

Cuba's NGOs: Government Puppets or Seeds of Civil Society?

By Gillian Gunn

Why have Cuba's Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) experienced explosive growth since 1989? Do they merely serve as a mechanism for channeling funds to the bankrupt state sector, or do they represent autonomous citizen groups capable of laying the groundwork for future civil society? Most importantly from a geo-political standpoint, will foreign assistance to Cuba's NGOs strengthen their independent status, or merely reinforce central state control?

These questions were addressed during a field study conducted in Havana and Santiago de Cuba during the summer of 1994. Representatives of twenty NGOs were interviewed, along with academics, foreign diplomats and Cuban government officials responsible for regulating NGO activity. Only preliminary conclusions are possible, due to the limited data available. However, the following statements seem justified.

- Cuba's 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.
- While many NGOs were originally intended to channel funds to the state sector, some developed institutional interests independent from, though not necessarily in conflict with, those of the state.
- Access to foreign exchange free of central state control is a necessary, if insufficient, condition for independent-minded NGOs to pursue their own paths.

These assessments are not intended to imply that the sole legitimate purpose of foreign assistance is to empower recipient independence. Indeed, most NGO donations throughout the world are provided for humanitarian purposes. However, due to the current debate in the United States and Western Europe about the political implications of NGO donations, this paper focuses on the independence issue.

Why NGO Growth?

"Civil society" and "NGO" used to be considered subversive terms in Cuba. Officials argued that, since the state inherently reflected the will of the people, there was no need for independent organizations to represent citizens. Cuban bureaucrats clinging to this Stalinist ideology are now increasingly challenged by reformers who claim that Lenin saw the need to maintain some independent organizations to "defend workers against deformations of the state."

The reformist view has been grudgingly accepted by the Cuban state. Fidel Castro used the term "civil society" at the 1994 Ibero-American Summit and *Gaceta*, the official journal of the state-controlled writers' union, recently defended the expression's legitimacy. The Cuban institution responsible for registering NGOS, the Ministry of Justice, reports explosive growth in their number from 1989 to 1993, and a leveling-off in 1994. Approximately 2,200 NGOs are now registered with the government and many others exist underground. The rising interest in NGOs has come both top-down from the government and bottom-up from the population.

The state's new support for NGOs is a matter of financial necessity. As subsidies from Moscow declined in 1990, the government sought alternative resources. Foreign NGO assistance was perceived as helping solve developmental problems in other countries where potential funders were uneasy about direct donations to governments accused of undemocratic practices. The Cuban authorities therefore Permitted a few ministries to establish parallel -NGOs- and re-labeled as "NGOs" some existing mass organizations and think tanks formerly associated with the Central Committee bureaucracy.

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The re-labeled mass organizations include the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC-Federation of Cuban Women), the *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (ANAP-National Association of Small Cultivators), and the *Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba* (UNEAC - Union Of Writers and of Cuba). These organizations have historically been utilized by the government to convey instructions, report citizen opinions and rally support for government policies. Often their leaders either simultaneously held high official positions or were closely linked to those who did. For ample, FMC leader Vilma Espin is the wife of Defense Minister Raúl Castro, and LINEAC head Abel Prieto is a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party.

Among the think tanks associated with the Central Committee and now titled NGOs are the *Centro de Estudios sobre América* (Center for the Study of America) and the *Centro de Estudios Europeos* (Center for European Studies). Both organizations were established in the 1970s to act as Central Committee academic research instruments. Though Central Committee funds are still significant, much of their budgets now come from external sources.

An example of a Ministry-sponsored NGO is "*Pro-Naturaleza*", an environmental organization with 5,000 members. Established in April 1993, most of its leadership is employed at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, formerly the Academy of Sciences. "*Pro-Naturaleza*" has not received any state funds, but has been housed rent-free within Ministry Property. Originally it hoped to pay a secretary and a researcher out of its own funds, but to date modest membership dues have been insufficient to cover the cost. Therefore, it has asked the Ministry to cover the salaries, with the request that this donation not be used to "encroach on the organization's independence."

Like the top-down motivation for NGO expansion, the bottom-up impetus was also related to events in the Soviet Union. *Glasnost* permitted a proliferation of Soviet NGOs, and by 1988 the Moscow press claimed that some 40,000 clubs and associations had been established. Close relations between Havana and Moscow at that time exposed Cuban intellectuals to many of these groups, which advocated themes such as religious freedom, popular culture, environmental protection and economic and social development. By 1990, the decline in Soviet subsidies to Cuba began to curtail the state's ability to deal with a wide variety of problems, including deforestation, housing deterioration, food scarcity, medicine shortages, and blackouts. Events in the Soviet Union both provided examples of citizen self-help and caused economic conditions which necessitated their implementation.

Churches were among the first to display bottom-up NGO behavior. The Catholic church, through its charity Caritas, obtained permission to receive humanitarian donations, primarily food and medicine, from abroad. The Protestant churches, via Cuba's Ecumenical Council, performed the same role. The Martin Luther King Center, established by Reverend Raúl Suárez, began to organize housing rehabilitation, development of alternative energy sources and infrastructure repair. The *Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba* (Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba) was established in 1991 to promote Afro-Cuban religious traditions, commonly referred to as Santería. Cuba's Christian-oriented Masons, founded in 1859 and driven underground by the Revolution, resumed activities in 1988 and now have 22,530 members.

Non-religious bottom-up organizations also have developed. The Felix Varela Center, established by former Central Committee staffer Juan Antonio Blanco in 1990, has, among other activities, sponsored recreation for child cancer patients and organized a community-based paint factory. The Pablo Milanés Foundation, established in 1990 by the black Cuban singer of the same name and financed with proceeds from his musical endeavors, provides support for young Cuban artists and aids independent cultural institutions.

This division of Cuban NGOs into two categories is drawn for the sake of analytical clarity. In reality, some top-down NGOs, such as "*Pro-Naturaleza*", have strong grassroots connections, and some bottom-up groups, such as the Martin Luther King Center, have close relations with the state. The state frequently attempts to convert bottom-up NGOs into government instruments, while citizens occasionally try to re-

shape top-down NGOs into grassroots organizations. The ideological lines between groups are also fluid. Bottom-up organizations are not necessarily anti-state, and top-down organizations are not necessarily anti-citizen empowerment.

State Ambivalence

The Cuban state is uneasy about NGOs. They are deemed useful because they capture resources that otherwise would not enter Cuba and relieve social tensions by resolving problems the state is unable to address. NGOs are also viewed with suspicion, however, because they represent an independent resource base for citizens whose desires do not always coincide with those of the state. Before Soviet subsidies disappeared, the state would have simply taken over those NGOs deemed inconvenient. To do so now would be self-defeating, for if Cuban NGOs are perceived as state front organizations, foreign donations will dry up. Therefore the state seeks to indirectly control NGOs without overtly dominating them.

The most obvious instrument of state control is the registration process. This is governed by the 1985 Law Number 54 on 'Associations and their Regulation,' along with Articles 39, 396 and 397 of the 1985 Civil Code.

To be accepted for registration an organization must fulfill the following requirements.

- Provide the names of thirty members, together with the names, addresses, telephone numbers and ages of the top leadership.
- Prove that the organization is self-financing.
- Submit a written statement of goals, together with an explanation of the institution's internal structure.
- Obtain a "negative certificate" from the Ministry of Justice stating that there is no other registered NGO with a similar purpose. If there is a duplicate organization, the new applicant must associate with the one already registered.
- Obtain the sponsorship of a "state reference institution" which affirms that the establishment of the NGO is in its interest. The reference institution subsequently has the right to attend the NGO's board meetings and inspect its accounts to confirm it is carrying out its stated purpose.

If the NGO is subsequently determined to no longer be performing its original purpose, the Ministry of Justice has the right to dissolve it. Furthermore, an organization will not be accepted for registration if its goals violate the Cuban Constitution or involve activities, in the words of a Ministry of Justice representative, "that are properly the role of the state." This prevents the registration of political parties as the Constitution

establishes a one-party system. Human rights organizations have been denied registration on the grounds that they are covert political parties.

Many organizations that appear innocuous or even pro-government have had difficulty registering. The Santiago de Cuba-based *Asociación Cubana de Estudios del Caribe* (ACEC - Cuban Association for Caribbean Studies) was denied a "negative certificate" on the grounds that another association with the same goals already existed. The Ministry then refused a request for a list of registered institutions, which the group needed to plan its reapplication. The applicant was also told that some of its objectives overlapped with those of existing government institutions, but was not told which objectives were problematic. Caught in this Catch-22, the Association took a gamble, re-drafted its application to emphasize cultural exchanges with institutions abroad, and was accepted.

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Another NGO, whose leader is socialist but inclined to outspoken criticism, had difficulty obtaining a reference institution, and finally prevailed upon friends in a state institution totally unrelated to the applicant's field of endeavors. This NGO existed for over three years before obtaining registration. Internal Communist Party schisms appear to have played a major role in the registration problems encountered by this and at least one other NGO.

The Pablo Milanés Foundation also existed for three years before obtaining registration in June 1993. Milanés wanted the proceeds from his concerts, film scores and other artistic endeavors to go to the Foundation, rather than be shared between state institutions and himself. The government was extremely reluctant to lose control of these revenues and events, and resisted. Milanés nonetheless moved ahead, recruited friends to work for the Foundation and paid them either out of his own pocket or not at all. They soon were organizing concerts which appealed to young Cubans more than those run by the state. The authorities were uneasy, but the singer's pro-Revolution background prevented the Foundation from being shut down.

According to a Foundation spokesperson, the role of Milanés in the 1992 National Assembly election became decisive. A poor, black neighborhood of Havana largely boycotted the election, undermining its legitimacy by refusing to vote for the individual selected by the party-influenced nomination process. (Only one candidate per seat was on the ballot, for whom citizens could vote yes or no.) When the neighborhood's youth said they would vote if Milanés were the candidate, the Party asked the reluctant singer to run. He acquiesced, and received a 94% "yes" vote, one of the highest percentages recorded. The Foundation's leverage was enhanced, and its registration application was accepted within few months. As of mid-1994 the Foundation owned both its building and the Land beneath it, a rare arrangement in Cuba.

The Asociación Cultural Yoruba also encountered difficulties, surviving precariously for fifteen years before it was finally able to register. Initially the Ministry of Justice claimed that it was a 'cult' and said there was no provision for such entities in Cuban legislation. The Association's leader believes that the intercession of the Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee, which is reportedly staffed by "open minded" individuals, smoothed this and other difficult interactions with the state bureaucracy. The Ministry of Culture, to which the NGO was initially directed, was far less helpful.

All of these NGOs which encountered registration difficulty were of the bottom-up variety. An individual or collection of friends decided to form a group, and tried to comply with the state's requirements. Sometimes, organizers found supporters in one branch of the state bureaucracy who helped them contend with opponents in other branches. These battles are a reflection of the dynamic tension between those seeking to expand space for civil society and those reluctant to lose control.

Curiously, of the NGOs visited, none had ever had their board meetings attended or their books inspected by their state reference institution. In fact, only one instance of such intervention was known in the NGO community. When a top Cuban official was asked if the Law of Association might be changed to eliminate the requirement for a state reference institution, the response was careful. "The inspections aren't being carried out anyway," he said. "I suppose it is counter productive to have a law which creates the impression of a higher level of state control of NGOs than what actually exists." However, this official then cautioned that a new law would still need to be designed in a manner which prevented the registration of organizations which use human rights activities as a 'cover for efforts to overthrow the government.'

NGO Conferences

As the above anecdotes illustrate, many of the bottom-up NGOs were finally able to register in the summer of 1993. This was no coincidence. From 5 to 11 September 1993 Cuba hosted the "*Encuentro sobre Cooperación con Cuba*" (Meeting on Cooperation with Cuba), designed to showcase Cuba's new NGOs to the international donor community. It was in the authorities' interest to include Cuban groups which were somewhat independent.

This was the second such gathering. The first, held in 1991, was organized by ANAP in collaboration with two European NGOs. Thirty-six Cuban NGOs and forty organizations from Europe and Latin America participated in the 1991 event. Although ANAP now has a somewhat more independent character, at that time it remained largely an instrument for ensuring Cuba's private peasants complied with government policies. According to several participants, the 1991 function was tightly controlled by the *Comité Estatal de Cooperación Económica* (CECE - State Committee for Economic Cooperation), which limited its success.

CECE had long been the gatekeeper for all foreign assistance flowing into Cuba. Up until 1990, this primarily involved agreements with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As that assistance waned, and NGO funds grew, CECE sought to control the new resource as well - a classic case of a bureaucracy reinventing itself when its Cold War justification evaporated. CECE's leadership, with attitudes shaped by decades of interactions with Soviet bureaucrats, was profoundly uneasy with NGOs and initially tried to curtail their activities.

Reflecting the influence of pro-state voices, the 1993 conference's final communiqué stated that the Cuban NGO activities would "fall within global plans with the necessary coordination with diverse Cuban entities."

By the time the September 1993 meeting occurred, the *Centro de Estudios Europeos* (CEE - Center for European Studies) had emerged as a CECE competitor and, along with the European alliance of NGOs *Grupo Sur*, co-sponsored the second gathering. The year before, with government permission, CEE became a "clearinghouse" for Cuban cooperation with European NGOs. CEE's existing relations gave it a strategic advantage over other Institutions. CEE now sees itself as a "marriage bureau" between Cuban and European NGOs. It helps Cuban NGOs prepare proposals, houses a fledgling NGO reference library, publishes a newsletter on Cuban NGO activities and conducts training seminars.

The Cuban participants presented 300 proposals at the 1993 meeting, of which sixty subsequently received foreign funding. The meeting formally established "platforms" in eight European countries to promote cooperation, but so far they are only functioning in Spain, Belgium, Italy and France. Reflecting the influence of pro-state voices, the Conference's final communiqué stated that the Cuban NGO activities would "fall within global plans with the necessary coordination with diverse Cuban entities." Caritas, which was not a participant, later rejected the conference communiqué on the grounds that it did not think Cuban NGOs should be required to "compliment state plans." The foreign NGOs present also unanimously called for "the end of the economic blockade... unjustly, immorally, and illegally imposed by the United States on Cuba..."

While the 1993 conference was heavily dominated by the government, it did further consolidate the state's acceptance of NGOs. The additional funding the conference generated may also eventually exacerbate underlying tensions between Cuba's NGOs and the state.

CECE

When asked about the ongoing role of CECE, a CEE spokesperson politely said, 'Some of the older members of the bureaucracy are not used to thinking of civil society as part of the solution to problems, and we need to change this mentality.' The Caritas

representative was more outspoken, remarking, "CECE gives me the most gray hairs." (CECE was recently renamed the Ministry for Foreign Investment and International Cooperation. However, since Cubans still refer to it as CECE, that term will be used here.)

A conversation with a high-ranking CECE official revealed the root of the problem. He stated that Cuban law requires government and NGO cooperation pass through the institution "because we have priorities provided by the government" and are best able to direct assistance to "Cuba's development needs." A Cuban NGO seeking foreign funding must present its proposal to CECE for approval because "it is hard in Cuba for any organization to act outside the state area."

The CECE official made several statements which could have come from an observer seeking to delegitimize Cuba's NGOS. He said these organizations:

- All end up housed within state agencies;
- Are "intermediaries to channel funds into state institutions;"
- Are necessary to complete the social sector of the country "but frankly the state can carry out the projects better;"
- May have a role within the one party system, and can help create more "diversified organizations that can respond to new interests" but should not form part of a civil society "opposed to the Revolution."

He remarked that Cuba already has a civil society-a revolutionary civil society made up of organizations such as the Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDR). These are neighborhood organizations viewed by external observers as instruments for monitoring and reporting citizens' political attitudes. The CECE official advocated widening the CDRs' activities and lamented that NGOs lead to decentralized control of foreign currency. NGOs mainly looking for outside assistance, he concluded, are "not really part of civil society, but they are a useful channel for funds."

Examples of CECE Interventions

A CECE representatives cited several instances in which his institution's intervention had prevented a "mistake" from being made. One U.S. NGO wanted to send vaccines for children, but only if its own doctors could administer them. CECE ruled that Cuba has more than enough doctors for that task, and rejected the application. A pharmaceutical donation was rejected on the grounds that it did not comply with Cuba's laws concerning importation of blood products, designed to prevent the spread of AIDS. CECE insisted a wheat donation be tested before distribution. It had such a high level of fumigation that additional tests were required for toxicity. an offer of protein cookies was rejected when CECE determined that for the value of the donation far more protein could be imported. A hosnital director obtained an NGO donation. but the resource was deemed in

shorter supply at another hospital, so CECE redirected the aid. "NGO assistance is not intended as individual charity, but as a contribution to the whole people," said the CECE official.

An example of problems which occurred when CECE was circumvented concerned a donation of prostheses manufacturing equipment. A Catholic organization independently arranged for its donation by Germany, but when it was delivered the designated health center had no building to accommodate it. Because the state had not been informed in advance, a building had not been set aside in the central plan.

CECE officials seem to believe they still control every aspect of Cuban NGO activities. This was largely the case before 1990, but Cuban and foreign NGOs have gradually chiseled away at CECE's monopoly. For example, in 1989 CEA had enormous difficulty getting an NGO donation approved. "There was no ideological problem because at that time we were formally associated with the Party," said a representative. "However, they thought that if a Cuban intellectual organization received foreign funds it would automatically take an equivalent amount away from an agricultural or industrial activity. They had a zero sum mentality rooted in the period of cooperation with socialist countries., Now, such donations are often executed without CECE's knowledge.

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Similarly, CECE had wanted Caritas to raise cash, which the state would then use to purchase medicine abroad. Caritas refused, and won the right to have the actual medical products donated to Caritas itself. CECE then insisted it be the sole entity to select recipients. Caritas demanded a say.

A compromise was reached by the establishment of two Caritas-government joint commissions, for education and health. Each involves three representatives from Caritas., three from the relevant Ministry and one from CECE. AU decisions require a unanimous vote. CECE had wanted medicine distribution to go through five levels of bureaucracy, for example. Caritas objected, convinced the commission members that this would be inefficient, and defeated CECE.

While uncomfortable with the situation., Caritas goes along with CECE's insistence that state institutions, mainly hospitals, schools and retirement homes, be the final distributors of donated products. Caritas ensures that only intended recipients consume the donated products by designating a "sympathetic individual" at each institution to report end- use. The charity seems satisfied that donations are generally used for their designated purpose. In fact, the Caritas monitoring network is acquiring such a solid

reputation that other NGOs 'have asked it to evaluate end-use of their donations too. Caritas is reluctant to take on this responsibility.

Caritas has not only defended itself against CECE, it has also prodded other NGOs to follow suit. Caritas wished to provide assistance to Cuba's private peasants by reconstructing an aqueduct. The government directed it to do so via ANAP, which Caritas viewed as an illegitimate NGO since its leadership "is selected by the state.' However, Caritas told ANAP it would accept the peasant association as a genuine NGO if it acted like one. 'We are very happy with their evolution," said the Caritas leader. 'ANAP has told CECE to stop interfering, and it has not included any Ministry personnel in the project."

Emboldened, ANAP then established a direct link with an Italian NGO for establishment of a seed bank. Officially, the project should have passed through CECE and the Ministry of Agriculture, but ANAP fought for autonomy, and won. "We are sure ANAP talks to various state institutions about the projects, but we see no evidence of interference, so for now we consider ANAP to be operating as a genuine NGO," said the Caritas representative. Universities have also fought for greater freedom of action. Before, if an academic wished to travel abroad on funds provided by a foreign NGO, the scholar had to be a member of the Communist Party or the Union of Young Communists. The travel required approval of the scholar's local CDR, the Ministry of Education, and CECE. Any payment for services performed abroad went to the state. In 1990, Cuba's universities received permission to make direct contacts with institutions abroad. Forty percent of any earned fee can now remain in the hands of the scholar, with forty percent going to the university, and twenty percent going to the Ministry of Education. Even though the Ministry of Education must be "informed" of pending travel and any proposed scholar with a "strongly marked political record" may be denied travel documents, CECE has no official role.

On a practical basis, CECE's role in NGO collaboration has been reduced to the following.

- European NGOs generally request a letter from CECE stating that it has no objection to a proposed project. Once that letter is obtained, the foreign NGO deals with the Cuban NGO directly.
- A Cuban NGO must pay large customs fees on imported goods unless it has a letter from CECE stating that their end-use is "within the priorities of the country." "Pro-Naturaleza", for example, would have had to pay a 20,000 peso duty to get a donated Toyota truck out of customs if it had not been able to obtain a CECE letter of support for the associated wind-power project. Similarly, the Cuban Red Cross needed such a letter to extricate a donated ambulance from customs.
- Any project which involves direct collaboration with a state enterprise requires prior CECE approval.

While the still powerful CECE can distort aid flows, a resourceful NGO with friends in the right places can frequently evade its grip.

Even these rules can be circumvented, however, especially if another state institution becomes involved. For example, when the Jewish community of Cuba had difficulty convincing CECE to release from customs a donation of kosher food supplies, the Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee successfully interceded.

If one accepts CECE's definition of NGO activities, there is no such thing as a genuine NGO in Cuba. Reality, however, shows an outmoded state institution being challenged by a broad coalition of NGOs, both of the top-down and bottom-up variety. While the still powerful CECE can distort aid flows, a resourceful NGO with friends in the right places can frequently evade its grip.

Incidents of Independence

Resistance to CECE interference is not the only area in which Cuban NGOs have exhibited independence from the state. Occasionally, an NGO's receipt of foreign funds has been used to strengthen its bargaining power with the state.

One of the most striking examples concerns the *Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital*, (Group for the Integrated Development of the Capital). The Group has not yet been able to register as an NGO because it is not fully self-financing, and remains officially connected with the Havana City government. However, it acts more like an NGO than many registered organizations.

The Group focuses on urban development, and as Cuba's resources have contracted it has emphasized local community self-reliance. As part of this effort, the Group seeks to rehabilitate existing housing. In contrast, the government puts an emphasis on new housing construction. In 1993, the Group was sent a donation of concrete block-making machines by a European NGO. They were seized upon their arrival by the local state construction enterprise, which said they were badly needed for new housing efforts. The Group resisted, to no avail, and finally informed the donor. The donor then told the Cuban government it intended to reclaim the machines, as they were not being used for their designated purpose. Faced with this ultimatum, the state construction firm backed down, and turned the machines back over to the Group.

This represented a small victory for civil society. The foreign NGO donation, and associated leverage, ensured that the Cuban NGO's objectives were furthered over those of the state. Of course, the state was not opposed to housing rehabilitation, but simply believed new construction to be a greater priority. If the Cuban NGO had been pursuing goals diametrically opposed to those of the state, the concession might not have been made.

"Pro-Naturaleza" demonstrated independence through its "citizen complaint" facility. In 1993, a resident of Santa Cruz del Norte, about forty kilometers east of Havana, reported that sugar mill workers were cutting down trees for firewood. When the complainant saw no action from the local authorities, "Pro-Naturaleza" accompanied him to talk to the administrator of the sugar mill. The administrator felt he could not order workers to cease cutting trees, the only fuel source available now that cooking gas was no longer being distributed. "Pro-Naturaleza" and the complainant then went to talk to the local Poder Popular (Popular Power) legislature. The local government agreed to supply the peasants with kerosene for cooking, and to replace the cut trees. A "Pro-Naturaleza" spokesperson remarked, "The citizen in his individual capacity was unable to get any attention. When we verified his complaint, and used our leverage with the authorities, we were able to get a result."

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While this incident showed the positive effect NGOs can have, similar results are not always possible. When a citizen complained to "Pro-Naturaleza" about a state slaughterhouse polluting a river with meat by-products, the NGO was only able to verify that the problem existed. The state enterprise said no money was available to purchase new equipment required to eliminate the pollution, and "Pro-Naturaleza" accepted the explanation.

The Cuban Red Cross is another NGO embarking upon a small, but important, step towards independence. It asked the government for permission to distribute a donation of used clothes in youth detention centers. It received a positive response, and will be allowed to visit the detention centers as part of the accord. It hopes that through visits to such institutions 'mutual confidence will grow and we will eventually be able to conduct inspections of adult jails." The Red Cross already acts as an intermediary for medicine sent from abroad to Cuban prisoners, forwarding it to the family members for final delivery. All prisoners are permitted to use this mechanism, without regard to the nature of their crime. While the Red Cross may not succeed in its effort to observe conditions in adult jails, its access to donated humanitarian assistance is at least giving it some leverage in negotiations with the state.

Cuba's Masons present one of the most interesting examples of NGO independence. They have a long history of resisting state interference. Spain shut them down in 1895 because their members were fighting for independence. They reopened in 1899, but in 1959 the Castro government again forced them to close their doors. In 1989, membership interest revived and the organization began to carefully test the limits of government tolerance.

The Masons now number 22,530 members in 314 lodges. They were never forced to register with the Ministry of Justice because they existed prior to the formation of the

Cuban state. However, when they re-drafted their constitution in 1986 they had to wait for more than one year for Ministry of Justice approval. The Masons are a fraternal organization with mystical associations. Their self-proclaimed objectives are to "combat ignorance," fight against "vice" including gambling and prostitution, and "inspire love for humanity" through opposition for "intolerance." Membership is available to all men who "believe in God and are moral." Women are barred from the main organization, but can join "*Las Hijas de la Acacia*," which currently has about 1000 members.

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An applicant can be a member of the Communist Party, but members of Cuba's "Rapid Response Brigades," civilian groups organized to harass dissidents, are barred because 'Masons must be tolerant people.' All members are required to avoid political debate in lodge meetings and to keep the content of such proceedings secret. Applicants who have committed common crimes are not admitted, though those convicted of "political crimes" are eligible. The Masons include several current and past political prisoners, though the majority of members are 'more or less integrated in the Revolution.'

The Masons used to provide student scholarships as well as run a university, a retirement home, a library and a charity for poor children. From 1959 until 1993 only the retirement home functioned. The state provided over half the budget, mainly in the form of medicine, and Masons were given priority in admission.

The Masons now wish to reactivate their social programs, moving carefully due to state monitoring. They reopened their library to the general public in May 1994 after hesitating for fear of provoking a state takeover of their rare book collection. They received donations of books and magazines from the German, Brazilian, Argentine embassies, as well as the U.S. Interests Section. University students have started to use the facility partly because for some topics the Masonic library is the only source in all of Cuba.

The organization is now appealing for medicines, office supplies, and library equipment from Masons and other NGOs from abroad. The group is also contemplating running small conferences on social issues, inviting diplomats from the U.S. Interests Section and ex-socialist countries.

The Catholic Church is also seeking to develop social programs independent of the state. Caritas organizes visits to the house-bound elderly and has established a group to help parents raise Downs Syndrome children. Its most politically intriguing initiative, however, concerns private entrepreneurship. When the government legalized certain types of family-scale private activity in 1993, (technically called "work on one's own account"), Caritas sought to aid furniture and shoe repair artisans. It concluded that because the fledgling entrepreneurs were not grouped in a civil association, they were

unable to defend themselves against criticism by those who resented their growing prosperity. Caritas was also concerned the new businesses could not get raw materials and had nowhere to turn for managerial advice. Many foreign NGOs have offered to provide assistance with these difficulties via Caritas, and the organization is contemplating setting up a credit, material supply and advice program to support this new sector. "If Cubans do not learn the rudiments of private enterprise, and Cuban Americans from Miami are eventually allowed access to the economy, local entrepreneurs will be swamped. We want to help avoid that," said a Caritas representative.

While these incidents of independence are relatively insignificant, each represents an incremental strengthening of the NGO vis à vis the state.

Impact on Civil Society

Some Cuban NGOs, while not explicitly demonstrating autonomy, have undertaken activities which expand civil society or bring an independent light to bear on a controversial topic.

The artistic activities of the Pablo Mjian6s Foundation frequently focus on Afro-Cuban culture, in contrast to the state's more European emphasis. The summer 1994 issue of the Foundation's magazine, *Proposiciones*, defended the controversial film *Alicia en el Pueblo de las Maravillas* (Alice in Wonderland), which was removed from Cuban cinemas in 1992 due to official discomfort with its critical stance. The Foundation has also facilitated administrative decentralization. When it initiated construction of a research center on African culture, it resisted pressure to go through state institutions and directly contracted a group of construction workers, paying them in pesos and equipment. The central authorities opposed the arrangement, but an alliance between the Foundation, the workers themselves, and the local authorities finally prevailed.

Of course, the Foundation is not totally free of government intrusion. Taxes are gradually being introduced in the Cuban system, and the government wants to establish a 25% levy on foundations. The Milanés Foundation, as the sole representative of this type of organization, is fighting for a 14% tax.

The Yoruba Cultural Association has also strengthened civil society. Practitioners of Yoruba ceremonies have long experienced tense relations with the state. Though Castro legalized the previously prohibited tradition in 1959, until recently practitioners were officially denied entry into the Cuban Communist Party. The Association admits dissidents, though like the Masons they are required not to "bring political problems into meetings."

The group organized two international conferences on Yoruba culture in 1992 and 1994. It had difficulty organizing the first, in part because the Ministry of Culture failed to process visas for 160 foreigners who wished to attend. This deprived the Association

of revenue from conference fees. The Central Committee's Office of Religious Affairs intervened in the 1994 conference, and visas were issued smoothly. The conference profit went into the Association's hard currency account, to be used to construct a museum intended as an ongoing source of both hard currency and peso revenues.

The 1994 conference touched on some sensitive topics. One presentation explored the "sociocultural significance of *la letra del año*." La letra is a prediction made at the beginning of every year by interpreting tossed coconut shells. The Association estimates that three-quarters of Cuba's population places some credence in its forecast. Consequently, the Cuban authorities have long attempted to influence the *babalawos* (Yoruba priests) who conduct the ceremonies, to ensure the prediction is neutral or favorable to the government. The Association has resisted such political corruption, and has contested "pliant" *babalawos'* attempts to register.

While the Association would appreciate donations, especially to its museum project, it was the only Cuban NGO contacted which expressed concern about the impact of donations upon recipient character. "We don't want too much help because we don't want to become dependent," said the Association's president in an interview.

Curiously, some NGOs with structures and practices which classify them as state-front organizations have occasionally sponsored projects which strengthen civil society. For example, the FMC, headed by the wife of the Minister of Defense, permits CECE to "coordinate" activities associated with donations, and "consults" the Communist Party concerning selection of delegates to the FMC's periodic congresses. The FMC, with a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) donation, has also provided courses for women to learn skills useful for starting their own family-scale private enterprises. Women have been trained in bicycle repair, cosmetics, hair styling, computer science, electrical repair and plumbing. (The UNDP defined the FMC as an NGO, despite its structure and practices.)

"All the workers knew the hospital was living from the donations of the Ecumenical Council," said the Council's President in an interview. "They could not do enough to help us..."

If one accepts the argument that small scale private enterprise builds citizen independence, then the FMC projects have strengthened civil society. However, the FMC's official connections also mean that women's expanded employment opportunities simultaneously enhance the image of the state.

Foreign donations have also increased the prestige of non-state organizations in the eyes of the general population. When the grandson of the President of Cuba's Ecumenical Council was admitted to a rural hospital, the staff reacted warmly. "AR the workers knew the hospital was living from the donations of the Ecumenical Council," said the Council's President in an interview. "They could not do enough to help us. We now have a positive

image at the popular level. This is quite different from what we would have encountered five years ago."

Advocated Strategies

What strategy a potential foreign donor adopts, regarding interactions with Cuban NGOs partially depends upon how the donor defines an NGO.

A diplomat posted at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana remarked, "If an organization includes people who take a position independent from that of the government, then the organization should be considered a legitimate NGO." He characterized think tanks that were never part of the Cuban university system, such as CEA and CEE, as illegitimate NGOs. In contrast he considered the faculties of history and philosophy at the University of Havana to be "totally independent."

A leader of Caritas said that even if an organization is led by an individual selected by the state and receives much of its funding from the state, if it has its own independent projects which help build civil society, it is legitimate. If, however, the organization simply acts as a bridge to send resources to the state, it is legitimate. A problem with this definition is that in one circumstance a given NGO may channel funds to the state, and in another it will act independently- Some observers have even argued that the former act may be the price paid for the latter opportunity.

The Catholic Bishop of Santiago had a chronological criteria, remarking that NGOs formed after 1989 were more likely to be genuine than those formed before 1989. Cuban dissident Gustavo Arcos felt that a small portion of state support would not jeopardize NGO status and argued that a group led by a religious person is "more likely to be a genuine organization."

Those observers who believed that an organization could have some state funds and still be a genuine NGO tended to support a Cuba donation strategy currently under consideration by an important coalition of European NGOs. This coalition is contemplating providing small amounts of funds to a wide variety of Cuban NGOs, including those which appear to simply be fronts for channeling resources to the state. The coalition would then return a year later and investigate if the resources had been used to make the recipient more or less independent of the state. Those which had become more independent would receive additional financing.

This strategy has the obvious advantage of empirically testing the impact of donations upon independence. However, it has the disadvantage that during the experimental stage some "front" NGOs would be financed. Curiously, the Catholic Bishop of Santiago, who had been quite skeptical about the legitimacy of Cuba's NGOs, was favorably disposed. He said, "It is important that a space be created in Cuba, a no man's land where one can do things without having to declare oneself for or against the state. The more the no

man's land grows, the better. This strategy would expand that space." Gustavo Arcos also supported the strategy, commenting, "It is worth running the risk of aiding false NGOs-. It would be an investment in Cuba's future civil society, and in any investment there is risk."

Conclusion

It is up to the individual reader to evaluate the role of Cuba's NGOs and the wisdom of foreign donations. This paper's research suggests that while foreign assistance can help a Cuban NGO break away from state dependence, it will not necessarily produce that result. Furthermore, the dividing line between independent and captive NGOs is not always clearly visible. An NGO which in one instance simply channels funds to the state may, in another circumstance, genuinely represent an independent citizen group. In addition, a foreign donation to a semi-independent Cuban NGO can paradoxically both aid the state by permitting the NGO's state allies to take partial credit for a problem solved, and strengthen civil society by demonstrating the power of organized citizens.

If Cuba continues to implement market-oriented economic reforms, it is likely that the accompanying decentralization will afford greater space for genuine NGOs, and the net independence-strengthening effect of foreign donations will increase. However, as long as the one-party system remains intact, Cuban NGOs will have to strike some compromises with the state.

Are Cuba's NGOs government puppets or seeds of civil society? The answer is ideologically and intellectually unsatisfying. They are both, though the latter characteristic is very gradually growing.

Partial List of Self-Described NGOs in Cuba

Asociación Cubana de Estudios de Caribe Calle 9 no. 55 entre 4 y 6 Reperto Vista Alegre Santiago de Cuba Telephone: 43219 Contact: Julian Mateo Tomes, President Sector: Caribbean studies	Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba Gervasio No. 456, entre Zanja y San José Apartado 1, Centro Habana Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 79-6948 Contact: Lic: Antonio Castañeda Márquez, President Sector: Promotion of Yoruba tradition
Asociación Nacional de Agricultores	CARITAS

<p>Pequeños Calle 1, No. 306 entre Lane y 13 Vedado Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 324541, 324717 Fax: 328586 Contact: Felix Perez Martinez, Head of External Relations Department Sector: Small farmers and agricultural cooperatives</p>	<p>San Lázaro No. 905 Centro Habana Ciudad de la Habana Apartado 594 Cuba Telephone: 704179 Fax: 333048 Contact: Dr. Rolando Suárez Cobian, Director Sector: Catholic charity</p>
<p>Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba I Esquina con 13 Vedado Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 328953 Fax: 333778 Contact: Jose Miller Sector: Jewish charity</p>	<p>Casa del Caribe Calle 13 No. 154, esquina con 8 Reperto Vista Alegre Santiago de Cuba Cuba Telephone: 42285, 42387 Contact: Joel James, Director Sector: Caribbean studies</p>
<p>Centro de Estudios de Alternativas Políticas Colina Universitaria Edificio Rectoria, 1er. piso Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 333479 Email: CEAO@TINORED.CU Fax: 322757 Contact: Lic. Milagros Martinez, Director Sector: Study of political alternatives</p>	<p>Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana Universidad de la Habana Calle 25 No. 222 A12 entre 222A y 230 La Coronela Ciudad de La Habana Cuba Telephone: 215335 Telex: 0512210 DICT.UH Fax: 322757 Contact: Alfonso Casanova Montero, Director Sector: Study of the Cuban economy</p>
<p>Centro de Estudios Europeos Avenida 3ra No. 1805 entre 18 y 20 Miramar, Playa Ciudad de la Habana C.P. 11300 Cuba Telephone: 226767, 222523 Fax: 331435 Contact: Lic. José Eloy Valdes, Director Sector: European studies, Cuban NGO coordination</p>	<p>Centro de Estudios sobre América Calle 18 No. 316 entre 3& y Sta Miramar, Playa Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 294631, 332716, 296688 mail: CEAOTINORED.CU Fax: 331490 Contact: Luis Suárez, Director Julio Carranza Valdes, Subdirector Sector: Study of the Americas, including</p>

	Cuba
<p>Centro de Estudios sobre los Estados Unidos Universidad de la Habana Apartado Postal 23054 Código 11600 Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 235807 Fax:322350 Contact: Dr. Esteban Morales, Director Sector: Study of the United States</p>	<p>Centro de Investigación de la Economía Internacional Universidad de la Habana Avenida 7ma, No. 609 entre 10 y 6, Playa Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 291408,2214.54 Contact: Antonio Romero Gómez, Director Sector: Study of the International Economy</p>
<p>Centro de Investigación de la Economía Mundial Calle 22 y 5ta Avenida, No. 2010 Municipio Playa Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 293009 Email: CIEMOTINORED.CU Fax: 332507 Contact: Dr. George Carriazo, Subdirector Sector: Study of the world economy, including Cuba</p>	<p>Centro Felix Varela Apartado 4041 Plaza 10400 Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 303900 Email: VARELAOTINORED.CU Fax: 333328 Contact: Juan Antonio Blanco, General Director Sector: Social and political issues</p>
<p>Centro Memorial Martín Luther King Avenida .53, No. 9609 Marianao 14 Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 203940 Email: MLKNG@TINORED.CU Fax: 332959 Contact: Rev. Raul Suárez. Director Sector: Protestant charity</p>	<p>Consejo Ecuménico de Cuba Calle 14 no. 304 Entre 3ra y 5ta Miramar Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 331792 Email CECOMORED.CU Fax: 331788 Contact: Rev. Orestes Gonzalez, President Sector: Protestant Charity</p>
<p>Cruz Roja Cubana Calle Calzada No. 51 Vedado Ciudad de la Habana C.P. 10400 Cuba Telephone: 324664 Fax: 326005 Contact.: Dr. Luis Foyo Cabalas, General</p>	<p>Federación de Mujeres Cubanas Paseo No. 260, Vedado Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 39932,377927 Fax:333019 Contact: Lic. Tamara Columbia Matos Sector: Women's issues</p>

<p>Secretary Sector: Humanitarian Relief</p>	
<p>Fundación Pablo Milanés Calle 11 No. 257 Entre J y I Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 333658, 333656 Fax: 333659 Contact: Bruno Hernandez, Assistant to the Director General Dalce Diaz Mora, Director for Projects Sector: Foundation to promote Cuban art</p>	<p>Grande Logia de Cuba de A.L.Y.A.M Calle 19 no. 508, Apartado 6, Entre E y D Vedado Ciudad de la Habana Telephone: 329064 Contact: Gustavo Pardo Valdes, President of the Permanent Commission of Libraries Sector: Masons</p>
<p>Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital CaRe 28 No. 113, Miramar Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba Telephone: 332611, 225506/7/8 Email: GDIC@TINORED.CU Fax: 335135 Contact: Arq. Gina Rey, Director Prof. Arq. Mario Coyula Cowley, Subdirector Sector: Urban development</p>	<p>Iglesia Católica Oficina del Obispo Calle San Gerónimo No. 607 Santiago de Cuba Cuba Telephone: 5480 Contact: Pedro Maurice Estiu, Bishop Sector. Cathofic Church</p>
<p>Instituto Superior del Arte Calle 778 entre 9a y Ila Casa 910, Miramar, Playa Ciudad de la Habana Cuba Telephone: 333652/3 Fax: 333659 Contact.: Raquel Mendieta Sector: Study of art</p>	<p>"Pro-Naturaleza" Academia de Ciencias Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente Capitolio Nacional Industria y San José La Habana, Cuba Telephone: 60-3411 extension 1179 Telex: 51 1 290 ACDPCU Email: DRIACC@CENLAI.CU Fax: 338212/3 Contact., Ing. Araceli Mateo de Acosta, Treasurer Sector: Enviornmental protection</p>
<p>Universidad de Oriente Carretera de Cuabitas Santiago de Cuba Cuba Telephone: 31860,32545 Fax: 32689 Contact: Lic. Manuel Blanco Mila, Rector Sector: University education</p>	

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