

# Cuban journalism students: between ideals and state ideology

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## Abstract

Cuban journalism students find that journalistic ideals learnt in university are incompatible with the media-reality they encounter during periods of practical training in state media. Journalism education in Havana pertains, in many ways, to aspects of ‘Western’ journalistic ideals, such as providing criticism, investigative journalism and reporting on social ills. In the propagandistic defence paradigm of Cuban state media, such ideals are very difficult to pursue. Although enjoying the hands-on experience, students also become frustrated and demotivated with censorship and institutionalised news criteria during training periods. Many thus look for opportunities in non-state outlets, where journalistic ideals are closer to those learnt in university.

## Introduction

**Periods of practical training can be perceived as a ‘shock’ for students in various fields when going from the theoretical approach of universities to real life experience (Edwards and Mutton, 2007, Parsons and Stephson, 2005).**

As Heggen and Smeby (2012) note, it is important that programmes that have the education of professionals as their goal, establish for students a clear coherence between the training and the professional practice. Although coherence is a subject thoroughly researched within profession-oriented career programmes such

as teacher and nursing training, there is a lack of literature on practical experiences in journalism education.

In journalism studies, the focus is more on how periods of training reflect back on education programmes. A common conclusion is that curricula in universities ought to be changed to prepare journalism students better for a changing media environment (Hovden et al., 2016, Mensing, 2010). In Cuba, this is different, if not the reverse. Journalism students in Havana consider that the university teaches them the kind of journalism they want to practice. During training periods, students become frustrated with censorship, institutionalism and a resistance to change in the state media. In this article, I will reflect on what happens when professional journalistic ideals are confronted with a different set of rules. This may explain the reasons for the discrepancy between the expectations of journalism students and the current situation in the state media.

The article seeks to answer the research question: How is the transition from journalism education to the state media during training periods perceived by student journalists in Cuba? The article will also evaluate possible future outcomes of student discontent in a changing media landscape in Cuba.

## Background

Before the 1959 revolution, the press in Cuba was dominated by US-based companies, and the island was used as a testing ground for new technology. Both radio and television broadcasting started well before the revolution (Louis, 2013, p. 75). The first journalism school in Cuba was created in 1942, and in the following years the education programme was spread throughout the country. These programmes were closely connected to US journalistic ideals. In the wake of the post-revolutionary processes in 1960, existing journalism schools were closed down. With the 1962 University Reform, journalism was again considered part of tertiary education. The first degree course in journalism at the University of Havana was opened as late as 1965 (Alonso and Pérez, 2016, p. 137).

In constructing a new type of press model separated from both the market and the state, the state media experienced a 'golden age' after the revolution, but that all changed with the 1965 constitution of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). Thereafter, the press was aligned with politics, justified in resistance to foreign threats. Many journalists working under the US paradigm were removed from their posts, inciting ruptures in journalistic styles and genres (Louis, 2013, pp. 75-85).

The Cuban state media is financed, controlled by and serves the interests of the PCC. The state media has radio and TV broadcasters and newspapers in every province of the island. Non-state media outlets now proliferate, both online and offline. In particular, content uploaded on memory sticks is serving as an important alternative information channel. Despite the breaking of the long-standing state media monopoly, the low rates of internet connectivity in the population allows state media to continue as the most important source of information for the average Cuban (Freedom House, 2017).

Most of the non-state outlets are registered at the Foreign Press Centre. These outlets can be closed down if found to be too critical of the government. Due to the lack of a press law, non-state outlets also operate in a legal vacuum and, therefore, students cannot engage in their training periods or internships outside outlets run by the state. There also exists a body of outlets that are openly critical of the Cuban government, so-called 'dissidents'. Associating with one of these would mean closing the doors to any other job opportunity and thus is not considered a viable option among students.

This is the scenario facing journalism students entering the profession today. Journalism education is a five-year long undertaking. Throughout this time, students generally have a one-month period of practical training in state media each semester. The article is based on the experiences students have during these periods. When finishing the programme, students are obliged to take a two- or three-year internship in a state media outlet, referred to as 'social service'. Students are assigned to either a radio, television or newspaper outlet, but they are not necessarily the students' preferred type of media. A study of 142 Cuban journalist interns finds that 50% are indifferent to or dissatisfied with their placement (García, 2016, p. 93). The salary for state media journalists is one of the lowest in the country, less than 30CUC\$, which equals 30US\$. During the internship period, students make less than \$20 a month.

Despite the poor remuneration, journalism is a popular topic of study. According to the homepage of the Faculty of Communication at the University of Havana (FCOM), more than 500 students applied to study journalism in 2017. To qualify for any university study, one must pass tests in mathematics, Spanish and history. The journalism programme only accepts about 60 students annually, and the students must go through a three-step admissions process. The first is a test of general culture, which 200 students in 2017 qualified

to take. This was passed by 50% who proceeded to make a journalistic piece. Out of these, only 72 qualified for the last round consisting of individual interviews (Seguera, 2017, December 11). In January 2018 a TV studio opened on the premises of the FCOM, making journalistic practice within the university on television possible for the first time. The show *Nexos*, which can be translated *Connections*, will broadcast through Facebook streaming via the online state outlet *Cubadebate* (FCOM, 2018).

## Research on journalism education

In the book *Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom* (Josephi, 2010c), 12 countries with limited or no media freedom are examined in order to propose a framework other than journalism education acting as the 'fourth estate in a democratic country' (Josephi, 2010b, p. 1). The study concludes that 'journalism education cannot be used as a sign of how free or not free the country's media system is'. For example, both Russia and Singapore are ranked as 'not free' as far as regards media freedom, but their journalism education programmes retain standards that would allow students to take jobs anywhere in the world. According to Vartanova et al. (2010, p. 203) the ideology-laden courses in Marxist-Leninism and the like in Russian journalism education are replaced with socioeconomic and humanitarian subjects. In Singapore, educators strive towards Western ideals while also preparing students to deal with government control at home. One teacher says students need to develop 'soft social skills' in order to approach an uncooperative government strategically (Duffy, 2010, p. 41).

Josephi (2010a, p. 254) considers that the Western paradigm of the media acting as watchdogs of the government and thus informing citizens is 'trending to become universal' in journalism education, largely due to NGOs gaining access to and influence of education programmes. In China, it was the economic growth and influence of the market that forced journalism education to shift from a purely political training to one focusing on the audience (Han, 2017, p. 74).

In the project *Journalism Students Across the Globe*, researchers have conducted a variety of comparative studies. One article examining eight countries in all continents except Asia concludes that the motivations for becoming a journalism student is a 'liking' of the profession, a belief in a talent for writing and a wish to contribute to social change (Hanusch et al., 2015, p. 154). While the countries in the study are ranked as 'free', with only one as 'partly free', it still indicates that the motivations for joining the profession are somewhat similar across different continents.

However, the structures of the media systems into which journalism students enter vary. A study of Swedish journalism interns shows that subcontracting and cost efficiency in news production is worrying students. The continuous pressure to produce more news, on different platforms, with fewer reporters, is experienced as straining and in contradiction to students' professional ideals (Wiik, 2016, p. 279).

The socialisation process in the newsroom is weighted as extremely important in journalism research (Breed, 1955). Donsbach (2004, p. 143) considers that persuasive processes such as pressure from seniors, managers or owners are psychological and implicit, rather than forced compliance: 'Cases where journalists consciously make news decisions against their better knowledge are the exception rather than the rule.' Gravengaard and Rimestad (2016, p. 301) studied how Danish journalism students learn criteria for a good news story during their internships. They conclude that students learned 'tacit expert knowledge' of what constitutes a good news story and became more competent members of the profession, yet also consider that 'news criteria' to assess ideas for a good story are insufficient, and as such are a deficiency in Danish journalism education.

In the discussion, the consequences of learning 'Western' ideals in a Cuban context will be debated, along with similarities and differences between Cuba and journalism education elsewhere.

## Research on Cuba

In a comparative study between Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela, Alonso et al. (2017) distributed questionnaires to 82% (N=383) of all journalism students enrolled in state universities in Cuba. About half of the students evaluate the journalism education to be good, or very good (2017, p. 254). While traditional media is still preferred by Cuban students, (television 27%, newspaper 18%, radio 9%), more than 8% claim to be oriented towards online outlets. This number is four times higher than in Ecuador and Venezuela, where

only about 2% answer the same (2017, p. 257).

In a study conducted among journalism students in Havana in 2006, participants consider that the state media is censored, politicised, boring, and lacks creativity and criticism (Estenez and Martínez, 2006, p. 96). A decade ago, students called for a press 'for the people, that alerts and denounces social ills' (ibid, p. 97). In the same study, some students report that training periods are positive, despite some 'obstacles'. Others experience being prohibited from publishing, finding the system rigid and thus becoming demotivated (ibid, p. 116).

A diploma thesis with questionnaires for journalism graduates (N=142) in Havana from the years 2010–14, found that 70% reported being 'very motivated' at the beginning of the programme. Upon finishing, only 23% maintained a high motivation for becoming a journalist. Qualitative interviews in the study confirm that such a sense of demotivation is provoked by the impossibility of continuing the critical environment at the university when working as a full-time journalist (García, 2016, p. 91).

## Method

The data consists of five group interviews with a total of 19 student journalists in the 3rd, 4th and 5th years of their study programmes. These were conducted during a two-month period of fieldwork in late 2016. I chose not to include the 1st and 2nd year students, as I considered it useful to draw on the experiences of participants who had studied a few years of theory, and gained some practical exposure, in interviews. Participants consist solely of students in Havana, a group that may hold different opinions compared to students on the periphery due to the more developed internet infrastructure in the capital.

Following Guldvik (2002), I found it useful that participants in the group interviews could ask their own questions and discuss among each other. In that way, responses were not solely dependent on my questions, thus opening a space for information unknown to me. I also liked that the group interviews diminished my role as a researcher, as I was outnumbered by the participants. I found participants to be much more critical than I had expected.

I recruited students by presenting my project at lectures, talking to students in the library, and through a research assistant. The first group interview was composed by the research assistant, and he was present during the session. He became a very dominant figure in the interview, suppressing the voices of the other participants. For that reason, the first group interview is not used as much as the others in the findings section.

Participation was voluntary. This can affect responses, as it may be that only a certain group of students found the project to be of interest. However, the diversity of views on the topics discussed does indicate that there is some breadth in the participant group. It is, nevertheless, important to keep in mind that I, as a foreign researcher, may lack a shared understanding of symbols, meanings and vocabulary with participants (Madriz, 2003). On the other hand, being a foreigner has some advantages in that one takes little for granted and may ask questions with an outsider's perspective (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011, p. 395).

I also gathered the curricula corresponding to the 3rd and 4th year of the programme (the 5th year comprises the writing of the thesis only), the reason being that I considered that more in-depth, less introductory curricula would be useful as a possible comparative tool to journalism education elsewhere. In retrospect, I see that the curricula of the first two years would have been useful because literature on journalistic norms, skills and social responsibility in Cuba seem to be lacking. Getting access to the curricula was dependent on a librarian uploading the content—it was not accessible for me on the FCOM intranet. The curricula are composed of a muddle of PDFs, PowerPoint and Word documents, grouped in folders. It is difficult to know if each folder pertains to one specific class, or a variety thereof. I will, however, make the assumption that the name of the folder corresponds to the name of the class. The lack of structure makes it difficult to use the content comparatively. It will therefore be presented as an overview.

The quotes in the findings section are selected as typical responses or because they show a variety in opinion. Some quotes are included if they shed light on important aspects of students' experiences during periods of practical training. Students are anonymous; both their year of study and references that could have identified them have been omitted. I have translated the quotes in the article from Spanish to English. Translations are verified by a proofreader. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data has approved the study.

## Journalism curricula

Here I will briefly go through the curricula of the journalism education for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students.

**Third year:** What is most striking, for both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years, is the number of subjects related to aspects other than journalism. Students go through courses in *English Language*, *Psychology* and *Latin American Literature*. The latter possibly reflects the valued trait of ‘having culture’, meaning knowing Cuban art and literature. Further, students study a variation of political subjects. In *Political Science*, the works of Plato, Aristotle, Marx, Engels, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Rousseau are studied. In the subject *Politics*, students are presented theories about civil society from a Marxist perspective and a capitalist perspective, as well as theories about democracy.

In *Political Economy*, the syllabus focuses on the creation and circulation of capitalism. Some of the objectives of the course are: ‘identify the socioeconomic foundations of contemporary capitalism’; ‘understand the dialectic of development and underdevelopment as an expression of the crisis in contemporary capitalism’; ‘understand the role of monopolistic state regulation in the development of capitalism’, and ‘evaluate some of the economic and socio-political trends in contemporary capitalism.’ In the subject *History*, students learn about many of the former countries of the Soviet Union, such as Russia, Yugoslavia and Hungary. An objective of the course is to understand: ‘The emergence and development of imperialism, the evolution of contemporary socialism, [and] the rise and development of the anticolonial and independence movements’.

Finally, students go through four courses directly related to journalism. One, *Methods of Investigation*, goes through methodological designs for academic investigation. *Hypermedia Journalism* considers texts on how Cuba should respond to and deal with the internet in the specific context of the country. In the subject *Ethics*, lectures and texts on the relationship between the USA and Cuba are important. In addition, the ethical framework of the journalists’ union (UPEC), and guidelines from ‘the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party to increase the informative efficiency of the nation’s mass media’ are provided. Finally, a course related to the training periods called *Practice in Newsrooms* is given.

**Fourth year:** The curriculum here is less extensive. Students continue to study *English*, and build on literature with *History of Cuban Art*. Also, *Cultural Processes in Cuba* considers the development of the country from pre-colonial times to the present. Further, *Cuban Economy* is studied, particularly post-revolution, meaning after 1959. Finally, a course in *Investigative Journalism* is given, where literature on Watergate and other US investigative stories are studied.

## Between ‘should be’ and practice realities

Students consider that journalism education at the university promotes journalistic ideals, where informing the public, criticism and ‘digging up the dirt’ are important components. One student says: ‘In the faculty they do not teach you skills enabling you to work in state media. They teach you to be a journalist, to “do” journalism. Of course, there are 40 professors throughout the programme, and each one of them has their own way of seeing things.’

Although some professors consider defence of the nation a primary objective, others believe journalists should write about society’s darker corners. The general impression from students is that the university studies prepare them for the ‘should be’. During practical training periods, students realise that these ideals can only be put into action in state media with great difficulty. A student says: ‘When all is said and done, they teach us a lot of things here, but when we arrive at the media institutions things are done differently, or they do the opposite. That’s the reality.’

At the same time, the periods of practice are highly valued among students, and most want more than just three to four weeks per semester. One student considers that: ‘there is not really that big of a difference between the university and the newspaper, because if there was, the training periods would be a disaster, whereas in reality we really enjoy the practice.’

Even if the training periods are valued for their insights into the profession, the division between theory and practice also frustrates students. One considers the lack of journalistic training among leaders in the state media, which is only about 50% (Garcés, 2013), a serious problem: ‘This disturbs me, because if they spend five years telling us that we need to recognise what is news and what is not, what is a good story, and what is not, then how is someone who is not a journalist, who doesn’t have any training, going to evaluate our work?’

## Practice stories

The students interviewed had all completed various periods of practical training in different types of state media outlets. Students highlight that training periods allow them to take part in the entire process, from writing and editing to printing. The degree of control and the experience of professional freedom are, however, described otherwise. One says: 'In the majority of the media I have worked in, they give you quite a lot freedom to work as you wish, and they treat you like just another journalist.' Another says: 'In the practice, we form part of the media's production system, and so in the same way they censor the work of the professional journalists who are working in the media, they censor our work too.'

The student quoted above explains that she wrote a review on the presentation of a book held by a famous Cuban author who is not accepted by the state. The article could not be published. She says: 'The explanation they gave me was that [the author] has said bad things about journalists. Is that a reason to censor a story?' Similar types of censorship have been experienced by many of the students during practice. In group two, the discussion proceeded thus:

*S2.1: For example, I once went on a job where I had to go to a conference. The conference was given by three intellectuals, one of whom had made statements earlier in the year that he did not like the state, and so they told me that I could only say there were just two intellectuals at the conference.*

*S2.2: It is like the Soviet photo where they erased people, but this is a written version.*

These types of stories are difficult to obtain from more experienced journalists already working in state media. It seems that the rules of the game become incorporated, and that self-censorship is used as a strategy before superiors need to employ direct censorship. Students, on the other hand, are unfamiliar or perhaps somewhat in opposition to these unwritten rules, emerging as they are from a different set of standards at university. One student wrote a story to fulfil the requirements of the university course *Investigative Journalism*, where the objective was to write an in-depth report about 'a social problem'. He wrote a story on illegal workers who, due to the risk of losing their jobs, wished to remain anonymous: 'I mean, it is a story that is relevant, that is approved by the academy and the journalists themselves [in the practice journal]. But all because of a single aspect of the media's editorial guidelines, it could not be published.'

Non-state outlets write stories in a different way than state media. This changing media scenery in Cuba contributes to making students aware of possibilities elsewhere, where the divides between theory and practice are not as great. One student says: 'To go to a media organisation and write about, I don't know, just the facts, and that's all, they presented such-and-such work, so-and-so were present, it's not enough! I am not studying here for five years only to write these kind of stories.' With the proliferation of non-state outlets in Cuba, students have the real choice not to spend their careers in state media. Many of the participants in this study collaborate with non-state outlets or other online platforms and see it as a way to realise journalistic ambitions that are currently impossible in state media. One student says: 'So, for journalists to view society from another point of view, they have to leave the [state] media and become a blogger. I mean, a journalist cannot be accomplished in the Cuban press that we have now.'

Students want the leaders in state media to delegate more trust and responsibility to the youth, but emphasise that they do not see themselves as victims. One says that perhaps students need to stand up for their work to a larger degree:

*I think that the problem has a lot to do with wanting to do it, in daring oneself to do it. I do not think we are victims either; but obviously neither do we have all the channels and the facilities open to us, it takes struggle, it takes sacrifice, but it could be worse, they don't put us in prison, they don't beat us up, they don't abuse us, there is debate.*

## Belief and demotivation

Despite the differences between *is* and *ought* in state media, many of the students see themselves arriving at a good time in Cuban journalism—a time when they can possibly steer state media closer to what they learn in university. One student says: 'I believe that it is up to the new dawn of journalists, marked by emigration and by the desertion [of journalism], that those who stay fight to make our profession something better.'

Another student considers that it is a 'moment of decision' in Cuba now, where the youth can be part of re-organising the press, changing it for the better: 'We can take part in thinking about the press, thinking about

what we should be doing, thinking about what we have been doing wrong all this time, thinking about how we can reach to the Cuban on the street better, how to reflect the real problems in society.’

But students have seen the previous graduates begin their work in state media without being able to change much, due to structural conditions. Some honourable exceptions are mentioned, of graduates succeeding in putting the public agenda in the news. Still, students experience that there is a scepticism towards them as journalists. One says:

*Sometimes in the street they ask you: “What are you studying? Ah, journalism!” People look at you as if saying: “Ah, journalists, you never talk about what interests the people, you say what they tell you to.” And this is a disadvantage, because we are studying here, we are the new generation that will arrive in the media, and like all those who have graduated before us, hope to change things, but in the end we don’t know if we are going to succeed or not.*

Discontent is accentuated by students looking for jobs elsewhere or by avoiding state media content. One says: ‘It is not common for a young person to get information from newspapers. [...] So there is a deception, it is like a divorce between an entire generation and the conventional press that is being produced in this country.’ Therefore it is and will increasingly be a challenge for Cuban decision-makers to maintain the support of the youth in a system that keeps promising change, but where real progress is yet to be seen. In group two, the students agree that the lethargy in the system is damaging motivation:

*During the UPEC congress [the journalists’ union congress in 2013] we believed that everything was going to change, that everything was going to get better, but now we are disillusioned. You see moments where things are getting better; when they say things are going to change, but you end up being a cynic, they take away your hopes. And we are much too young for them to take our hopes away.*

## Managing a share of autonomy

Periods of practical training are just one component in journalism education, but they are important in the sense that they connect students to the realities of the work they are about to enter. No theoretical study can fully prepare for all aspects of working life, and matching university curricula to the changing world of any profession is difficult. Trying to analyse this interplay in the Cuban context is, however, different from experiences in the Nordic countries as described by Wiik (2016) and Gravengaard and Rimestad (2016). They call for university curricula to better reflect practical realities for Swedish and Danish students entering a scenario where there are fewer jobs and increasing online competition.

For Cuban students, this is happening in reverse. They are secured a job in state media, but they are not allowed to use their skills in this system. Students want the newsrooms to incorporate the ideals and values that they learned at university. This discrepancy between theory and practice in Cuba shares similarities with studies from other countries with limited or no media freedom (Duffy, 2010, Vartanova et al., 2010). A theoretical framework situated in the ‘West’ inevitably complicates a transition to a work situation controlled and regulated by the state. In Cuba, participants in this study and graduates interviewed by García (2016) share perceptions of uneasiness and discontent over not being able to put journalistic ideals into practice. In 2016, as well as in the study by Estenoz and Martínez (2006), students wanted the same: to reflect problems in society, write about necessary topics, and make pertinent criticism.

Despite the many current changes in the Cuban media landscape, with non-state actors and access to the offline internet blooming via memory sticks, the state media remains steadily resistant to reform. The official discourse of the Communist Party (PCC) often claims that more flexibility and autonomy is needed for journalists (PCC, 2011), but these words seldom translate into action. Students say they are losing hope for a future in state media when nothing happens. Thus, the pull towards exploring other possibilities in outlets outside the conventional state media increases for students. That almost one in ten journalism students are interested in online media jobs (Alonso et al., 2017), despite low rates of connectivity in Cuba, confirms this.

Considering that state media is the only option in both practice and internship periods, it may be reasonable to question whether the journalism education in Cuba is too little adjusted to the practice reality facing students. According to García (2016, p. 93), the graduates most content during internship were those continuing within academia as teachers or researchers, not those working for traditional media. In Singapore, teachers claim to attempt a balance between international and national expectations in journalism education (Duffy, 2010). However, leaving Cuba to find work outside is rare and, for many journalism students, economically impossible. In conversations with teachers and journalists, leaving the country is, to some degree,

also viewed as deserting the revolutionary project. It is therefore a contradiction that students are trained in more or less international/Western standards, when these are almost impossible to achieve when working in Cuban state media.

Viewing Cuba from the outside, it also seems probable that the political elite would be interested in controlling information in state-financed universities. While ideologically driven aspects still are part of the Cuban journalist education, why do the PCC allow a 'Western' education? For some authoritarian regimes, a certain degree of independence and autonomy in selected sectors is indeed acceptable and even necessary as a pressure release, albeit within certain limits. Lee (1998, p. 56) describes this as the case for Hong Kong media when incorporated as an administrative region of China.

Following the same line of thought, giving limited freedom to selected groups may also be a strategic choice by the PCC. The intellectuals in Cuba have been marginalised in the state media, but critical discussions in their own publications, such as the magazine *Temas*, have passed state scrutiny. The same goes for the somewhat critical publications of the Catholic Church in their magazine *Espacio Laical*, translating to *Lay Space* (Marreiro, 2014, pp. 13, 16, Karlsen, 2013).

Students do not, however, enter spaces such as those mentioned above, pertaining to similar journalistic paradigms as those they learn in university. It is possible to argue that the 'dissident' media, to some degree, also share 'Western' ideals of journalism: criticising social structures and government failures. But these outlets are far from being an option for students. The frictions experienced by students, of compromising their journalistic ideals in state media, would probably be diminished if their education was more in tune with practice realities. But encouraging a self-censoring process among students, rather than striving to change a media system frozen in a Cold War defence paradigm, would be a waste of the university's share of liberty.

The experiences students have of direct censorship seem to diminish as journalists become incorporated in state media practice. The socialisation process as described by Breed (1955) is a compelling force. Although structures of censorship in Cuban state media are more informal than forced, journalists in a Cuban context do make news decisions against their better knowledge—contrary to what Donsbach (2004) claims. It seems that self-censorship is a mechanism that sooner or later becomes a strategy if journalists are to preserve their jobs in the state media; this is also seen in other authoritarian contexts (Skjerdal, 2008; Skjerdal, 2010; Tong, 2009; Lauk, 2005). Therefore, bearing a different set of ideals learnt in journalism education can be extremely valuable. It gives students and also more experienced journalists a tool to analyse the media reality they are part of from a different perspective. If and when the possibility to make changes arrive, at least the younger journalists are ready to incorporate these.

But the ideals students hold may also become a problem for the political power block. As Bye (2017, p. 109) mentions, there is less tolerance for waiting out reforms among average Cubans, and there is a sinking confidence in the political leadership among younger generations. Economic prospects have not improved despite the reforms initiated by Raúl Castro (Torres Pérez, 2016). Venezuela has recently also withdrawn its support to Cuba due to internal economic and political turmoil, which will cause further economic hardships for the country. As noted by Hoffmann (2011), if autonomous civil action sparked by online voices are able to connect to offline public debate, it will challenge the regime's plan for the state-society relationship. Young journalists are already looking towards non-state platforms to exercise journalistic ideals closer to those learnt in university. These students may, therefore, increasingly become a driving force in defying the structures currently maintained by the Communist Party.

## Conclusions

Cuban journalism is caught between rupture and continuation. New media platforms are opening up, managing to gain an unstable foothold among online consumers. The state media steadily protects its position as promoter of the Cuban revolution, the Communist Party and of anti-imperialism. Journalist students stand with one foot in each camp, learning journalistic ideals incompatible with the reality in state outlets.

Building on Antonovsky and Lev (2000), Heggen and Smeby (2012) consider that coping with new situations depends on an experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. This means that students must be able to understand the coherence between education and practice, must believe they can navigate it, and that the work is understood as meaningful. This perspective may be useful in analysing the uneasiness and discontent students report in relation to training periods. Education situated in the 'West', with training periods in a strict Cold War defence paradigm, makes for a difficult shift for students. When these two worlds do not meet, students experience that the abilities they have acquired in five years of study are not put to use. The manageability for students during practice is consequently reduced. Many have expe-



rienced direct censorship and are opposed to editors who belong to a different paradigm deciding over their work, in contrast to journalists already internalised in the system.

The transition from education to practice is not experienced as meaningful as students have to let go of the ideals of investigative journalism, criticism and providing information to the public. Although some are optimistic, hoping for a change soon, others look, rather, to outlets outside the conventional state. In these ideals at least partly overlap. While a discrepancy between education and practice is found in various other countries with limited or no press freedom (Josephi, 2010c) the case is somewhat different in Cuba. The situation of non-state outlets being in a position to challenge state media has only existed for a short time. Having a real choice of where to develop journalistic skills is a relatively new state of affairs, and seemingly embraced as a number students and graduates collaborate with non-state outlets on a regular basis (García, 2016). The willingness to wait out political reforms is decreasing along with the country's deteriorating economic foundation. Maintaining support from the youth in Cuba will, in all likelihood, be difficult for the political elite if they do not promote a more progressive media policy.

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