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Cuba's Opposition Branding Named Yoani Sanchez [1]

Yoani Sanchez, the most famous Cuban blogger who advocates for the freedom of speech, is a distinct critic of the Castro's administration. Although a recognizable figure around the globe, she has never been able to travel; yet, after twenty previous denials Sanchez was just granted permission to leave the island for the first time. Even though this fact itself constitutes a solid basis for assuming that a smaller part of Fidel's legacy is disappearing silently, it is important to realize that a demure dissident ghost is present in each of Yoani's actions. Therefore, the more she articulates her liberal ideas on Cuban soil, the more the Cuban nationals are exposed to the dangers of controversy which causes strong repulsion among the members of the island´s ruling class. Back in the years when the strictest set of rules was enforced one symbol of the communist restrictive regime designated as *tarjeta blanca* (the white card) was indispensable to obtain in order to travel abroad. Having been officially abolished, a significant shift from the past was made in an attempt to loosen the rigidity of the Cuban travel policy. However, many Latin American researchers are convinced that this gesture of granting her a passport is intentionally designed in a manner which will bring Sanchez face-to-face with her opponents. Yoani is a founder of the blog, Generation Y, which is remarkably influential in the digital community, so Cuban officials might be interested in pointing out her professional failings. One such example, her declaration that the hotel *Parque Central*, a reputedly a property of the Spanish hotel company NH, was continuously depriving the Cuban nationals from Internet access, which turned out to be false interpretation of reality. An immediate response of the company in question printed in the Spanish newspaper *El País* revealed that NH could be hardly blamed as no property in Cuba belonged to its portfolio.

On another occasion, trying again to ignite criticism of the Cuban government, Yoani claimed, without prior verification, that her Twitter account had been blocked by the island´s gerontocracy. To the unpleasant surprise of the public worldwide, Twitter itself assumed full responsibility for a temporary failure causing disoperation in Cuba. Therefore, the Cuban officials remained guilt free and Sanchez ended up with a self–discrediting experience on her hands.

I deem important not to miss the fact that Sanchez will soon finish her tour that consists of visiting ten countries in eighty days. Thus, in February she left the hostile territory of her homeland in the Caribbean to launch her journey around the world starting in Brazil. Nevertheless, the first obstruction appeared right at the beginning when a presentation of a documentary movie she planned to attend had been cancelled due to the strong protests of the Castro's supporters. Hence, at the improvised press conference held in the Brazilian Congress in order to substitute the cultural event which didn´t take place, Sanchez declared that the Cuban government would save huge amount of financial resources if *los cinco* (five Cuban citizens accused of espionage and imprisoned in the United States) were freed. Unfortunately for her reputation, nobody has noticed the ironic tone of her voice that provided a space for different types of misinterpretation. Having pointed at some of Yoani´s

contradictory statements over the Cuban reality, I would like to accentuate that when conducting public diplomacy an individual must be cautious and transparently readable, but at the same time, must avoid being paraphrased in an erroneous way.

In spite of some yet not explained journalistic discrepancies, Sanchez's public image can be easily compared to the profitable company - such as Bacardi Rum which is easily recognizable for its black bat appearing in the company logo, so too is Sanchez who is considered to be a known brand of the Castro's opposition. This generally accepted label allows her to shape the public opinion to a large extent. On a more specific level, she has succeeded in expanding the like–minded audience for quite some time now. In turn, these allies have been putting light pressure on the members of the socialist machinery ever since. Now that she is physically able to leave the island, the people will listen to her even more attentively checking every single detail of her rhetoric. Yoani's long prohibited foreign activities are likely to lead to some sharp-edged outputs when targeting the Cuban *oficialismo*. The question, however, is whether these outputs of her international tour will deter the Cuban government at least a little bit or, on the contrary, will feed its repressive side. In this sense, public diplomacy has always been a powerful weapon able to infect the masses instantaneously. The coming days will prove whether Sanchez's democratization tendencies or Castro's Marxist ideology is more contagious.