

## CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA: THE LOGIC OF EMERGENCE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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The resurgence of civil society was credited with playing a critical role in the transitions of the so-called Third Wave of democracy (1974-1987). Social movements, human right organizations, churches, and other forms of organized “people power” mobilized repressed populations against authoritarian governments throughout the world and helped bring about regime change from Portugal to the Philippines. The unexpected fourth wave which came in the wake of the collapse of European communist regimes and the disappearance of the Soviet Union was also declared a triumph of civil society against the state by many observers. Vladimir Tismaneanu (1992) was representative when he asserted that the main cause of the East European revolutions was “the rise and ripening of civil societies in countries long dominated by totalitarian Leninist parties” (p. xiii). However, not all communist party-states succumbed during the critical years 1989-1991. Contrary to early optimistic reports, civil societies did not “rise” in all communist polities, even in those where transitions away from communism took place. Ironically, three of the five communist “survivors”—China, Cuba, and Vietnam—had more prominent dissident movements and a greater level of independent social activity in the late 1980s than some of the victims of the Leninist extinction.<sup>1</sup> The enduring party-states were not immune to the world crisis of communism,

however their regime elites were able to survive the conjunctural crisis and maintain political control through the deft combination of repression and reform. The persistence of these party-state regimes requires a closer look at the dynamic of emergence and its relation to regime change.

This paper describes the emergence of civil society in Cuba in the context of systemic crisis and regime response, broader changes in state-society relations and of its “nontransition” (López 1999). The Cuban case is compared with developments in other communist party-states including the handful of regimes that resisted the democratizing fourth wave. The “logic of emergence,” a four-step process describing the advent of civil societies in communist states delineated by Marcia Weigle and Jim Butterfield (1992), will be used as a starting point to examine the Cuban case. The paper concludes with speculations about the future of state-society relations in Cuba.

The emergence of civil society organizations that seek autonomy from the state by definition signifies an essential change in the nature of a communist-party regime and a challenge to its very coherence and legitimacy. This is a collective phenomenon much broader than the presence of isolated intellectual dissidence and more vital than the activities of coopted pre-revolutionary organizations or the cloistered

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1. The two other surviving regimes are Laos and North Korea. Although Belarus, Turkmenistan, and other former Soviet republics are run by almost the identical cadre of regime elites, the ruling parties do not identify themselves as Communist.

churches.<sup>2</sup> It also implies that public space has been ceded, lost, or abandoned by the state and that social actors have pressed from below (and sometimes from within the regime) to occupy these spaces. Although the party-state remains dominant in almost every aspect of Cuba's public life, the changes described in this paper evidence that the logic of emergence is at work on the island.

### CIVIL SOCIETY DEFINED

The term *civil society* has a double life: first as an analytical category for scholars, and second, as a rallying cry for political activists. As such, it has been subject to considerable conceptual stretching and wishful thinking. In this paper, it is an ideal-type used as a conceptual model to aid in the understanding of the social realities and dynamics of the Cuban polity. Civil society is defined as the realm of public groups and associations created for the purpose of articulating or representing individual or group interests. It plays an intermediary role between individual/family interests and the state, other actors, and forces such as the market. One of the defining qualities of a polity is the level of autonomy that civil society enjoys vis-à-vis the state. As such, it cannot be understood in isolation from other elements of the polity.<sup>3</sup> The presence or absence of a civil society is dependent to a great extent on the level of development and the nature of the political regime. Civil societies arise from the increasing complexity of social and economic life and the proliferation of interests, identities, and causes, thus, a particular civil society is the result of unique combinations of structures, cultures and values, and of notions of public versus private spheres.

### PRECONDITIONS FOR EMERGENCE

Weigle and Butterfield (1992) concluded that the "seeds" of civil society sprouted in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as a result of a systemic crisis brought about by "the failure of the regimes to adequately perform self-defined functions of value for-

mation and interest representation" and by "the failure of regimes to respond to needs of a complex society and modern economy" (p. 5, 18). They describe four stages in the development of civil society:

- **defensive**—private individuals and independent groups actively or passively defend their autonomy from the party-state;
- **emergent**—independent social groups or movements seek limited goals in a widened public sphere which is sanctioned or conceded by the reforming party-state;
- **mobilizational**—independent groups or movements undermine the legitimacy of the party-state offering alternative forms of governance to a politicized society; and
- **institutional**—in which publicly supported leaders enact laws guaranteeing autonomy of social action, leading to a contractual relationship between the state and society regulated eventually by free elections.

The first two stages were shaped, to a great extent, by the shared characteristics of communist party regimes, while the latter two depend largely on historical precedent, political culture, nationalism, and the level of institutional development (pp. 1-2). The stages themselves contain complex characteristics and events. In order to understand how the process is initiated, one must examine the nature of the regime, the severity of the systemic crisis, the capabilities of the state, the status of societal initiative, political culture, and historical trajectory.

Where and how does civil society emerge in polities that by definition have eliminated it? The most important (and obvious) preconditions for the emergence of civil society are the survival of independent thought and of some vestige of pre-revolutionary patterns of social organization. Foundational communist systems eliminated opposition to the new order and dissolved independent sources of power that

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2. Dissidents, pre-revolutionary organizations, and churches are nevertheless sources of alternative visions, discourses, and support for nascent civil societies.

3. For interesting discussions of civil society, see Cohen and Arato (1992), Hann (1996), and Keane (1998).

might rival the Communist Party such as other political parties, trade unions, professional associations, religious organizations, as well as any vestiges of the *ancien régime*. Pre-existing non-communist organizations were banned, coopted, or merged into new entities created by the state, while the majority of the population was inducted into mass organizations that would serve as “transmission belts” for the party. Alternative visions that differed from the communist regime hibernated or dissimulated acquiescence in order to survive.

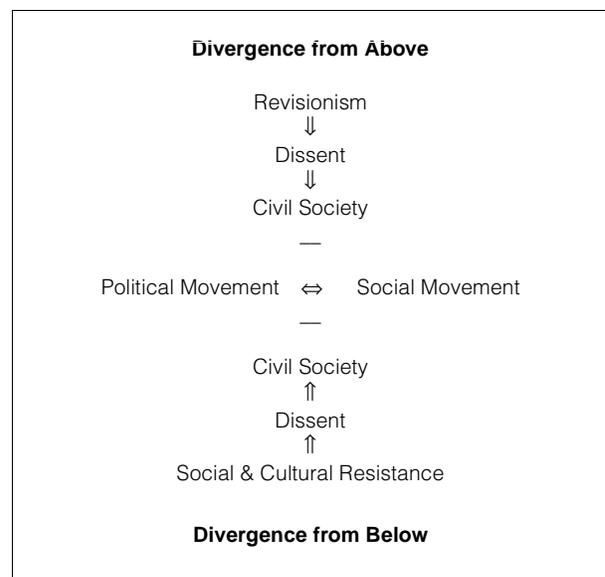
The costs of individual or collective action were very high especially in the mobilizational periods when opposition was weeded out—the consequences of opposition were exile, death or lengthy imprisonment in the *gulags* (see Courtois, Werth, et. al. 1998).<sup>4</sup> In Stalinist Europe, with the exception of pockets of anti-communist guerrilla activity that lasted into the early 1950s, collective resistance was passive, taking non-political guises such as cultural, ethnic or religious activity, or was spontaneous and violent, such as the riots of 1953 in East Germany and Poland.

The emergence or re-emergence of civil society cannot occur unless the onerous conditions of foundational regimes are alleviated. The “reformation” of classical communist regimes took place in the wake of the death of the founding leaders (e.g., Josef Stalin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh).<sup>5</sup> The main characteristics of these reforms were: the decentralization of political power away from the maximum leader towards the party apparatus in a more collegial process that reemphasized Lenin’s concept of democratic centralism; the end of the widespread use of state terror which was replaced by more subtle, “hegemonic” forms of social domination; and a renegotiation of the coercive compact between the patronal state and

the society.<sup>6</sup> This is the environment in which the defensive stage of emergence occurs.

The defensive stage is actually a period of complex interactions that result in conditions which permit the public articulation of divergent views. We can identify three characteristic modes of the defensive stage: decompression, liberalization, and retrenchment. The first signs of “life” are triggered by social *decompression*, i.e., the elimination of mass terror and the reinforcement of the private domain by individuals. The party-state relieves pressure without making substantial reforms—it is mostly a question of less energetic enforcement of repressive laws, a toning down of ideological rhetoric, and a cautious tolerance toward traditional cultural expression. The “seeds” of civil society that have survived the violence of the communist takeover and the terror of the mobilizational phase of the regime begin to sprout during this period, particularly among intellectuals and religious groups.

**Figure 1. Divergences from Communism**



4. Millions of individuals perished in the Soviet Union, China, and other communist dictatorships during the long process of takeover and mobilization in the founding of the party-state.

5. Reforms took place in client or “satellite” states at the prodding of the new reformist leaders of patron states (USSR, Vietnam) and sometimes met with the resistance of local hardline party leaders.

6. The economic measures related more to alleviating shortages and addressing other consumer issues, but not a wholesale macroeconomic reform. It should be noted that not all ruling party elites implemented “de-Stalinization” with equal vigor.

A closer look shows that the catalyst for emergence is a change in the political regime that allows the lowering of the costs of individual and collective self-organization and the “opening” of public space. The change may be due to a conscious effort at reform, the diminution or erosion of state capabilities, an unintentional result of conjunctural conditions, or a combination of any of the three. This is the signal for divergences or “dissents” from Communism to publicly appear from “above” and from “below” (see Figure 1).

Divergences “from above” in Communist polities emerged from within party elites during the transition from Stalinism to post-totalitarianism, first in the form of *revisionism*, and later of *dissidence*.<sup>7</sup> These forms of opposition emerge in the political realm. Revisionism is a critique of the party from within the party in order to “perfect” it, usually appealing to communist utopic ideals to criticize bureaucratism and other “deformations” of socialism (e.g., Lev Trotsky, Rudolf Böhro). Dissent is essentially defined as “a difference of opinion or feeling.” Although dissidence is isolated and confined at first to urban intellectuals (predominantly former party members, revisionists or dissidents), it serves as an example to potential activists and the community-at-large.<sup>8</sup>

Divergence “from below” emerges as dissent or social resistance in the social realm and is motivated by political, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or national

differences with the authorities (Ionescu 1967, p. 179).<sup>9</sup> Dissent from below emerges among the lower status intelligentsia and students motivated by political or ideological reasons and tends to aggregate in educational and cultural entities. Ironically, many of the institutions that are the locus of dissent were created by the state and many of the new dissidents are youthful “products” of the new order. Social resistance is prompted by economic, social, religious, and other types of grievances against the party-state. The form taken depends to some extent on the type of grievance, (i.e., a work-related complaint might spawn a strike). Social resistance also organizes using traditional networks and remaining pre-revolutionary institutions such as churches and fraternal organizations.<sup>10</sup>

*Liberalization* can follow periods of decompression. Liberalization involves actual political reforms that permit a pluralization of social life and some economic reforms that address the systemic crises that beset the inflexible structures of communist party-states.<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Remington (1993) states that a theory of transition from communism should be based on the knowledge of how the regime and the society “influence and penetrate each other, and how that relationship changes during the transition itself.”<sup>12</sup> This moment permits the articulation of revisionism and dissent in more active or public ways, often with the tacit assent of reform-

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7. Revisionism is defined as opposition within the system that seeks to transform socialism from within “on its own grounds” (Jöppke 1994, p. 550). Dissent (or dissidence) is a critique of communist state power from outside the party that seeks reforms to the system. He describes it as “polite and moderate in tone,” but containing “the seeds of revolutionary transformation” (p. 550).

8. The dissenter often “emboldens the religious and ethnic dissidents to step forward. Inevitably, religious and ethnic activism is more broadly based and deeply rooted in the society and is therefore less easily repressed” (Sharlet 1985, p. 355). Dissidents by speaking out in the public sphere “have broken the state’s monopoly on spoken and written information by establishing an alternative, unofficial communication system” (p. 355).

9. The political realm is seen as “off-limits” because it is perceived as a locus of conflict totally occupied by the party-state.

10. Ghi a Ionescu (1967) describes five centers of aggregation of dissent in communist polities: churches, the armed forces, the universities, cultural reviews and groups, and personalities (p. 191).

11. The process of emergence is essentially a restructuring state-society relations, an interactive process that changes the political opportunity structure of the polity and is prone to many influences and forces.

12. There seems to be a consensus among scholars that civil society can emerge in communist party-states only if public space is opened through reform or liberalization initiated by the state (Haraszti 1990, Rau 1990, Remington 1993, Weigle and Butterfield 1992). These reforms can vary in their scope and motivation; their impact on the polity can be non-linear and out of proportion with the programmatic changes in policy.

ist party elites and sometimes with the open adoption of revisionist agendas (e.g. Prague Spring). Divergent views usually appear first in the realm of culture (e.g. literature, theater). Dissent also aggregates around other issue areas: political grievances concerning civic rights, particularly human rights; national, regional, or ethnic grievances; social or economic grievances; and religious practice (Ionescu 1967, p. 179). Remnants of pre-revolutionary social life, such as the churches, tended to move cautiously given their institutional interest in survival and their negative experiences with the communist regimes. They can regain some initiative if the commitment of a core of practicing believers has survived and if the local church leadership can navigate the uncharted waters of liberalization.

*Retrenchment* is a reversal of either decompression or of liberalization. The continuation or expansion of reform is dependent on a number of factors, but the perception of regime elites is central. Their perspective helps determine the willingness of the leadership to tolerate opposition and their ability to maintain regime elite unity in the face of self-organizing society. Regime elites will stay the course if they see that political power and regime legitimacy are enhanced by the changes in the coercive compact. Early successes might even allow discreet reformists to deepen the reforms which allow civil society to move to its next stage, the emergent phase. However, the moment regime elites sense danger, they clamp down on dissent and on independent economic and social activity. If elites can maintain unity in the midst of a systemic crisis, they can reequilibrate through the use or threat of force, and later renegotiate the coercive compact with the population. If regime elites split and cannot resolve the impasse, a regime breakdown is likely to occur, and a transition to democracy may be possible with the presence of an embryonic civil society.

The *emergent stage* as described by Weigle and Butterfield (1992), requires a deepening of liberalization that results in an expanded public sphere and reforms to the party-state that allow independent social groups or movements to operate and seek limited goals. The reforms probably take place in the context

of intra-party debate and social restiveness. Liberalization can proceed to a *pluralization phase* when there is a minimum if tacit consensus between regime moderates and gradualist elements in the leadership of civil society. This period is inherently unstable due to the potential for divisions in the party between pro- and anti-reform elements and can result in a *reversal* of reform, a crackdown on independent activity, and a purge of reformist party elements. Another source of tension is the escalating demands of newly-emboldened individuals who press the state and non-state institutions alike in the defense of their personal and group interests.

The radical elements of civil society can move the process towards the *mobilizational stage* if they can compel the preponderance of the civil society leadership into conspicuously political questions about the nature of the regime. The politicized groups are no longer speaking of dissent or reform, but as an alternative to the communist party regime. To do this, they must fashion an opposition coalition, create or accumulate their own resources, and communicate to the people through some sort of mass media. If they succeed at mobilizing large numbers of people against the regime, the communist party-state must respond. This is a moment of criticality for the post-totalitarian regime as its legitimacy is being undermined, its authority is eroding, and its options dwindling. Regime elites must resolve their impasse and move either to end independent political activity, or continue the process of pluralization into the next stage, the *institutional phase*.

## REGIME CRISIS, STATE AND SOCIETY IN CUBA

“ . . . the [social] contradictions repressed by legal means will, by necessity, emerge illegally at the margins. Despite the rigid totalitarian structure, the emergence of parallel trade unions, human rights committees, and independent cultural, religious, and ecological associations, is inevitable. Thus, even under the conditions of this society, an ‘opposition’ is generated . . . ”

—Ariel Hidalgo (1994, pp. 46-47).

Ariel Hidalgo’s prophetic words refer to the emergence of dissident, opposition, and independent so-

cial organizations that began to proliferate in Cuba in the late 1980s-early 1990s in the context of a systemic *crisis of social domination*.<sup>13</sup> Despite the regime's unique origins, Cuba was not immune to the world crisis of communism. Starting in 1986, it had to take a number of measures to deal with the economic, social, political, and ideological challenges presented by the exhaustion of socialist accumulation and the bankruptcy of Marxist ideology.<sup>14</sup> The Cuban regime along with a few other hardline communist dictatorships (Czechoslovakia, GDR, Romania) responded to the systemic crisis not with reform, but with resistance to change, a rejection of *glasnost*' and *perestroika*, and by appealing to ideological orthodoxy while relying on intensified political controls. Fidel Castro and the others who resisted reform were proven right. Political reforms led to increasing autonomy from the state for individuals, groups, and organizations. János Kornai (1992), in his landmark study of the political economy of communist systems, wrote:

... reforming tendencies increase the autonomy of individuals, groups, and organizations in several respects. This applies to independent political movements, associations in society, private businesses, self-governing local authorities, self-managed firms, state-owned firms that become more independent in accordance with the ideas of market socialism, and so on.

Various degrees of autonomy and subordination appear, but within them the weight of autonomy grows as a result of the reform, and as it increases, so the totalitarian power of the central leadership decreases. Once some degree of autonomy has taken place, it becomes a self-generating process ... (p. 569).

The demise of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc left Cuba bereft of political allies, trading partners, and of the massive Soviet subsidy estimated at \$65 billion between 1960-1990. Cuba, already flailing with the failures of the rectification, plunged further into a profound crisis euphemistically called "the Special Period in Time of Peace" (SP).<sup>15</sup>

One of the consequences of the SP was the shrinking of the Cuban state and the deterioration of its ability to control society. These developments prompted changes in the socio-political opportunity structure shaped, in part, by societal responses to a decline in state capabilities, changes in the international environment, and the unexpected consequences of the limited economic reforms and political adjustments made in the period 1992-1994.<sup>16</sup> Up to that time, the regime had avoided substantial changes making concessions only when it felt it could balance the potential risks and benefits with its "control of the streets."<sup>17</sup> It called upon its usual repertoire of responses to social discontent and to emergent interests

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13. Guillermo O'Donnell (1988) writes "a crisis of social domination is a crisis of the state *in* society," "the supreme political crisis" because "the state is failing to guarantee the reproduction of basic social relations and, with them, of the system of social domination" (p. 26). The definition is even more apt in the case of Communist party-states due to the all encompassing nature of their power—the party-state that aspires to control every aspect of the polity's political, economic, social, ideological, and cultural life.

14. By 1986, the limits of Cuba's inefficient and highly centralized economy had been reached. Fidel Castro's response to *glasnost*' and *perestroika* was the proclamation of the anti-reform, anti-market, ideologically-driven Rectification Process (1986) with its emphasis on voluntary work, moral incentives, and mass mobilization. Fidel Castro assigned blame for "errors" and "negative tendencies" to the Soviet reform model introduced in the 1970s epitomized by the SDPE and to the introduction of limited market-like measures such as the farmers' markets. These economic policies were already being undermined by Fidel Castro as early as 1982 and a move toward recentralization began by 1984 (Rosenberg 1993). The most visible sign of Cuba's dire straits was the suspension of its payments on the immense debt it had accumulated to western creditors. One interpretation of the Rectification was that the regime needed to mobilize the Cuban people and squeeze the domestic economy even harder in the absence of more generous Soviet subsidies and Western cash.

15. The Cuban government proclaimed the "Special Period" in August 1990. The crisis has its roots in Cuba's inefficient economic system, in its extreme dependence on Soviet aid and trade with the socialist bloc, and in the peculiarly *caudillista* nature of Cuban communism. Carmelo Mesa Lago (1994) claimed that "the decline in the Cuban economy is much worse than the deterioration suffered by any country in market transition in Eastern Europe, even though Cuba has not yet begun a full process of marketization" (p. 9).

16. State capability is defined as: the capacity to *penetrate* society, *regulate* relationships, *extract* resources, and *appropriate* or use resources in determined ways (Migdal 1988, p. 4).

17. Fidel Castro learned the lessons of the Soviet bloc collapse: make as few reforms as possible; keep the party united, lean, and mean; deal harshly with potential or evident disloyalty; and do not allow a formal opposition to organize (Domínguez 1993).

or groups: open cooperation, cooptation, preemption, mere toleration, and open antagonism (Butterfield and Weigle 1991, pp. 176-184). In addition, the regime utilized its “exile option,” the exportation of real or potential opponents to other countries. This policy, which has been so vital to the consolidation and survival of the revolution, in essence decapitated the emergent civil society organizations, delaying the process the emergence and robbing the Cuba of human resources capable of playing an important role in the future of the polity. However, as the regime soon found out, its policies also resulted in the proliferation of new groups and the rise of a new generation of leaders. It seemed that for every dissident that went into exile, ten more appeared on the scene.

The impact of the changes were not limited to the emergent contestatory sector. Indeed, between 1986 and 1993, the regime permitted *decompression* in selected sectors of Cuban life while continuing its policy of repression in others.<sup>18</sup> Among the most relevant political changes that affected state-society relations were: the creation of a Cuban “non”-governmental organization sector, an increase in the role of foreign NGOs and international agencies in Cuba, and the decision to allow religious believers to join the Communist Party. These developments contributed to the revitalization of the public sphere and the slow reconstitution of civil society. By the end of 1995, a very different public sphere had replaced the sterile, monist arrangement of the Castro-Leninist state (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. The Public Sphere in Cuba: Associative Life**

<p><b>Socialist Civil Society (Authorized)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass organizations</li> <li>• Legal NGOs</li> <li>• Associations recognized under Decree-Law 54</li> </ul> <p><b>Alternative Civil Society (Not authorized or Illegal)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public groups not recognized legally by the state.</li> <li>• Pre-revolutionary institutions that remain outside official civil society.</li> <li>• Groups involved in dissident, opposition, or independent social activism.</li> </ul> <p><b>Informal Civil Society</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal networks</li> <li>• Spontaneous groupings for single purposes</li> <li>• Private associations with no outward manifestations toward the sphere of public interaction.</li> </ul>
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Associative life in Cuba (Figure 2), can be divided into three parts: socialist civil society, alternative civil society, and informal civil society.<sup>19</sup> The term ‘civil society’ is used in all three expressions for the sake of simplicity and because autonomy is an issue of contestation even in the officially sanctioned realm. The defining characteristic for all of the groups is the relationship with the party-state, a relationship that has been conflict-ridden, even for the government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs).<sup>20</sup> The boundaries between the three categories are actually permeable—a group may transit from level to another and there is a substantial unofficial network of contacts and communications in the shadow of the party-state and security apparatus. In fact, the kinds of behaviors and practices with the

18. The Castro regime has allowed periods of decompression at different times during its tenure, usually prompted by regime crises that required alleviating social pressures from below. It made tentative moves toward liberalization starting in 1992 and ending in mid-1996 with a move to retrenchment epitomized by the crackdown on *Concilio Cubano* in February and Raúl Castro’s speech to the Fifth Plenum of the Politburo in March 1996.

19. *Associative life* is the world of organized society—the public existence and operation of groups representing particular collective interests and values regardless of their autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state or other superior authorities. It is distinguished from civil society precisely because of the irrelevance of autonomy to its definition. Mass organizations, corporatist organizations, political parties, and soccer clubs are examples of associative life.

20. This appellation more accurately reflects the origins if not the degree of autonomy of the NGOs that were spun off the state such as the Center for the Study of Europe or the Cuban Council of Churches.

creation of social capital are found in all three categories, including in mass organizations.<sup>21</sup>

The Cuban government defined socialist civil society (SCS) as the totality of mass organizations and legal NGOs and associations registered under Law-Decree 54 (Hart 1995; see also Ministerio de Justicia 1989).<sup>22</sup> In 1995, the zenith of the “NGO boom” in Cuba, the government recognizes over 2,200 organizations as “non-governmental” (Trueba 1995). Many of the NGOs are “re-labeled” mass organizations such as the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). Some NGOs are new, such as Ideas Bank Z, a promotional group for young artists that describes itself as an “independent and non-profit project” that is “free of esthetic [sic] exclusions” (Ideas Bank Z: 2).<sup>23</sup> Other well-known Cuban NGOs include the Cuban Council of Churches, the Félix Varela Center, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center. Unlike many developing countries where NGOs often represent non-state interests, sometimes even anti-state groups, NGOs in Cuba must be in agreement with Cuban state, and are often creations of the state: “In Cuba, relations between government institutions and civil society do not have an objective or a subjective

basis for the development of antagonism, but instead for cooperative relationships” (Mensaje de Cuba 1995, p. 8).<sup>24</sup>

Friction occurred frequently between the state and the new NGO sector (Gunn-Clissold 1997) as the limits of autonomy were tested throughout 1995.<sup>25</sup> Until finally, in 1996 the regime cracked down on the activities of Cuban NGOs seen as havens for regime reformers and “fifth-columnists” by the regime. The most notorious case was the destruction of the Center for the Study of the Americas (CEA), a former Communist Party thinktank rechristened as an NGO (see Raúl Castro 1996; Guiliano 1998 for the CEA).<sup>26</sup> The impact was different on the two targeted sectors. While the oppositionist alternative civil society reappeared fragmented but vigorous within months and tripled the number of organizations on the island by 1998, the state-initiated sector never fully recovered the autonomy it enjoyed from 1993-1995.

Informal civil society (ICS) is somewhat of a misnomer because the groups and practices it describes generally do not have institutional forms and do not purposefully seek a public identity.<sup>27</sup> ICS has an ambiguous relationship to the state and to the other

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21. Benigno Aguirre (1998) has written about shadow institutions and the odd synergy between different elements of social reality: “In Cuba, officially sanctioned institutions commingle with their dual deviant shadows. These shadows are not supposed to exist even as they facilitate the operation of the legal institutions. Although unsanctioned by the established institutions, shadow institutions do not exist independently of the institutions that they complement. Parts of the CO [culture of opposition], they offer opportunities for covert and surreptitious activities rather than explicit, open to the public acts presenting demands to the authorities” (p. 8).

22. The very use of the term ‘civil society’ by the regime is significant as it reflects the enormous influence of international trends even on the Communist party-state.

23. It is financially and institutionally supported by the Union of Young Communists (UJC), the Union of Artists and Writers of Cuba (UNEAC) and other State organs as well as by a host of private patrons in the United States, Europe and Latin America.

24. Although some authors have downplayed the financial motive for the NGO Boom (e.g. Cisneros 1996; Paugh-Ortiz 1999), Gillian Gunn’s observation in 1995 that “Cuban NGOs grew because the government deemed them useful financial intermediaries and because citizens desired self-help organizations capable of resolving local problems the state was unwilling or unable to address” (Gunn 1995, p.1) and that the Cuban government’s support for NGOs “is a matter of necessity” is borne out by the very statements of the Cubans. The Center for European Studies (CEE), formerly a Communist Party think tank and now an NGO receiving assistance from abroad, states, “It is clear, that given the State’s lack of material resources, there is no other alternative but to face the situation with the active participation of all of those affected, including the search for external financing as well as resources in the country” (Mensaje de Cuba 1995, p. 8). [note: author’s translation.]

25. The Pablo Milanés Foundation ran into trouble in mid-1995 (Blanco 1995, Montaner 1995).

26. The CEA was singled out by name by Raúl Castro and denounced in a speech at the Fifth Plenum of the Politburo of the Communist Party in March 1996 that signaled the dangers of overstepping the limits of autonomy (Castro 1996, p. 9).

27. The term is derived from an analogy with the informal economy.

realms of social life. Its existence allows for the channeling of social needs and interests into modalities that help diffuse tensions and do not directly challenge the authorities.<sup>28</sup> ICS is also the arena for illicit practices that can subvert the official policies. ICS is, in effect, a kind of proto-civil society that never quite solidifies—ephemeral, instrumental, subterranean, and consciously non-political. It is in part a range of behaviors, practices, and networks that help identify a realm of social action often found within the institutional shells of more solid entities. ICS serves as a support and a threat to the established interests of the party-state. Some of the more visible examples of ICS are Abakúa societies, Spiritualist Circles, Gay and Lesbian social networks, neighborhood groups created to address local problems, Radio Listening Circles, etc.

This is the realm where the “hidden transcript” is found—the stage for the “infrapolitics of the powerless” (Scott 1990, p.xiii). It is also the locus for the creation of social capital that serves as a mechanism for survival within the system for individuals, as a guarantor of the survival of the party-state system which requires conduits for the off-the-record deals and bargaining necessitated by the structural inefficiencies of centrally-planned economies and labyrinthine bureaucracies, and as a human and material resource base for the emerging civil society.

The third type of civil society in Cuba serves as a public institutional alternative to the state-approved socialist civil society. This alternative civil society

(ACS) consists of the following: (1) non-political groups not recognized legally by the state; (2) pre-revolutionary institutions which by choice remain outside the officially circumscribed “socialist civil society”<sup>29</sup>; and (3) organizations involved in dissident, opposition, or independent social activism. These are not clandestine organizations—they function in the public realm within the limits imposed by state repression and material limitations. They have institutional identities, publicly stated purposes, goals, and programs, as well as established leaders, members, and supporters. Some even have transnational links with diasporic or foreign organizations.<sup>30</sup> They are voluntary, purposive, public, spontaneous groups that aspire to greater autonomy from the state in order to fulfill their objectives. It is this group of organizations that most directly challenge the societal vision of the communist party-state.<sup>31</sup> The theoretical and strategic importance of the phenomenon of emergence and of its implications for a regime change or democratic transition fuel much of the ongoing research and programmatic activities of pro-democracy organizations in Cuba and in the diaspora (Espinosa 1999b).

### THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA

The process of emergence in Cuba followed the pattern of other communist party-states noted by Weigle and Butterfield (1992). Despite the decades of repression and the exile of the most of pre-revolutionary civil society’s leaders, independent thought and key pre-revolutionary institutions such

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28. ICS is in fact a continuation of pre-existing patterns of marginality and informality that date back to the days of slave resistance to colonial masters through secret societies, syncretic cults, and other strategies of cultural survival and continuity.

29. The most prominent groups in this category are the churches and other religious organizations left outside of the official government registry because they are exempted from the Law of Associations (Ministerio de Justicia, Law 54, Ch. 1, Art. 2)

30. The only alternative vision of society that persisted in Cuba with a coherent message and a national institutional presence was the Roman Catholic Church. Although the development of church-state relations and the church’s emergence out of silence is a critical element of the larger period of the emergence of civil society in Cuba, it is beyond the scope of this paper. The church was able to use its unique position to serve as a greenhouse for many elements of pre-revolutionary Cuban life and continues to play an important role as a laboratory and safe-space for civil society in Cuba. Thus, while the church and other religious denominations are an intrinsic part of the overall picture, they are dealt with in more detail elsewhere (see Espinosa 1999d).

31. These are the groups that most of the literature on the nascent civil society in Cuba refers to (e.g. Bragado 1998, del Aguila 1993, Espinosa 1996, López 1999, Valdés and Estrella 1994).

as the Roman Catholic Church survived.<sup>32</sup> The main pre-conditions were met thus permitting the slow process of emergence to commence when conditions allowed. The proclamation of a socialist republic and the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 hastened the dissolution of the remaining “islands of autonomy” so that by 1970, persons with alternative visions were imprisoned, dead, exiled or rendered mute by the state authorities.<sup>33</sup> The costs of individual or collective resistance to the revolutionary government were quite high, especially in the takeover (1959-1961) and mobilizational periods (1962-1970).<sup>34</sup> However, neither the repressive power of the state or the loss of opposition elites to prison and exile could prevent widespread individual resistance using what James C. Scott calls “the weapons of the weak” or sporadic collective action that would serve in later years as precedents for dissent, opposition, and other forms of independent social action.

As the revolutionary government attempted to institutionalize its power in a political organization during the early 1960s, it also ran into opposition from the left. This was a ‘revisionist’ opposition that emerged among the Communist elite and intellectuals which appealed to the utopian values of socialism, and referred to a ‘revolution betrayed.’<sup>35</sup> Their entry into the political prison system of Cuba signaled the determination of the Castro regime to impose its monocratic vision even on its own erstwhile supporters. It also marked an important change in the composition of the political prison population, which after 1968, would increasingly include Marxists and former Marxists.<sup>36</sup> In fact, a substantial part of the leadership of the human rights and political dissident

movement came out of the left opposition to the Castro regime including figures such as Ricardo Bojall, Adolfo Rivero Caro, and Ariel Hidalgo.

Religious practice was the only public form of dissent that was tolerated, albeit under significant restrictions. Believers and their children were kept under special scrutiny and were denied access to a wide category of educational and job opportunities. The regime harshly persecuted Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists, and sent dozens of Catholic priests, Protestant ministers, and *babalawos* to prison. The government also made an effort to coopt or penetrate religious denominations. In sum, the regime watched the practice of all religion in Cuba as if it were a potent source of political opposition. The realm of culture, which had been one of the last bastions of non-conformist expression, saw its privileges inexorably shrink throughout the 1960s culminating in the imposition of socialist realism in 1971 (Congress on Culture and Education). Writers and artists who rejected the ideological controls produced work in isolation, sought departure, or went silent. A few continued to illegally circulate their work fueling a growing *samizdat* movement during the early 1970s. In many ways, the cultural figures of the 1960s and 1970s, were the first Cuban dissidents. But even individuals without an agenda could run afoul of the system during this period. “Any independent activity challenged the central principle, and the dominant feature, of the system of real socialism, namely ‘the leading role of the party’”. No matter how limited, or how personal, any manifestation of independence was, it was feared by the authorities as something which defied the ruling ideology and threatened their

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32. For a thorough discussion of the dissolution of civil society in Cuba, see Espinosa (1999c). Also see Bengelsdorf (1994) and Rabkin (1993).

33. Richard R. Fagen (1969), writing about the new revolutionary institutions that were replacing civil society notes: “...the Cubans were acting like Leninists long before they knew it” (p. 14).

34. By 1970, there had been between 5,000-15,000 executions, over 200,000 political prisoners, and over 1 million political exiles, not mention the victims of everyday repression whose lives were disrupted by the policies of the Cuban dictatorship (Lago and Espinosa 1999).

35. The regime took action against Social Democrats (1960-65), Trotskyites (1962-63), anarchists (1962), old-line communists of the *Partido Popular Socialista*, former members of the July 26 Movement and their insurrectionary allies (e.g., the Marcos Rodríguez affair), the *microfacción* (1967-68), and later, critical Marxist intellectuals.

36. For an interesting analysis of the dynamic between historic political prisoners and the new dissidents, see Ackerman (1998).

exercise of supreme power in every nook and cranny of life. However non-political it was, such activity at once became political, and was treated as such by official circles” (Skilling 1989, pp. 73-74). Thus having long hair, wearing tight pants, listening to American rock music, growing garlic and selling it to your neighbors, and other seemingly innocuous activities, could land a Cuban in jail.

The social organizations and activities that constitute emerging civil society in Cuba existed literally and figuratively outside the confines of the Communist party-state and its model of socialist society. They emanate from five major sources: (1) the state itself; (2) remnants of pre-revolutionary civil society, especially the churches and fraternal organizations; (3) revisionists and dissidents from the Cuban Communist Party; (4) dissident and human rights movements; and (5) informal personal and social networks (Espinoza 1998b).

These groups emerged (or re-emerged) into the public sphere in phases consistent with the first two stages of the “logic of emergence.” As in the other communist party-states, consolidation (1970-1986) meant a slight *decompression* in some sectors of life, no relief in others (e.g. the “gray quinquennium” in culture), and to some extent, a “normalization” of the dictatorship. This period coincided with the adoption of Soviet models and systems, Cuban integration into the Soviet bloc, and with a steady outflow of exiles mainly to the United States, Spain, and Venezuela.

Those who opposed the communist system who had not left or gone silent, were in jail as political prisoners. Paradoxically, Cuba’s political prison system

functioned as a greenhouse for dissident and opposition thought throughout the period from 1970 to 1986.<sup>37</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to say that today’s ACS was born in prison. In fact, many of the early human rights and political opposition movements were germinated or gestated in the political prisons of Cuba during the 1980s.

### THE DEFENSIVE STAGE

**Phase 1** (1976-1987), the defensive stage in the development of civil society, began with the founding of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights (*Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos*—CCPDH) by Ricardo Bofill, Marta Frayde, and others in Havana. This period was characterized by the focus on human rights and the creation of groups in political prison. Bofill and the others were inspired by the Soviet and East European activists they learned about from shortwave broadcasts, western books and media, and ironically, from earlier sojourns in the Soviet bloc that brought them into contact with dissident ideas among intellectuals. Human rights groups have been the heart of the dissident movement in Cuba since the late 1970s, creating the first fissure in the wall of totalitarianism (Bragado 1998). Other developments during this period include the creation of new groups in prison, their dissemination outside of prison by newly released political prisoners, the publication of *samizdat*, and the projection outside of Cuba of the plight of political prisoners and of the human rights situation in general.<sup>38</sup>

Ariel Hidalgo (1994) wrote: “Even though these organizations did not last for long, their birth during that month [February 1984] under the influence of the Committee [CCPDH], they were able to play their role and served as an example, even in the nar-

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37. The major contributions of political prisoners to the eventual development of ACS in Cuba were: developing models of civic pluralism in prison that would later serve as examples for the emerging ACS; developing new strategies and ideas for confronting the Castro regime; forging bonds of solidarity that overcame differences based on prior political affiliation which continued (for the most part), upon release from prison; helping give opposition to the Castro regime names and faces in the international community through groups such as Amnesty International; and serving as a training ground for leaders of future ACS organizations such as Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, and others.

38. Among the groups organized in prison in 1984 were: the Association of Dissident Artists and Writers—*Asociación Disidente de Artistas y Escritores Cubanos* (ADAEC) formed by 8 prisoners and led by Lázaro Jordana and the Self-Defense Group for Persecuted Believers—*Junta de Autodefensa de Religiosos Perseguidos*—(JARPE), led by Eduardo Crespo Govea, a pastor jailed for planning to form a political party based upon the principles of José Martí (Hidalgo 1994, pp. 70-71).

row confines of prison, of the pluralism of civic organizations that would one day develop into the independent civic movement that later developed throughout the country. Besides, they made us think for the first time about the possibility of mining the steely structure of totalitarianism with grassroots organizations that would gain space little by little under the protective umbrella of international pressure” (p. 71). Splits in the fledgling movement also occurred, e.g. Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz was kicked out of the CCPDH in 1987 and formed the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional*. Other new groups were formed, in part influenced by the developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (*Liga Cívica Martiana* in 1986 and the *Conjunto de Defensores Independientes de los Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional José Martí*). Among the major contributions of the dissident movement are: the development of a critique is from “within” the logic and political culture of the regime; the creation and development of the ‘civilist’ option when all other paths of opposition had been thwarted; the beginning of work with Radio Martí (founded in 1985) and exile shortwave radio in order to have a voice in Cuba (the broadcast of the *Coloquio de La Habana*, a discussion recorded in Cuba and broadcast back to the island by Radio Martí was a first); and finally, the use of international linkages and solidarities based on human rights and other progressive ideas.

**Phase 2** (1988-1993) was marked by the proliferation of new groups with a more diverse set of interests including political parties, the first of which was the Partido Pro-Derechos Humanos (1988), the creation of the first coalitions, the increasing influence of Radio Martí, the first effective links between civil society and the diaspora, and a more fruitful relationship with human rights monitoring groups such as Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and others.<sup>39</sup> The pattern of isolation of dissidents began to change in the late 1980s thanks to these developments and to the Cuban state’s concern about its international image. People cautiously began to return

to the churches, sought help from human rights organizations, and even approached the *Asociación de Lancheros de Cuba* for help ascertain the fate of Cubans who had left the island on rafts (Consejo de Lancheros 1991). Hidalgo and others have referred to this period as “the explosion of pluralism,” and in fact the number of groups exploded from about a dozen in 1988 to 103 in 1992 (Altuna 1993). Many of the groups sought to register their associations according to Cuban law, but most never received an answer. The groups also started to show a diversity of interests: independent Masons, artists and writers (*Asociación Pro-Arte Libre*), and even ecopacifism (*Sendero Verde*). More obviously political groups were also formed: the Christian Democratic Committee (1988), the social Christian *Movimiento Cristiano ‘Liberación’* led by Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, Friends of *Glasnost’* and *Perestroika*, and the trade union *Unión General de Trabajadores Cubanos* (1991). Concurrently with this development, the Cuban Catholic Church was revitalizing by national meetings (e.g., ENEC) and the resuscitation of lay organizations. At the more informal level, *peñas*, *tertulias*, and *salones* became more common and dealt with more challenging topics.

The limited economic reforms carried out in 1993 and 1994, such as dollarization, the opening to foreign tourism, and the introduction of other market-like mechanisms in the centrally-planned economy had some unforeseen consequences, among which were the accumulation of capital in private hands and the intermittent opening of social spaces. Increased reliance on exile remittances and the opening of direct telephone communication between Cuba and the United States also proved a boon to the contestatory sectors of the emerging civil society. In the short-term, however, the government’s combination of repression and incentives has allowed it to “re-equilibrate.”

As stated earlier, the government allowed slight changes in the model of state-society relations by per-

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39. “Para los disidentes en la Isla, para los pequeños grupos de derechos humanos que intentaban salir a la luz pública, Radio Martí era el cordón umbilical, la línea directa de información que podía dar legitimidad a los movimientos” (Encinosa 1994, p. 326).

mitting the so-called “NGO boom” within the parameters of Decree-Law 54 (Ministerio de Justicia, 1985). The process began in 1992 with the formation of the *Centro Félix Varela* (Benjamin 1997, p. 2), and continued in fits and starts throughout the period under review. The availability of alternative sources of funding facilitated pockets of autonomy within this emerging sector, which in turn created new loci for the generation of social capital and for the representation of more diverse interests. This liberalization or *mini-apertura* and the shrinking of the Cuban state also encouraged the mushrooming of unofficial, dissident, and opposition organizations “from below” and the revitalization of the few remaining institutions of pre-revolutionary civil society such as the Catholic Church and the Free Masons.

The new Cuban discourse on “socialist civil society” and “non-governmental organizations” also had a demonstration effect on dissident and opposition groups who quickly adopted and adapted the model in their struggle for democratization and political change (along with strong influences from the experiences of Eastern Europe and Latin America). They also sought alternative sources of support including foreign, domestic, and diasporic actors. Some non-state institutions that existed before the revolution, such as churches and other religious groups, expanded their contacts with their international networks of support.

**Phase 3** (1994-1996) saw the formation of independent professional associations such as the *Asociación Nacional de Economistas Independientes de Cuba*, founded by among others, Marta Beatriz Roque, *Corriente Agrarista*, an independent lawyers’ group, and the *Colegio Médico Independiente*. These groups emerged as “independent” variants of official state-sponsored organizations. More trade unions were formed such as the *Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores*, *Unión Sindical Independiente de Cuba*, and the *Unión Sindical Cristiana*. There is also a *Movimiento de Trabajadores Católicos* founded in 1994.

Religious denominations (including members of the state-chartered National Council of Churches) increased their social activities, ecumenical activities, and contacts with foreign co-religionists. The Roman Catholic Church started giving greater attention to its social role through lay organizations such as the *Movimiento Diocesano de Mujeres Católicas*, organizing the *Centro de Formación Cívica y Religiosa* in Pinar del Río, publishing diocesan magazines such as *Palabra Nueva* (started in 1992), *Vitral*, *Vivarium*, sponsoring the *Semana Social Católica*, a seminar series that dealt with Catholic Social Thought, as well as others that dealt with contemporary issues. The church also promoted the development of Catholic lay leaders and intellectuals such as Dagoberto Valdés and Luis Enrique Estrella, co-authors of the groundbreaking “Reconstruir la Sociedad Civil: Un proyecto para Cuba,” a paper delivered at the II Semana Social Católica in 1994, that brought international and scholarly attention on the topic of civil society in Cuba.<sup>40</sup>

The emergence of independent journalism was another important development during this period, with figures such as Raúl Rivero, Néstor Bager, Yndamiro Restano, and others forming press agencies and cooperatives. The most significant development however was the formation of *Concilio Cubano*—the largest coalition of opposition groups to date. Founded in October 1995, it gathered 135 groups under its umbrella before it was crushed in February 1996 (Montaner 1998). *Concilio* developed a sophisticated relationship amongst its constituent groups as well as with exile groups and foreign diplomats and journalists resident in Cuba. The period between mid-1995 and February 24, 1996, marked a highpoint in the cooperation and coordination between internal opposition and exile supporters. Support groups sprouted abroad and a number of exile organizations openly adopted the “civil society” strategy against the Castro regime.

This phase was also characterized by increased hostility between Cuba and the United States, the Clinton

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40. Cáritas-Cuba was founded in 1990.

administration's Track II policy that promoted the development of civil society in Cuba to help bring about a peaceful transition to democracy, and the implicit recognition by Western European diplomats of the opposition. The regime nevertheless refused to grant recognition to the emerging groups referring to them as *grupúsculos contra-revolucionarios*, counter-revolutionary grouplets created by the American Central Intelligence Agency and aided by the "Miami Mafia."<sup>41</sup> This phase ended with the crushing of *Concilio Cubano* and the shootdown of two airplanes piloted by Cuban-Americans over international waters. These two acts, combined with the crackdown on the CEA and other regime reformers announced in March 1996, demonstrated the regime's awareness of the potential disruptive synergy of exile, opposition, and reformist initiatives to its survival. The Castro government was willing to face international condemnation and a possible military confrontation with the United States rather than allow the consolidation of an alternative to its rule on the island.

**Phase 4** (1996-1997) was distinguished by the regrouping of many of the civil society groups repressed in the earlier in the year by the summer 1996 and the proliferation of new groups throughout the island. The Working Group of the Internal Dissidence—*Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna*—led by Vladimiro Roca, Marta Beatriz Roque, René Gómez, and Félix Bonne, was founded in 1996 in the aftermath of the crushing of *Concilio Cubano* and published a number of studies culminating in the document, *La Patria es de Todos* (1997) in June 1997, in response to the Cuban Communist Party's call to the Fifth Party Congress. This period also saw a boom in independent journalism and in information exchange facilitated, in part, by direct telephone links between Cuba and the United States, the use of the Internet by groups such as CubaNet, and the use of Radio Martí and South Florida Span-

ish-language stations as a medium for denunciation and mobilization. This phase ended with the arrest of the four leaders of the Working Group in July 1997.

**Phase 5** (1997-1998) began with the imprisonment or exile of a number of leaders, but ironically, the groups 'deepened' their presence on the island. ACS has expanded from urban areas to rural areas and public civic action was reported in all 14 provinces between February 1998 and January 1999 (up from 7 provinces in the previous 12 months).<sup>42</sup> In 1998, 36% of civic activity was in the city of Havana, down from 41% the previous year. The number of groups grew more slowly, but their membership increased. A report published by the *Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano* (Rivero, Gutiérrez, and López 1999) notes that the civic movement has begun to plan and carry out public activities directed at the Cuban public. Many of the new groups such as the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights, the Third Millennium Forum, and the Moderate Opposition Reflection Forum, have also undertaken longer term projects that are geared toward organizing among the population with less emphasis toward projecting outward to the exile community and international media. The *Directorio* also reports more cooperation between groups and better communication between them—31% of civic activities involved more than one organization. The report also notes an increase in spontaneous strikes, riots, protests, and demonstrations that in many cases compelled authorities to address grievances.

The spectrum of activity of the current groups can be classified as follows: (1) civic movements or organizations; (2) political parties; (3) human rights movements; (4) social assistance organizations; (5) labor unions; (6) rural, agricultural and other workers' cooperatives; (7) independent professional and sectoral associations; (8) independent journalism; (9) cultural

41. For a typical attack on these groups, see "¿Quiénes son los disidentes y los presos de conciencia en Cuba?," *Granma* (March 4, 1999).

42. Amaya Altuna (1998) estimated the number of groups at 380 in 1998, and now estimates the number to be over 400.

and arts groups; and (10) faith-based groups and institutions.<sup>43</sup>

The number of organizations, their geographic distribution, and the small, but consistent size of their membership demonstrate the persistence of Cuban activists despite the repression, privations, and the machinations of Cuban intelligence. Their inability to better organize a movement that will allow them to go to the next step, from marginal group to movement, reflects a number of problems of Cuban society and of the civil society groups themselves, among them the lack of material and logistical support, a lack of trust, and the lack of access to media.

Holly Ackerman (1996) summarizes the impasse that goes beyond a collective action problem to one of mobilizational fatigue and hopelessness; writing about Cuban rafters who left in 1994, she wrote:

They risked their lives to escape, not to try to change the regime. What is more, they could not envision places where struggle might take place. Churches, human rights groups, and independent organizations in general, were viewed as ‘trouble,’ not as causing trouble. The state’s ability to monitor and punish these groups was seen as thorough and inevitable. Essentially, they felt the regime could not be defeated. The phrase, ‘why go to jail?’ was repeated as a reason for avoiding human rights groups despite belief in their objectives (p. 200).

Ackerman also points to an essential element in Cuban political culture that has hampered the development of political maturity and of civil society in Cuba:

Exile in the U.S. served as a substitute for civil society in some absolutist sense. Albeit at a high price, those who lacked commitment could leave- sooner or later. Miami became the repository for dissent and the ‘North American dream’ became a transitional mech-

anism that substituted for citizen action. In this way, the privileged migratory status of Cubans in the U.S. probably slowed evolution of civil society (p. 214).

Although civil society groups (and particularly the Catholic Church) are more approachable for the average Cuban, to many, the groups seem to lack an ideology or of a widely known or developed alternative to the present situation. Cubans are also exhausted from the daily grind of “*resolver y comer*” and the long march to nowhere. There is also an impression, that is partially borne out by anecdotal evidence, that rather than presenting an option for change, some of the civil society groups have become instruments for obtaining dollars from abroad or exit visas. A Christian Democratic activist who is an experienced observer of the Cuban scene stated that as long as the majority of groups expend their energy in projecting images and projects for exile and foreign media consumption instead of performing the dangerous nitty-gritty work of organizing among the population, they will remain marginalized.<sup>44</sup>

A bit more charitable, Juan J. López (1999) has increasingly focused on the concept of “political efficacy” as a variable to explain the Cuban “nontransition” and the reticence of many Cubans to join in opposition activities.<sup>45</sup> López and others have also pointed to the importance of the development of independent communications media so that activists can reach the population with news of their activities, and importantly, their achievements. “Democratic activists and independent journalists in Cuba need computers, paper, printers, fax machines, and money for transportation (and sustenance)” (p. 16). Despite the sobering analyses of informed observers, the number and diversity of alternative civil society shows potential, under the right conditions, for the emergence of a civil society in Cuba that will be able

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43. The following section relies heavily on Altuna, et. al. (1992-1998), Bragado (1998), Montaner (1998), Rivero, et. al. (1998, 1999), as well as many pieces published electronically by CubaNet. This section is an extract of a longer piece titled, “Alternative Civil Society in Cuba: Dissidence, Opposition and Independent Social Activism in Cuba” (forthcoming).

44. A notable exception, in her opinion, is the work of the Catholic Church. She suggested that civil society groups emulate the church and engage in civic “evangelizing.”

45. He defines personal political efficacy as the individual’s expectation that his participation in obtaining a collective good might have a reasonable degree of effectiveness.

to play some role in the determination of the country's future.

### CONCLUSION OR THE NEXT STAGE?

In terms of Weigle and Butterfield's "logic," Cuba is still in the defensive stage. However, as the discussion of the phases demonstrated, the situation in Cuba is quite complex. The Cuban case exhibits an odd amalgam of elements that by coexisting, call into question the relationship between civil society and democratic transition, as well as some of the basic assumptions of the literature. Some of the characteristics that would define a passage into the "emergent" stage appeared in the offing in 1991 when the Communist Party changed its attitude toward religious practice by allowing believers to join the party. Another important step was taken when the state authorized the creation of the first NGO in 1992, the Centro Félix Varela led by Juan Antonio Blanco (Benjamin 1997), a development which has led to the NGO "boom" (1992-1996). When the regime legalized the use and possession of hard currency "dollarization," limited self-employment, and farmers' and artisans' markets, it also opened the possibility of legally deriving income from non-state sources. These developments occurred while more obviously contestatory organizations were being repressed and their leaders jailed or expelled from the country. There was also a brief thaw immediately before and after the visit of Pope John Paul II in January 1998. However, the crackdown in 1996, the jailing of activists, the intensification of ideological "war" by the draconian "Law for the Protection of National Sovereignty" (1999), and the closed trial and continued incarceration of the four authors of *La Patria es de Todos*, demonstrated that the regime would continue to reject any vision different than its own. Other than the limited debates about economic reforms in 1993-1994 in the National Assembly, there was no public evidence of intra-party debates and no space was opened for the new alternative organizations. There was no deepening to the slight liberalization of 1993-1994, on the contrary, there was retrenchment

and an intensification of the campaign to discredit the opposition.

In 1988, on the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Cuba actually had a larger and more active dissident and opposition movement than many of the regimes that collapsed when the Soviet Union pulled out its military guarantee (see Figure 3). Although Cuba survived the so-called "Leninist Extinction," the nature of the regime was changed. The Castro government did not become a "reformist" regime that might allow civil society to pass from defensive to emergent stages. Instead, the regime has eroded, along with its state capabilities, its legitimacy, and prospects, into an odd hybrid of Stalinism and Iberoamerican *caudillismo*. The regime has been able to maintain elite loyalty and renegotiate the coercive compact sufficiently to stave off a revolt from below as in Romania or the emergence of a People Power movement that coalesces political opposition with religious social activists as in the Philippines, Haiti, and Poland. The question is how long can the regime provide the minimum requirements of the coercive compact? The Castro regime understands the dangers of reform and it also understands that to accept the legitimacy of an opposition and allow independent social activism to compete for the hearts and souls of Cubans would mean the end of the regime, both in the political theoretical sense as well as in the real political realm.

What do the other communist party-states tell us about the possibilities for Cuba? Using 1988 as the base year for comparison, let us look at the subset of cases where communism was imposed from the outside.<sup>46</sup> These regimes relied on the Brezhnev doctrine to keep their unpopular Communist parties in control. The three regimes that resisted political reforms, also exhibited the lowest levels of independent activity (Bulgaria, GDR, Romania). Dissent from "above" was minimal in these states; opposition was from "below"—persecuted ethnic and religious minorities (Turks in Bulgaria, Hungarians and Germans in

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46. The Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary, Poland, Romania. Laos and North Korea are treated elsewhere; see Espinosa (1999a).

Romania). Counter-elites were not allowed to form.<sup>47</sup> The transitions from communism in these cases were pushed from below by inchoate social forces, not by an organized civil society. In the aftermath of the removal of the dictators (violently in Romania), communist elites were able to dominate the process of transition calling on the aspects of pre-Communist political culture most congruent with their continuation in power, albeit under different names.

Five “imposed” regimes faced significant independent action (Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland). Of these, the only Czechoslovakia was an anti-reform regime, but almost alone among the Eastern bloc, the country had a developed civil society and a democratic political culture before communism. All had negotiated transitions where communist elites handed power to civil society-based counter-elites which had the opportunity to create popular support (“from below”). In eroding Stalinist regimes, such as Czechoslovakia and the GDR (both with experiences with Soviet intervention), civil society quickly coalesced from dissident organizations and spontaneous movements, but only because regime elites were unable to prepare smoother exits as in Hungary and Poland. Where civil society had its strongest presence, Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic countries, the political and social transitions were more clearly defined and positive.

The subset of regimes where communists came to power through a native-based revolution includes Albania, China, Cuba, Russia (USSR), Vietnam, and Yugoslavia. There was significant independent activity in all but Albania, which along with Cuba, had an anti-reform regime. Russia was in the midst of the political and economic reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev. China and Vietnam had already undertaken important economic reforms, but eschewed political reforms. Nevertheless, they also faced a revival in civil society fueled in part, by the opportunities opened

up by economic reform. A critical factor for these regimes was party-elite unity when faced with the moment of criticality. Where party unity was maintained, regime elites stayed in power: Albania (until 1992), China, Cuba, Vietnam. When the party fractured, the regime was unable to survive the moment of criticality: Russia and Yugoslavia.<sup>48</sup> In sum, Albania followed a pattern very similar to that of Bulgaria and Romania with reshuffled communists leading the transition, while Yugoslavia fell apart into its constituent republics each finding different paths away from communism despite the persistence of the Serbian Communist leader Slobodan Milošević. The Soviet Union fissioned into 15 republics, each with its own pattern of transition away from communism that had as much to do with pre-Communist political culture as with the strength of local party elites and their ability to recast themselves as national political elites.

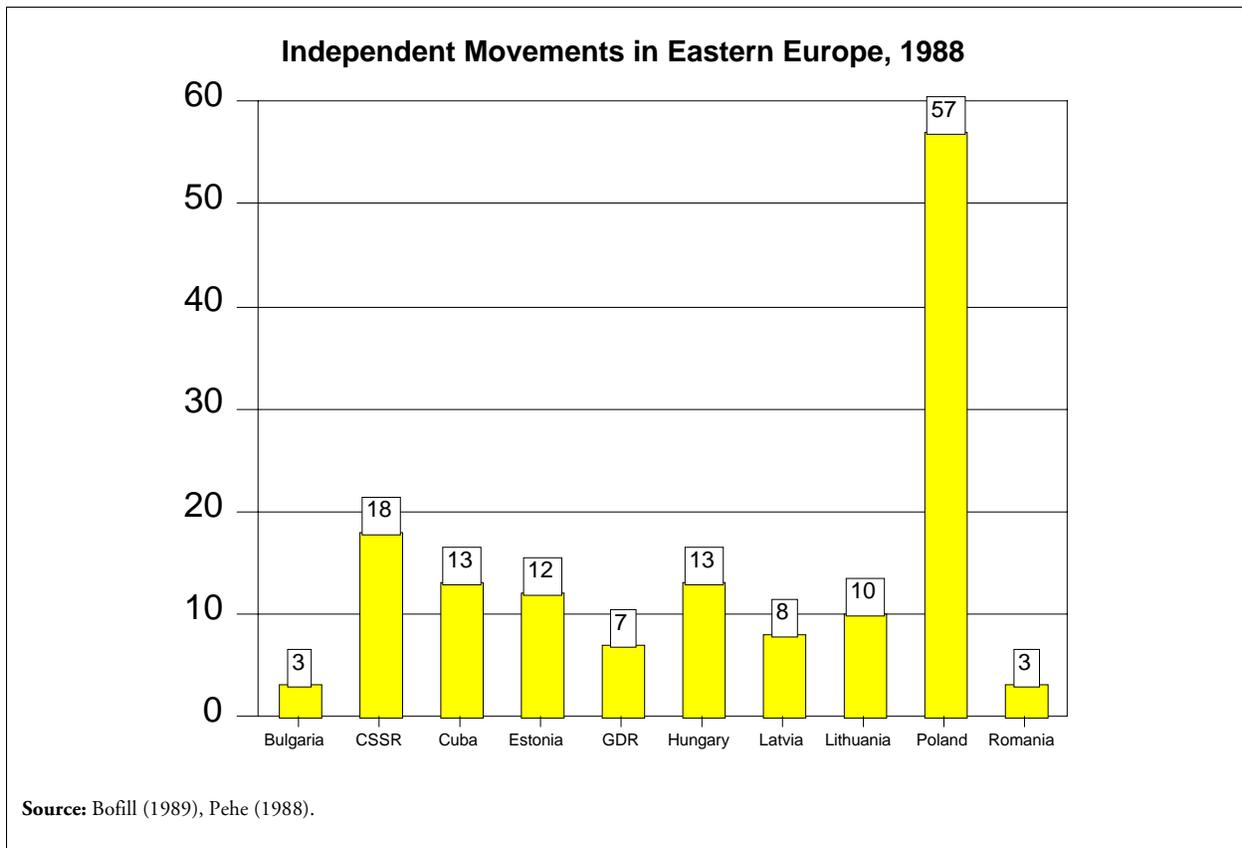
The Leninist survivors have been able to stay in power despite significant civil society activity because: (1) the communist party stayed united and never lost control; (2) it carried out economic reforms not political reforms, allowing it renegotiate the coercive compact with the population thus quelling potential unrest from “below” without allowing the consolidation of political dissent or opposition; and (3) punishing political dissidence by political prison or exile, this separating potential civil society leaders from potential followers. Cuba’s meager reforms cannot compare with those undertaken by China, Laos, and Vietnam. It has taken only minimal economic reforms, but apparently sufficient, in combination with the prospect of immigration to the United States, to maintain control. However, as the other survivor cases demonstrate, it takes a considerable amount of reform, a willingness to take risks and to be brutal if necessary to stay in power as a party-state. No communist regime has fallen or been reformed by the founder. Although the Chinese model has come into

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47. The GDR’s rapid absorption by West Germany allowed it take a different path, but one that has left obstacles that are yet to be cleared in a unified Germany.

48. Yugoslavia already had a reformist regime (since 1948), a high level of activity (which varied significantly by republic), a mix of pre-communist political cultures, and a party riven by ethnic divisions.

Figure 3. Independent Movements in Eastern Europe, 1988



vogue again in Cuban political discourse (see Castro 1999), the kinds of profound reforms undertaken by China are not likely to happen under Fidel's rule. Perhaps the prospect is being held out as an incentive for younger regime elites. The party-state has indeed eroded, providing room for divergence, but not for the development of a counter-elite available for any negotiated transition. Although groups such as the Moderate Opposition Reflection Forum and many others since 1991 have offered to be partners in negotiation and exiled figures such as Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo have made clear their willingness to sit down with Fidel Castro himself, the regime continues to attack all opposition as illegitimate.

The experiences of Eastern Europe have had more than a decade to sink in on all sides, as has the Chi-

nese success with its mix of communist party-state rule and state capitalist economic development. The future of Cuba is contingent on many variables known and unknown. If the coercive compact can be maintained and the emergent civil society kept in check, the status quo, (a steady but gradual erosion through economic, political and social transition) will last until the death of the founder. The two most likely would be the Chinese option (state capital, one-party rule) or the Bulgarian option (where reformist communists come to the fore and slowly ease the triple transition toward democracy and markets).<sup>49</sup> If civil society can continue to expand to the point where it can serve as a credible option, regime elites might call on them to negotiate a reasonable exit or compromise with a modicum of power-sharing upon the death of Fidel Castro (Hungary or Po-

49. Adam Przeworski (1991) refers to the double transition, political and economic, but Marta Beatriz Roque suggests that a social transition is also part of the process of democratization. She is referring to the areas of social practice and ideology, and of civil society as an entity itself (Roque 1997).

land). If events move quickly toward mass demonstrations and a push from below to oust the regime, then the quick exit option unfavorable to the interests of communist elites might hold, with dissident elements helping channel popular emotion into a peaceful transition (GDR, Czechoslovakia). However, if the compact cannot hold, civil society is kept weak, and pressure from below erupts into widespread turmoil like the riots on the Malecón littoral in Havana in August 1994, then a Romanian scenario could emerge involving a split in the regime's armed forces and violence from below and a transition controlled by the victorious faction of former regime elites with an uncertain path.

Cubans have increasingly been on their own in the midst of a shrinking state and the formation of islands of "savage" state capitalism, and have begun to look for alternatives; they have turned outward to relatives, remittances, and the visa lottery, to institu-

tionalized sources of alternatives visions—especially the churches, or to anomic escapes. The party-state is unable to provide many options as it concentrates resources in maintaining its political power base (defense, police, intelligence) and in keeping elite cohesion and loyalty. The state can no longer afford to occupy the public spaces it did before. Civil society groups function as squatters (*precaristas*): living at the margins of legality in precarious circumstances, "courageously moving the fence at night," and always at the mercy of the state.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the logic of emergence, a complex, non-linear process moves along and time waits. While the emergence of civil society in Cuba meant that an essential change had taken place in the nature of the regime, its presence does not necessitate a regime change or a democratic transition. However, the strength of civil society will help determine whether the path the polity takes upon the death of its founder.

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50. The term "*precaristas*" is used by María Cristina Herrera to describe the strategies used by the Cuban Catholic Church and others in their quest to gain and keep social space (conversation with author).

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