

## El Yuma blog by Ted Henken

<http://elyuma.blogspot.com/>

**Tuesday, December 8, 2009**

### [The Savaging of Yoani Sánchez: Crying Wolf\(ette\) - Part 1/3](#)

Is this the sound of the other shoe dropping? You can be forgiven for not having noticed, but while you were eating your *Lechón con flan* over the long Thanksgiving weekend, the Cuban government clearly changed its strategy in dealing with the independent blogger movement and especially with the most prominent member of that movement, **Yoani Sánchez**.

Of course, October and November were quite eventful in the Cuban *blogósfera*, featuring a series of audacious *guerrilla* video maneuvers from *La Flaca* (first at an immigration office and then inside the *Temas* internet debate). This was followed by a pair of violent, government-orchestrated crackdowns, both taking place in the streets and aimed at reminding her and her husband, Reinaldo, along with their pesky blogger friends like [Claudia Caudelo](#) and [Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo](#) (pictured above with Sánchez), that “*la calle es de Fidel*” – even if he hasn’t been seen on it in more than three years.



This was all capped off by Sánchez’s coup of scoring a one-on-one Q&A with President Obama, published on her blog as “[Siete Preguntas](#)” on Thursday morning, November 19.

However, over the course of the following week, more articles critical and dismissive of Sánchez have appeared in the official Cuban on-line press (and, according to [AFP](#), it seems also in the print version of the Spanish language edition of [Granma Internacional](#)) than had appeared there in all of the previous two-and-a-half-years.



The bulk of these articles can be found only in Spanish at CubaDebate.cu and CubaPeriodistas.cu, both Cuban government sites.

Related “attack” articles are available on the personal blogs of a number of Cuban journalists. For a series of especially vicious attacks, replete with childish animated illustrations of Sanchez and Escobar see Norelys Morales Aguilera's blogs [here](#), [here](#), and especially [here](#). Also, a few pro-government foreign journalists have mounted



similar attacks, the most representative of which is the three-part series by the French journalist and professor [Silam Lamrani](#).

Finally, the leftist/socialist websites [Kaosenlared.net](#) and [Rebellion.com](#) both feature a number of similar articles, as do [LaRepública.es](#) and [DesdeCuba.net](#) (not to be confused with the original of the species which hosts Sánchez's *Generacion Y*: [DesdeCuba.com!](#))

A handful of these articles have been made available in English translations by [Machetera](#) on her own stridently pro-revolution blog [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). And even the normally more balanced, if aptly named site [Progreso Weekly](#) / [Progreso Semanal](#) has gotten into the act, with three dismissive articles of its own ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

Instead of ignoring Sánchez and her growing group of fellow bloggers as “insignificant elements” as the Cuban state media had done up to this point (in fact, to my knowledge she has never before been mentioned by name in the official Cuban press), this veritable flood of articles all attempt to link her, through a combination of **insipid insinuation** and **innuendo ad nauseam**, to a supposed “media war” deployed by the United States (together with the “Western media transnationals”) against Cuba.

And, lest we think these “media-terrorist” attacks against the Cuban government are born of conviction, ideology, or argument, we are repeatedly reminded in these stories that for Yoani, it’s a simple case of “*Todo Por Dinero*.”

For example, *Granma Internacional* makes the unsubstantiated claim that Sánchez received an unprecedentedly large cash advance for the publication of a book in Brazil “*digno de un Nobel de Literatura*” (dignified of a Nobel Laureate).



The French journalist [Lamrani](#) goes even further, making the fantastic and similarly unsubstantiated claim,

“It is therefore impossible that Yoani Sánchez is a simple blogger who denounces the difficulties of a system. Instead, powerful interests are hidden behind the curtain of smoke constructed by Generación Y, representing a formidable arm in the media war carried out by the United States against Cuba. Sánchez knows full well that her obedience to these powerful interests will be rewarded generously (more than \$100,000 in total so far). She has chosen to join the business of dissidence and live happy days in Cuba.” Amazingly, this final paragraph of Lamrani’s supposedly revelatory three-part series on what he calls the “Yoani Phenomenon” features a footnote that leads the reader back to her own blog where she lists her prizes. Investigative reporting at its best!

Sanchez's [Ortega y Gasset](#) prize did indeed come with a 15,000 Euro check (the same amount awarded to each of the four prize winners each year). However, according to the coordinator of the **Maria Moors Cabot** prize Josh Friedman, whom I emailed, this more recent award from the Columbia University School of Journalism earned her exactly **\$0.00** (not \$15,000 as was incorrectly reported earlier this week by the Colombian (not Columbian) journalist Hernando Calvo Ospina [here](#) and [here](#)).

Cabot recognized Sanchez with a special "citation" as a blogger, not a full "award" like the three other winners, who each received checks for \$5,000. So, it seems that if there's any financial conspiracy going on here, it works against bloggers in the new media not in their favor! Oh, and she was unable to collect all this prize money that is the supposed driving force behind her blog since she was denied an exit permit to travel to New York by the Cuban government.

In fact, the only thing Lamrani's series "reveals" is that he himself has some kind of special access to Cuba's European ambassadors and to the embassy files on Cuba's European emigrants. For example, in his series we get the salacious "scoop" that Sánchez supposedly married a German man in order to leave the country in 2002 (that would make her very authentically Cuban indeed!), coupled with an insinuation that she never actually graduated from the University of Havana, and that she had to "beg the Cuban immigration officials in tears that they grant her an exceptional dispensation" allowing her to return to live in her native country.

Now, Lamrani complains, she has the temerity to be "forgetful of the magnanimity of Cuban authorities" and has chosen instead to show her gratitude by joining the opposition upon returning to Cuba.

Connected to this claim of greed and ingratitude is the often repeated assumption that a blog as "extremely sophisticated," frequently trafficked, and widely translated and read as *Generación Y* must be funded by some mysterious, sinister, and deep-pocketed donors. But anyone who knows even a little bit about blogs can tell you that their great advantage as a communications medium lies exactly in the fact that they allow anyone with **minimal funds, few resources, and no publishing apparatus or institutional credentials** the ability to tell their own story in their own way.

After that, a blog's popularity and influence (or lack thereof) is really only a function of whether it can attract and keep its readers (building brand loyalty), and get other bloggers and media outlets to link to it (networking).

***Sunday, December 6, 2009***

**[Let a Thousand Flowers..., uh, Bloggers Bloom!: Of Blogrolls and BestBlogs \(Part 1/5\)](#)**

I was just in the process of updating my **blogroll**, that list at the right-hand side of the blog where I link to other blogs of Cuba interest. Mine's called "**BestBlogs**."

I guess you could say I "recommend" them, since I do call the list "BestBlogs." However, the usual disclaimer applies - **recommendation does not imply agreement.**

For example, the logo, "Free @ Internet," pasted to the upper left here is used on many blogs connected to the dual projects, [Itinerario/Academia Blogger](#) and [Voces Cubanas](#), a weekly blogger workshop and blog portal, respectively, for independent Cuban bloggers usually run out of the home of Yoani Sanchez and Reinaldo Escobar. There are 16 blogs currently collectively housed at the "Voces Cubanas" portal, while the number of such independent blogs in Cuba could easily be double or tripple that.

The logo on the right, on the other hand, is from the main portal of another group of young bloggers, lanuched informally by a group of 15 students and professors at the University of Havana, calling themselves simply, "[Bloggers Cuba](#)." Notice that they both use the Cuban flag - but in very different ways. Both groups have also been organized for about a year and meet up regularly to share blogging strategies and encourage one another. Of course, there is also much that separates them.

Keep reading this new five-part series, "**Let a Thousand Flowers..., uh, Bloggers Bloom!**", as I will have much more to say about these and various other blogger movements and internet news sources rapidly flourishing (despite and sometimes because of government repression and/or support) in today's Cuba.

So, I "recommend" that you check out both of these portals, while I do not uncritically "endorse" all the content of either. In fact, my list of "BestBlogs," like my list of best friends, I only agree with about 50% of the time. What's the point of talking, debating, reading, exchanging ideas, and *dialogando* (that word with such a tragic Cuban/Cuban-American history - e.g., *dalogueros*, Cuban-Americans who dared exchange ideas with the Cuban government back in the 1970s and 1980s and were met with terrorist violence because of it in Miami), if we are already in agreement.

I do, however, make recommendations with an eye to the importance of a source's serious contribution to the Cuba debate or if it is sharing of a perspective that is not likely to get much play in the monopolistic corporate media in the U.S. and even less so in the state/party controlled media in Cuba.

Remember these wise words from journalist A. J. Liebling:

"Freedom of the press is guaranteed...  
only to those who own one."

This is part of the reason that the internet in general and blogs in particular are so potentially "**revolutionary**" (to use a pregnant word) in societies where the state, the party, or a few large



media conglomerates own or control the **MSM** - mainstream media.


With that said, I recently added a group of new blogs to my blogroll, including: [Desde Aqui](#) (Reinaldo Escobar's blog from Cuba), [La Polemica Digital](#) (the blog by University of Havana journalism professor Elaine Diaz that Carlos Alzugaray recommended in my previous post, [Los Consejos de Carlos](#)), [Babalu Blog](#) (a proudly "intransigent," right-wing blog on Cuba from Miami - Sanchez has called Babalu "*el abuelo de los blogs sobre Cuba*"), and [Mambi Watch](#) (a kind of moderate antidote to the positions expoused in Babalu, thus the name which implies keeping an eye on and calling out Miami's "recalcitrantes" - *Mambi* is the collective term for the Cuban foot soldiers who fought against Spain for Cuba's independence from 1895-1898).

I have also added [Boring Home Utopics](#) and [Lunes de Post-Revolucion](#) (a pair of blogs maintained from Cuba by the writer, photographer, and provocateur Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo), [Cambio de Epoca](#) (Juan Antonio Blanco's blog hosted on the Cubaencuentro.com site in Spain), [Los Hijos que Nadie Quiso](#) (Angel Santiesteban's literary blog written from Cuba and also hosted on the Cubaencuentro.com site), [Herejias y Caipirinhas 2.0](#) (Miami-based journalist Rui Ferreira's blog), [Cuaderno de Cuba](#) (*Nuevo Herald* columnist Alejandro Armengol's blog), [Cuban Colada](#) (a blog on Cuba maintained by a team of *Miami Herald* reporters), [Cartas desde Cuba](#) (a blog from *BBC's* [foreign correspondent](#) in Cuba, Fernando Ravsberg - photo to the right).

I am also in the process of putting up links to the blogs and opinion pages of the on-line news sites, CubaEncuentro ([blogs](#) & [opinions](#)) and the recently launched Dario de Cuba ([blogs](#) & [opinions](#)) (more on this below).

These new additions expand on my initial blogroll, which included [Generacion Y](#) (Yoani Sanchez), [Octavo Cerco](#) (Claudia Caudelo), [Sin EVAcion](#) (Eva Gonzalez, aka, Miriam Celaya), [The Cuban Triangle](#) (Phil Peters), [Penultimos Dias](#) (Ernesto Hernandez Busto), and [Along the Malecon](#) (Tracey Eaton).

Stay tuned for Part Two, "**Los Hijos de Yoani**" (not *Prisa*), in this 5 part series, "**Let a Thousand Flowers..., uh, Bloggers Bloom!**"

Posted by El Yuma at [2:33 PM](#) [3 comments](#)  [Links to this post](#)



### [\*\*The Savaging of Yoani Sánchez: Of Straw Men, Cocky Hens, and Lobeznas Disfrazadas \(Part 2/3\)\*\*](#)

In the first part of this series, "[Crying Wolf\(ette\)](#)," I highlighted a series of articles appearing in the Cuban press (in print and on-line) aimed at disqualifying Yoani Sanchez. Without exception, they deploy one or more of a handful of tired tactics traditionally aimed at discrediting any critics of the Cuban revolution.

Most commonly, they attack the critic, not the criticism; the messenger, not the message.

In other words, they attack Sánchez's person, her integrity, her motivations, her (rich and luxurious?) lifestyle, or even her choice of fashion (a blond wig in Cuba – how dare she!), choosing to ignore her arguments and analysis about Cuba's many pressing problems:

Official corruption, collapsing infrastructure, an inefficient economic system, lack of freedom of expression, of the press, of association, of assembly, to travel freely abroad, to live where one chooses, to buy and sell one's belongings (including one's home or car), to work on one's own account, not to mention the severe limits on other political, civic, economic, and human rights.

In other words, these attacks are a concerted but unsuccessful attempt to **change the subject**. Cuba's real problems don't appear on that long list above and can simply be reduced to this: the fatherland is threatened by an ungrateful, anti-Cuban, skinny computer hacker with a poison pen (ink bought and paid for by Uncle Sam, of course).

This elegant graphic comes to us courtesy of the blog of Cuban journalist Norelys Morales Aguliera - [Islamia](#).



Luckily, Yoani hasn't taken the bait. She refuses to be dragged down into the mud with her critics, even having the [class](#) to express solidarity and understanding with them as fellow bloggers. Instead of being distracted by the [noise, er, news](#), she has kept up her mission of expanding the space for critical dialogue by speaking truth to power, refusing to stop "[kicking the darkness 'till it bleeds daylight](#)" - verbally speaking, of course.

The second most common line of attack is the claim (without any evidence apart from insinuation and innuendo) that Sánchez is “fabricada,” “mandana,” “controlada,” and “finaciada” by the State Department, the CIA, the Miami Mafia, outsiders, enemies of “Cuba” (conveniently rolling *el pueblo* and *el gobierno* into a single unit). As a mere [“peon](#),” a pawn supposedly doing the bidding of these stealth powers, she cannot therefore be authentically Cuban. In short, she may live in Cuba, but her blog is anything but “*DesdeCuba*” as it claims.



For example, in its article, "[Yoani Sanchez: la hija de PRISA](#)," from Friday, November 27, *Granma Internacional* (see image to the right) raises the following pregnant questions clearly aimed at character assassination (while offering no proof to support its claims other than the claims themselves): "Are the successive prizes she receives really disinterested and apolitical" (or are they given in exchange for her political posture)? "Is she really independent, lacking any links and support from Havana's European embassies?" "Does she or does she not have a connection to the U.S. Interest Section?"

Another tactic that runs through these articles is to complain that she gets an inordinate, unfair, and therefore conspiratorial amount of international media attention vis-à-vis other independent bloggers and movements across the globe. For an example of this argument, see [here](#) and [here](#). But how does the fact of the repression of an Egyptian youth justify the repression of Cuban youth? There is no question that the much pilloried **MSM** (mainstream media) as well as the U.S. administration, even under Obama, carefully chooses which governments it criticizes (and when and how) and which international dissidents it supports as heroes. Still, none of this can legitimately be used to disqualify Sanchez or question the authenticity of her struggle.

This authenticity has, perhaps, been best captured by the exiled Cuban political scientist and self-identified democratic socialist, when he [wrote](#):

"Yoani, for her part, is a permanent construction. She constructs herself with surprising abilities and courage, one day exhibiting the humility of Mother Theresa of Calcutta, while the next day showing the mystical aggressiveness of Joan of Arc. She is also constructed by her detractors, who attack her with epithets so offensive that they end up provoking sympathy for her even from those of us who don't always agree with her. [...]

"Yoani rescues two ideas that are vital for the future of Cuba. Above all, she defends her right, as well as that of her fellow bloggers and of the many millions of Cubans (including exiles), to live in their homeland, freely express their opinions, and work to realize their goals. In the second place, she calls attention to the duty of those in positions of power to open up public spaces to all opinions..." (see the original source in Spanish [here](#)).

Some more reasonable critics make a number of valid points about the historical context where "Cuba is expected to apologize for repeatedly hitting the United States in its fist with its face" (filmmaker Saul Landau's favorite quote), or about the embargo and its effects on Cuba's internet connectivity, or about the technical aspects of Cuba's internet infrastructure. (See, for example, [this](#) article by Nelson Valdes).

But none of these admittedly important issues can be blamed on Sánchez – she has indeed repeatedly stated her unequivocal opposition to the embargo, the U.S. travel restrictions, and to U.S. Treasury Department rules that limit Cubans' access to internet services like Google Earth and MSN messenger. (For more on this, see Phil Peters recent post, "[What is Treasury telling Google?](#)" at his blog, The Cuban Triangle).

Still, these same critics commonly dismiss the independent blogger phenomenon as an

epiphenomena at best or as a willing and well paid part of a coordinated “*guerra mediática*” (media war) hatched in the Pentagon and aimed at Cuba at worst.

Finally, there’s the regrettable element of misogyny in many of the attacks against Sánchez in this full court press. Like Mariela Castro did when she dismissed Sánchez last year as a “cocky hen” (*gallita*) who hides behind her “macho” husband (and you’d think Mariela would know better as a sexologist and advocate for greater freedoms for Cuba’s LGBT community), these journalists often resort to sexist language aimed at belittling the blogger.



The best example of this is in *Granma Internacional*’s offensive against her written by Enrique Ubieta Gomez, where she is referred to as a “*lobezna disfrazada de cordero*” (a wolf-ette in sheep’s clothing). Other past articles have referred to her affectionately as a “[Pentagon Babe](#)” (for a good back and forth between bloggers on this trumped up charge see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Even the *Granma* article itself (a reprint of an article that first came out on-line almost a year ago [here](#) and [here](#)) is entitled, “*Una Hija de Prisa*” (daughter of Prisa – the institution connected to the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* that awarded her the Ortega y Gassett prize last year).

In all these desperate attempts to “savage Sánchez” (now spreading virally on many supposedly “progressive” websites across the world), the authors **ignorantly overlook** or simply **conveniently ignore** the **real reasons** for her substantial success and rapid rise to international fame to date. Is it overconfidence, naivete, jealousy, or just that they don’t understand this new generation and their newfangled gadgets?

***Tuesday, December 8, 2009***

### **[The Savaging of Yoani Sánchez: The Reasons Why... \(Part 3/3\)](#)**

My previous [post](#) in this three part series, “**The Savaging of Yoani Sanchez**,” described the flood of recent articles in the Cuban press aimed at disqualifying the blogger. Essentially, these articles allege that she is a foreign media phenomenon, completely unknown in Cuba, financed by enemies of the revolution.

While it is clear that Sanchez began with a much greater following abroad than she has so far attained within her own country (kind of like the *Buena Vista Social Club*, come to think of it), none of her critics care to admit that this fact is due primarily to the government's monopoly on mass media in Cuba. By law and by definition, Cuban mass media *is* Cuban state media. Remember, the national daily [Granma](#) is the "*Organo Oficial del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba*" (the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party).

Indeed, up until last week, the state media had steadfastly refused to even mention her by name, knowing perhaps that the wily Cuban public is often skeptical of what it reads in *Granma*, and may become interested in "*un tal Yohanis*" exactly because the government has begun to badmouth her. This is also likely the reason that the article that did attempt to savage her, "[Yoani Sánchez: la hija de PRISA](#)" (a reprint of an article first published on-line back in January, 2009) appeared only in the weekly, Spanish-language version of *Granma Internacional*, not in the national daily *Granma*.

Furthermore, the fact that Sanchez's blog, along with a growing number of the blogs and portals that she is associated with, are "**blockaded**" by the government and thus inaccessible to the vast majority of the Cuban public did not seem to merit mention by her critics. (Last year on a trip to Cuba I confirmed this when I was unable to access her blog or the portal that houses it, [DesdeCuba.com](#), from a number of Havana hotels).

Instead, with a twisted logic, her critics use the fact she is (still) relatively unknown within Cuba (because of this internal "**embargo**" on the free flow of information) as "proof" that she is a foreign media construction and, it is insinuated, a foreign agent, whose critiques of Cuba's socialist system serve foreign interests and are not shared by her fellow Cuban subjects, er, citizens.



Thus, out of overconfidence, naivete, jealousy, or just a lack of understanding of this new generation and their newfangled gadgets, and in their effort to disqualify the blogger, her critics have willfully overlooked or conveniently ignored the *real* reasons for her substantial success and rapid rise to international influence to date.

So, here I offer my own analysis of "**the reasons why**"; my "top ten list" of what is really "behind" what her critics have labeled alternately "The Yoani Phenomenon" or more sinisterly "[La Operación Yoani](#)."

1. **David vs. Goliath:** The laudatory international media frenzy that initially greeted Fidel Castro in the 1950s (with **Herbert Matthews** of the [New York Times](#) - pictured with Castro above [Fidel's the one with the cigar] - describing him as "an overpowering personality" whose "men adored him"; "he has caught the imagination of the youth of Cuba all over the island," "an educated, dedicated fanatic, a man of ideals, courage, and of remarkable qualities of leadership"), is ironically being replayed here with Sánchez and her "revolutionary" blog. Remember, Batista also attempted to censor the Cuban national media preventing them from fueling Castro's rising popularity within the country - necessitating the foreign media's "infiltration" of the country to get the story out. However, Batista was much less adept at completely controlling a national media (which was still then in private hands) than is the current government, of which the national mass media is an official extension.

The American and global public love an underdog and the media (especially the **MSM**, much-reviled on both the far-left and the far-right) love simplistic stories of heroes and villains. Remember, [Time](#) categorized Sanchez under the rubric of "Heroes and Pioneers" when listing her among the "100 Most Influential Persons" back in 2008 - even if she insisted that she preferred the simple title of "[citizen](#)." This same "David vs. Goliath" dynamic is part of the reason Castro himself has had such success for so long at generating international support, respect, and admiration for the revolution. Havana has known how to play a convincing David to the U.S.'s even more convincing Goliath for the past 50 years - consistently winning sympathy and support at the UN by focusing attention on the admittedly counterproductive, illegal, and immoral embargo (not to mention "[torpe y anacrónica](#)" as Sanchez's own words).

For her part, this 34-year-old, 90-pounds-when-soaking-wet, *chica impertinente!* has had the same media savvy (now in the internet age) to play up her own role as a young, witty David to the Cuba government's now doddering, and occasionally vengeful and violent octogenarian Goliath, winning growing levels of international sympathy and support by emphasizing the government's own "internal blockade" against the initiative, independence, creativity, and civic freedoms of the Cuban people. As a result, this David of yesteryear is none-to-happy at being cast as today's Goliath by this young, new, and female David, and is unleashing its potent media arsenal in response.

2. **Water in the Desert:** For far too long, the Cuban public (both within Cuba and in exile) have had to listen to "*los mismos tres gatos*" – the historic (elderly, white, male) leaders of the revolution on the one hand, and the traditional (elderly, white, male) exile leadership on the other (not to mention a traditional internal dissident movement who, despite its long-suffering bravery, tend to consider a fax machine a form of new technology). Now, along comes "something completely different" – a child (or grandchild) of the revolution (not a "greedy former landowner attempting to regain lost fortunes") who speaks in a language that others from her generation (both within Cuba and abroad) can readily understand and identify with (even if they do not always agree with).

3. **Taleno con cojones:** Cubans love *pan con mantequilla*, *pan con croqueta*, and *pan con bacallao*. Well, Sánchez has the good fortune of combining two characteristics that Cubans also love, respect, and admire – she has the Cuban “*don de palabra*” and, forgive the *machista* expression, the “*cojones de actuar*.” In other words, “She’s Got Talent!” and the courage of her convictions to deploy that talent in a consistent, courageous way that has earned the grudging respect even of those who do not always share her politics.

In fact, one of the things that first distinguished her blog from others in Cuba when it was launched in April, 2007, was the fact that she openly placed her [name and photo](#) (in the form of her *carne de identidad* no less) alongside her critical chronicles of daily life. In a society awash in years of fear and distrust, this was indeed brave and has been an example that others have begun to follow. Her talent with the written word is also perfectly matched to the blog as a media platform.



To be effective, blogs need three elements: **brevity**, **frequency**, and **personality**. Even occasional readers of Sanchez's blog will note that her posts, best described as a form of the Spanish genre known as "*cronica*," are very rarely longer than just three sharply written paragraphs (unlike my own often long-winded and unwieldy blog posts); she updates her blog several times a week; and she has an easily recognizable and consistent writing style that combines a rich description of everyday Cuban reality with an incisive wit, analysis, and often understated political criticism, almost always featuring an evocative photo or video clip from YouTube.

4. **Technology:** Sanchez's style (described above) and her use of technology are perhaps the two elements of the “Yoani Phenomenon” that cannot be overestimated. We live in an age of a new and, yes, truly “revolutionary” change in communication technology and social networking. This technological revolution is both “news” – that is, it is of interest to a world-wide public who could otherwise care less about Cuba and its internecine, byzantine family squabbles – and fully “present” and “real” to an increasing number of the global population, and especially so to those under 35 (well, maybe 38!, my own age at present). Sanchez has the great advantage of being both young enough to master the use of these new technologies (blogs, YouTube, Twitter, etc.) and mature enough to have something penetrating and original to say when using these new media.

Also, Sanchez is kind of a Davy Crocket of the internet – if “he ‘kilt’ him a bear when he was only three,” as the song goes; we learn on her blog that she ‘bilt’ her very first computer from spare parts back in the Cuba of the early 1990s - *en pleno periodo*

*especial!* So, it seems that she is not only the best-known blogger in Cuba, but she is also likely the biggest computer nerd and best self-taught hacker among her new and rapidly expanding generation of Cuban bloggers. This trait has allowed her to recently begin moving beyond simply writing her own blog, to participating in a number of independent workshops and outreach programs (see for example [itinerarioblogger.com](http://itinerarioblogger.com), [unaislavirtual.com](http://unaislavirtual.com), and [vocescubanas.com](http://vocescubanas.com), not to mention her group's original portal [DesdeCuba.com](http://DesdeCuba.com) itself) aimed at promoting blogging and computer literacy among those in Cuba with something to say but no platform with which to say it.

5. ***El periodismo ciudadano*** (citizen journalism): Last Friday's article in *Granma Internacional* argues that Sanchez was "fabricated to come across as a simple young person alienated from her daily life, and not a politician." However, the weekly claims she "not only talks of politics" but that she also "engages in politics" through her meetings of independent bloggers. In fact, the thing about Sanchez that is perhaps most annoying to both Cuban authorities and to some anti-government activists is that she openly rejects the label of dissident, counter-revolutionary, oppositionist, and even hero and pioneer, insisting that she is nothing but a citizen.

This strategic positioning allows her to simultaneously distance herself from both the traditional internal dissident movement and the Miami counter-revolution (often easily dismissed in Cuba for their links – both real and imagined – to the U.S. government and the use violence). Calling herself a simple citizen also allows her to reclaim for her fellow Cuban citizens the rights and responsibilities attendant to that designation. In essence, she seems to be saying, "We are citizens, not subjects – and we demand the right to act and be treated as if that were actually true." How dare those pesky citizens engage in politics. Don't they know that politics are best left to us politicians!

For example, this is how she describes the concepts of "citizen journalism" and "verbal violence":

"Citizen journalism' is causing quite a fervor across the world, really shaking the foundations of traditional journalism. Citizen journalists are individuals, without any particular professional training, who live in the epicenter of events. One fine day, they decide to recount how they live and to film, record, and photograph the reality that surrounds them, converting themselves into transmitters of information. In the Cuban case, citizen journalism is especially important given the fact that the government exercises an information monopoly. Here, a citizen journalist is a person who writes about everything that the official press refuses to mention.

"In the case of 'verbal violence,' this is one of our fundamental premises in the work we do at DesdeCuba. We refuse to use incendiary language, defamation, or harangues, because that only exacerbates the cycle of intolerance that is an obstacle to reasoned debate. Cuba is a very diverse country. You walk out into the street and you not only find a diversity of races but also of opinions. The official press spends all its time trying to make us believe that this is a very monolithic country, that we all think the same, and it does so with a dose of revolutionary violence and ideological aggressiveness that is

paralyzing. We have to find a way to put a stop to this never-ending cycle, to this spiral of aggression that is very characteristic of Cuban journalism." (For more on these topics and the related concept of *la red ciudadana*, or "citizen network" she relies on to translate and post her blog in multiple languages, see portions of my video interview with her [here](#) and [here](#)).

**6. Subjective, partial, and generational (but not dishonest):** Both in Cuba and the U.S., it is common to hear bloggers criticized as being biased and lacking in the proper objectivity and professionalism expected of journalists. This criticism is true as far as it goes. However, most bloggers, Sanchez included, do not claim objectivity, and in fact much of their effectiveness is borne out of their very subjectivity and unique perspectives and personalities. Unlike many traditional journalists and most newspapers, news websites, and media institutions who make false claims of being "fair and balanced" (*Fox*), publishing only what's "fit to print" (*NYT*), bloggers are clear to their readers from the start that the news they share is "their news," much of its value arising from the particular bent, bias, or shtick of the blog or blogger. At the same time, subjectivity and personality are not necessarily synonymous with dishonesty. Readers beware and readers be responsible! Everyone should be entitled to their own opinions and analysis, but not to their own facts.

**7. A Critic, Sí; An Ideologue, No:** While her critics often try to paint her as a mouthpiece of the "Miami mafia" or "*la extrema derecha*," and while she was long suspect among that very group for being a Castro agent, one of the most refreshing things about her and her group of fellow bloggers is their original, sui-generis, and critical analysis of the Cuba that they live in. In other words, they are not ideologues hewing to anyone's party-line. And it is this characteristic of non-ideological authenticity, more than any other, that has won them a large following among their largely post-ideological generation of Cubans.

**8. Grass-roots vs. Astroturf:** If Sanchez's critics would take the time to review the first year of Generacion Y's existence they will find that, like most other blogs, this one began rather modestly (in terms of its technical sophistication) and attracted relatively little attention or reader comments. In fact, my own post-by-post review of the blog shows that during its first 8 months of existence (April-November, 2007), only one of her 52 posts attracted more than 20 comments with most attracting under 10. This is in great contrast to the hundreds, and eventually thousands of comments her posts began to attract in 2008 and 2009.

In other words, as the blog evolved, its readership grew, and readers increasingly loyal, demanded to become part of the GY conversation. For example, two sequential posts from October 6 ("[Arte blogética](#)") and October 13 ("[La solidaridad me llega](#)") illustrate this organic, grass-roots phenomenon clearly. Toward the end of the first post, Sanchez warns her readers not to be surprised if they login in the future to find a "closed for repairs" notice instead of a new post. "I post and I survive, or better yet, I survive because I post," she writes ironically to end the first message. However, after receiving an "avalanche" of encouragement in response to this first post, in the next one, "[Solidarity](#)

[reaches me](#)," she corrects herself, "instead of writting 'I survive because I post,' I will have to write 'I survive because I post and because you read me'."

Moreover, if one reads this particular blogpost carefully, one discovers that during its first six months of existence, GY was not even equipped to receive reader comments, with the comments presumably going directly to Sanchez via e-mail messages (and perhaps added later to the current blog platform after it was technically updated). Sanchez explains this to her readers in the "[Solidarity](#)" post from October 13:

"Why can't we add comments to your blog? you ask. That will soon be possilbe, only now if you look closely you will realize that it is not set up on any known platform, neither Wordpress nor Movable Type. Instead, I painstakingly built it letter-by-letter in pure html, because that was the easiest way that I found -from Cuba- to do it. At the end of this month, I am going to do everything over again so that it functions like a true blog with all the normal possibilities."

Thus, in response to reader comments and demands, Sanchez gradually increased her blog's technical sophistication, adding new "gadgets" and languages every few months – especially as she found more and more volunteers in an ever-expanding global citizen network to translate and manage the various languages in which the blog operates.

Indeed, in e-mail exchanges with the current translator of GY into English, I discovered that his "labor of love" began after he noticed that new posts had suddenly ceased to appear on the English version of the blog. Then, on May 5, 2008, there appeared a GY post, ironically entitled, "[Trabajo voluntario](#)," where Sanchez asked for translation help. After waiting a few weeks and seeing that no one else had stepped forward, he simply wrote her in his high-school Spanish and offered to join the team. "You wont believe this, but in the beginning I could barely speak Spanish and I still have never even met Yoani," he told me. "But I figured that with my seven years of French, two of Latin, and those five weeks of Spanish practice I got on vacation in Costa Rica, I could give it a try. I was blown away when she finally wrote me back with a simple message: 'Here's the password. Go for it!'"

If GY is actually a clandestine foreign "astrotruf" construction, and not an authentic grass-roots phenomenon as its critics allege, this gradual, organic growth would not be so evident. And the CIA would have surely given her enough money from the start to launch a blog in multiple languages with all the proper technical bells and whistles!

Indeed, if Generation Y owes anything to a secret government conspiracy or clandestine operation, it is not to the usual foreign suspects (*Los Yanquis*, Spain, Prisa, Montaner, or *La CIA*), but ironically to the Cuban government itself. Likely the biggest surge in Generacion Y's readership came after the Cuban authorities began strategically blocking access to it within Cuba just before its first anniversary in April, 2008. Indeed, March and April mark the first time that reader comments surged beyond 1,000 entries, reaching upwards of 2,000, 3,000, and even 5,000 comments in response to one post in late April.

Of course, there's nothing like a ban to increase the public's desire for something – that forbidden fruit thing...

**9. Projection:** In his attempts to explain his own rapid rise to popularity during the election, candidate Barack Obama liked to say that people of good faith often saw him as a blank slate on which they could project their diverse hopes and dreams. I think that Sanchez, her blog, and the larger movement of which she is a part, has a similar function for Cubans (at home and abroad). They have long been waiting for someone with the *talento y cojones* to say out loud the things that they could not find the words or courage to say themselves. This diverse public includes proud members of the extreme and intransigent right in Miami (like some of the bloggers at [Babalublog](#) and the [members](#) of the [Cuban Liberty Council](#)), while at the same time including much more progressive Democrats like [Arturo Lopez Levy](#) in Taiwan/Colorado and [Alejanadro Armengol](#) in Miami, Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and even a few self-defined “socialists,” like [Haroldo Dilla](#) in the Dominican Republic and [Sam Farber](#) in New York, as well as many, perhaps a silent majority of Cubans on the island.

**10. The Young and Restless (and Female):** Finally, in a country with a long tradition of being ruled by old men as if it were a military garrison under attack and granting themselves the right to speak for all with the royal “[WE](#),” one has to recognize the unique power of the lone voice of a youthful, individual woman speaking in the [first person singular](#) (only one among many), all the while inviting others who may disagree to engage in a civil, respectful, but critical debate for the present and future of their common homeland.

The fact of her female gender in a machista political culture is also key to her success to date as it has led her opponents to cynically underestimate her courage and talent. For perhaps the first two years of her project, many of her critics made veiled assumptions that she had to be just a pretty face, an attractive facade for someone else's thoughts or ideas (her husband, Montaner, Bush, Obama... anyone but her). This is the kind of comment I typically got from my usually well-informed Cuban friends when I asked them about her on a visit to Cuba in July 2008. However, on that same visit, I discovered through a [long interview](#) I conducted with her in person that she is fully her own woman, with an extemporaneous verbal eloquence to match her razor sharp written dexterity.

There's an old saying, "Behind every great man, there's a great woman." Well, the reverse of this is indeed true in Sanchez's case, except that her husband Escobar is indeed her #1 collaborator and supporter, not the Svengali that [some](#) have tried to make him out to be. And, in this case, he is joined by a growing "worldwide web," a veritable [citizen network](#) of other collaborators and supporters.

In the end, it's not about Yoani, but about Cuba. As Sanchez told [El Pais'](#) Mario Vicent last year, "Life is not to be found in another place, but in another Cuba."