

## Communication studies from Caribbean thought. Contributions of Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall on development and cultural identity

*Estudios de comunicación desde el pensamiento caribeño. Contribuciones de Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon y Stuart Hall sobre desarrollo e identidad cultural*

*Estudos de comunicação a partir do pensamento caribenho. Contributos de Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon e Stuart Hall sobre o desenvolvimento e a identidade cultural*

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The essay addresses Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon, and Stuart Hall's contribution to social communication studies from a Caribbean setting. The scenario that Beltrán found in Puerto Rico and the theoretical contributions of Fanon and Hall in their reflection on the colonization and decolonization processes were examined. Methodologically, we worked from a contextualization of the period in which Luis Ramiro Beltrán lived in Puerto Rico and Hall's reading of Fanon's work in his analysis and theorization of the Caribbean colonial/decolonial issue.

**KEYWORDS:** Luis Ramiro Beltran, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Caribbean, decolonialism, colonialism, cultural identity.

*El ensayo aborda la contribución de Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon y Stuart Hall al campo de los estudios de la comunicación social desde un escenario caribeño. Se examinó el escenario que encontró Beltrán en Puerto Rico y las aportaciones teóricas de Fanon y Hall en su reflexión sobre los procesos de colonización y descolonización. Metodológicamente, se trabajó a partir de una contextualización del periodo en que Luis Ramiro Beltrán vivió en Puerto Rico y la lectura que Hall hace de la obra de Fanon en su análisis y teorización de la cuestión colonial/decolonial caribeña.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Luis Ramiro Beltran, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Caribe, decolonialismo, colonialismo, identidad cultural.

*O ensaio aborda a contribuição de Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon e Stuart Hall aos estudos de comunicação social a partir de um cenário caribenho. Examinou-se o cenário que Beltrán encontrou em Porto Rico e as contribuições teóricas de Fanon e Hall em sua reflexão sobre os processos de colonização e descolonização. Metodologicamente, trabalhamos a partir de uma contextualização do período em que Luis Ramiro Beltrán viveu em Porto Rico e da leitura que Hall faz da obra de Fanon em sua análise e teorização sobre a questão colonial/decolonial caribenha.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Luis Ramiro Beltran, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Caribe, América Latina, decolonialismo, colonialismo, identidade cultural.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE CARIBBEAN VORTEX OF HEGEMONIC AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC TRADITIONS, FROM DEVELOPMENT TO CULTURAL IDENTITIES

This paper addresses Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Frantz Fanon, and Stuart Hall's contribution to the field of communication studies and neighboring disciplines from a Caribbean scenario. It focuses on two issues to pursue their theoretical impact on social and human sciences. The first line of query followed the hegemonic scenario of using communication and media for modernization and progress from the United States' neo-imperial tactics and methodologies encountered by Luis Ramiro Beltrán as he studied in Puerto Rico. Secondly, the essay focuses on the counter-hegemonic approach to media and communication from colonization and decolonization theories perspectives following Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall's theoretical contributions to the field. Regarding the first analysis, I worked from a historical contextualization of the period in which Luis Ramiro Beltrán lived in Puerto Rico and from his biographical contributions in various interviews where he described the first stages of his training in the field of communication in institutions promoting the United States hegemonic vision of development and modernization of the Latin American region to counter the spread of communism during the Cold War years of the 1950s. The counter-hegemonic concept of the neo-imperialist development policy of the Caribbean was one advanced during the 50s by Frantz Fanon's theories on colonialism which moved forward in communication studies through Stuart Hall's concepts of cultural identity and representation. Although we recognize the extensive bibliography and publications that analyze the work of these two Caribbean thinkers, I addressed the essay's second focus through Hall's reading of Fanon's work and by way of Hall's work on the Caribbean colonial/decolonial question to put forward a theory of cultural identity to understand the colonial experience.

Let us consider the Caribbean region a privileged place to study some of the knowledge configurations underlying communication and media studies in the Americas. For example, communication practices and techniques that emerged from development theories were used in

Caribbean modernization projects and were highly influential in the region. Modernization, progress, and development theories thought about to counter underdevelopment and offset the shadow of communism in the area during the maelstrom of Post-War and Cold War years entered media and communication programs. Besides recognizing the importance of the aforementioned development theories, a comprehensive history of communication studies in the Americas need to account for the colonial history of Caribbean plantation culture and western imperial forces clashes in the region as they provided the background for the theoretical work about coloniality and decoloniality. Metaphorically, this plantation culture that constitutes the great Caribbean region revolves around two vortices: voyages and hurricanes.

Although we realize that the theoretical incursion of Beltrán, Fanon, and Hall is the product of traveling contacts, their work adds to Latin American critical thought like a hurricane vortex. Hall (1996) has described the historical recurrence of one of those vortices, the voyage: “In modern times, since 1492, with the onset of the “Euro-imperial” adventure—in the Caribbean, since European colonization and the slave trade—since that time, in the “contact zones” of the world, culture has developed in a “diasporic” way” (p.496). Unsurprisingly, Beltrán, Fanon, and Hall were three intellectuals whose lives were marked by their diasporas across several continents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> After his stay in Puerto Rico in 1953 and a brief return to Bolivia, where he worked on the script for the documentary *Vuelve Sebastiana*, Luis Ramiro Beltran lived from 1955 in a working-intellectual diaspora in Costa Rica, the United States, Colombia, and France, with brief stays in several Latin American countries, finally returning to Bolivia in 1991. Frantz Fanon escaped from Martinique during the collaborationist period with the Vichy Nazi government in 1940. He joined de Gaulle’s forces, with whose allied forces he traveled through Morocco, Algeria, and France. After the War, he returned to Martinique for a short period and finally returned to France to study medicine and psychiatry. From 1953 onwards, he traveled to Algeria, Tunisia, and Italy and died in the United States in 1961. Stuart Hall described the diasporic experience of a Jamaican born living in England with a worth-reading personal narrative:

Communication programs, schools, and theories that emerged in the Americas within the framework of the Post-War and Cold War eras were not exempt from international politics and turmoil. With the emergence of decolonization policies, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States, the imperial forces with economic, political, and military interests in the Caribbean, had to rethink their strategies of domination, transforming the region dramatically.<sup>3</sup> Overall, by the end of the 1950s and the beginning

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I left in 1951 and I didn't know until 1957 that I wasn't going back; I never really intended to go back, though I didn't know it at the same time. In a way, I am able to write about it now because I'm at the end of a long journey. Gradually, I came to recognize I was a black West Indian, just like everybody else, I could relate to that, I could write from and out of that position. It has taken a very long time, really, to be able to write in that way, personally. Previously, I was only able to write about it analytically. In that sense, it has taken me fifty years to come home. It wasn't so much that I had anything to conceal. It was the space I couldn't occupy, a space I had to learn to occupy (Hall, 1996, p. 491).

- <sup>3</sup> Puerto Rico has kept and maintained its colonial status of belonging to, but not being part of, the United States, possession under the territorial provisions of Article 4 of the United States Constitution (*Downes v. Bidwell*, 1901) since 1898. In 1946, France's territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Saint Martin became French Departments with strong cultural and political assimilation to the metropolis. However, on July 3, 1950, President Truman signed into law the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950, enabling Puerto Rico to organize its government and draft its own constitution. Although not before having been extensively amended by the United States Congress, on July 25, 1952, the ratification of the Puerto Rican constitution was officially proclaimed. In 1956 the British Caribbean Federation Act declared the short-lived West Indies Federation (1958-1962), uniting the British colonial possessions in the Caribbean until 1962 when Trinidad, Tobago, and Jamaica became independent nations—the decade closed with the 1959 Cuban Revolution and its aftermath. The Netherlands did not start its decolonization process until the 1970s. It

of the 1960s, the Post-War – Cold War Caribbean scenario saw the emergence of politics coming from three global strategies: the United Nations' decolonization policies, the rise of Cuba's not aligned countries movement, and the United States' policies for the region's rapid development and modernization. The region's vortex is palpable in some of the important theoretical trends that since then have influenced communication and media studies in the Americas and in other parts of the world, that is a hegemonic view of communication and development<sup>4</sup>, and a counter-hegemonic perspective from a critical theory of culture and communication that deals with categories coming out of issues dealing with cultural identity such as race, postcolonial, coloniality and decoloniality.<sup>5</sup>

The theoretical work of Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Martinican Frantz Fanon, and Jamaican Stuart Hall should be contextualized within the timeline of this Caribbean hegemonic/counter-hegemonic policies background. Fanon, Beltrán, and Hall lived and experienced these Post War – Cold War transformations and incidents which

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moved exceptionally slowly until 2010 when Curacao, Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, and Bonaire became self-governing countries, as already were Surinam in 1976 and Curaçao in 1986.

- 4 Post War communication and development theories understood communication as an index and a promoter of modernization in the so-called third-world countries. Early ideas and models came from studies developed by Lerner (1958), Rogers (1962), and Schramm (1964). Schramm pays attention in his book to modernization projects and development carried out in Brazil, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Puerto Rico.
- 5 Critical and Cultural Theorists and concepts and models of postcoloniality, coloniality, and decoloniality see the colonial power underlying modernity's structures of power, knowledge, and subjectivity and, in general, throughout contemporary western thought. A heterogeneous critical and theoretical work includes the writings of Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall, along with the long tradition of postcolonial/decolonial authors like Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri C. Spivak, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Maria Lugones, Enrique Dussel, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

shaped the Caribbean daily life.<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon published in 1952 *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), joined in 1954 the Algerian National Liberation Front, and in 1961, the year of his death, published *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). Luis Ramiro Beltrán studied in Puerto Rico during 1953-1954 audiovisual communication and media techniques for the advancement of development and modernization in the region. Stuart Hall moved to study in England in 1951, beginning in 1957 his political activism by becoming a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and later joining E. P. Thomson and Raymond Williams to become the founding editor of *The New Left Review* in 1960. They translated these experiences into concepts, categories, and theories to study communication and modernization policies in the case of Luis Ramiro Beltrán, as well as postcolonial/coloniality and decoloniality political, symbolic, epistemological, and racial issues, as dealt with by Fanon and Hall. The theoretical work they developed illustrates the role played by the Caribbean Post-War Cold War state of affairs in developing approaches to tackle communication problems and concerns across the entire Latin American region. This backdrop of a Caribbean region embracing global strategic and geopolitical importance provides an undeniable intellectual and cultural viewpoint to study the field of communication studies in Latin America. From the perspective of communication research in Latin America, positioning Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán's work from the Caribbean vortex of the Cold War and the Post-War allows tracing the theories of communication for development and modernization and his subsequent critical position

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<sup>6</sup> Besides the rapid transformation of its colonial history, the Caribbean was not immune to the Cold War escalation of arms that began shortly after the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and the fear of communist advances in Asian and Eastern European countries. After the Korean War confrontations in 1953 and during the period of the significant arms intensification of the Cold War with highly mediated events such as the uprisings in East Berlin that same year, France embarkment into war in Indochina through the 1950s and in Algier after 1954; the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Anglo-French intervention of the Suez Canal, both in 1956.

from the crucible of the hegemonic project of the United States' neo-imperial interests. On the other hand, the Caribbean vortex itself leads us to recognize Jamaican Stuart Hall's importance in thinking about media and communication forms of representation from the theoretical scaffolding with which we analyze the construction of cultural identities from colonial/neo-colonial perspectives.

#### HEGEMONIC COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT: THE PUERTO RICO THAT LUIS RAMIRO BELTRÁN ENCOUNTERED

The role the United States Post-War colonial policies towards the Caribbean played in the advancement and progress of hegemonic communication and development theories during the late 1950s and early 1960s, as exemplified in its neo-colonial practices on the island of Puerto Rico, provides a good understanding of some of the key elements underlying the notions of progress and modernization during those years. Luis Ramiro Beltrán, one of the founding fathers of the Latin American communication field, discusses this communication and development approach to modernization in his articles, becoming critical of it as time passed (Beltrán, 1993, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Moreover, Beltrán reviewed the importance of his stay in Puerto Rico during the 1950s in several interviews, a fact that his biographers have pointed out (Aguirre Alvis, 2015; Torrico Villanueva, 2015; Urquieta Molleda, 2015).

Luis Ramiro Beltrán's recollection of his first encounter with Frank Shideler, the Bolivian representative of the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences that arranged his training in communication and media in Puerto Rico, embodied the hegemonic role played by this agency in training Latin Americans in communication and media strategies to advance regional modernization and development.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In a 2004 interview with Alfonso Gumucio Dragon for *The Communication Initiative Network*, Beltrán describes his early incursion into what later became known as communication and development.

One morning in August 1953, a *gringo* by the name of Frank Shideler came to my door. I had not met him before, but Mercedes de la Reza, a schoolmate of mine, had recommended I get to know him. He explained

The agency provided Latin Americans during the 1950s and early 1960s a communications training program for agricultural extension agents as part of a series of courses developed by the National Project

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to me that the Bolivian and the United States governments had signed a cooperation agreement called Inter-American Agricultural Service (*Servicio Agrícola Interamericano*, or SAI). Shideler was the director of information and extension and wanted me to work with him. I did thank him for his thoughtfulness but declined because I felt neither capable nor interested in agricultural issues. In addition, the salary he offered me was not so attractive. He listened carefully and then drew out his magic weapon: He offered me a two-month scholarship to study “audiovisual education” in Puerto Rico, including film production and graphic arts, if I accepted a trial of three months with flexible office hours. I did succumb to his persuasive offer, and Frank Shideler then became my first mentor and teacher for communication for development.

He did honor his word. By December 1953, after he evaluated my performance satisfactorily, he sent me to Puerto Rico to participate with 15 other Latin Americans in the First International Seminar on Audiovisual Education, sponsored by the predecessor of USAID, the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA). The course was followed by workshops at the Faculty of Agronomy of the University of Puerto Rico and at the Community Education Centre, which the U.S. government had established under the direction of Fred Wale.

This is how I got my first theoretical orientation on the educational uses of communication, which the United States had learned and developed from its experience in the Second World War. They would not mention “development.” Instead, they used “progress” and “modernization.” I enjoyed learning the essentials about producing films and using photography for rural education, as well as acquiring the skills to design and produce posters and educational brochures using silkscreen techniques. The study of communication for development was interesting, and I loved the beauty of the island, which was populated by good people embarking in the process of “modernizing” and moving from their neo-colonial status to that of a “free associated state” (Beltrán, 2004).

on Agricultural Communications at Michigan State University<sup>8</sup> and funded by the Kellogg Foundation. Luis Ramiro Beltrán's friendship with Frank Shideler, as illustrated in his lectures, essays, and interviews,<sup>9</sup> and the audiovisual training and education he obtained in Puerto Rico's Agricultural Experimental Extension Center and the Community Education Division are crucial to follow the development of the Latin American Theory of Communication and Development. Before arriving in Bolivia in the 1950s, Frank Shideler had been an assistant director at the Publications and Information Office of the Agricultural and Experimental Extension Department at Colorado Agricultural and Mechanical College (Richardson, 1948).

Shideler studied Industrial Journalism around 1937 at the Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science (The Kansas Industrialist, 1937). With an in-depth knowledge of universities created under the Land Grant Universities Act in the United States, Frank Shideler sees 1950s Puerto Rico, with its Cold War neo-colonial model of industrialization and development, as the ideal place for Latin Americans to venture into communication techniques for the progress and modernization of agriculture. In Puerto Rico, through the financial incentives to *Land Grant Universities*, the University of Puerto Rico was founded in 1903 and established in 1911 in the west coast of the island, the College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts in the city of Mayagüez, with an Agricultural Extension Service and a San Juan-based Experimental Station. As emphasized in his texts on the emergence of communication and development theories in Latin America, it was in these university institutions, which represented Truman's Point Four policies of progress and modernization, where Luis Ramiro Beltrán spent his Puerto Rican stay.

The Puerto Rico that Luis Ramiro Beltrán encountered during his visit was the neo-colonial scenario envisioned by United States

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<sup>8</sup> Michigan State University and the University of Puerto Rico are public land-grant universities. The land-grant institutions' programs are intended to strengthen research, extension, and teaching in the food and agricultural sciences under a United States law signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1862.

<sup>9</sup> Beltrán (1979) dedicated Shideler his "Agricultural Communication in Rural Development Seminar" held in Caracas.

president Harry S. Truman in his January 20, 1949, inaugural speech when he called for modernization for underdevelopment areas in the world (Colón Zayas, 2017; González de Bustamante, 2012; Rivero, 2015). In this speech, Truman laid out his Cold War neo-imperial development doctrine against the communist advance. This consisted of providing health, technical and agricultural assistance to improve the living standards of underdeveloped countries, showcasing individual welfare as one of the achievements of the capitalist system. In Point Four of his 1949 inaugural address, Truman stated, “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas” (Truman, 1949).<sup>10</sup> A year before his famous speech, Truman visited his Caribbean possessions and military bases in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Cuba in February 1948 to ascertain U.S. military power. Once the military scenario was secured, Truman and his government embarked in 1949 on a development policy showcasing Puerto Rico’s neo-colonial 1952 status as a “free associated state,”<sup>11</sup> which served as a stage for Luis Ramiro Beltrán to begin to think about the idea of communication for development.

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<sup>10</sup> Although the Truman Doctrine did not contemplate economic aid for Latin America, its military, economic, and ideological power marked the signing of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also known as the Treaty of Rio, on September 2, 1947, in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Bethel & Roxborough, 1988). The Pan-American Union began discussing the joint military defense issue in February 1945 in Mexico City. The agreements were recorded in the Act of Chapultepec, ratified with the signing of the Treaty of Rio. Finally, the new contracts were finalized in Bogota on April 8, 1948, with the signing of the Charter of the Organization of American States. With this agreement, the Pan-American Union, created in 1910, disappeared, and on April 30, 1948, the Organization of American States began to operate. All these meetings took place when the Truman administration was shaping a Latin American development policy to contain communist expansion (La Feber, 2002; Rabe, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> On July 3, 1950, President Truman signed into law the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950, which enabled Puerto Rico to organize its

By the time Luis Ramiro Beltrán arrived in Puerto Rico, the island already had a private media industry that promoted consumerism and consumer-oriented ideals influenced by the development and modernization politics of the time. Through audience commodification, this media industry popularized the idea that modernization tied to increase purchasing power meant getting rid of underdevelopment as envisioned by Harry Truman in his Point Four policy. Truman's plan supported the development of government agencies and programs to carry out psychological warfare against communism, a strategy that was consolidated during the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. The media industry in Puerto Rico supported strategies to eradicate communism in various ways –sometimes contradictory– and made Cold War narratives circulate and become part of the population's daily life.

Beltrán (2006b) described the importance of President Truman's Point Four project in his account of half a century of development and communication theories in Latin America:

At the end of the 1940s, the Government of the United States of America became aware that the numerous “underdeveloped” countries that had been members of the alliance against the countries that constituted the Nazi-fascist axis that unleashed the war deserved similar support to the one provided by them. President Harry Truman announced in 1949, in the fourth point of a fourteen points speech, the creation of an international assistance program, technical and financial, for national development that would come to be known as the “Fourth Point.” And the agency now known as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established to implement it.

The program provided governments, including, of course, Latin Americans, support for the expansion and improvement of road infrastructure, housing, electricity, potable water, and sewerage. On the other hand, it established cooperative agricultural, health, and education services with said governments from the beginning of the 1950s. Understanding that

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government and draft its own constitution. The United States Congress amended and ratified the island's constitution, officially proclaimed on July 25, 1952.

pro-development action in these fields required bringing about behavioral changes in both officials and beneficiaries through educational persuasion, it included for the respective sector of each of these social services a unit dedicated to providing information. And this measure would come to constitute one of the major roots of what several years later would come to be known as “communication for development” (Beltrán, 2006b, p. 56).

Truman sponsored his technical assistance venture in a complex Caribbean scenario. He used Puerto Rico’s neo-colonial prototype of a non-incorporated territory as a model of progress and modernization for countries in the Latin American region to follow to emerge from underdevelopment. In his opening speech at the IV Round Table on Communication and Development organized on February 1993 by the Institute for Latin America (IPAL) in Lima, Beltrán emphasized that: “Since 1953, the first international training center for audiovisual education was the Division for Community Education (DIVEDCO) in Puerto Rico, which received some support from the government of the United States of America” (Beltrán, 1993),<sup>12</sup> acknowledging Puerto Rican institutions’ role in the advancement and progress for what became known as the Latin American School of Communication and Development.<sup>13</sup> To this fact, Aguirre Alvis (2015) has referred in his essay on the occasion of Luis Ramiro Beltrán’s death in 2015:

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<sup>12</sup> DIVEDCO brought together a group of technicians, directors, artists, and writers while laying the foundations for developing a national cinema, as the Churubusco Azteca studios had done in Mexico. DIVEDCO hired the services of writers such as Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, René Marqués, and Pedro Juan Soto to write the scripts and trained film directors such as Amílcar Tirado, Luis Maysonet, Ángel F. Rivera, and Marcos Betancourt, among others. DIVEDCO forged a Puerto Rican national discourse linked to Luis Muñoz Marín and the Popular Democratic Party’s modernization project, although within the parameters promoted and allowed by United States government agencies (Colón Zayas, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> The emphasis given by Beltrán to his role as scriptwriter involved in the storyline and narration of Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Ruiz’s 1953

[...] It is essential to refer to his [Luis Ramiro Beltrán] great leap into the theoretical world in the communication field initiated by the providential fact of becoming in contact in September 1954<sup>14</sup> with Frank Shideler, Chief of Information of the Inter-American Agricultural Service (SAI) in La Paz. He sought him out to be part of a team of editors in agricultural extension. As a hook to get him to take the job, he offered him to attend a course on audiovisual information in Puerto Rico.

Attuned with Truman's Point Four policies of development and modernization, hegemonic Mass Communication Research theories and categories during the 1950s and early 60s in the United States provided through its linear, sender-receiver information models the scientific basis for modernization's exponential growth and direct progression as can be seen in the work of those intellectuals whose work will be part of Beltrán's formation at the University of Michigan, where he went after his Puerto Rican stay. However, by the early 1970s, he broke away from the communication for development and modernization paradigm proposing a community-based participatory

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documentary *Vuelve Sebastiana* upon returning from Puerto Rico is worth mentioning. Beltrán must have come across DIVEDCO'S scriptwriters and filmmakers, such as Jack Delano, Benjamin Doniger, and Amílcar Tirado. Jack Delano's *La caña* (1947), *La voz del pueblo* (1948), *Los peloteros* (1951), Benjamin Doniger's *Pedacito de Tierra* (1953), and Amílcar Tirado's *El Puente* (1954) were probably some of the projects that Beltrán came across while in Puerto Rico. Ruiz-Beltrán's *Vuelve Sebastiana* and Tirado's *El Puente* were awarded prizes in Italy. The majority of the films produced by DIVEDCO during those years questioned development and modernization hegemonic practices while simultaneously serving as vehicles promoting a Puerto Rican national identity in contrast to the United States.

<sup>14</sup> In some interviews, Luis Ramiro Beltrán dates this meeting in August 1953, while in others, September 1954. His role as a scriptwriter for the 1953 documentary *Vuelve Sebastiana* upon returning from Puerto Rico makes 1953 a more accurate year of the event taking place.

mode for development. He started to think in terms of counter-hegemonic categories such as cultural imperialism and Latin American communicative dependency (Barranquero, 2014).

CARIBBEAN VORTICES OF A LATIN AMERICAN COUNTER-  
HEGEMONIC CRITICAL THOUGHT AND ANALYSIS OF CULTURE:  
CARIBBEANESS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

If the Caribbean spark of communication for development was linked to the vicissitudes of the Cold War, Truman's 1949 inaugural speech, and his neo-imperial Fourth Point policies, the Caribbean foundations of the Latin American tradition of critical thinking and communication and culture are much more complex and go beyond this essay's scope. Thanks to its condition as a "meta-archipelago that lacks limits and a center, and that overflows its sea" (Benítez Rojo, 1989, p. iv), the Caribbean constitutes, since the times and events of the Cold War, one of the sources for the development of dependency theory, theories and philosophies of liberation, pedagogies of the oppressed, the theology of liberation and current colonial, postcolonial and decolonial theories, as demonstrated by the importance and global influence of the work of two of the most important Caribbean theorists and philosophers Frantz Fanon<sup>15</sup> and Stuart Hall.

A historiographical and bibliographical incursion into the intellectual movements of the greater Caribbean region serves to portray the trajectory in the zone of a tradition of critical thought and debates on culture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century well into the 21<sup>st</sup> (Bosch Carcuero & Lora, 2016; Hernández Martínez, 2015; Santory Jorge & Quintero Rivera, 2019; Valdés García, 2017; Valdés León & Voltaire, 2018). The desire to modernize the Caribbean ports of Caracas, Havana, Santo Domingo, and San Juan is reflected in the work of Andrés Bello, José Martí, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Eugenio María de Hostos, among many other nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century thinkers portraying

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<sup>15</sup> Gordon et al. (2013) examine Fanon's relationship to Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, while Lackey (2007) understands Fanon's stand on religion as geared towards human liberation.

Latin American modernity and liberal modernization (Ramos, 1989; Ortega, 2014).

On the other hand, since World War II and the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Caribbean has had a continuous development of various trends of critical thinking and significant cultural concerns in various intellectual, political, and social spheres, as seen in the works and ideas of Fernando Ortiz and Roberto Fernández Retamar in Cuba, Édouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon in Martinique, René Depestre in Haiti, C. L. R. James and Eric William in Trinidad-Tobago, José Luis González and Manuel Maldonado Denis in Puerto Rico, Derek Alton Walcott in Saint Lucia, Stuart Hall in Jamaica, Juan Bosh and Pedro Mir in the Dominican Republic, among many others. This group of Caribbean thinkers, from which I privilege Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall in this essay for their theoretical contribution to the most recent Latin American communication thought, has bequeathed to Latin America many conceptual tools to approach the region's new historical, political, and social subjects region that emerged from the colonial problem and decolonization, the articulation between ethnicity and class as a political link, the problematization of the ideas of cultural identity, diasporas, and transculturation, the differences between national consciousness and nationalism, the colonial trauma and the postcolonial configurations. These debates and currents of Caribbean thought have helped to shape, along with others, the Latin American philosophical and theoretical work of Leopoldo Zea, Bolívar Echevarría, Paulo Freire, Ángel Rama, Darcy Ribeiro, Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Galeano, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and Aníbal Quijano, to mention a few of the many Latin American thinkers. They have influenced communication studies and research through the works of Aníbal Ford, Jesús Martín Barbero, Muniz Sodré, Renato Ortiz, Beatriz Sarlo, Néstor García Canclini, and Rossana Reguillo, among others.

In 1978, Ángel Rama described in his essay "The risky navigation of the exiled writer" Latin American intellectuals' emigration process during the 1960s and 70s. Instead of defining exile and emigration as a negative displacement, he described the continental flow of Latin American intellectual diasporas as beneficial for the entire region. Communication between the intellectual elites of different

areas intensified, knowledge of those areas' cultural singularities was expanded, and a richer structural vision began to operate through joint ideas and plans (Rama, 1978). For Rama, José Martí was:

[...] an early paradigmatic example of the link between the intellectual and the immigrant environment for fulfilling a political task, aiding both the survival in foreign lands of a deeply felt and loved national culture and the experience of a new life system, with degrees of greater democratization and greater social expectations (p. 97).

Following Rama's notion of intellectual diasporas, one can correctly argue that both Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall continued José Martí's path.<sup>16</sup> In "Negotiating Caribbean Identities", Hall (1995) describes his departure from Jamaica in 1951 to study in England as an escape from "a society that was profoundly culturally graded" (p. 7). The experience of that journey, his condition as a Caribbean immigrant in London, "twice diasporized" (Hall, 1995, p. 6), allowed him to understand, expose, and theorize about the place where he grew up as one where:

[...] cultural relations did not remain fixed, and the relative cultures were quickly open to integration, assimilation and cross-influence. They were rarely self-contained. They became subject at once to complex processes of assimilation, translation, adaptation, resistance, reselection and so on. That is to say, they became in a deep sense diasporic societies. For wherever one finds diasporas, one always finds precisely those complicated processes of negotiation and transculturation which characterize Caribbean culture (p. 7).

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<sup>16</sup> An essential figure in the Latin American Modernist literary movement, Rama singles out Cuban José Martí's personal and political diaspora during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, others followed a similar diasporic trend of traveling during the 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout the Americas, Europe, and Africa. For example, among many others, one can add to this list Puerto Ricans Eugenio María de Hostos and Ramón Emeterio Betances, Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña, St. Thomian Edward Wilmot Blyden, Trinidadians Mohammedu Sisei and John Jacob Thomas, and Jamaicans John Brown Russwurm and Francis Williams in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

If, as Rama (1978) says, Latin American intellectual diasporas intensified communication between scholars from different areas, broadening knowledge about their cultural singularities, Hall's London academic environment where he learned and read the work of thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire provided him a richer structural vision for Caribbean representation. In theorizing Caribbean identities and representations, Stuart Hall (1995) finds Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as the most powerful statement to understand the internal traumas of Caribbean identity as a consequence of colonization and slavery. Fanon's potent and influential voice has been described as that of "the purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth". "He [Fanon] may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change: from the area of ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality" (Bhabha, 1994, p.40). Hall elaborates the idea that to position oneself within a Caribbean cultural identity implies "not just the external processes and pressures of exploitation, but the way that internally one comes to collude with an objectification of oneself which is a profound misrecognition of one's own identity." (Hall, 1995, p. 8). Against that background, Hall (1995) adds that the attempts to decolonize, "the attempts to regenerate and ground the political and social life of the society, not in an absent picture or image which could never be fulfilled, not in the nostalgia for something outside the society, but in the complicated realities and negotiations of that society itself, is a question which had to entail the redefinition of identity" (pp. 8-9).

The fruitful dialogue that Hall engages with Fanon serves to elaborate the initial position that defines 'cultural identity' in culture as "a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, 1989, p. 69). For Hall:

The question which Fanon's observation poses is, what is the nature of this 'profound research' which drives the new forms of visual and cinematic representation? Is it only a matter of unearthing that which the colonial

experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed? Or is a quite different practice entailed –not the rediscovery but the production of identity? Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past? ( p. 69).

Through Fanon, Halls advances the some of the first post-colonial/ decolonial theories of Caribbean identities and representations based on acts of imaginative rediscovery of an essential identity based on hidden histories. Despite recognizing their critical role in the emergence of important social movements grounded on cultural identity as a collective “one true self,” imposing an imaginary coherence to a dispersed fragmentation, the history of all enforced diasporas, and serving as resources of resistance and identity (Hall, 1989, pp. 69-70), Fanon’s theories provided Hall to posit a second view of cultural identity that allowed to “understand the traumatic character of ‘the colonial experience’” (Hall, 1989, p. 70).

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 1989, p. 70).

Stuart Hall is not the only one who recognizes the relevance of Frantz Fanon’s work to thinking about many pressing categories of those in the social sciences, humanities, communication, aesthetics, etc., in Latin America and worldwide. Works such as “Frantz Fanon in the century: On certain persistence in Latin American thought” (2009) and “Decolonial notes on the writing of Frantz Fanon” (2011), both by Alejandro de Oto, Catalina León Pesántez (2008) *The*

*color of Reason and of Critical Thinking in the Americas*, and “The Continuing Relevance of Frantz Fanon in the Postmodern Era of Globalization” by Ntongela Masilela (2017) show the validity of the ideas for global critical thinking.

Stuart Hall’s legacy in Latin American has been the subject of recent works such as Daniel Mato’s (2016) “Stuart Hall from/in Latin America”, *Stuart Hall from the South: Legacies and Appropriations* coordinated by Eduardo Restrepo (2014), and the compilation and translation into Spanish of Hall’s most important works edited by Restrepo et al. (2010). It is worth remembering the words of Hall (2005) to understand the role that the Caribbean had in his work: “I’ve never written about the Caribbean, though much of what I’ve done has been inflected by the Caribbean”.

Fanon’s work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), as well as all of Stuart Hall’s extensive work, problematizes our contemporaneity as they provide many explanations to think and investigate not only as Hall would call, “the underground sources of identity and cultural creativity” of our times, but also the pressing issues of the trauma of living in neoliberalism. There is no doubt about the need to resort to the diasporic thought of Fanon and Hall to think and investigate Latin America and other academic and intellectual latitudes, be it from communication, critical thinking, and from analysis of culture, topics such as alterity, citizenship, colonialism and decoloniality, transculturation, hybridity, discrimination and social exclusion, class and identity, stereotypes and essentialisms, ethnicity and identity, migrations and diasporas, borders, multiculturalism, territories, violence, culture and identity, etc.

## THINK CARIBBEAN: CONCLUSION

Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Franz Fanon, and Stuart Hall’s theoretical trajectories make us think that the field of communication and media studies have a Caribbeaness as the result of the continuous diaspora of intellectuals, the exchange of ideas and cultural productions, and as the site of uninterrupted imperial policies based on colonial and neo-colonial strategies and social and economic experiments of

progress and modernization. Beltrán, Fanon, and Hall's theories and critical thinking lead us to agree with Han when he speaks of theory in our contemporary world.

Theory offers more than a model of a hypothesis to be proven or disproven by means of experimentation. Strong theories [...] are not models that could be replaced by data analysis. They are founded on thinking in the emphatic sense. Theory represents an essential decision that causes the world to appear wholly different –in a wholly different light. Theory is a primary, primordial decision, which determines what counts and what does not– what is or should be, and what does not matter. As highly selective narration, it cuts a clearing of differentiation through untrodden terrain (Han, 2022, p. 86).

Following Han, we can describe Beltrán, Fanon, and Hall as providers of strong theories founded on thinking. In that sense, they gave the tools for deconstructing the hegemonic scenario of the use of communication and media for modernization and progress from the United States' neo-imperial tactics and methodologies, analyzed by Luis Ramiro Beltrán's critical thinking and viewpoints after his stay in Puerto Rico. Secondly, they are theories that postulate the counter-hegemonic approach to media and communication from colonization and decolonization, cultural identity, theories and perspectives, as seen in Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall's theoretical contributions to the field. Their legacy undoubtedly makes us agree that bringing forth the history of communication and mass media research in the Americas is also to *Think Caribbean*.

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## PROFILE

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