



Yoani Sánchez on why it's time to end the embargo

By Joshua Keating Tuesday, March 19, 2013

Dissident blogger and FP contributor Yoani Sánchez is currently touring the United States after recently receiving permission from the Cuban government to travel outside the country.

Along with activist and photographer Orlando Luis Pardo, she spoke today at the Cato Institute in Washington. When asked by a member of the audience to explain her opposition to the U.S. embargo on Cuba -- particularly in light of the fact that fellow leading dissidents including Óscar Elías Biscet, Berta Soler, and Guillermo Fariñas want it to remain in place -- she replied:

I want to begin by saying that all the people you have mentioned are brothers and sisters in the struggle and I have excellent relationships with them. Unlike the Cuban government that forces a monolithic vertical structure and only reflects one point of view, one of the excellent things about the dissident movement is that it reflects a wide variety of viewpoints. This diversity does not stop us from sharing the same goal, which is a transition to a democratic system in Cuba.

I come from a generation of Cubans that have grown up with an official discourse constantly running through my ears that has expertly used the embargo as its foremost excuse -- blamed for everything from the lack of food on our plates to the lack of liberty in the streets. I have seen since I was a child how the official media constantly presents the embargo as the big bad wolf from the fairy tales I read as a child.

I would love to see how the official propaganda apparatus would function without this big bad wolf. I doubt that it could.

Sánchez spoke about the increasingly vibrant online independent media scene in Cuba and discussed plans to start an online newspaper when she returns to her country. "You can't even imagine the speed with which information is circulating on the island of Cuba," she said. "There's a whole alternate web of

circulation where things [are] taken off the Internet and put on a thumb drive and passed from citizen to citizen in a manual way."

She continued: "It took me a full 10 years to see images from the fall of the Berlin Wall. But my son was able to witness the images from Tahrir Square almost exactly as they were happening."

Sánchez wrote for FP about her struggles to travel outside Cuba last November. She has traveled to Brazil, Mexico, Spain, and the Czech Republic since she was granted a passport, and has been met at several of her stops by pro-Cuban protesters, who have disrupted her events. At today's event, she said she suspected that the Cuban government may have granted her permission to travel in order to set up the very public disruptions, or in hopes that she would remain abroad. "They made a bad bet," she said.