format. No self-referential texts appear in periodicals nor articles published in specialized journals; neither are undergraduate and postgraduate research, by the way, the latter very relevant, since in recent decades, a considerable part of the historical production in communication has been carried out from the academy, mainly, in the Faculty of Communication of the University of La Havana. That, we reiterate, is due to methodological issues in this exciting report; the history of Cuban print journalism cannot do without a large part of these sources. We include some important works of his time, although they have been outdated in light of the present. We do not cite all the titles throughout these pages, only those we consider relevant or original.

The Mexican researcher Del Palacio-Montiel (2006) proposes some categories to address the historiography of communication in her country. We use some of them to classify and comment on my sample. That is a catalog under construction to which new titles may be added. Del Palacio-Montiel mentions, among others, the following categories: 1) indexes, catalogs, and guides to printed periodicals; 2) collective works; 3) general histories of journalism; 4) studies that use the press and journalism as a source for other historical research; 5) collections and selection of articles, photographs and cartoons; 6) regional histories; and 7) case studies, for example, from a particular

newspaper or journalist. This research focuses only on the first three, the indexes, collective works, and general histories, since we intend to locate the primary references for constructing a “general history.” However, that does not imply that in a future phase of the search, the bibliographic review will be expanded with monographic studies, regional histories, and works that use the press as a source for other historical investigations, of which there are precedents in Cuba.⁴

All the texts to which reference will be made are studies on the history of the printed press. In other words, investigations on other media with outstanding trajectories in Cuba, such as cinema, radio, and television, were omitted. Likewise, the documentary review focuses on general research, which rules out monographic and regional studies; the latter is not very frequent in the history of Cuban communication (Lima-Sarmiento, 2017).

⁴ For example, within the monographic studies focused on stages, figures or outstanding media institutions of the 20th century, see for example the approach that Lima-Sarmiento (2014) makes to the press during the *Machadato*, or some studies written from different political positions, focused on the press during the Batista dictatorship and the arrival of Fidel Castro to power (Calvo González, 2021; Díaz-Castañón, 2010; Ortega, 1989; Salado, 2016; Villaescusa Padrón, 2015). These works have in common the tensions between the press and the government and the strong control exercised over the latter over information. Several biographies have also been written on prominent personalities in journalism of the past century. For example, see the work of Bermúdez (2011) on the journalist Conrado Massaguer and the recently published biography of the photographer Jorge Oller (Hidalgo Martínez, 2021), which covers moments both in republican Cuba and already during the Revolution. With regard to works that use the press as a historiographical source, there is, for example, the book by Fernández Calderón (2014) on the racial debate in the Cuban press at the beginning of the Republic (1912-1930), and already more recently, the work of Fernández Batista (2021), on the collapse of real socialism in the Cuban written press (1985-1992).

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC PRODUCTION ON THE HISTORY OF CUBAN JOURNALISM

Concerning indexes, catalogs, and guides to printed periodicals, there is a vast tradition of bibliographies prepared both in the Republican period and in more recent dates. Due to their importance, and because they include most of the previous references, these two texts cannot fail to be mentioned: *For the History of Journalism in Cuba: a Bibliographic Contribution*,⁵ by Mota (1985) and *Bibliography of Cuban Mass Communications*, by Lent (1992). These works save years of bibliographic surveys for any scholar interested in the history of national journalism. Lent's book is also crucial for studying Cuban communication in general. Both texts include references ranging from the founding of the first gazettes finalizing the 18th century to the end of the 20th century. Lent's text opens with a broad introduction to the subject of the Cuban press in a historical key. A thematic and authors indexes facilitate the location of the sources. Some are in collections in the United States and Spain and, of course, in Cuban libraries. Mota's book, for its part, organizes the information into four indexes: thematic, journalists, publications, and finally, topographic, the latter particularly valuable because it allows tracking of the press in the different regions of the country. Two challenges face the researchers who approach these issues. In the first place, both texts close the bibliographic review in the eighties, so there is no up-to-date reference that is so comprehensive. Secondly, it is a problem that cuts across studies on the history of Cuban journalism; it is necessary to mention the problematic access to documentary sources, many scattered and in poor condition.

On the other hand, there is a tradition of descriptive articles on the journalistic phenomenon, which dates back to the Republican era. Under the format of collective works produced by the journalistic union, stand out, among others, titles such as the *Centennial Number of Diario de la Marina*⁶ (1932), *Journalism in Cuba, Commemorative*

⁵ Original title in Spanish: *Para la historia del periodismo en Cuba: un aporte bibliográfico*.

⁶ Original title in Spanish: *Número Centenario de Diario de la Marina*.

Book of Journalist's Day,⁷ published between 1935 and 1958; the well-known *Album of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Association of Reporters of Havana*⁸ (1952) and the *Professional Directory of Cuban Journalists*⁹ (1957). It is also crucial to mention the book *The Cuban Press, 1902-1932. Commemorative Historical Work, with Biographical and Bibliographical Data of Cuban Journalists and Newspapers*,¹⁰ edited by Tomás González-Rodríguez. Likewise, the *Anthology of Cuban Journalists, 35 Biographies, 35 Articles*¹¹ (1943), compiled by Rafael Soto Paz.

These works make it possible to make a first approach to the history of Cuban journalism in the Republic. As can be seen, at the time of their printing, most of these books were union publications, which over time acquired a historical nuance; that is, they related the present of Cuban printed communication, but over the years, they became historical documents, panoramic photographs of the island communication system.

The texts are part of a research tradition dedicated to the study of practices, institutions, actors, and media, which is not related to a particular theoretical corpus, much less it is ascribed as a discipline in the field of communication, practices are much more recent in time (Montero Díaz & Rueda, 2001). In the same way that it happened in the Latin American nations of the continent, which achieved their independence a century before Cuba, the first historical approaches to Cuban journalism have a political function-oriented towards reinforcing the national ideology of a new Republic. The same thing will happen,

7 Original title in Spanish: *El periodismo en Cuba. Libro conmemorativo del Día del Periodista.*

8 Original title in Spanish: *Álbum del cincuentenario de la Asociación de Reporteros de La Habana.*

9 Original title in Spanish: *Directorio profesional de periodistas de Cuba.*

10 Original title in Spanish: *La prensa en Cuba, 1902-1932. Obra histórica conmemorativa, con datos biográficos y bibliográficos de periodistas y periódicos de Cuba.*

11 Original title in Spanish: *Antología de periodistas cubanos, 35 biografías, 35 artículos.*

as we will see, in works after the revolutionary triumph. As Timoteo-Álvarez (1987) points out, the “official histories of national journalism” obey the need for self-affirmation of the states. Both in the Republic and in the Revolution:

The process of emergence and institutionalization of historical studies in communication was channeled—in general terms—according to a dual functionality. On the one hand, political functionality oriented towards the consolidation and legitimization of national ideologies, and on the other, functionality in favor of the affirmation and “dignification” of the journalistic activity itself, based on the registration of its founding antecedents and the presentation of models exemplary in the exercise of the profession (Amaya, 2010, p. 160).

Paradoxically, these journalistic productions, without scientific pretensions, elude one of the great evils of the stories of journalism: the excessive tendency to catalog, to the repertoire, to the commented list of titles (Checa-Godoy, 2008). Instead, these are texts that, for the most part, assume narration as a discursive mechanism, partly explained by the fact that their authors mostly have journalistic training.

Regarding the topics addressed, the documentary review allowed us to identify some areas of interest within historical communication studies. In the first place, attention to significant figures of journalism, which is evidenced in the anthology of Soto Paz (1943) and in the book by González-Rodríguez (1932), which systematizes biographical and bibliographical data of Cuban journalists in the first three decades of being a Republican (1902-1932). Likewise, laudatory texts to recognized professionals are frequent in the annual book dedicated to Journalist’s Day. The following articles are good examples: “Los Precusores” by Lamarque (1935); “Province Journalists” by Morales-Díaz (1935), the latter also a recognition of the regional press; “Great Figures of *Diarismo*” by Alfonso-Roselló (1935); “Digressions about Journalism and Journalists from the Day Before Yesterday, Yesterday and Today” by Hernández-Guzmán (1949), among others.

In the works analyzed, the general reports of publications also stand out, with a tone sometimes closer to personal assessment and

in others to the description of publications. For example, Labraña (1940), under the generic title “The Press in Cuba,” maps the field of journalistic production of the time. The Professional Directory of Cuban Journalists¹² (1957) dedicates entries to some relevant publications of that time, such as *Alerta*, *Avance*, *Diario de la Marina*, *El Mundo*, *Prensa Libre*, *Bohemia*, and *Carteles*, as well as a section on what they call “Journalism in the Provinces.”

These texts also show the diversity of institutions and actors dedicated to public communication in the Republican era. González-Rodríguez (1932) devotes, for example, a chapter of his book to addressing the Hebrew press and another to commenting on the work of Cuban journalists born outside of Cuba, which is explained if one takes into account that in the first decades of the century XX Cuba was a vital recipient of emigrants, mainly from Spain. In the *Album of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Association of Reporters of Havana*¹³, Arocena (1952) writes a chapter dedicated to “Women in Cuban Journalism.”

The *Professional Directory of Cuban Journalists*¹⁴ (1957) offers an overview of the institutional framework of journalism in the last decades of the Republic before the Revolution. For example, there are entries about institutions such as the National College of Journalists, various provincial colleges (Havana, Pinar del Río, Matanzas, Las Villas, Camagüey, Oriente), the Havana Reporters Association, the Cuban Press Association, and the Manuel Márquez Sterling Professional School of Journalism.

A recurring theme in the publications analyzed refers to the legal status of the press, often in a historical key. It includes topics such as censorship, freedom of the press and thought, and current legislation. For example, Gay-Galbó (1947) refers to the issue of press censorship in Cuban history, and Martínez (1953) speaks of freedom of information and journalistic responsibility. Likewise, *The Journalism in Cuba*¹⁵

¹² Original title in Spanish: *Directorio profesional de periodistas de Cuba*.

¹³ Original title in Spanish: *Álbum del Cincuentenario de la Asociación de Reporteros de La Habana*.

¹⁴ Original title in Spanish: *Directorio profesional de periodistas de Cuba*.

¹⁵ Original title in Spanish: *El periodismo en Cuba*.

includes sections dedicated to existing press legislation on the island, which is an invaluable source for reconstructing in a diachronic key the press legislation of the Republican era.

The triumph of the Revolution changed the institutionality of the Cuban press. They have disappeared union publications, which until now had assumed the construction of the historical account of journalism in Cuba. New topics appear on the agenda while others vanish. The Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC), founded in 1963, will build a new institutional memory. Titles such as *Congresses of Cuban Journalists*¹⁶ by Marrero (2006); *Say the Moral Word. Rescue of a Worthy and Truthful Journalism*¹⁷ (Marrero, 2003); *Journalism and the Ideological Struggle*¹⁸ (Vera & Constantín, 2003); and *La Coletilla: a Battle for Freedom of Expression, 1959-1962*¹⁹ (Ortega, 1989) confirms this.

In recent years, some collective works on the history of national journalism have been published. Those works result from collaborations between professors and graduates of the Faculty of Communication of the University of Havana. The intention of these texts, sometimes more successful than others, is to relate journalistic production to the political, social, and economic context, for which they have used the theoretical model of the Spanish Martín Serrano (2004) and the historical-structural approach of Sánchez-Ruiz (1991). As intelligibility devices, Ruiz's model visualizes the interdependent relationships between communication processes and the social context.

In the same way, as in other Ibero-American nations, the impact of Serrano's work has been central to Cuban historiographical production since the 1990s. As stated by the Mexican researcher Fuentes-Navarro (2019):

¹⁶ Original title in Spanish: *Congresos de periodistas cubanos*.

¹⁷ Original title in Spanish: *Dígase la palabra moral. Rescate de un periodismo digno y veraz*.

¹⁸ Original title in Spanish: *El periodismo y la lucha ideológica*.

¹⁹ Original title in Spanish: *La coletilla: una batalla por la libertad de expresión, 1959-1962*.

For more than forty years, the theoretical work of Manuel Martín Serrano has emphasized its socio-historical location in the generational context of the change in thinking about social change and the place that communication has occupied in that process, and that is crucial to confront the transformations of communication and society (p. 2).

The researchers Saladrigas and Olivera give an account of a transition in the Cuban historiography of the press from a phase more attached to description to a new, more complex stage:

(...) Historical studies have advanced in the relationship between communication and culture, the latter in its mediating and mediating nature of the richest and most diverse processes of construction of meanings that have occurred in Cuban history, such as the modes of expression that they adopt today (Saladrigas & Olivera, 2016, p. 21).

In 2015, some professors and students of the Faculty of Communication of the University of Havana published in digital format, under the editorial seal of *Temas* magazine, an anthology of *Cuban Journalists of the Republic (1902-1959)*²⁰ (González et al., 2015). In it, chronicles by Lino Novás Calvo, editorials by Sergio Carbó and Pepín Rivero, and articles by Onelio Jorge Cardoso and Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, among many others, were compiled. A total of 38 authors, a sample that is as representative as possible of Cuban journalism from the period 1902-1959. This work has precedents, in addition to the anthology by Soto Paz (1943), dating from the Republican era, two texts by the researcher Núñez-Machín, one dedicated to *Women in Cuban Journalism*²¹ (1989), and another to *Classics of Cuban Journalism*²² (1978). It is also necessary to include the *Dictionary of Cuban Literature*²³ (Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980), in charge of the Institute of Literature and Linguistics of the Academy

²⁰ Original title in Spanish: *Periodistas cubanos de la República (1902-1959)*.

²¹ Original title in Spanish: *Mujeres en el periodismo cubano*.

²² Original title in Spanish: *Clásicos del periodismo cubano*.

²³ Original title in Spanish: *Diccionario de la literatura cubana*.

of Sciences, which collects the files of various journalists. Finally, it is essential to mention the *Bio-Bibliographic Dictionary*²⁴ (2003) by Domingo Cuadriello. In the latter are several Spanish-origin journalists with outstanding careers in Cuba.

Also in 2015, two collective works titled *Themes on the History of the Press and Social Communication in Cuba*²⁵ came to light, one dedicated to the 19th century (Fernández & Ferrán, 2015) and another to the 20th century (Fernández & Salazar, 2015). The text about the 20th century begins with the US military occupation of the island (1898-1902), during which a significant change happened in the ways of producing and distributing communication in the former Spanish colony, as well as the introduction of new print publications. This first section dedicated space to talk about the magazines of the first republican decades and the days when movie theaters lit up the cities of Cuba, especially Havana. The book also focused on radio and television, media in which Cuba was a pioneer country. Another chapter dealt with the communist press and some media's role in opposition to Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. Finally, the book closes with two other sections, the first about the Cuban press model's changes from 1959. The last one, "The press in the Revolution," covered many contemporary topics, for example, the "literary journalism" made in Cuba during the eighties. One final topic was the media readjustment suffered in Cuba in the nineties, resulting from Special Period, a Castro's euphemism to name the crisis after collapsing the Soviet Union. The volume published some of the most important research conducted at the Faculty of Communication of the University of Havana. It is a sample of the research agenda on issues of press history in the years before the release of this project. However, a closer look quickly reveals many of the book's limitations. For example, some themes, stages, figures, and institutions were practically not mentioned. This book is a precursor to a selection of readings on the history of the press in Cuba, published in 1988 (Fernández & Casas).

²⁴ Original title in Spanish: *Diccionario bio-bibliográfico*.

²⁵ Original title in Spanish: *Temas de historia de la prensa y la comunicación social en Cuba*.

Print journalism of the Republican period, its lights and shadows, is practically not addressed in both books, especially that referring to the years after the Revolution of 1930. Beyond specific references to some print publications, especially magazines, little is known. It talks about the republican press system, press legislation, the most prominent media, figures (journalists and executives), and institutions related to journalism. It is symptomatic that both compilations (the one from 1988 and the one from 2015) dedicate a chapter to the communist press within the republican context, which was just one of the expression currents of a press system that, although it experienced important episodes of censorship, was characterized by its plurality. These texts, designed for teaching, obey a study program -and a vision of history- tending to legitimize the trajectory of the communists as a leading force in Cuban social history, to the detriment of other currents of diverse political sign that played transcendental roles in republican life. In other words, it is highly simplistic to reduce printed republican journalism to generalist magazines such as *Bohemia*, *Carteles*, and *Social*, and to newspapers such as *Noticias de Hoy*, without delving into the history of media such as *El Mundo*, *Diario de la Marina*, *El País*, among others.

The book by journalist and researcher Marrero, *Two Centuries of Journalism in Cuba: Moments, Facts and Faces*²⁶ (2018), is possibly the only recent attempt at a general history of journalism on the island. The first edition of this work dates from 1999, and in 2018 a new printing included essential additions. This investigation stands out for its capacity for synthesis since the author manages to summarize in just one volume a large part of the vicissitudes of Cuban journalism throughout two centuries of history, not only in the printed press but also on radio, television, and the Internet. The exhaustive systematization of publications and authors makes this book an unavoidable reference for any journalism researcher on the island. The text presents, however, two critical shortcomings. First, most of the research is built from secondary sources. Although it is an object

²⁶ Original title in Spanish: *Dos siglos de periodismo en Cuba: Momentos, hechos y rostros*.

of study that is practically immeasurable, resorting to specific moments in an exhaustive documentary review of periodical publications would have enriched the analysis. Second, but no less important, the author's political passion for the revolutionary process sometimes weighs down historical and communication evaluations (Arencibia Lorenzo, 2018). As a result, the text, profuse in critical readings during the colonial and republican periods, assumes a descriptive tone, at times hagiographic, of what it calls "revolutionary journalism."

The construction of the historical account depends, on the one hand, on who asks the questions, that is, who the historians are; and on the other, who answers them, in other words, what sources are used. As stated by Checa-Godoy (2008):

Nor are fashioning alien to the study of the history of communication. Sympathies or currents favor or promote certain studies and themes or elevate protagonists who are later forgotten. The opposite also occurs; forgotten characters (...) reappear with force and are revalued (p. 63).

In the specific case of the history of journalism, in recent years, there has been a tendency to "settle scores" with the official history promoted by the Cuban Revolution, which has its best exponent in the text by Marrero (2018). Previously, some prominent voices of journalism in the Republic had offered their particular interpretation of the events based on memoirs published in exile. A critical compendium of these works may be the subject of another article, but the memoirs of Rivero (2004) serve as an example.²⁷

In recent years there has been a tendency to make visible figures and events hitherto neglected, mainly from the Republican era, and also a

²⁷ Son of José Ignacio "Pepín" Rivero Alonso, he assumed the reins of the *Diario de la Marina* in the mid-40s, after the death of his father. After the triumph of the Revolution, José Ignacio and his family went into exile in the United States, while supporters of the new government took over the newspaper's headquarters on May 10, 1960. In his memoirs, José Ignacio Rivero recounts his vision as director of the *Diario de la Marina*, his confrontation with the government of Fidel Castro, and his experience of life in exile.

critical (re)reading of historical processes. This practice shows a “game of interpretations and revisions” (Checa-Godoy, 2008), something rare in historical communication studies, an area of study with very recent history. Revisionism, therefore, can be interpreted as a sign of early maturity. In addition, it shows the close relationship between politics and communication and how history, writing, and memory control are always disputed activities.

For example, the journalist Fernández-Cuenca, in his book *The Imposition of Silence*²⁸ (2016), analyzes the transformation of the Cuban communication system in the watershed 1959-1960. Fernández-Cuenca offers an interpretation of the historical fact in the antipodes of the “official version,” questioning practices such as the “*coletilla*”²⁹ or the “natural” disappearance of the Republic’s media organization chart, arguing that both one and the other obeyed an orchestrated strategy from the new revolutionary power.

The writer and journalist Valle (2020) does the same in his book *The Executioner’s Strategy*³⁰, a history of censorship in Cuban culture from 1959 to the present. The work is not limited to the field of artistic creation but instead addresses core issues of journalistic production and brings to light facts that have not been addressed so far, which is highly relevant for delving into the complexities of the field. An example is the impact that *perestroika* and, above all, Soviet *glasnost* had on the Cuban journalistic sector, which led to a whole debate among journalists and university students regarding a possible informative opening on the

²⁸ Original title in Spanish: *La imposición del silencio*.

²⁹ The so-called “*coletilla*” was a note that was published at the end of those pieces of information that offered a vision contrary to the Revolution. Emerged from the early Sixties, the note generally said the following: “This information is published at the will of this journalistic company in legitimate use of the freedom of the press existing in Cuba, but journalists and graphic workers (or announcers in the case of radio and television) of this work center also express in use of that right that its content does not conform to the truth or to the most elementary journalistic ethics” (Ortega, 1989).

³⁰ Original title in Spanish: *La estrategia del verdugo*.

island. Valle reconstructs two historical events that marked journalism in Cuba in 1987, the so-called “Sandra case”³¹ and the meeting between Fidel Castro and the journalism students of the University of Havana on October 26 of that year. Both events provided evidence that an informative opening similar to that in the Soviet Union would not exist in Cuba (Valle, 2020). Likewise, he makes a first approach to the history of the so-called independent media, which emerged in Cuba in the early nineties outside the radius of the government communication system.

Many areas deserve a critical reading of the recent past, which is connected not only with the present of insular journalism but also with possible future scenarios of the Cuban public sphere. I will mention some of them below, without any order of relevance, but that I consider would be important problematic subjects for the history of Cuban journalism of the last century. For example, 1) the analysis of press legislation and its practical application; 2) the study of the media as expressions of an ideological plurality during the Republic; 3) the tensions between propaganda and information before and after 1959; 4) the censorship practices and the speeches that justify it by the different governments that Cuba had in the 20th century; 5) the social responsibility of journalism and the social responsibility that journalists and directors have assumed throughout the last century; 6) the performance and functions of union organizations; 7) the influence of foreign press models and professional practices in the Cuban system, such as the Western liberal press and the Soviet model; 8) the exercise of Cuban journalism carried out outside the island, among others. We invite you to think about new problematic subjects that contribute to the complexity of the historical narrative.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the first decades of the 20th century and to date, some twenty works have been published in book format dedicated to the history of Cuban printed journalism. Diachronic readings on national print journalism diverge in terms of theoretical approaches, scope, agendas,

³¹ For more information about this story, read García Méndez (2020).

and methodological frameworks. Anthologies of journalists, memoirs, commemorative editions of relevant publications, general histories of journalism, compilations of union entities, and bibliographical compendia have been some of the main formats of expression of an emerging academic field, which overlaps with other areas of the humanities, such as the histories of art and literature. From volumes more attached to anecdotes, in its beginnings, it passes to texts that try to explain the multiple interdependencies between the practice of journalism and the political, economic, and cultural context of the very complex Cuban 20th century, including the watershed of 1959. The anecdotal accounts of journalistic events, the biographies of relevant figures, and the history of institutions give way to proposals that question the relationships between the sociopolitical context and the production of communication.

As regards the historiographical production after Fidel Castro came to power, the construction of two parallel stories about Cuban journalism stands out, one produced from the Island and the other from exile. However, the increasingly general tendency is the demolition of this virtual border between academic research inside and outside Cuba, which is appreciated not so much in joint publications but in participating in events that welcome researchers from different origins. In my opinion, this will contribute to constructing a more objective, less propagandistic account of our history of journalism in the last century, a story that goes to the facts and tries as much as possible to present different interpretations of the same phenomenon.

Throughout these pages, an attempt has been made to demonstrate that, apart from some specific referents, there is no such thing as what the researcher Moreno (1981) defines as a “historical synthesis work” in the specific case of our object of study, research that covers the republican period (1902-1959) and the more than six decades after Fidel Castro came to power (1959-). However, the intellectual production on the history of Cuban journalism of the 20th century, although incipient, has some background to assume an always postponed but necessary “general history.” In other words, a story that is as comprehensive as possible, based on previous studies and the review and comparison of primary sources, is in charge of defining points of continuity and

rupture, trends, and guiding principles of journalistic activity on the Caribbean island during the past century.

Regarding the disciplinary field, it is worth highlighting that the most recent texts on the history of journalism are mostly written by authors linked to journalism and social communication, both academics and media professionals. However, there are also sociologists and historians. That evidences a tendency to professionalize the field of historical communication studies. This process is also the result of the disappearance of the republican union organizations that, until the triumph of the Revolution, had the construction of the historical account among their functions. The Union of Cuban Journalists proposed the same since its foundation in 1963, although little by little, the weight of the investigative tradition will be assumed by academics, both inside and outside Cuba.

On the other hand, of those “bricks” that Schudson (1997) talks about when he refers to descriptions of relevant institutions or significant figures of journalism, this complex subject deserves a “story proper,” a story that asks for the relationships between journalistic production and the economic, political and social context (contexts, in the plural); a history that questions the production conditions, the actors, the communication practices, the press legislation and the different periods that mark the trajectory of the century. In short, a story that searches the past for some clues from which to glimpse the future of public communication on the Caribbean island.

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