

Examining Cuban Civil Society

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for examining Cuban civil society in order to understand the degree to which civil society organizations can act as agents of influence. This paper adopts a Gramscian definition of civil society and posits that there are three sectors of Cuban civil society: national sector, international sector, and hybrid sector. Although studying agents of influence naturally precedes a discussion on how agents influence and what types of change might occur as a result, this paper tries to remain focused in constructing an epistemological model that provides a way to view Cuban civil society comprehensively so that questions about change outside the scope of this paper can separately be addressed.

This paper will provide a current snapshot of the Cuban government, then proceed to review various definitions of civil society, and define the model for broadly examining Cuban civil society that, in some instances, can apply pressures through “boomerang effects,” followed by application of this model and then a conclusion based on the discussion.

Background on the State of the Cuban Government and Economy

With a population of 11.2 million, Cuba is the largest country in the Caribbean. The country has been governed by the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) since the Batista government was overthrown by Fidel Castro in 1959. Under the auspices of political groups forming the *Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas* (ORI), Castro led the socialization of property and commercial enterprises throughout the island, expropriating US\$1 billion in 1961, belonging to U.S. businesses. Deteriorating relations with the United States completely broke down after an unsuccessful CIA-led attempt to invade

Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Cuba turned to the Soviet Union for protection and trade, becoming a member of the Council for Mutual Economy Assistance (CMEA) in 1972, which underscored a Cuban monoculture based sugar and loans to finance current account deficits.

In the late 1980s, while the Soviet Union was embracing *perestroika*, Cuba clung to its socialist roots and rejected liberalization. The accompanying collapse of the Soviet Union devastated the Cuban economy, because it accounted for 80 percent of all Cuban trade which was followed by “Special Period.” (Gray, Alexander I., 2005) The Special Period (1990-1995) was a time in which the Cuban government sought to preserve the gains from the revolution in areas such as education and health care which included an opening of social space to Cuban NGOs for the provision of social services through foreign aid. In order to shore up the economy, the Cuban government shifted its focus to services and away from manufacturing which was favored by now-defunct CMEA. The population continues to be among the most educated in Latin America, as evidenced by student performance in school. Studies have shown that Cuban third grade language achievement test results are the highest among 11 Latin American and Caribbean countries studied. (Gasparini, 2000: 6) Education spending increased from 6.3 percent of GDP in 1998 to 11 percent of GDP in 2004. (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2005: 17) Health indicators are comparable to OECD countries which include the best infant-mortality rate in the region (6.3 per 1,000 live births). Furthermore, Cuba has the highest ratio of doctors to the population in the world.¹

Economy:

The country remains economically segregated. Although it has fixed its exchange rate at 1:1 with U.S. dollar, the floating domestic rate is closer to 26:1. Foreign commercial interests and tourists have generally been required to use the convertible peso in hard-currency outlets. In practice, this system underscores the dualistic nature of the domestic economy: state-set prices versus free-market prices and official versus unofficial “exchange rates” which encourage black markets.

Although the state remains the largest employer, accounting for 73.2 percent of employment in 2003, this figure represents a decline in state employment from 95 percent in 1989. Public employment is primarily in health and education sectors whereas non-state sector employment is primarily in agricultural cooperatives and smallholdings (50 acres or less). Despite the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and a consequent contraction of the Cuban economy by 33 percent in terms of GDP in the first half of the 1990s, unemployment rose only to 8 percent.² Pressures from the withdrawal of Soviet

1. 596 doctors per 100,000 in 2005 compared to 279 doctors in the U.S. and 164 doctors in the UK.

subsidies in the early 1990s caused the Cuban government to increase tax rates and prices on non-essential goods and also undertake limited market liberalization efforts which included creation of Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Co-operation, an important development for Cuban NGOs, the eventual establishment of consumer credit in 1999 and interest-bearing savings accounts in 2000.

Trade:

Although the European Union's policy has been "constructive engagement" which had included possible membership in the Cotonou Agreement, it did not come to fruition in part because of the March 2003 crackdown on Cuban dissidents. However, Cuba has strong trade relations in the Americas with Canada, Mexico and Venezuela. The 1998 election of President Hugo Chavez has provided a boon to Cuba-Venezuelan relationships which has been mutually beneficial in that Cuba is assured access to Venezuelan oil and Cuba has provided the medical expertise of delegations of Cuban doctors to Venezuela.³ Cuba has also been engaging China on both military and tourist initiatives.

US relations:

The United States and Cuba have had an uneasy relationship since the Spanish American War when the U.S. gained ownership of land on which Guantanamo Bay Base currently sits. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, American interests in Cuba have shifted from countering a Cold War military threat to promoting regime change. Substantial political lobbies such as the Cuban American National Foundation and the Cuban Liberty Council have guided U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba.

Recent relations with Cuba have ebbed and flowed. The 1996 Cuban shooting down of Brothers to the Rescue planes dropping leaflets over the island, provided an impetus for the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, known as Helms-Burton Law, which prevents U.S. investment in Cuba. However, by 2000, medicine and food sales were permitted to Cuba, the first in the past forty years. In October 2003, the Commission for the Assistance of a Free Cuba was established. The Commission report increased restrictions on travel and remittances. The CIA's National Intelligence Council has recently placed Cuba on a watchlist of 25 countries, such as Nepal, Sudan, and Haiti, whose instability may require U.S. intervention. The U.S. embargo of Cuba has been the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy.

2. Other estimates go as high as 40 percent.

3. One-third of Cuba's national oil needs are supplied through Petroleos de Venezuela on preferential financing terms.

This approach is over four decades old and has not achieved the democratic transition some had hoped.

For 14 years, the United Nations has consistently approved a resolution that condemns the U.S. embargo against Cuba. In 2006 the vote was 182-4, with the four opposing countries being the United States, Israel, Palau, and the Marshall Islands.

Framework for Examining Cuban Civil Society

I proffer that Cuban civil society is actually composed of three sectors: the international sector, the national sector, and the hybrid sector. All three groups work at various levels as agents of influence in Cuban society which overlap in their spheres of influence. The international sector is composed of groups primarily based outside of Cuba whose chief role is to collect and disseminate information about conditions in Cuba in order to foster a “boomerang effect.” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Freedom House are all examples of agents of influence within the international sector. Their sphere of influence is primarily other foreign governments and international organizations which may, in turn, apply pressure for change to the Cuban government. The national sector is comprised primarily of groups based exclusively within Cuba who are officially acknowledged by the Cuban government resulting in social space in which to operate under the state. Their primary role is as agents of influence in perpetuating Cuban socialism but they do provide opportunities for civic participation and engagement. Their sphere of influence as independent organizations is virtually non-existent but they have the social infrastructure and access to the Cuban people. Mass organizations and Cuban NGOs are examples of agents of influence within the national sector. Lastly, the hybrid sector is comprised primarily of groups that are work within Cuba but are externally supported. They are groups that challenge the current government and ones that are likely to be the short-term catalyst for a post-Communist transition. Opposition and dissident groups are examples of agents of influence within the hybrid sector.

Definition of Civil Society

This section will review the various definitions of civil society as they relate to Cuba and then argue for a more inclusive view of aspects of Cuban civil society. The modern concept of “civil society” evolved in reaction to developments between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries; specifically, the evolution of the modern state, the contraction of religion as the result of the Enlightenment, and increased focus on the individual.⁴ In this context,

civil society has typically been thought of as separate and distinct from the state and an agent of change. Dilla and Oxhorn define civil society as:

the social fabric formed by a multiplicity of self-constituted territorially-and functionally-based units which peacefully coexist and collectively resist subordination to the state, at the same time that they demand inclusion into national political structures. (Dilla and Oxhorn, 2002: 11)

Consequently, civil society vies for space that is held by the state. Furthermore, Dilla and Oxhorn proffer that civil society is “a multiplicity of territorially-based units.”

Civil society has been associated with the promotion of the private market, in part, because of these roots. Otero and Bryan argue for a broader view of civil society as a civil sphere which includes Cuban black market activity. (Otero and O’Bryan, 2002) The early 1990s in Cuba during the Special Period provide an example of how the Cuban state, because of the withdrawal of Soviet subsidies, ceded space for the development of private agriculture and self-employment. (Chanan, 2001: 404) However, too much of a focus on market development erodes what Dilla and Oxhorn call the “associative principle” that undergirds civil society. (Dilla and Oxhorn, 2002: 12)

Civil society development is also linked to democracy development because liberal democracy fosters a plurality of perspectives and a distribution of decision-making conducive to the development of multiple non-state civil society organizations. Lopez argues that the bellweather of democratization efforts in Cuba is the development of “groups that emerge and are maintained independently of the state.” (Lopez, 2002: 30) However, liberal democracies, as Dilla and Oxhorn point out, emphasize the individual over the collective, which can be problematic when trying to apply this definition of civil society to Cuba. Gray provides an interesting nuance in terms of how Cuban civil society might perceive itself in the form of the relationship between Cuban and European Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) during the Special Period. He draws the distinction between solidarity and cooperation. He argues that, because Cuban socialism is based on working towards the same common goals, Cuban NGOs see their relationships with European NGOs as one of solidarity whereas European NGOs see their relationship as one of cooperation (Gray, 2005). This is an important distinction in that it does not assume a plurality of positions assumed in a liberal democ-

4. See Craig Calhoun, “The Idea of Civil Society,” *Social Forces* 73, no. 3 (1995): 1118; and Michael Chanan, “Cuba and Civil Society, or Why Cuban Intellectuals Are Taking About Gramsci,” *Nepantla: Views from the South 2.2* (Duke University Press, 2001). Alexis D’Toqueville partially ascribed the predominance of equality among the American people to the effects of civil society. Adam Smith also wrote about how the growth of capitalism and private wealth, “introduced order and good governance” (See Chapter IV in *Wealth of Nations*, New York: Bantam Dell, 2003).

racy and the civil society that develops it and is more rooted in associative rather than individualistic principles.

Can civil society exist separate from the state in a Cuban context? Janos Kornai argues that the relationship is blurred, at best. In a classical communist system, power is centralized in the state through the party. He elaborates on the concept of “democratic centralism” in which party participation is (nominally) voluntary, and highly centralized through branches, regional structures, up to the Central Committee, Politburo and general secretary, or President in Cuba’s case. Because there is no competition in a classical communist society, mass organizations sanctioned by the state have a monopoly of access over certain groups of people. This is why mass organizations in this type of system are “transmission belt” organizations because they transmit Party ideology to groups of people, which in Cuba’s case would be the Federation of Cuban Women or the Union of Young Communists, for example. (Kornai, 1992: 40) As a result, the state’s influence extends to “every sphere of life....Under other systems there...are ‘private’ spheres in which the state cannot or will not intervene. This distinction between the state and ‘civil society,’ ... becomes entirely blurred.” (Kornai, 1992: 46)

In all these instances, civil society is regarded as either separate from the state and an agent of change or an extension of the state. As a result, the view of how civil society does and could function in Cuba is somewhat limited. I posit that civil society in the Cuban context is not only separate from the state but part of it and that they are not just “territorially-bound” but occupy international as well as national space. Consequently, each sector’s component members act as agents of influence over a sphere of influence which includes the Cuban people, the Cuban government, and international players. I turn to Chanan’s interpretation of Gramsci to provide clarity to explain this concept. There are at least two Gramscian notions of civil society. The first, and often the one most referenced, is that civil society and the state are the same; specifically he represents this mathematically as “State=political society+civil society.” (Gramsci, 1971: 263) Here, civil society is an extension of the State in exercising “hegemony under the armor of coercion.” (Gramsci, 1971) This interpretation allows for no space or separation between civil society and the state. However, Chanan points out the second conception of civil society as a “realm...in which power, authority, and the social elite (not only) seek to organize consent and hegemony, *but also where consent and hegemony may be contested by the sectors they dominate. In this sense, civil society may indeed be counterposed to the political order.*” (Chanan, 2001: 392; emphasis added) In this sense, although the state maintains the monopoly of violence and does use civil society to maintain hegemony, the space in which coercion occurs under the state can also be space in which this coercion is contested.

Chanan views the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, not just as extensions of state security, but also to campaign for vaccinations and shop for sick neighbors. Although I do not argue that these groups can produce a level of revolutionary change, they may be able to implement it, as they did after 1959, and should therefore be considered when examining Cuban civil society in its totality for both short-term and long-term change. Furthermore, the concept of civil society and civic participation is ingrained because of mass organizations. So, although their role as agents of influence is limited from the perspective of a post-Communist transition as the domestic sphere for social action is still largely state-controlled, their access to the community of Cubans and reification of civic participation is worthy of consideration in the broader context of Cuban civil society.

International Sector of Cuban Civil Society

In *Activists Beyond Borders*, Keck and Sikkink examine how transnational advocacy networks provide pressure among more powerful actors to bring about social change. The power these networks have is in information exchange. By retrieving information from activists about conditions in a particular country, Keck and Sikkink posit that transnational organizations can initiate a “boomerang effect” in which the repressive state is pressured from the outside as a result of the activist’s work within the transnational advocacy network. The tactics used by these networks include information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, mobilization of shame, accountability politics, issue framing and testimonials. I will focus on how three international organizations have worked to disseminate human rights standards and report on the status of human rights in Cuba.

Agents of influence in this sector are standard setting international organizations which monitor developments on human rights and political freedoms. They are non-governmental organizations which put pressure on governments by applying and tracking an international standard by which human rights and political freedoms are judged. Although their effects may not be directly felt, their work gives voice to human rights violations on an international stage which would otherwise go unheard and are acknowledged to be essential to the work of promoting a more open society in places such as Cuba.⁵

Human Rights Watch (HRW), arguably one of the most influential non-governmental organizations to lobby for human rights on an international

5. Cuban Democratic Directorate and Center for the Study of a National Option, “Steps to Freedom 200: A Comparative Analysis of Civic Resistance Actions in Cuba from February 2003 to January 2004,” Steps-31, 2003: 29 international organizations acknowledged.

stage, publishes annual reports on the status of human rights throughout the world. The 2006 report highlights the deficiencies in the Cuban Criminal Code which permit the detainment and imprisonment of individuals who have committed no illegal act but are penalized for “dangerousness” by being given an “official warning” which can and does include detainment, intimidation, and incarceration into prisons with deplorable conditions.⁶

Because the Cuban government does not recognize the existence and activities of human rights organizations in Cuba, HRW plays the role of publishing and disseminating on an international stage the activities these organizations and the status of human rights in Cuba. For example, HRW 2006 report highlights the work of a local Cuban human rights group, the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, which published a list of 306 political prisoners in July 2005. Of the 75 dissidents arrested in the March 2003 crackdown, 61 remain in prison. HRW also reported on a mass protest of 200 individuals on May 20, 2005.⁷

Amnesty International, another prominent international human rights organization, also provides public reports of human rights abuses throughout the world. Amnesty, based in London, focuses on promoting the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and has not taken a political position on Cuba. Both Amnesty International and HRW are not officially permitted to visit Cuba. In a 2005 report, Amnesty focused on the March 2003 crackdown on dissidents, by providing profiles of each and how the Cuban government is violating UN principles on detainment of prisoners.

These organizations maintain a focus on human rights development in Cuba and alert the international community regarding some of their most egregious violations. Amnesty’s report, for example, includes profiles of imprisoned dissidents. However, because these organizations analyze world trends, reports are contextualized and, as a result, are subject to shame tactics referenced by Keck and Sikkink. For example, HRW reported recently that an amendment to create a new UN Human Rights Council was opposed by

6. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2006: Events of 2005* (New York and Washington, D.C.: Human Rights Watch and Seven Stories Press, 2006): 187. Amnesty International’s 3/18/2005 report provides a more detailed background on Article 91 of the Penal Code and Law 88, both of which were used in sentencing the dissidents to excessive prison sentences up to 28 years in length for political protest activities (1). See “Cuba: Prisoners of conscience: 71 longing for freedom,” *Amnesty International*, accessed 3/14/06 at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR250022005?open&of=ENG-CUB>.

7. The protest, which was reportedly one of the largest in recent memory, sparked debate among prominent dissidents. The Varela Project’s Oswaldo Paya was quoted as calling the meeting “a fraud” and another peaceful protest group, “Ladies in White”, also did not participate for fear of being “provocative.” A CNN report indicated Polish EU observers were denied entrance into the country and Czech senator and German deputy who were in-country were directed to leave the country. Lucia Newman, “Cuban Dissidents Rally in Havana,” *CNN*, accessed 3/14: <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/americas/05/20/cuba.rally/>

both Cuba and the United States. (Moss, 2005) As agents of influence, these organizations rely on pressure tactics; however, alone they cannot change circumstances. Lastly, Freedom House is another example of an international monitor that provides research which raises human rights abuses to the international stage. Freedom House has been tracking political rights and civil liberties developments for over 30 years through its seven-point system, in which it annually assesses and scores over 190 countries. Its ranking standards are also based on the UNCHR and their scores are used in selecting and funding the U.S. government's new development organization, the Millennium Challenge Corporation. In its 2005 Country Report, Freedom House not only highlights the March 2003 crackdown but also contextualizes these events within a scoring scheme that compares country records throughout the world. Since 1972, Cuba has scored a seven (7), putting it at the most repressive end of the range for both political rights and civil liberties.

National Sector of Cuban Civil Society

Mass Organizations

Today's Cuban civil society broadly defined has its roots in pre-revolutionary forces. The *Partido Socialista*, which included Castro's *Movimiento 26 Julio* and an anti-Batista student group, *Directoria Revolucionario* were consolidated in 1965 into the PCC. The PCC's youth wing, the *Union de Jovenes Comunistas* (UJC) has special constitutional status. The two together constitute one in six of the Cuban population aged between 15 and 65 years. The Party is linked to economic well-being in that recommendations for party membership typically occur through the work place and opposition activists are typically punished by being denied employment or advancement. Additional state organizations include:

- *Central de Trabajadores de Cuba* (CTC) which represents 13 official labor unions with a combined total of 3.3 million and 80,000 workplace branches. The CTC was founded in 1939 and is one of the oldest unions in the Americas.
- *Comites de Defensa de la Revolucion* (CDRs) constitute the largest Cuban mass organization with cells in every neighborhood. Although CDRs are a critical component of state security and surveillance, they have increasingly become more active in providing social services, such as street cleaning and vaccinations. Of all the organizations, membership here is the greatest at 85 percent of the population over 14.
- *Asociacion Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (ANAP) has a membership of about 150,000 small farmers who own 50 acres or less. Since the mid-1990s, they constitute a market of producers which sell produce at local farmer's markets.
- *Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC) has a membership of 80 percent of women over 14 years of age.

- *Federacion de Estudiantes Universitarios* (FEU), whose founding in 1923 pre-dated the Cuban revolution, maintains a membership of 200,000.
- *Federacion de Estudiantes de Enseñanza Media* (FEEM) and *Pioneros* have a combined membership of 1.5 million primary and secondary school students.

These organizations were established to increase mobilization and, at the inception of the Cuban revolution, represented an emergent civil society. (Dilla and Oxhorn, 2002: 16) Although these organizations are not independent from the state, and are agents of influence in perpetuating the current Party ideology, their extensive social infrastructure requires that they be considered in any post-Communist transition. Furthermore, the existence of this infrastructure among a highly educated public perpetuates solidarity and associational values that are critical components of civil society.

Cuban NGOs:

Unlike the mass organizations, Cuban NGOs, although briefly state sanctioned, crept into the space created in the Special Period, because of their ability to attract foreign aid.⁸ The Cuban government required that Cuban NGOs register, have a sponsoring state institution, and subject themselves to dissolution by the Ministry of Justice at any point. (Gunn, 1995) By 1995, the Ministry of Justice had registered 2,154 civil associations.⁹ (Dilla and Oxhorn, 2002: 17) Castro himself first used the term “civil society” in a 1994 Ibero-American Summit. This spurred a discussion around what this term means as it had been regarded as a neoliberal extension of the United States. According to one government official, civil society outside of the government was problematic in that “Cuba already has a civil-society-a revolutionary civil society made up of organizations such as the Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDRs).” (Gunn, 1995: 8) This perspective reflects the concept of a Cuban socialist civil society, which is most connected to the first definition of Gramscian civil society in that it civil society is an extension of the state. However, the Cuban government needed these organizations even though they were encroaching on the state’s territory in the provision of social services. For example, Oxfam America supported a small housing project through the National Association of Small Producers (ANAP), a mass organization. By 1993, an international donor conference took place in Cuba to showcase Cuban NGOs. In the three year period of 1993-1996, NGOs

8. Jorge Luis Acanda Gonzalez discusses this period in his article, “Cuban Civil Society: I. Reinterpreting the Debate,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 39, no. 4 (2006): 32-36. Specifically he addresses the space the state vacated in terms of its ability to provide social services, a central tenet and responsibility of Cuban Communism. As a result, the Cuban government, “was compelled to open up significant space for foreign investment” which included allowing “other actors to take on certain functions heretofore under its exclusive purview” (36).

9. Since 1997, civil society registry been frozen.

raised \$42 million and numbered from 20 to 50 organizations. There were even six priority areas designated for NGO grants: alternative energy, community development, environment, popular education, promotion of women and institution building. However, a 1996 contraction of this space by the state froze NGO registration.

Clearly, both mass organizations and Cuban NGOs operate in the space carved out by the state. Mass organizations are constitutionally part of the Cuban government and as a result, have a specific function and space. Although they have access to the Cuban population and foster civic participation making them agents of influence, their ability to affect a transformation in the short-term is minimal. Cuban NGOs were provided some latitude by the government and its interaction with foreign donors gave it a degree of independence in which to operate for a brief period of time. Both types of national organizations have and can play a limited role in implementing transition but are unlikely to initiate change.

Hybrid Sector of Cuban Civil Society:

Dissident and Opposition Groups:

Organized opposition to the Cuban government is estimated at 100 small human-rights groups and opposition parties. Political prisoners range anywhere between 100 to 1,000 individuals. (*Economic Intelligence Unit*, 2005: 10) These groups work within Cuba and their members are primarily Cubans, although they operate with the support and assistance of internationally-based organizations. Groups include independent journalists, like the Society of Journalists Manuel Marquez Sterling; civic protest groups, like the Ladies in White modeled after Argentina's *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*; and the Cuban Democratic Directorate. As agents of influence, their primary audience is not only the Cuban government but also the Cuban people and an international audience in seeking leverage for change. Because they operate within Cuba and with international assistance, they exert a "boomerang effect" in the way international NGOs do in influencing the international community to pressure the Cuban government. There is a debate around organizations linked to Cuban émigrés typically residing in the U.S. and/or funded through USAID between those that consider the organizations as infiltrated by U.S. foreign interests and those that see the agencies as legitimate and credible by virtue of this funding.¹⁰

10. Juan. L. Lopez addresses this debate in *Democracy Delayed: The Case of Castro's Cuba* in Chapter 3; specifically, he cites the responses from a Center for the Study of a National Option, which interviewed nine civil society groups in Cuba and 1,023 exiles. The Castro government openly uses the threat of a US invasion to elicit the Cuban people's support.

Opposition and dissident groups pay a price in terms of their access to the Cuban public and ability to influence the Cuban government. The March 2003 crackdown in which 75 people were arrested, quickly tried, and imprisoned was attributed to U.S. aid to dissidents. Although recent reports indicate that civil resistance activities have increased from 44 civic actions in 1997 to 1,805 actions in 2004, the Castro government continues to block opposition movements by arresting, detaining, and imprisoning prominent activists.¹¹

The Society of Journalists Manuel Marquez Sterling is an example of a society of independent journalists supported through Paris-based Reporteros Sin Fronteras. They support the publication of *Revista De Cuba*, a collection of over 250 articles originally published in 2002. Articles report on the activities of Project Varela, racism and poverty in Cuba, in addition to the March 2003 crackdown. In fact, Alfonso, the director of the society, was arrested and continued to report from jail.

The Hialeah, Florida-based Cuban Democratic Directorate, has been publishing reports since 1997 on resistance and repression activities in Cuba in an effort to track the development of an independent civil society. They are supported by the International Republican Institute, funded by USAID, and National Endowment for Democracy.¹² They rely on their communications with local opposition groups in order to track and report island-wide activities. Until 2003, at least one-quarter of the civic protest activity was based in Havana. The 2004 report indicates that Havana resistance activities shrunk to 18.5 percent of the overall total, meaning that, although overall civil resistance activities increased in 2004, proportionally more activities were occurring outside the capital province in places like Pinar del Rio, Matanzas and Villa Clara than in previous years.

The Leonor Perez Committee Mothers which began in 2002 as a prayer group of the wives of political prisoners and the wives of the 75 activists who were arrested in March 2003 came together as the Ladies in White. They have met in churches throughout Havana and proceed, dressed in white, down to the Quinta Avenida. They have appealed to the government for the release their husbands and an end to punishment meted out as a result of individual expression.

All three groups are examples of agents of influence working within Cuba, as well as outside, whose goal is to affect change. They are not sanctioned by the Cuban government and, as a result, as subject to retaliation. Because they are effectively not permitted access to the Cuban population by being restricted in their activities, their influence is limited. However,

11. See *Steps to Freedom*, 2003, 13; and *Steps to Freedom*, 2004, 10

12. <http://www.iri.org/countries.asp?id=8539017010>

through support from foreign groups, they are able to continue to vie for societal space currently occupied by the Cuban government.

Cuban Catholic Church:

The Cuban Catholic Church's role has also largely been subject to the Cuban government. Since the Fourth Communist Party Congress held in 1991 adopted a more flexible position on religion in general, the Catholic Church has been able to participate more actively in Cuban society. During the Special Period, Church charities, like Caritas, received humanitarian assistance from abroad. The 1998 visit of Pope John Paul II was also favorably received, in part because of his condemnation of the US embargo. However, the Catholic Church's position on free market democracy which fosters individual rights still clashes frequently with the policies and practices of the Cuban government. Catholic schools and constructions of new churches are prohibited. Only five of the 120 churches taken by the government have been returned to the church.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to proffer a model of Cuban civil society which provided examples of organizations as agents of influence in potentially producing change. The hybrid and international sectors hold the most promise for short-term change in Cuba because their sphere of influence is not fully controlled by the Cuban government. These organizations can pry open the space needed for short-term change by leveraging outside resources through modes of communication and pressure. However, long-term implementation of change could rely on the social infrastructure laid by the mass organization. A good deal of this type of change relies on the type of transition which could occur in Cuba, whether to a liberal democratic or social democratic model, which is outside the scope of this paper.

Juan L. Lopez argues that resources for mass communication are necessary on the island in order to make people aware of opposition movements and foster a feeling of solidarity to undertake the type of mass protests which overthrew oppressive governments in Eastern Europe. Access to the population is still largely controlled by the Cuban government through the national sector. Perhaps the continued pressure applied by both hybrid and international sectors can produce enough of a tipping point as to convert the national sector from an agent of influence to an agent of change.

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