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Translation Practices during the Cold War: The Battle for Cultural Control in the Caribbean

1 Introduction

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 shifted the course of the Cold War and made the Caribbean region the center of many geopolitical strategies by East and West in their disputes over control of the area. Being so close to the United States, Cuba posed a challenge and a risk to American economic, political, and financial interests and a manifestation of the threat of communist expansion in Latin America. Both the United States and the Soviet Union sought to increase their control and ideological influence through cultural production, and devoted enormous amounts of resources, both human and economic, to guarantee their presence and visibility in the region. This article will explore how the new situation created by a socialist revolution in the Caribbean disrupted the dynamics and balance of international power in the region, and how some specific cultural practices, like literary translation, cultural diplomacy, and artistic exchanges, reshaped the ideological imaginary in the area. Specifically, the article will first focus on the formation of a socialist translation system in Cuba after 1959, and then will analyze how socialist translation was put into practice, and how the circulation of periodical publications from the Eastern bloc tried to influence Cuban population to create a specific social subjectivity.

Many studies have been devoted in the last few decades to the cultural Cold War in Latin America, starting with the groundbreaking study published in 1999 by Francis S. Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War. The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. More recent and equally important works include *Política y polémica en América Latina. Las revistas Casa de las Américas y Mundo Nuevo*, by Idalia Morejón Arnaiz, in 2017; *La poesía al poder. De Casa de Las Américas a McNally Jackson*, by Cristián Gómez Olivares, in 2018, and *Guerra por las ideas en América Latina, 1959–1973: Presencia soviética en Cuba y Chile*, by Rafael Pedemonte, in 2020.

All these studies, and others, offer a precise map of the actions, money, and human and technological resources used by both superpowers, the Soviet Union, and the United States –sometimes in a more visible way, sometimes less obviously– to gain influence in the rest of the world and specifically in the Latin American continent. Our article, much



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more modest, points to an area that none of these studies have taken deeply into account: the role that translations played not only in putting a “high” literary culture into circulation, but also in reaching out to a broader audience by promoting “popular culture”.

2 Creation of a Socialist Translation System

Soon after taking power, the new Cuban authorities became aware of a significant challenge: the island did not share its native language with any other member of the socialist bloc, and Cuba lacked translators from the languages of those nations. Historically, the languages of Cuban translation had been English and French, languages that were not massively spoken in the socialist countries: in many cases, these languages were politically and ideologically ‘suspect,’ although in others, like in Russia, there was a long French cultural tradition from the tsarist times. As Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov demonstrate in their article “From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the ‘Anti-Cosmopolitan’ Campaigns on Soviet Culture”, in the late 1940s the Soviet authorities thrust an anti-Western campaign that not only limited travel abroad for its citizens but also tried to increase the importance and dominance of Russian as a scientific and international language. In this context, French was perceived as a feudal language, and English, as the language of the enemy. Moreover, by the sixties many countries within the socialist bloc had made Russian language mandatory in the schools. As Marshall R. Singer states,

While Russian was never the official language of any of the countries of Eastern Europe, it was the second language, spoken in the higher government, military, and intellectual circles. Most schools in Eastern Europe taught Russian as a second language ... In countries such as Afghanistan, Cuba, and Vietnam, on the periphery of the Soviet sphere but still under heavy Russian influence, the percentage of Russian speakers was lower but still significant (Singer, 1998, 21).

As mentioned, when the Cuban Revolution triumphs, the new government faced, among others, a linguistic challenge. To partially overcome this specific difficulty, while new translators were trained some works were made available through indirect translations from a third language, following a practice that had been in place for decades.¹ However, two main factors eased the path for translations from Russian into

1 For instance, in 1848 Diego Vicente Tejera translated 17 poems by Sándor Petőfi, the Hungarian National Poet. He translated them from the French. After the Cuban Revolution, Félix Pita Rodríguez translated Vietnamese literature from French versions. In other cases, Cuban writers worked with foreign translators to complete indirect translations of literary works, like in the special issue of the journal *Unión*, in 1965, dedicated to Hungarian literature: the Cuban team (Fayad Jamís, Félix Pita Rodríguez, Angel Augier, Fernando Moro, David Fernández, Luis Marré, José Rodríguez Feo, José Luis Martínez y Armando Álvarez Bravo) worked on direct translations provided by Hungarian translators Vera Sékács and András Simor. See: *Revista Unión. Literatura húngara de hoy* 2, abril-junio 1966.

Spanish, and the arrival of a great number of translated Soviet books on the island: first, the presence in the Soviet Union of a strong intellectual community of Spanish-speaking citizens (the “Children of the War,” who had been sent to the USSR during or after the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939). Many of the members of this Spanish–Soviet community were the first linguistic bridge between Cuba and the USSR; secondly, the Soviet Union—a multilingual nation itself—, despite its suspicions regarding certain languages, had a solid translation history furthered and consolidated since the beginning of the twentieth century by the World Literature publishing house founded by Maxim Gorki in Petrograd in 1918.

According to Blas Nabel Pérez Camejo: “en 1960 se exportaron a Cuba 12 mil ejemplares de libros soviéticos. En 1962 esta cifra se acercó al millón” (Pérez Camejo, 1990, 300). At the same time, specialists from the socialist countries traveled to Cuba to perfect their skills and take on the task of translating from their original languages into Spanish and teach their language to Cubans.

In a speech on December 22, 1961, Fidel Castro did what can be considered the first call for students to master the languages from the socialist bloc, especially Russian:

Necesitamos 2 300 graduados de octavo grado para ingresar como becados también en la escuela Héroes de Girón para profesores del idioma ruso ... Seguirán estudiando, naturalmente, su bachillerato; es decir, su secundaria y su preuniversitario, pero al mismo tiempo recibirán enseñanza que los capacite como profesores del idioma ruso ...

Necesitamos 200 graduados de secundaria básica para estudiar, como internos en la escuela de idiomas, otros idiomas distintos que los capacitarán para desempeñar diversas funciones: intérpretes, traductores, en los organismos estatales (Castro, 1961).

In a date as early as 1962, the Soviet Union sent 100 professors of Russian language to the island, following the petition by Fidel Castro (Pérez Camejo, 1990, 268–274).

El Ministerio de Educación de la URSS y el CC del Komsomol lo habían formado [the pedagogical contingent] de entre los mejores egresados de los centros pedagógicos. Fueron alojados en uno de los barrios aristocráticos de La Habana, en Miramar ... Precisamente aquí fueron organizadas dos escuelas que debían preparar, mediante un programa acelerado, profesores y traductores de idioma ruso. Estas escuelas recibieron el nombre del famoso revolucionario francés, Pablo Lafargue (nacido en Cuba), y del gran escritor proletario soviético Máximo Gorki (Pérez Camejo, 1990, 272).

These steps were part of a broader objective of transforming the island's cultural landscape and creating a new literary and translation system. Consequently, laws were passed, and institutions created to promote the production and consumption of culture generated not only in Cuba but also throughout the world, with an emphasis on the Eastern Bloc. Among the first steps that the Cuban government took after 1959 to promote cultural production and consumption, it is worth mentioning the founding of Casa de las Américas in April of that year, and its publishing house the following year; the creation of the National Printer in 1959 —between 1962 and 1967, when it became the National Publishing House. From the National Printer other press houses were also created, such as University Press, Pedagogical Press, Youth Press and the Political publishing house—; the literacy campaign in 1961 —it is estimated that more than 700,000 people learned to write and read with the help of thousands of volunteers of all ages—; the Department of Literature and Publications of the National Cultural Council (1959–1962); the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, in 1961; Revolution Edition (1965–1967, under the direction of the National Cultural Council, for the publication of university books); the Book Institute, in 1967. Two other important initiatives created independently left their mark on Cuban cultural life in those early years: Ediciones R., a publishing house founded by members of *Lunes de Revolución*, which only survived until 1965, and Ediciones El Puente, created in 1960.² Both were doomed to failure due to the sociopolitical context of the time.

In 1967, an additional important step was taken: the creation of the Department of Translations in Havana, as part of an entire apparatus to guarantee universal access to quality World Literature, not just from the socialist countries. This Department were to work closely with the Cuban Book Institute to provide translation services to all publishers affiliated with it, and it was made up of a team of about 20 translators of recognized competence, like Virgilio Piñera and César López, among others. This small number of literary translators, however, could not meet the high translation demands: immediately after 1959, the government created new institutions, like Casa de las Américas and the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba with the intention of establishing direct contact with the international intellectual community. This small number of translators had to provide their services to all literary publishers of the time, and others that were created later: Arte y Literatura; Gente Nueva; Ámbito... (Smorkaloff, 1987, 172). On many occasions, given the impossibility of translating a certain work on time, an alternative adopted was to use translations already made into Spanish (Acosta, 2008). The other option was to rely on translations provided by Soviet and other socialist translators and publishers.

2 In his book *El martillo y el espejo: directrices de la política cultural cubana (1959–1976)*, Emilio Gallardo Saborido makes a very accurate analysis of the disputes between Alejo Carpentier —director of the National Publishing House since its creation in 1962, until 1966— with El Puente group.

As a result of all these efforts, translation reached an unprecedented level of professionalization; at the same time, the universities established careers specialized in the study of foreign languages and thousands of students were sent to the Eastern bloc to learn languages theretofore practically unknown in Cuba. Years later, other higher education institutions exclusively focused in the teaching of foreign languages were created: The Faculty of Foreign Languages of the University of Havana (FLEX), in 1972; and the Pablo Lafargue Higher Pedagogical Institute (ISPLE), in 1977.

All these steps aimed to consolidate the birth of a new Cuban cultural citizenship through the education and teaching of reading and writing of the population, and by making cultural production accessible to all Cubans in terms of both price and location. The new authorities were determined to challenge the notion of the bourgeois-lettered city.

Angel Rama, in *La ciudad letrada*, defines the lettered city as the center of power in the Latin American societies created after Spanish colonization:

En el centro de toda ciudad, según diversos grados que alcanzaban su plenitud en las capitales virreinales, hubo una *ciudad letrada* que componía el anillo protector del poder y el ejecutor de sus órdenes: una pléyade de religiosos, administradores, educadores, profesionales, escritores y múltiples servidores intelectuales, todos esos que manejaban la pluma, estaban estrechamente asociados a las funciones del poder ... Desde su consolidación en el último tercio del XVI, ese equipo mostró dimensiones desmesuradas, que no se comparaban con el reducido número de los alfabetizados a los cuales podía llegar su palabra escrita y ni siquiera con sus obligaciones específicas, y ocupó simultáneamente un elevado rango dentro de la sociedad (Rama, 1984, 25).

By the mid-twentieth century, this description fit the Cuban reality: cultural production, especially literature, tended to be an endogenous practice, where producers and consumers were one and the same. Although Cuba had a solid literary tradition, the number of illiterate citizens was huge.³ In this sense, the concrete steps taken by the Cuban government in those first months and years constituted an effort to remedy the limited access to both domestic and worldwide cultural production while also fostering local production.

But all these nuances need to be read in the more global context of its time. The triumph of a revolution led by young rebels, so far from the epicenter of socialism, came to fulfill the hopes of the international left, as a fresh new movement that would also open the door to Latin America and defy the United States and its system of values.

3 According to official data offered by the Cuban government, before 1959 the 23.6% of the population was illiterate. See "Cuba en cifras antes y después del triunfo de la Revolución," <https://www.radiorebelde.icrt.cu/50-revolucion/estadisticas.html>.

3 The Cold War in the Caribbean: The Menace of Russian Translations

On the Caribbean geopolitical map configured after 1959, but especially starting in 1961, when Castro declared Cuba a socialist nation, Cuba and Puerto Rico became the antipodes of the confrontation between the socialist and capitalist blocs. As in the rest of the world, here also the cultural Cold War was moving in two directions: toward high culture, with the publication of journals such as *Casa de las Américas* and *Mundo Nuevo*, while also reaching out to more people through popular magazines. Two specific publications illustrate this cultural confrontation through translation practices: *Reader's Digest*, from the United States, and *Sputnik*, from the Soviet Union. Symbolically, these two magazines can be seen as depicting the battle for the control of the Caribbean, not only culturally, but also ideologically and politically.

It is necessary to add that despite frequent comparisons between *Selections from the Reader's Digest* and *Sputnik* that note the similarities between the two publications' formats and objectives, significant differences separate them: *Sputnik* was of a shorter duration —circulated only between 1967 and 1997— while *Reader's Digest* began in 1922 and is still in circulation. The number of copies and languages into which the content was translated, and therefore the magazines' scopes, also differed: *Sputnik* was published in seven languages, with a monthly circulation of 500,000 copies in at least 30 countries, while *Reader's Digest* was translated into 21 languages and its worldwide circulation reached several million copies. Unlike *Reader's Digest*, whose circulation was banned in socialist countries, *Sputnik* was distributed and sold in various nonsocialist countries. Another important difference, evident just by opening any of the two magazines, was the lack of publicity in the pages of *Sputnik*,⁴ contrary to the abundance of promotional information found in *Reader's Digest*.

These two, needless to say, were not the only ones; there was a myriad of periodical publications such as *New Times*, *Moscow News*, and *Soviet Woman* on the Soviet side, and *Life* magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Man's Magazine*, and *Stag* on the North American side.⁵

According to Francis S. Saunders,

[la CIA situó] agentes en el *Correo del Pacífico Sur* (Santiago), en el *Crónica de Guyana*, *El Sol de Haití*, el *Tiempos de Japón*, *La Nación de Rangoon*, el *Diario de Caracas*, el *Bangkok Post*, y antes de la Revolución cubana, el *Tiempos de La Habana* ... “No más Cubas” era una política concreta para la CIA que, con este objetivo, poseía varias revistas de calidad que hacía circular tras *Tortilla*

4 Occasionally, some advertisement could be found on the back cover of *Sputnik*.

5 For more detailed information on popular North American magazines, see Parfrey, 2015.

Curtain, Cuadernos (editada por Julian Gorkin y, más tarde, por Germán Arciniegas), y su sucesor *Mundo Nuevo* (editada por el literato uruguayo Rodríguez Monegal, y diseñada para promover el tema del “Fidelismo sin Fidel”). Por otra parte, la CIA también creó una división en Nueva York llamada Foreign Publications Inc. (Publicaciones extranjeras inc.) para subsidiar varias publicaciones anticastristas (Saunders, 2003).

Even before the Cuban Revolution, the United States had focused on expanding its influence by means of cultural magazines and subsidies to intellectuals and writers. One of the main instruments of that effort was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, whose “Manifesto to Free Men” proclaimed that “freedom of opinion is one of the inalienable rights of man.”⁶

En su máximo esplendor, el Congreso llegó a tener oficinas en 35 países, publicaba más de 20 revistas de alta calidad, y organizaba seminarios, conciertos, premios literarios y exposiciones. En este período, no hubo una sola organización, salvo en la Unión Soviética, que dispusiera de tan grandes recursos, o que influyera de manera similar en las carreras de tantas personalidades cimeras de la cultura (Saunders, 2003).

As Saunders explains, among the first magazines published by the Congress for Cultural Freedom were *Encounter* (United Kingdom), *Preuves* (France), *Tempo Presente* (Italy), *Cuadernos* (Latin America), *Quest* (India), and *Quadrant* (Australia) as well as others outside of the literary realm: *Soviet Survey*, *Science and Freedom*, and other news magazines such as *Forum Service*. From 1964 to 1968, new titles appeared: *China Quarterly*, *Minerva*, *Censorship*, and *Transition* (Morejón Arnaiz, 2017, 21). The United States was concerned about Latin America, and magazines were founded in the region with the same objective of preventing or slowing down the advance of communist ideas and counteracting anti-American sentiment, which had been exacerbated by events such as the military intervention in Guatemala in 1954. Some of these magazines were, as Morejón Arnaiz enumerates, *Cuadernos* (Paris, 1953–1965), *Cadernos brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro, 1959–1970), *Temas* (Montevideo, 1965–68), and *Mundo Nuevo* (Paris and Buenos Aires, 1966–1971). Several, such as *Mundo Nuevo*, were financed through the new organization created after the dissolution of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the International Association for Cultural Freedom, which was funded by the Ford Foundation.

Saunders illustrates the role of intellectuals in the cultural Cold War:

6 Idalia Morejón Arnaiz has studied the Congress for Cultural Freedom, as well as magazines and their institutions.

No se trataba de comprar o subvertir a escritores e intelectuales, sino de crear un sistema de valores arbitrario y artificial con el que los académicos fueran promovidos; los editores, designados; y los estudiosos, subsidiados y publicados; no por sus méritos —que en ocasiones eran considerables— sino por su filiación (Saunders, 2003).

Although in this case Saunders is referring to the role of the United States and the CIA in the cultural Cold War, it is interesting to note that this same trend can be extrapolated and effectively applied to the Soviet case. Both powers, with almost identical strategies, pursued the same objective: the formation of a citizenry that responded to a particular ideology. The concept of ideology proposed by Marianne Moyaert is useful for a better understanding of the situation: “Ideology functions as a pre-given symbolic realm, permeating all discourse, claiming a certain naturalness. It exerts a power over how people within a society think, what they accept as reasonable, what they consider important, valuable and worthy of pursuit” (Moyaert, 2011, 96).

In her article “Between Ideology and Utopia: Honneth and Ricoeur on Symbolic Violence, Marginalization and Recognition,” Moyaert proposes a reading of ideology as an expression of cultural imagination that is useful for understanding the mechanisms of social domination in a given period, and the role played by the magazines in question as essential cogs in said machinery of domination. She follows the postulates of Ricoeur, who rejects the view that critical theory has negatively represented ideology as a false consciousness:

At its deepest level, ideology is integration, fulfilling the important role of symbolically gathering people together as a community. It both establishes and preserves a community’s sense of unity, “by means of symbolic systems immanent in action and thereby preserves the social identity of the political community.” A society revolves around a cultural heritage grounded in shared memories that are commemorated. “[This commemoration] takes place in [their] narratives, [their] legends, [their] histories, whose heroes are people, or at least individuals; it happens in [their] feasts with their celebrations, their rituals” (Moyaert, 2011, 95).

Once the group led by Fidel Castro came to power, the island became the epicenter of the socialist camp’s geopolitical operations, where ideological dissemination through culture —especially literature in translation— served as the most vital battleground for the confrontation between the East, led by the Soviet Union, and the West, led by the United States. The Cuban socialist experience modified the traditional colonial and imperial borders and transformed the Caribbean in an arena of

new geopolitical content. Although the Cold War started after the end of World War II, it was not until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution that the Caribbean —still suffering from its colonial history— turned into a hotbed of confrontations between the two political poles. One of the most active forms of such confrontation took place via culture, particularly the printed word and literary translations.

Given the rudimentary quality of the almost nonexistent translation system in Cuba in 1959, as previously stated, which consisted mainly of a few writers and intellectuals, the Cuban government and its new allies took a comprehensive approach to train translators who would put into circulation the new ideological–aesthetic postulates not only in Cuba but in the entire region.

As part of these cultural strategies promoted and sustained mainly by the Soviet Union, given its political and economic weight among the socialist nations, intellectuals and artists from socialist and nonsocialist countries were invited to visit the USSR so they could witness the advances of Soviet society and later report on this reality in their respective countries. In addition, many students from developing nations had the opportunity to go to the Soviet Union to pursue a higher education for free. And many scientists from those developing countries took part in programs such as Interkosmos, which sent them into outer space in joint flights with the Soviets.

In this new context in the Caribbean, so close to home, the United States felt forced to deploy and reinforce strategies to guarantee its dominance in the region. It intensified its military interventions in the area: between January 1959 and February 1972, it carried out 42 political–military operations in the Caribbean.⁷ Notable among these were the military interventions in the Dominican Republic in 1965, in Curaçao in 1969, and in Trinidad and Tobago in 1970. To guarantee the success of such interventions, the United States maintained military bases in the area,⁸ just as the Soviet Union had the Lourdes listening station in Cuba.

It is important to remember that in 1959 Cuba supported at least three invasions to-neighboring countries: to Panama on April 18,⁹ to the Dominican Republic on June

7 19 of these were related to Cuba, 9 to the Dominican Republic and 8 to Haiti; overall, such operations were related to 11 countries from the area: Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Panama, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela, British Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Curaçao and Mexico (Pierre–Charles, 1998, 149).

8 The United States had ten military bases in the Panama Canal Zone until 1999; six in Puerto Rico; Guantanamo in Cuba; Chaguaramas in Trinidad (between 1958 and 1971); and the tracking stations in Antigua and Santa Lucia, and those of the naval experiment in the Bahamas (Lieuwen, 1966, 9).

9 A group of eighty-two Cubans dressed in olive green disembarked in Nombre de Dios (on Panama's Atlantic coast). César Vega, major of the Navy Cuban, led them. The men were seeking to overthrow the government of Roberto Arias, but they were defeated by the National Guard and imprisoned. The Cuban government denied being behind the operation.

14,¹⁰ and to Haiti on August 30.¹¹ Later, Cuba stopped trying to promote the rebel movements in the Caribbean basin, at least by those means.

But the confrontation touched all areas of reality, beyond military exercises and interventions. In this sense, magazines like *Reader's Digest* and *Sputnik* can help us to understanding the magnitude of the ideological confrontation that took place through culture.

These magazines had the largest circulations of their kind, and in both cases their audiences extended far beyond the borders of the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively, not to mention far beyond the Caribbean basin: both circulated, in translation into other languages, in many countries. The two magazines also maintained an ideological counterpoint, often mixed with all kinds of information from a range of journalistic and even scientific sources.

4 *Reader's Digest* vs. *Sputnik*

When in 1975 the Soviet magazine *Sputnik* started circulating in Spanish language, and therefore, arrived in Cuba, the readers of the island were already familiar with Russian culture and literature. In the 25 previous years, the impact of the Soviets was visible in all areas of social, military, and economic life, and the magazine, with its diverse content and colorful pages, became one of the favorites for the Cuban public.

In total, more than 160 issues circulated between 1975 and 1989 in Cuba. The magazine, as well as the rest of the publications from the socialist bloc, but mainly from the Soviet Union, promoted a specific model of society by praising heroism, sacrifice, science and sports. To better understand the scope of the influence that these periodical publications had on the generations of Cubans, it is valid to bring up the opinion of filmmaker and writer Oneyda González, when she explains her script for the documentary *Todas iban a ser reinas*:

Una de las cosas que me vino de inmediato a la mente era eso: ¿qué pasó con el modelo de mujer en el que yo me formé? Porque yo soy una mujer que todavía me formé leyendo revistas como *La mujer soviética*. Yo recuerdo que yo quería ser bailarina, o científica, o cosmonauta. Eran esos los modelos y,

10 Alberto Bayo, from Republican Spain, who had trained Cubans for the Granma expedition in 1956, also trained Dominican exiles. Fifty-six men landed in the town of Constanza aboard a Venezuelan C-46 plane and fled to the mountains to establish a guerrilla force. They were annihilated in two weeks. Two yachts then docked in Maimon Bay; the crew members were exterminated, and any survivors, killed.

11 About 30 Cuban expedition members disembarked in the community of Les Irois, South of Haiti, alone, because the ship where the exiles were supposed to arrive Haitians who would be part of the expedition never arrived. Cubans took refuge in the forest but were decimated shortly after.

además, era interesante ... Yo me acuerdo de que en las páginas centrales de aquellas revistas venía la vida del hogar de aquellas mujeres que tenían un buen marido, que podían desarrollarse plenamente en la vida social y eran un modelo de lo que yo quería ser (Unpublished interview).

As González clearly states, these magazines not only provided the Cuban reader with interesting and somehow exotic information about distant realities but also portrayed aspirational models for the new society promoted by the government on the island.

The information published in those magazines, as well as the ideological and sentimental education promoted by culture and formal instruction in general, facilitated the creation of a Cuban social subjectivity connected to USSR models—and to the rest of the socialist world, although to a lesser degree—. Once the magazines disappeared, and the socioeconomic system that supported them, a large part of those who were educated under these aesthetic precepts, continue to feel a sentimental affinity for a common past that was written, to a large extent, with letters of the Cyrillic alphabet.

Years later, the prohibition on the circulation of popular magazines like *Sputnik* and *Moscow News* (*Novedades de Moscú*), in August of 1989,¹² illustrates the ideological scope conferred on these publications. In the editorial published in *Granma*, its (unknown) author states that

Novedades de Moscú y *Sputnik* son portadoras de puntos de vista y posiciones respecto a la construcción del socialismo, a partir de una determinada interpretación de la experiencia soviética, casi siempre controvertidos, cuando no sustancialmente divergentes de los criterios y la orientación esencial de nuestro Partido, tanto en lo que concierne a las vías y métodos de la edificación socialista como a cuestiones ideológicas medulares (1989, 9).

For as long as these magazines served their purpose of helping the ideological interests of the state, they were welcome. But once that the government perceived them as a threat, they were banned.

In Cuba, *Sputnik* was one of the magazines with the largest circulation for several reasons: the limited variety of publications available to the public at the time, its affordable price, and the diversity of its content.

Novosti, the agency in charge of putting *Sputnik* into circulation, was interested in promoting abroad a positive, modern image of socialist development in the Soviet Union. The very name of the magazine points in that direction: Sputnik was the first

12 The editorial officially banning *Sputnik* and *Novedades de Moscú* first appeared on the regular *Granma* issue on August 4, 1989. For this article we have consulted the *Resumen Semanal*, where the editorial was also reproduced.

artificial satellite, launched by the Soviet Union in 1957. The magazine had fixed sections that addressed a range of topics, from politics to science, the arts, and literature.

But besides the variety and attractiveness of its content, one of the main functions of the magazine was to serve as a counterpart to the values promoted by the West. *Sputnik's* eleventh issue, from November 1980, clearly illustrates this goal. It included "The Future Began in 1917," an excerpt from an article by Nikolai Polianov, taken from the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* (*Foreign Literature*). In the article, the author recounted the life of Vladimir Lenin, and in particular, his encounter with H. G. Wells in 1920: "If the peoples of the Western countries truly want to help the Russian people, they must learn to understand and respect the convictions and principles of the Bolsheviks. So far, the governments of Western countries have ignored these convictions and principles in the rudest way" (Polianov, 1980, 5).

Highlighting such statements made by Western public figures, along with the dissemination of news of socialist achievements in science and sports, were the most frequent legitimization strategies used by the magazine to promote Soviet ideology. Criticism of the capitalist system by leading politicians was also a common trend. For instance, the same article quoted Henry Ford II and John Kennedy: according to the magazine, Ford would have offered the following agonized commentary on the US future: "I don't know where we are headed to. There are two directions to follow: one leads to war and the other to bankruptcy."¹³ And from Kennedy, *Sputnik* reproduced the following statement made by the US president in 1961: "Before the term of my presidency expires, we will have to verify again if an organized and administered nation like ours can continue to exist. I am not very sure that we will succeed in this test" (Polianov, 1980, 7). It would be too cumbersome to dwell on the many quotes of this type reproduced in the magazine during the socialist years (1967–1991), but the few examples noted above provide a snapshot of the trend.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States had a particular interest in Latin America and the Caribbean, but since the Second World War it has paid special attention to the area. According to Lisa Ubelaker Andrade,

the United States government strengthened its investment in the region, and, through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), under the direction of Nelson Rockefeller, produced media designed to curb Nazi influence and advance U.S. shares of the consumer market (Cramer & Prutsch, 2012; Hart, 2013). The office also provided incentives for private entities willing to invest in pro-Allied propaganda aimed at the region (Ubelaker Andrade, 2019, 5).

13 The magazine does not mention when Ford II supposedly said this phrase or provide the context.

One of the main tools for such a goal was the wide circulation of *Reader's Digest* in the region. Although it was a privately venture, it was

billed as a way to build cultural ties outside of the United States while also contributing to international diplomacy; press surrounding the venture stated that the Latin American edition of the U.S. magazine would aid the U.S. war effort, consolidating support for the United States in the region (Ubelaker Andrade, 2019, 5).

By the middle of the 40s, the magazine had become a huge success in the continent, where thousands and thousands of copies were bought in a matter of hours every month. In the same way that *Sputnik* would promote the Soviet lifestyle and ideology years later, *Reader's Digest* exalted US values as the ideal to be achieved by readers everywhere. According to Ubelaker Andrade, "the U.S. magazine targeted [existing] Latin American professionals, viewing them as a consumer market as well as a politically-relevant group" (Ubelaker Andrade, 2019, 8).

When analyzing the role of the magazine in the construction of a social imaginary from its beginning, Joanne Sharp, in her 2010 book *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity*, states that

[i]f the interwar period could be seen as one in which *Reader's Digest* created an ambivalent political geography, then the period that followed the end of World War II would be characterized by a single-minded obsession with the threat that communism posed to the "free world" (Sharp, 2010, 83).

The communist peril was writ large in articles that explained the danger to society if individuals did not act as responsible citizens ... Increased vigilance was necessary because of communist conspiracies to take over the world ... Intensification of the narrative of communist takeover as a result of ignorance led ultimately to the introduction of the concept of "total war" (Sharp, 2010, 89).

In this vision constructed by the magazine, the Soviet Union is presented as an absolute evil in a way that was reasonable and acceptable to readers. In this sense, the Soviet Union was represented as the alter ego of the United States, and as a threat. For much of the period in question, Sharp's study shows that *Reader's Digest* published a great number of articles related to the Soviet Union or communism.¹⁴ These articles, according to Sharp, presented communism not as a mere political ideology, but as an essentially Russian

14 Between 1962 and 1965, 150; between 1966 and 1969, 155; and between 1970 and 1973, 80. See Figure 6. Number of articles about the Soviet Union or communism in the *Reader's Digest*, 1922–1994 (Sharp, 2010, 84).

ideology whose tactics of territorial expansion were disguised as utopian claims (Sharp, 2010, 86). Anti-Russian sentiment, then, was extrapolated out and directed against any territory in which the Soviet presence or influence was notable or threatening.

One example is the article “Why Fear Russia?” that appeared in the October 1955 issue of *Reader’s Digest*. The text, authored by David Lawrence, called Americans to remain vigilant because “for Russia anything is a weapon” (Sharp, 2010, 89).

After 1959, when the Soviet presence in the area became a concrete reality, the US magazine intensified its presence in the Caribbean and Latin America. With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, *Reader’s Digest* began publishing articles on the specific danger the island posed in relation to the spread of communism in Latin America. On many occasions, Cuba was explicitly accused of serving Soviet interests. For example, in the February 1981 article “Angola: Where the West Can Still Win,” its author, Smith Hempstone, stated: “With modest help from the West, [Savimbi] believes, Angola will become an African Vietnam for the Kremlin and its Cuban mercenaries” (Hempstone, 1981, 105). In July of that same year, Ralph Bennett published an article entitled “El Salvador’s Made-in-Havana Revolution.” In general, Cuba was presented as “the Russian knife at America’s throat” (Bennett, 1982, 105).

Notes for a Conclusion

After 1959, Soviet and American competing powers sought to influence those in charge of the cultural realm in the Caribbean, specifically in Cuba and in Puerto Rico, respectively, while also reaching the largest audience possible by supporting the production and distribution of magazines and books from the region and around the world, translated into the local languages. Given the precarious literary system that the islands had then, it was necessary to develop different strategies to strengthen the translation practices, increase the number of potential readers, and to improve the book industry. In the case of Cuba, the socialist bloc support and experiences, specially from the Soviet Union, were fundamental to achieving these goals. But the process was complex and nuanced since, on the one hand, despite its strong economic ties with the USSR, Cuba had its own cultural and ideological agenda. On the other hand, Puerto Rico, despite its neocolonial status, has always had a conflicting relationship with the United States. In this context, *Reader’s Digest* and *Sputnik* can illustrate the confrontation between the two superpowers as they were part of a multilayer dominance strategy.

Both magazines were supported and heavily funded by the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively, to boost the ideological influence of these powers in the region. Sometimes openly, as illustrated here, but mainly through a strategy of soft cultural approach, the publications sought to promote an idea of a lifestyle that mimicked Soviet and American ideologies.

Reader's Digest and *Sputnik* promoted both a Manichaeian infantilization and a moral simplification of society based on the portrait of the other as a threat, quashing from the start any possibility of dialogue or consensus. According to the vision proposed by the two magazines, the other was the absolute enemy. In alignment with the respective ideologies that they represented, both promoted practices of total exclusion that pushed toward radicalization. By providing a particular narrative of the world, they sought to encourage the creation of a specific social imaginary to respond to certain state policies. At the same time, both magazines became more practical and popular tools than literary production (including translated works) for fulfilling such a mission.

Although a more profound and detailed analysis and comparison escapes the scope of this article, the history of the birth and decline or disappearance of these periodical publications shows how they served specific objectives and how both powers used translation as a geopolitical tool. It can be argued that although *Reader's Digest* still exists, its years of splendor coincided with those in which the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was more intense. As instruments of the cultural Cold War, these publications fulfilled an ideological mission but, at the same time, became a cultural and sentimental reference for more than one generation of Puerto Ricans and Cubans.

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Translation Practices during the Cold War: The Battle for Cultural Control in the Caribbean

Keywords: cultural Cold War, translation practices and systems, socialist bloc, Caribbean, lettered city

This article focuses on the cultural Cold War in the Caribbean from the sixties to the nineties, when Cuba was a member the Soviet socialist bloc. During that period, both the United States and the Soviet Union deployed different strategies to control the area, economically, politically, and culturally. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 changed the Caribbean geopolitical map and allowed the Soviets to have a more definite point of entry to the region, while at the same time it represented a threat to US interests not only in the area but also in the rest of the continent. As this study demonstrates, the competing powers supported the production and distribution of periodical publications translated into the local language to promote their ideologies and ways of life. In the case of Cuba, a new cultural and translation system was created following the Soviet model. The translation practices implemented by both superpowers played not only a fundamental role in the circulation of a “high” literary culture, but they also promoted various forms of consumption of “popular culture”.

Prevajalske prakse med hladno vojno: boj za kulturni nadzor v Karibih

Ključne besede: kulturna hladna vojna, prevajalske prakse in sistemi, socialistični blok, Karibi, učeno mesto

Prispevek se osredotoča na hladno vojno v Karibih od 70. do 90. let, ko je Kuba pripadala sovjetskemu socialističnemu bloku. V tem obdobju so Združene države in Sovjetska zveza razvile različne strategije za gospodarski, politični in kulturni nadzor območja. Zmaga kubanske revolucije leta 1959 je spremenila geopolitični zemljevid Karibov in Sovjetom odprla vrata v regijo, hkrati pa je pomenila tveganje za interese Združenih držav, ne le v tej coni, temveč tudi v preostalih delih celine. Avtorica pokaže, da sta tekmi podpirali izdajanje in distribucijo periodičnih publikacij, prevedenih v lokalni jezik, kot sredstvo za utrjevanje svoje ideologije in načina življenja. V konkretnem primeru Kube je njena vključitev v socialistični blok terjala postavitev novega kulturnega in prevajalskega sistema, ki bi sledil sovjetskemu modelu. Prevajalske prakse, ki sta jih

izvajali velesili, niso igrale le temeljne vloge pri obtoku »visoke« literarne kulture, temveč so spodbujale tudi najrazličnejše oblike konzumiranja »popularne kulture«.

Prácticas de traducción durante la Guerra Fría: La batalla por el control cultural en el Caribe

Palabras clave: Guerra Fría cultural, prácticas y sistemas de traducción, bloque socialista, Caribe, ciudad letrada

Este artículo centra su atención en la Guerra Fría cultural en el Caribe en las décadas de los sesenta a los noventa, cuando Cuba pertenecía al bloque socialista soviético. Durante ese período, tanto los Estados Unidos como la Unión Soviética desplegaron diferentes estrategias para controlar el área, económica, política y culturalmente. El triunfo de la Revolución Cubana, en 1959, cambió el mapa geopolítico del Caribe y permitió a los soviéticos tener una puerta de entrada más concreta a la región y al mismo tiempo representó un riesgo para los intereses estadounidenses no solo en la zona sino en el resto del continente también. Como demuestra este estudio, las potencias en competencia apoyaron la producción y distribución de publicaciones periódicas traducidas al idioma local, como un medio para promover sus ideologías y formas de vida. En el caso particular de Cuba, su incorporación al bloque socialista demandó la creación de un nuevo sistema cultural y de traducción que siguiera el modelo soviético. Las prácticas de traducción implementadas por ambas superpotencias no solo jugaron un papel fundamental en la circulación de una cultura literaria «alta», sino que también impulsaron variadas formas de consumo de la «cultura popular».

O avtorici

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