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Cultural Studies in Latin America: “Packaged Cuba”

Martín Oller Alonso and José Raúl Concepción Llanes

Abstract

The new information and communication technologies (ICT) have both changed the ways of practicing journalism and the lifestyles of the global society. In this context, media have been considered important diffusion instruments of the values and dominant ideology. In turn, evidence of the dominance of the “cultural industry” of the United States in Latin America increased. In Cuba, with the triumph of the Revolution in January 1959, the media landscape changed against western ideological hegemony, and with the help of media, the ICAIC and the ICRT, the new government defended the revolutionary ideas through control of the cultural industry. The new political strategies covered all systems in Cuba, adopting a speech aimed at maintaining revolutionary ideas and, subsequently, socialist ideals. Nowadays, the communicational, journalistic, technological and digital scenario in Cuba depends, more than ever before in the revolutionary stage, on the current political landscape “post-Castro” due to the ratification of Miguel Díaz-Canel as its new president and the period of constitutional renewal between August 13 and November 15, 2018. A new context, where the alternative consumption of cultural, informative and entertainment products is a visible phenomenon in Cuban society, and the *Paquete Semanal* (weekly package) is the best exponent, is the greatest challenge that the revolutionary ideology in Cuba has faced.

Keywords: Latin America, cultural studies, Cuba, *Paquete Semanal*, Cuban alternative media, ICT

1. Introduction

Since the end of the twentieth century, the new information and communication technology (ICT) have changed the ways of practicing journalism and the lifestyles of global society. Despite the digital divide, the underdeveloped and developing countries have also been transformed by ICT and the evolution of it. In the age of the internet and micro-screens, a whole generation of new communication professionals and young people marked by the use of these technologies has grown up. Specifically, the ways of consuming cultural products and the media have undergone a major renovation following the substantial rise in the use of personal computers, Internet and smartphones. At the start of the new millennium, Castells [1] called attention to the structural changes caused by ICT and the emergence of a new global society based on the establishment of networks: “The convergence of social evolution and technology has created a new base for carrying out activities throughout the social structure. This material base, composed of networks, marks the dominant social processes” (p. 3).

Even today, and supported by ICT and their high inclusion power, in Latin America, an “imperialist culture” is maintained, defined by Petras ([2], p. 145) as “the systematic penetration of the rules of the dominant classes of the West” and based on “the significant construction of social acts and the historical particularity of human culture” ([3], p. 22). McLuhan suggests the complete ecological unity that exists in the interaction between the physics of the media and the metaphysics of culture [4].

In Cuba, not only journalists, but all of Cuban society, are inserted into a national context where there are major technological limitations, caused by the economic problems of the nation and, to a large extent, due to the isolation caused by the US embargo, tightened at the beginning of 2019 by US policies towards Cuba through the activation of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act by the Trump administration.

As a result of the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Cuba lost its main market and underwent a deep economic crisis, which caused irreparable damage to the functioning of much of the media and all social spheres. During this period of time, called the “Special Period”, old evils overcome by the 1959 Revolution returned to life on the Island: poverty, loss of moral values and development of the black market, among other adversities. These events marked “the beginning of a process that would shake the relative social homogeneity of life opportunities achieved” [5]. In this environment, the new technologies began to determine journalistic practice, the relationship between journalists and the Government, and the cultural and media consumption—as well as the “informal” consumption of contents.

In these circumstances, the “black market” became a consolidated space where distributors of audiovisual content in Cuba bypassed the media and the official cultural industry. In this way, the “banks”¹ started to rent out movies in VHS format and the commercialization of the so-called “cables”, which connected different houses to provide access to the same satellite antenna, then began the process of replacing VHS with DVDs as audiovisual support and “burners/sellers” of discs appeared. With this background, the so-called *Paquete Semanal* (Weekly Package) appeared almost a decade ago with the use of external storage disks as a means of transfer of information/news.

As part of this alternative consumption of cultural, informative and entertainment products, the *Paquete Semanal* is a product sold on USB storage devices and made primarily from illicit Internet downloads in state centers benefiting from broadband and the “capture” of videos using satellite television antennas. Within this black market of content distribution, parallel to the official media and government institutions, the *Paquete Semanal* has been sustained from its beginnings in a status of “pseudo-legality” or “a-legality”.² A situation that has allowed its composition, distribution and consumption was carried out in an alternative way to the media and governmental and cultural institutions of the Cuban state.

2. Cultural studies in Latin America

Since the British Cultural studies placed context as a fundamental determinant to take into account in communication studies, it has become a fundamental

¹ Stores specialized in the sale of audiovisual and digital material.

² Lindahl [6] in his book “Fault Lines of Globalization: Legal Order and the Politics of A-Legality” speaks about “a-legality” develops in five stages. In our proposal of “a-legality” we refer to the third stage, that describes how and why the strong dimension of a-legality reveals legal boundaries as normative fault lines

element in the investigations that seek to establish the correlations between the different structural systems of a country. The Latin American perspective of cultural studies emphasizes the relationship between communication and culture because at the beginning of its implementation in the region, according to Mattelart and Neuveu [7], Latin America was still suffering the years of authoritarian regimes, or coming out of them to enter into the years of democratic transitions, between the failure of the progressive forces, not to mention the bloodshed that for the academic community lead to the tragic disappearance and exile of numerous researchers. As a consequence, Latin American thinkers were challenged to amalgamate their theories from the logic of the intersections: history had to be understood at the same time as economy, the dependence of the time and the collaboration of local elites with the dominators; it was necessary to understand the popular and residual at its intersection with the processes of codification of the dominant culture [8]. In this way, the paradigm of active reception was transcended, in order to experiment with the educational, commercial, informative and, above all, political content of the mass media, not because of the content itself, but because of the influence it has on the audience and the use that the sources of power—both democratic and factual—can make of them.

From the 1980s, the new political winds of the continent led to major breakdowns and theoretical shifts, shaping the main contributions in the field of cultural studies in the region. Previously, the Cuban Revolution had triumphed in 1959, decades later progressive governments emerged in several Latin American countries. In this context, the media are considered as a real part of the processes of social reproduction and a critical activity begins to confront the theoretical and methodological heritage that generated profound epistemological changes and gave life to a new conception of communication in which the role of government was fundamental. The theory of dependence appears, to bring to coalition issues such as the cultural penetration of imperialism in the continent, the cultural dominance that the American way of life entailed, and the subordination and domination of native cultures, among others. This movement advocated by a New World Order of Information and Communication, in which underdeveloped countries should establish national communication policies to protect cultural heritage.

The media were considered important diffusion instruments, by some, of the values and the dominant ideology; by others, of the modernization necessary to get out of underdevelopment [9]. In turn, evidence of the dominance of the “cultural industry” of the United States in Latin America accumulated. Despite any criticism for the Theory of Dependency, Gámez [9] points out how community radios, alternative newspapers and, in general, betting on popular communication appear as a means of stimulating the participation of the most exploited sectors. By understanding the cultural nature of mass communication, and legitimating it as a space for the production of meanings, the transmissive models are overcome and the active character of the individual is emphasized, whose consumption practices and meaning production will be conditioned by the sociohistorical environment in which it develops:

Latin America is not only a place of a radical critique of modernization theories applied to the dissemination of innovations in relation to peasants in the context of timid agrarian reforms, family planning policy or distance learning. It is a region that also produces “initiatives that break with the vertical mode of transmission of the ‘ideals’ of development”. ([10], p. 75)

In this new scenario, and after the fall of the utopias that signified the collapse of the socialist experiences, disbelief is generated in the rigid/absolute schemas/

conceptions. For this reason, the previous paradigms were questioned and the communication sciences, which had not managed to solve their methodological and epistemological challenges, began to reverse what they had held to be true. In this context, Jesús Martín-Barbero places “mediation” as one of the central and most systematic analytical categories within his studies. The theoretical proposal of this author opened the way to think about communication from two essential displacements: from media to mediations and from communication to culture.

Martín-Barbero [11] offers a broad conception of communication, which goes far beyond what concerns the media itself to the proposal that mediation becomes an essential category for analysis. This entails studying how culture is negotiated and how it is subject to transactions in a series of contexts, including cinema, popular press, television, radio, circus, musical performances and many others. Martín-Barbero suggests that the syncretic nature of popular practices is of great importance in Latin America. Such practices contribute both to preserve cultural identities and to adapt them to modern demands. Essentially, according to Schlesinger and Morris ([12], p. 8), “interest in mediations is a discourse on the formation of identities”.

Some thinkers consider that the contribution of Martín-Barbero [11, 13–15] and García Canclini [16–21] has been fundamental in detecting the importance of the topic of “cultural consumption” at a time when the dominant preoccupation in the studies on culture and communication in Latin America was still the analysis of the messages in the mass media as a support of the “ideology of domination”.

3. Media speech in the digital context of the Revolutionary Cuba of the twenty-first century

According to Olivera and Salas [22], the psychological and sociological perspectives of the revolutionary communicative maneuvers self-endorsed through “the mimetic contamination of the Cuban Social Sciences with the Marxist-Leninist theoretical currents arrived from the socialist field” (p. 5). The area of communication was doubly affected, because in the USSR this scientific field was not as developed as other fields. As a consequence of the importation of foreign models, these authors claim that “the autochthonous theoretical development, the critical examination of the different objects of study and the theoretical updating of the researchers was limited, and the existence of a left functionalism was generated” (p. 6); to the point where all scientific fields suffered from too strong a dependence on state guidelines: “The research practices were very permeated by the ideology assumed from the political power and less influenced by an epistemological vision” (p. 7). An affirmation that agrees with the criterion of Linares and Rivero ([23], p. 7): “The state played the role of regulator par excellence in the construction of spaces of equality in all the fundamental areas of life, including recreational—cultural”.

This is a logic that, to this day in Cuba, continues to develop from more complex tactics and the increase of the new technological devices and the new discursive, relational and structural mediations between journalists, citizens and the government. For Castells [24], we live in a time that is expressed in a new information and communication system of global reach, of convergence of means and languages, and interactive, generated through the expansion of the internet and the new technologies of the information and communication, differentiated from the traditional media in regards to their reticular structure and digitalization. A context in which Canclini [20] especially emphasizes cyberspace as a sphere in which all types of language coexist and which has caused a readjustment in the ways of understanding communication and interpreting the sociocultural practices of the subjects: “This

contamination between audience behaviors is even more versatile on the Internet, where the boundaries between eras and educational levels blur" (p. 30).

At this point, it is important to clarify that, despite there being cultural policies directed from the state to expand the links between Cuban population, education, culture and revolutionary ideology, "there is no direct and unilateral relationship between institutional efforts and behavior of the subjects" ([20], p. 63). Cuba, like every country with scarce financial resources, is late to most of the technological advances. Hence, the well-known "digital gap", which separates the technological context of the developed world from territories with little monetary capital, has widened in the Island due to the policy of isolation of the revolutionary government itself and the economic embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States. Specifically, there is an external digital gap when compared with other nations, and an internal one due to differences in access between citizens themselves.

However, the relative absence of internet and other ICTs in Cuba does not have a high impact due to the high standard training of citizens in mathematical knowledge and reading and writing. A very important aspect to take into account is that the digital gap should not be measured only in terms of availability of technological resources, but also human resources and, in this sense, the Cuban population does not deviate far from the First World. According to Pedro Urrea (2015, personal interview), it is not enough to own the equipment, it must also be known how to make the most of it. The most important issue does not lie in the possession of devices, because this is not as serious as the ignorance of languages. In addition, the first could be solved if the political strategy for the distribution of ICTs in Cuba were changed. If there were a national policy that promoted social, community, family and individual access to new technologies, with a less instrumental and political vision, they could be used in a more active and innovative way. Therefore, while it is relevant to highlight Cuba's achievements in digital literacy, it is also important to recognize that, as long as ICTs are not overcrowded, the potential skill of the population will not be fully manifested.

4. Origin and evolution of alternative cultural platforms

One of the main limitations of official media was and is the excessive control exerted by the state's management over it. Gustavo Arcos (2015, personal interview) highlight that this could provoke a certain priority for the transmission of materials with a high political content during audience's preferred periods of relaxation: "Media are excessively controlled by the Ideological Department [of the Communist Party of Cuba], which governs, determines and conditions contents. It has as a consequence that many topics provided by official media do not take into account the needs of the public. That's when alternative businesses thank those responsible for programming, as the public come to them to satisfy their moments of leisure and relaxation".

The "corseted" programming, technical deficiencies, and the lack of adaptation to the needs and tastes of the audience, favored the proliferation of "alternative" platforms. Although "there was a time when the importation of VHS players was prohibited, with a very simple idea based on restricting the entry of this equipment into the country" (Pedro Urrea, 2015, personal interview).

However, as Pedro Urrea continues affirming, "this was a failed attempt to control the use of media linked to the mass consumption of information [...]. Parts of the new technologies were massified through the alternative market, because there was no state means of acquiring them. This was due to the absence of a policy for the use of ICTs at the population level".

From the 1990s, with the popularization of Betamax lecto-recording equipment and Video Home System (VHS), the so called “film libraries” (*bancos de películas*) became frequent, where customers went to rent films and some even arranged a system of home delivery. The behavior of this type of consumption was changing depending on the evolution of the technology used to distribute the materials. Even Barrera [25] concludes in his anthropological research, *The revolt of the viewer: an exploratory study on alternative media consumption*, that among the “most obvious” motivations for this type of consumption has been the “technological development”.

Barrera [25] points out that

Cable Television and the Antenna occupied a central place in consumption and were preferred over National Television. In the case of technological supports (DVD/PC/HDD Player), the consumption is greater with respect to the National Television in people without access to the cable or the antenna, when they have audiovisual offers to consume. However, these supports are used to a lesser extent by those with access to the cable or antenna. (p. 76)

In the first decade of this century, large external storage disks with USB connection reached the IT market. This technology still coexists with the DVD in the Cuban market of informal distribution, however, large hard drives will end up replacing DVDs due to their greater capacity for storing information. The displacement of one technology by another is a gradual and inexorable process, therefore, although in the alternative distribution both forms still coexist, it is a question of time until the most advanced relegate those with less capacity.

4.1 Background to the *Paquete Semanal*

The alternative consumption of cultural, informative and entertainment products is a phenomenon rooted in Cuban society almost 20 years before the existence of the *Paquete Semanal*. However, Vanessa Márquez, who was in charge of a study conducted by the Social Research Center (CIS) on the *Paquete Semanal*, explains that currently, the most popular distribution support is this one.

“The *Paquete Semanal* has been relegating to the sale of DVDs due to its greater storage capacity, although both audio-visual materials are very similar and contain the same content as 6 or 7 years ago—movies, shows, series, and telenovelas”. Similarly, it has largely replaced antennas or cables. As Rodríguez [26], a journalist from Camagüey, in an article written for *BBC Mundo* about informal audiovisual consumption in Cuba, clarifies, nowadays antennas or cables do not constitute the main offer due to the cost and irregularity of access, but because the population is more attracted to the *Paquete Semanal*, which is simpler and cheaper to obtain.

Although the scope of the *Paquete Semanal*, in terms of audience size, does not threaten the supremacy of television as a means of communication par excellence in the Cuban context, the *Paquete Semanal* does constitute a challenge for the main institutions in charge of production and management of all media and audiovisual content on the Island. Therefore, state entities must update their content taking into account the needs of the public and not so much the ideological guidelines imposed by the socialist political system.

A pertinent example of the complexity of the production and distribution system of cultural material and leisure in Cuba was the controversy sparked by the film *Wedding dress* by the Cuban director Marilyn Solaya in 2014, which, after its premiere at the XXXV Festival of New Latin American Cinema, appeared on *YouTube* and in the *Paquete Semanal*, provoking a deep debate among Cuban intellectuals about piracy and copyright. The complexity of this conflict of interests

led Cuban film personalities such as Juan Carlos Cremata, Arturo Sotto, Norge Espinoza, Marina Ochoa, Gustavo Arcos and Juan Antonio García Borrero to speak out on the matter.

The *Paquete Semanal* is defined by journalists as an audiovisual conglomerate, while applications and writings are seen as useful complements of the main material that is composed of series, films, soap operas, drama, talent shows, reality shows, video clips, animations, documentaries, sports and news videos. The journalist Fernando Ravsberg [27], in his article, *The Cuban Youtube*, agrees with the above and also details his particular hypothesis about the creation of the *Paquete*. For Ravsberg, this product dates back to 2008 and its inventor is the man who made himself known through the YoePC58 brand, who has not been in business since 2013. Reyes [28] reaffirms the mechanisms for sending it to the provinces through state transportation: "During the first decade of the twenty-first century, in Cuba there was the curious phenomenon of the appearance of wholesale distributors of audiovisual content, who provided the variety and sufficient quantity of material to sustain the consumers' avidity. Many of them even establish themselves in stamps or recognizable brands". Some of those brands made known through the *Paquete* are: YoePC, SamuelPro, ShowPlus, Abdel la Escencia, Elio eL Transporta2r, AlePromo, El Troyano and Tico Relly.

The great unknown about this product is its realization. With the aforementioned technological limitations, the ways used to download a Terabyte of information every week are a mystery: "How can hundreds of gigabytes of video information be obtained, often within a few hours of the original transmission?" Asks Dean Luis Reyes [28] in his article *Phenomenology of the Paquete*, since most of the accounts of Internet in Cuba suggest a very low download speed.

The variety and quantity of materials is not the only outstanding feature, Vladia Rubio [29], on the *CubaSí* website, refers to its possible instructive quality and to the news content it has: "It contains materials for entertainment, but also many others whose essential purpose is to instruct, inform, update".

In the press, the *Paquete Semanal* is generally characterized as a compendium of audiovisuals, media, computer applications, documents and advertising. The main qualities highlighted are the amount of materials it has and its effectiveness at distributing it throughout the country. Alejandro Rodríguez, Camagüey journalist, writes for *BBC Mundo* [26]:

The Paquete has existed for about five years in the Cuban socio-cultural life and thanks to it one has access—with a week's delay, to that which foreign television stations transmit, along with contents downloaded from the Internet, including commercial advertising, something not seen on national television, all controlled by the state.

4.2 *Paquete Semanal* and its implications for the socialist ideology of the Cuban Revolution

We need to specify exactly what the *Paquete Semanal* is. It is not a media, neither official *nor alternative*; that is clear. However, with a capacity of one terabyte, it offers a content comprising different types of materials ranging from those of North American, Mexican, Spanish, Korean origin, to award-winning films. It also has sections of humorous videos, shows, newscasts, documentaries, music, cooking shows, literature, magazines, updates for antivirus, applications for android systems, among many other choices. Something that makes it a "format" to be taken into account when analyzing the "medium" through which the Cuban population receives certain content and information.

So wide has been the scope of this product in Cuba in recent years, which, according to the Doctor of Communication Sciences and vice president of the Union of Journalists of Cuba (UPEC), Rosa Miriam Elizarde (2015, personal interview), has come to establish patterns in the consumption model of the Island that could determine the interaction with broadband internet: “Cultural consumption on that platform is marked and has to deal with the forms, tastes and interests of consumption that conform with the *Paquete Semanal*, as a framework of negotiations and remaining of the visions and representations of the subjects in the current Cuba”. For this reason, the most important thing is to put products on the market that reach the entire population and adapt to their needs and desires. More so at a time when, although the political system covers all spheres of life in the country, it is losing the ability to organize and control the use of free time by citizens.

This is a readjustment aimed at adjusting the territorial inequalities based on the distribution of natural resources, the strategic importance of the space, and the political-administrative decisions of the state [5].³

According to a study carried out in 2015 by the Social Research Center of the Radio and Television Institute (CIS) [31], the *Paquete Semanal* is consumed by at least 40% of the population of Havana. Furthermore, as Vanessa Márquez (2015, personal interview), one of the directors of this research, explains, this figure is very conservative, because due to the pseudo-legal nature of this product, some people surveyed hid their consumption. Even so, its high social penetration indicates the popularity of the *Paquete Semanal*, being currently a key product within the Cuban audiovisual and information Consumption, to such an extent that the film and television critic, Víctor Fowler⁴ defines it as “one of the main Cuban cultural phenomena of this century” and the renowned filmmaker, Rebeca Chávez [32], states: “Cuba’s programming is the *Paquete*”.

The relevance achieved by the *Paquete Semanal* is also seen in the increase in articles devoted to its composition and analysis in the national and international press, some of them published in important media such as *Granma*, the official organ of the Communist Party (PCC), the Information System of *Televisión Cubana*, and the well-known *British BBC* chain, among many others. Important personalities of culture, such as the advisor of the Council of state, Abel Prieto (2015, personal interview), have directly referred to the consumption of this product. In addition, the issue has been addressed at events such as the VIII Congress of the Union of Artists and Writers of Cuba and in debates organized with intellectuals and officials to expressly address this phenomenon.

On this lack and the absence of works on the consolidation of this “informal system”, which are transparent, rigorous and with impact on the spheres of power, the critic and researcher Juan Antonio García Borrero [33] delves deeper:

Studies on cultural consumption in contemporary Cuba have yet to finalize a long agenda. [...] We would lack a solid basis for discussion, from which concrete strategies can be proposed by our cultural institutions in this era where informal consumption is simply redesigning the leisure maps in a radical way.

Due to the importance of this product, it is pertinent to carry out studies that characterize the informal consumption of contents included in the *Paquete Semanal*, its consumption practices, its management and distribution and its relationship with the growing de-ideologization of socialist ideals among Cuban youth. The foreign contents offered in the *Paquete* are composed, mainly, of American,

³ Based on the theory of the Brazilian researcher Santos [30] regarding “the opaque and luminous zones”.

⁴ Dissertation in Competition Ania Pino in Memoriam (November 8, 2014).

Spanish, Mexican and Colombian productions, which sometimes transmit messages and values different from those that the socialist model of the Cuban Revolution tries to inculcate in the citizens of the country. Globalization and economic power have made the North American audiovisual industry “colonize” a considerable part of the planet, extending and imposing its ideology. In Hollywood, only 5% of the world’s cinema is produced, however, more than 50% of the profits are generated [34]. Cuba is not exempt from this cultural hegemony, from that possession of the symbolism that Max Webber described as “charismatic authority”. As they do not have the economic and technological resources to face it, it is crucial to address the use that young people give to these cultural assets and their ways of appropriating them. In this regard, Borrero [33] considers:

I will be told that the Paquete Semanal is guaranteeing among its contents that diversity to which any individual could aspire. There are quotas of truth there, but also mirages that make us forget that the cultural hegemony in these times operates with a deceptive freedom to choose. The Cubans of today have almost everything that is seen in the First World television and movie theaters, and it is precisely that indisputable detail that could activate the button of suspicion. The representation of the others worlds where would it be? Would not the Paquete be a jail with infinite paths that bifurcate to always arrive at the same image-emitting center?

One thing is certain, the *Paquete* and the rest of tools and technological platforms are consumed for a large part of the social groups is intensely linked with the different artistic, cultural and ideological fields, constituting “the main sources of information and entertainment” in Cuba ([33], pp. 46 and 47).

4.3 Is the Paquete Semanal the archetype of the “packaged Cuba”?

The *Paquete Semanal* has been a topic frequently addressed in national and international media. The Information System of Cuban Television, the program *La mesa redonda* (The Round Table), *Granma*—the official body of the Communist Party of Cuba, *Juventud Rebelde*—the Union of Young Communists, *BBC Mundo*, *Radio Reloj*, the cultural magazines *Cayman Barbudo*, *Temas*, *La Jiribilla* and *La Gaceta*, as well as the websites: *CubaSí*, *Cubadebate*, *OnCuba Magazine*, *Cuba Contemporánea*, *Progreso Semanal* and *IPS Cuba* have examined this topic from different perspectives.

Intellectuals, directors of cultural institutions and researchers have publicly referred to this phenomenon, either through congresses, debates or press articles. A number stand out among these: Abel Prieto, Rafael Hernandez, Rebeca Chávez, Juan Antonio García Borrero, Cecilia Linares, Gustavo Arcos, Milena Recio, Mario Masvidal, Rolando Pérez Betancourt, Víctor Fowler, Dean Luis Reyes, Fernando Ravsberg and Omar Olazábal.

Above all, after the issue was addressed during April 2014, at the VIII Congress of the UNEAC, where the then advisor to the Council of state and former Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto (in *OnCuba*, 2014) referred to the *Paquete* as a result of “errors of our educational, cultural and media institutions”. The editor-in-chief of the magazine *OnCuba*, Milena Recio, describes the boom of information published with respect to this product after the Congress: “in May of this year (2014) the *Paquete Semanal* was spoken of in a low voice, in daily life, but It was not publicized in the usual press circuits. Today, the *Paquete* has already been talked about a lot. There have been institutional pronouncements”.

One of the main evidences of Cuba’s packaging is mentioned by the researcher and professor at the University of Havana, Laura Domínguez (2015, personal

interview), who considers that the state offering is incapable of equaling the private one: “If we analyze Cuban TV, I do not think it is up to competing with the *Paquete*. In Cuba it is very difficult to create a cultural option that exceeds the *Paquete*. Proof of this is that more than half of surveyed consumers of the *Paquete* do not mention anything negative in regard to this product”.

5. Conclusions

The proposal of this chapter as a contribution to the cultural studies in Latin America is part of the idea that the decolonial turn in this region arises from the need of “changing the way of changing”, which entails an “epistemic declassification” (*desclasamiento epistémico*) [35] based on “the need to abandon all pretensions of universality and truth” (p. 49) from northern hemisphere countries. This reconceptualization of the (des)colonial matrix implies, according to Mignolo [36], the management and control of subjectivities (media consumption, contents of the digital native platforms, education, among other); the management and the control of authority; the management and control of the economy; and, the management and control of knowledge. Areas to which a fifth could be added, the management of “nature, land and territory” (pp. 45–46).

Hence in Cuba, media, both official and private, and the academy [37–39] recognize the great ideological influence and the extent of consumption of the *Paquete Semanal* in society and its impact on current cultural and informative processes due to its influence of the habits of a large section of the population, impossible to quantify due to the “unofficial” status of the *Paquete* and its informal means of distribution. The noteworthy thing about this context is that in a country with a socialist system, which keeps private property limited to some non-strategic sectors for the government, a private product emerges, controlled by a group of people who, according to themselves, prioritize the contents that sell best and work outside the cultural policies of the state, and which manages to establish itself as a private monopoly of content distribution through informal channels, which in recent years have become almost as important as official modes. A position that attacks directly the conservation of the socialist ideological foundations posed by the Cuban government.

This is a disjunctive that affects the country and citizens in general, but that directly concerns the group of journalists on the Island. The main friction between alternative platforms of cultural contents, like the *Paquete Semanal*, and Cuban journalists, as legitimate constituent members of the current media panorama of Cuba, is the lacking legal recognition of these new communicative actors, related to the production and distribution of informative contents outside the apparatus of official media. The *Paquete Semanal*, specifically, exists in a climate of a-legality and diffuse property regime, without rigid operating structures, which has enabled it to adapt more efficiently to changes within the Cuban media ecosystem.

Similarly, the official media and journalists working on them are aware of their inability to face the information and entertainment offer of these alternative platforms that have the *Paquete Semanal* as their main exponent. As [34] points out, many other countries with great economic power cannot cope with the American production of series and films.

It is a challenge for the new government, official institution and media, and journalists due to the diverse, dynamic and complex nature of this phenomenon; for the encompassing, deregulated and changing of this type of cultural practices, which include multiple social, economic, legal and, above all, political processes. Even more so in a country where the socialist values of the revolution, infused into society, have been based on collective and communal needs.

The current reality is that the social uses of the contents of the *Paquete Semanal* are generated from a compendium of materials that nowadays, due to its novelty and wide diffusion, is at the center of the phenomenon of the consumption of informal content and appropriation of individual and collective values far from the socialist paradigms and ideals. Content formed by information from magazines, literature, series, movies, soap operas, reality shows, sports, musicals, media, documentaries and, almost anything you can imagine. For this reasons, the *Paquete Semanal* is considered as a modeler of daily social practices, and, for the young consumers, this compendium of digital content constitutes a core element in the configuration of their leisure time.

The consumption of the *Paquete Semanal* has important implications for the formation of values and identity—both individual and generational—of Cuban people. The new generations prefer to interact with this alternative rather than the traditional media, because the *Paquete Semanal* offers a greater abundance of cultural options and more facilities for the choice of spend time. The rising prominence of informal content consumption in Cuban society, beyond the official media, constitutes a challenge for the decision makers of the country’s public policies, especially those associated with the communication and culture sectors. These policies must be updated to reconfigure the cultural consumption that the unofficial alternatives have caused.

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