

Cuba in Transition? The Civil Sphere's Challenge to the Castro Regime

***Gerardo Otero
Janice O'Bryan***

ABSTRACT

This article assesses how much the emergence of civil society and private market activities are challenging Cuba's ruling communist regime. The assessment is based on a conceptualization of a "civil sphere," constituted by civil society and private market activities (or the "second economy"), and how this affects democratic transitions from state-socialist societies, using Cuba as a case study. Examining the multiple sectors at play reveals an increasingly organized and vocal opposition, but one hampered by continued government repression. Considering several theoretical and historically possible scenarios, this study concludes that under current conditions, the civil sphere's significant challenge is still not enough for a regime change in the Cuban state.

Organized members of civil society have been one of the most understudied components of state-socialist regimes. Scholars from the right have considered such regimes' citizens largely as impotent masses that do not merit investigation, while those on the left gloss over dissent (and persecution) and focus only on loyal revolutionaries serving the socialist cause. Any autonomous civil sphere was thought to be extinct in state socialism. The political and economic transformations that engulfed the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s shattered such conceptions, however, as civil opposition groups played (to varying degrees) decisive roles in the push for political regime change in the region. The study of democratic transitions in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia produced a subset of studies on the role of civil society in bringing about or reinforcing the transitions. Poland's Solidarity Movement, for example, has been held up as perhaps the model case of civil society making a significant contribution to the downfall of the state-socialist regime (Weigle and Butterfield 1992; Holmes 1997; Arato 1981; Bernhard 1993).

Consequently, the focus has changed in studies of Cuba, where it is now known that a civil sphere, spurred on by the economic and political crises of the so-called Special Period (begun in 1990), has also been reborn. It is encouraging that a number of authors have begun to exam-

line the views and desires of the Cuban citizenry, including opposition groups and other dissidents. There are, however, a number of limitations to what has been accomplished to date. First, most authors employing the term *civil society* do not attempt to define or explore the concept itself, or, if they do, they offer only a minimalist definition (Fernández 1999, 30; Dilla 1999, 32). At the same time, writers have made little effort to distinguish between the manifestations and goals of civil society groups under different regime types or at different stages of political development or transition.

These theoretical shortcomings lead to a second problem: most scholars tackling the subject provide either incomplete pieces of the puzzle or conflicting views on what sectors in Cuba should be classified as part of civil society. One source may discuss diffuse manifestations of anomie in society, another only dissident groups, and a third the growth of a self-employed sector, but rarely do they present a wider perspective on civil society as a whole. The nature and extent of private economic activities (legal and informal), furthermore, may have a variety of consequences for Cuba's transition, some positive and others detrimental.

All of this literature attests to the important changes occurring in Cuba, but it is hard to predict the direction this transitional stage will take. We can foresee at least three theoretical and historically possible scenarios.

- Continuation of the status quo, or even further reversion to authoritarian repression, eventually under a new leader (most likely Raúl Castro)
- All-out political and market liberalization similar to that in several Eastern European countries (re-"Americanization" of the island)
- Gradual democratization of politics and liberalization of the economy into a market-based, democratic socialism

This study aims to examine what potential the Cuban civil sphere holds to influence the transition, and whether it can contribute to making the third proposition a reality. We should clarify from the outset that we greatly value the human development achievements of the Cuban revolution. But the collapse of most other state-socialist regimes and the consequent economic stresses have placed a considerable strain on the Cuban regime that strongly threatens such achievements. The question is whether the growth of a civil sphere, which we also welcome, might be combined with a transformation that preserves the human development component.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to assess the extent to which the emergence of a "civil sphere"—that is, civil society and private market economic activities—challenges state-socialism in Fidel Castro's Cuba. On the one hand, it may be argued that the development of this

autonomous sphere in state socialism has resulted from the regime's attempts to accommodate economic crisis and its political consequences. On the other hand, many of the developments in the civil sphere can be explained exclusively as initiatives emerging from below and having their own dynamics. The question is whether the growth or "thickening" of civil society (Fox 1996), along with increased private market activities, poses a challenge to Cuba's state-socialist regime.

We argue that further development of the civil sphere is hampered by continued government repression, as well as the government's flexibility in finding outlets for economic and political crisis. This flexibility of the Cuban regime, along with its success in fomenting a nationalist, anti-U.S. ideology in the Cuban people, has served to sustain the regime's popularity. We conclude that the status quo—the state's containment of the civil sphere—will prevent a democratic transition anytime in the near future.

Beginning with a conceptualization of the civil sphere in transitions from state-socialist regimes, we examine Cuba's cultural and historical specificities, and then various manifestations of civil society and the emergence of socialist entrepreneurs in Cuba during the 1990s. We conclude with a discussion of the historical feasibility of various political and economic scenarios for Cuba as the twenty-first century takes off.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE CIVIL SPHERE IN TRANSITIONS FROM STATE SOCIALISM

Democratization has become the secondary crusade of Western powers since the 1980s, linked to the expansion of neoliberal globalism as the hegemonic ideology (Dryzek 1996; Pateman 1996; Batista 1994). We do not assume, however, that democracy and unfettered capitalism go hand in hand, or that democracy can be achieved only in a liberal capitalist state (the U.S. model). Democratization, moreover, is not on only the neoliberal right-wing agenda. Leftist critics have also challenged the extent to which civil society has been "confiscated" under state socialism (Bengelsdorf 1994, 29, 31–32). Recognizing a wide diversity of groups within the civil sphere whose "emancipatory struggles" are valid and urgent, they see civil society now as an essential ingredient to a democratic system. They acknowledge that pluralistic agendas are at play in civil society that must be accommodated. Thus, rather than erasing the boundaries between the state and the civil sphere, a new left advocates a definitive differentiation between the two (Pierson 1984, 568; see also Lowy 1986; Cohen and Arato 1992, 154–55).

These studies suggest that it is not only possible but also necessary for a vibrant civil society to exist within a democratic socialist state. Its autonomy, furthermore, must be respected, and it must be allowed to

have a voice that influences political decisionmaking. It has been argued that a strong civil society is essential to democracy as an independent sphere of socialization from that of the state and as an arena of resistance to oppressive government (Hadenius and Uggla 1996; Bernhard 1993; Diamond 1992).

Defining the Civil Sphere

For the purposes of this paper, the "civil sphere" includes both civil society and private market economic activities. Our main focus is civil society, but we consider private economic activities by socialist entrepreneurs to represent a considerable challenge to state domination in the critical realm of the economy. In some instances, for ease of exposition, we speak of "civil society" so as to include private market activities. Strictly speaking, the latter might form part of a broader "civil sphere," autonomous from the state, which could eventually become the basis for a legally existing civil society and a full-fledged socialist or capitalist market.

"Civil society" can be defined both broadly and narrowly. In a broad definition, it is the sphere of social interaction between the economy and the state, and includes social movements and the intimate sphere of the family. In a narrow definition, civil society consists of

voluntary political association oriented by its relation to the state, but self-limiting in not seeking a share of state power . . . a realm of freedom in which individuals are not forced to act in strategic pursuit of material reward (as required in the economy) or constrained by the power relationships embodied in the bureaucratic state. (Dryzek 1996, 47)

This division is quite applicable when studying liberal democratic states, but when we consider the situation of state-socialist regimes and possible transitions toward democratic systems, the "intimate sphere" takes on a deeper significance. In states where autonomous public associations are impossible or highly dangerous to form, only the intimate sphere remains as a skeletal sphere of autonomy from the state. The intimate sphere guards the memories and values of a society—its culture, faiths, history, and traditions—and abets dissenting thoughts and activities in self-defense from state policies. When a transition finally occurs, this sphere provides a foundation on which the society can be rebuilt (Arato 1981, 29; see also Di Palma 1991, 70).

For similar reasons, we also choose to include private economic actors in the broader "civil sphere." Black market activity, for example, is a manifestation of people taking independent initiatives to cope with the scarcities often produced by centrally planned economies (CPEs)

and creating their own solutions to adversity (Batista 1994, 14; Holmes 1997, 202).

For their part, labor groups and oppositional political parties in state-socialist regimes clearly lie within our definition. Labor unions usually straddle the political and economic spheres, but they simultaneously represent popular mobilization to combat negative actions by these two spheres. In state-socialist regimes in particular, where individual trade unions were eliminated by the state (in the logic that the Communist Party would now "represent" all workers in a "dictatorship of the proletariat"), the role of nonstatist unions and labor movements has coincided far more with one of the theoretical roles of civil society; that is, constituting the sphere of autonomy from which state power may be contested (Bernhard 1993, 307).

Finally, there are opposition political parties, which would normally be classified in the political sphere as part of the system of political representation. In state-socialist regimes, however, they are usually deliberately excluded from this sphere. The practice of democratic centralism decrees that the Communist Party is the only legitimate political party allowed in the state, giving that party an effective monopoly on power. To contest that monopoly requires other political actors autonomous from the state. Political dissidents and underground opposition parties can then play an important role in effecting a transition toward a more pluralist political system (Holmes 1997, 275). Civil society can nourish the wellspring of political talent in a country, and opposition to single-party monopoly can be a pool from which future leaders of the political sphere may arise. This conceptualization illustrates the interdependence of the political and civil spheres and demonstrates why, in transitions from state-socialist regimes, political parties must be included in the definition of civil society.

Whereas all the group types discussed above form part of the civil sphere, they will not have equal significance in a democratic transition process. Some may have little relevance or even be detrimental to the effort (Hadenius and Ugglä 1996, 1624). For example, ultranationalists or religious fundamentalists may help to topple a communist state but replace it with a different brand of authoritarianism (Garner 1996). Human rights and prodemocracy groups depending on local circumstances, in contrast, may make extremely notable contributions to democratization, because the liberties for which they fight are the premise on which all independent associations flourish (Arato 1981, 27). Likewise, the information sectors of a society—the artists, intellectuals, publishers, and media—can make a positive contribution to democratization (Bernhard 1993, 308; Buttgieg 1995, 26). They disseminate information and ideas; without the freedom to exchange ideas, to dispute dominant ideologies, a democracy, liberal or socialist, cannot truly func-

tion. An independent press is considered a "hallmark" of civil society for this reason (Nelson 1996, 349).

Theorizing the Civil Sphere's Role

In most regime types, civil society and the state usually will interact and influence each other. Even in authoritarian dictatorships, the state sometimes accommodates certain sectors of civil society. In state socialism, however, until the state recognizes individual and group rights to speak, organize, and participate in the country's governance, the situation can be more one of stark opposition (Arato 1981, 24). Civil society and private market economic activities can be seen as constituting an alternative sphere to the monolithic dominance of ruling Communist parties. In this confrontation, civil society can become the means to channel diffuse dissidence into an organized opposition as it grows in strength and numbers, or "thickens," as Jonathan Fox has put it (1996, 1089).

Weigle and Butterfield identify four stages to civil society's development in the Central European cases (Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia): defensive, emergent, mobilizational, and institutional (1992, 1). The defensive stage began as systemic crises afflicted each country, involving both economic failure of the centralized systems and a consequent loss of political legitimacy by the party-state (see also Holmes 1997, 26). Popular dissatisfaction spurred increased dissidence (not always overt) by many individuals and some small groups. The defensive stage led eventually to an emergent one, as dissidents coalesced into various groups or social movements and began to "seek limited goals in a widened public sphere which is sanctioned or conceded by the reforming party-state" (Weigle and Butterfield 1992, 1). Presumably, this stage also included continued unsanctioned opposition activities, depending on the particular case.

As the opposition groups gained a public presence and legitimacy, they could contest the hegemony of the party-state and present themselves as a political alternative—the mobilizational stage. This process culminated in the final, institutional stage, where new, publicly acclaimed political leaders reestablished a legal framework of human rights and the autonomy of civil society, usually involving free elections (1992, 1).

This model of the events that transpired in the Central European states is descriptive rather than theoretical. Drawing on the literature on social movements and our own observations, we formulate a theoretical framework for the analysis of transitions from state-socialism. In our view, four factors, two internal and two external, affect the civil sphere's ability to contest the one-party, state-socialist regime.

The two internal factors are specificity and organizational levels. First and foremost, specific local contexts and historical moments must be taken into account, because no two countries will experience the exact same events. The success of the civil sphere in state socialist regimes, furthermore, directly depends on the levels of organization and mass support its associations can achieve while attempting to counter the hegemony of the one-party state. (Factors such as a shared political culture or a strong unifying sense of nationalism therefore may greatly aid the cause.)

The external factors are repression and political opportunity structures. The second internal factor, organization levels, is conditioned by the levels and types of repression exerted by the party-state. If repression is thorough and consistent, it can prevent an effective opposition from coalescing (although it cannot repress mass discontent so effectively). The concept of political opportunity structures (Tarrow 1998; Buechler 2000) posits that civil society does not act or succeed in a vacuum. Its development and achievements are partly based on larger political and economic determinants, the attitude of the party-state, the presence or absence of sympathetic reformers in the party, and even the international context (for example, presence of diaspora; prevailing ideology, such as perestroika; or pressures by foreign governments). These factors provide either obstacles or opportunities that associations in civil society must overcome or utilize.

In contrast to most previous state-socialist societies, Cubans have enjoyed a relatively high level of participation through structures such as "popular power," with the right to recall most politicians except those at the highest levels (Bengelsdorf 1994). This has afforded the Cuban population considerable experience in serving on collective decision-making bodies, committee work, and so forth. Possessing such social capital will help facilitate formation of political organizations that are alternative to the Cuban state. The anti-U.S., nationalist ideologies that the state has strengthened for decades, furthermore, could also become the basis for a democratic-socialist alternative that rejects the U.S.-led neoliberal globalism.

Given these peculiar cultural and ideological legacies, we would argue that with continued pressure from below, the Cuban state could open up to a democratic transition. Nevertheless, these cultural specificities have also allowed the regime to sustain its popularity. Eyal et al. call for a study of comparative capitalism and show that in the post-communist phase, capitalism can have several different forms, with different predominant actors, depending on local specificities (1998, 159-93). A look at how Cuban civil society developed during the 1990s will suggest the likelihood of alternative scenarios, including market-based democratic socialism.

CUBA IN THE 1990S

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the state-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 had a tremendous impact on Cuba. Tied to COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), the Soviet bloc trade organization, and heavily dependent on Soviet aid and subsidies, the quasi-artificial Cuban economy collapsed (Cardoso and Helwege 1992, 31–32). The extremely severe economic hardships Cubans experienced during the Special Period also generated challenges for the political system (Bengelsdorf 1994, 138; Eckstein 1994, 96). There were international and domestic pressures for the Cuban state to adopt reforms similar to Gorbachev's *glasnost* (political opening) and *perestroika* (economic restructuring). World events thus temporarily raised the hopes of those who desired Cuba's democratization. Fidel Castro's regime, however, refused to implement any significant changes that would undermine its political control (Bengelsdorf 1994, 145, 169). The regime also continued to practice harsh repression of any individual or group expressing "nonrevolutionary" opinions on democracy, human rights, or economic alternatives. Despite this treatment, however, dissidents, activists, and opposition organizations do exist in Cuba. These represent the emergence of civil society.

Taking the civil sphere as defined above, we examine six areas which are (re)developing in Cuba: unorganized dissidence, prodemocracy and human rights groups, seeds of opposition political parties, the regrowth of religious activity, an independent press, and the microentrepreneurial sector. These groupings both overlap with and differ somewhat from those sectors identified by other scholars on Cuba. For example, Haroldo Dilla (1999, 32–33) includes legally registered organizations and the state mass organizations in his considerations; Damián Fernández also includes mass organizations, along with semiautonomous bureaucratic branches, such as controlled government organizations (CONGOS) and government-oriented organizations (GONGOS) (1999, 31). We have chosen not to consider any government-sanctioned group in this study because such groups' compromised autonomy precludes them from being part of an effective opposition movement. While such groups may form part of Cuban civil society after a political transition, at present they are still appendages of the state.

Fernández, furthermore, names "global civil society" as his fourth sector (1999, 31). As a contributing factor, external links and the presence of a diaspora can form important support networks for a repressed civil society. We prefer, however, to focus exclusively on Cuban-created sectors as being the most significant voices in their country's political transition. The aims and views of the large and vocal group of Cuban exiles living in Miami, moreover, are actually splintered and contentious,

and many Cubans on the island view the exiles' intentions with great unease. It is a complex situation, which deserves a separate study.

Unorganized Dissent

Most opposition against the Cuban state today must still be categorized as unorganized or "informal" dissidence, carried out by individuals, families, and friends in their private lives. This is what James Scott (1985) would call "everyday forms of resistance." There is rarely an overt expression of discontent in these actions but rather a covert circumvention of laws and formal channels of approved activities. Examples include everything from second economy activities or workplace absenteeism and theft to graffiti, street humor, and wearing U.S. fashions (see Fernández 1994, 74). Informal, individual dissent in the intimate sphere, of course, is really relevant only at the early stage of effecting political transition (that is, when few organized alternatives exist). These activities, moreover, have both positive and negative repercussions for the democratization of Cuban civil society as a whole.

Cuba's severe economic crisis in the 1990s has caused much of the popular discontent in the country. Rising unemployment, food shortages and strict rationing, blackouts, transportation cuts, and extreme scarcity of medicine and basic consumer products have led to a large increase in economic crimes (Eckstein 1994, xii, 78, 84, 123). Some of these activities also took place in earlier decades; for example, the black market for U.S. dollars began in 1959 (Cardoso and Helwege 1992, 93), and a black market for other goods emerged when the rationing system was implemented in 1962 (del Aguila 1994, 91). Workplace theft, profiteering, and embezzlement were so prevalent in the 1980s that they helped spawn Castro's Rectification Campaign in 1986 to help curb nonsocialist dealings (Eckstein 1994).

Still, economic crimes soared in the 1990s (Fernández 1994, 75–76). In terms of labor dissidence, "foot dragging" and absenteeism have been two methods of showing disgruntlement (Eckstein 1994, 40, 83). Examples of "illegal" transactions to get around punitive government fees and taxation and to augment incomes can be found both inside and outside the narrow state-sanctioned entrepreneurial sector. Individual tax evasion is another form of informal protest that has surfaced. In 1994, Castro introduced a new income tax on self-employment earnings in order to limit them and to redistribute the additional revenues as the state required. The new tax has not been well received by Cubans, long unused to such measures (*Economist* 1997; Morris 1996, 18).

Among more overt cases of unorganized dissidence, intellectuals and youths have communicated their dissenting opinions directly to the Council of State and Communist Youth, respectively (Pérez-Stable 1992,

25, n. 45). People have been imprisoned for writing political graffiti and for refusing to serve in the armed forces (Lago 1993, 234). Youths were at the core of the 1994 Malecón riots, the culminating event of that summer's spike in rafter escapes. People chanted "we are hungry" to Fidel Castro, who was appearing in the neighborhood at the time (Bengelsdorf 1995, 29; Morris 1996, 18; McGeary and Booth 1993). Political protest has been reported through instances of spoiled ballots in municipal elections in 1992 and local elections in 1995, notably in Havana (Eckstein 1994, 122; Baloyra 1994, 31; Centeno 1997, 11).

As government restrictions prevent Cuban citizens from openly disagreeing with state policies, informal dissent is often the only safe avenue available (Eckstein 1994, 10). Informal dissidence, such as worker intransigence, can and has influenced government policymaking, if we look below the surface of state propaganda. For example, the success of the black market helped to pressure Castro to decriminalize possession of U.S. dollars in 1993, which had several important consequences (Eckstein 1994, 125). In this limited sense, Cubans are no longer second-class citizens in their own country, now able to enter the formerly tourist-only dollar stores and restaurants to purchase relative luxury items. Nor are people classified as criminals for having the means to purchase those goods. Decriminalization of the possession of U.S. dollars has meant that expatriates can send more funds to support struggling Cuban relatives. It has also been somewhat of a breach in the state's centrally planned economy, as "dollarization" undermines the socialist ethos.

This dollarization, however, is not a positive development in terms of equity, as it has created new schisms between those with access to dollars and those without (Bengelsdorf 1994, 138). It has been discouraging to professionals whose state-paid peso salaries are now inferior to those of service employees in the tourism sector. Decriminalization, however, does mean that the state is being forced to acknowledge limits to its control of the people's actions and desires. "[I]ncreased crime reflect[s] growing defiance of state authority" (Eckstein 1994, 122), which carries political repercussions. "When individuals must break the law every day (by engaging in the black market) in order to guarantee their own economic survival, respect for socialist norms erodes and discontent within the state rises" (Pastor 1996, 230).

Some of the economic crimes are better categorized as delinquency rather than dissidence (Marshall 1987, 261). While these acts may help erode government control, they also destabilize society as a whole. Cuban youth are particularly vulnerable, with high unemployment increasing the numbers of panhandlers, pickpockets, purse snatchers, and prostitutes, particularly in Havana. These cannot be considered positive trends for the development of Cuban civil society.

The black market, while softening daily hardships for some in the short term, also deprives people of scarce resources, encourages corruption, and undermines the formal economy (Cardoso and Helwege 1992, 81; Pérez-López 1997, 170, 179–82). These types of dissidence, moreover, may actually harm civil society's potential for helping democratize the repressive regime (Werlau 1997, 68, n. 36). The emerging individualistic culture hardly encourages the kind of collective action required for a democratic transition. Paradoxically, as Damián Fernández points out, informality may even enhance governability and legitimacy, to the extent that it provides the status quo functional elements for its persistence (Fernández 1994, 79).

Informal dissidence alone, therefore, is insufficient to accomplish a democratization of the regime. Given its widespread occurrence in Cuba, however, we can establish that Cuban civil society has reached the equivalent of Weigle and Butterfield's defensive stage of development, in which individuals and atomized groups try to protect themselves against the party-state. The Cuban state, of course, has so far weathered the systemic crisis of the Special Period better than the Eastern European cases—that is, it is still in power.

The question then becomes whether civil society can advance, in its own fashion, to the second, emergent stage, in which independent social groups or movements act in a wider, state-sanctioned public sphere. The Cuban state has not yet allowed the creation of any autonomous public sphere; it has used either strict repression tactics (imprisonment, execution) or exile to drain the ranks of known activists (Cardoso and Helwege 1992, 6; Marshall 1987, 258; Lago 1993, 233). Nevertheless, a number of organized groups and coalitions have emerged or resurfaced in Cuban civil society.

Organized Opposition Groups

In the last two-and-a-half decades, increasing numbers of human rights, prodemocracy, and other organized dissident groups have arisen in Cuba, despite heavy condemnation and repression by the government. Human rights groups have often been the first to surface in civil societies of communist states, and Cuba is no exception. Such groups began to emerge as early as the mid-1970s (del Aguila 1993, 165) and continued to multiply into the 1980s and 1990s (del Aguila 1994, 197; Bengelsdorf 1994, 171). By the very early 1990s, Carlos Aldana, then the Party's chief of ideology, had publicly acknowledged approximately 50 dissident groups with a total membership of about 1,000 (Eckstein 1994, 121; Padula 1993, 35). Their platforms not only demanded human rights but also supported perestroika, democracy, and family reunification (Eckstein 1994, 121). The number of groups has continued to increase;

as of 1996 approximately 140 groups had joined the coalition *Concilio Cubano* (Cuban Council) alone (Amnesty International 1996), and more nonmember groups could exist. This suggests that the number of groups may have more than doubled in only a few years.

The main types of groups organized currently in Cuba are those of human rights, prodemocracy (that is, specific political rights), youth, labor, potential political opposition, and even environmental groups (Human Rights Watch 1997, 108–9). It is very difficult to obtain inside information on them because of their necessarily secretive nature. The aims of many of the groups overlap considerably.

Human rights groups are, predictably, the largest group type. The two more renowned groups are the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) and the Cuban Committee for Human Rights (CCPDH) (del Aguila 1993, 170–72). The CCDHRN was formed in 1987. It is led by Elizardo Sánchez, one of Cuba's most prominent dissidents (Purcell 1992, 137). A former philosophy professor, Sánchez also heads the Democratic Socialists (Eckstein 1994, 118). The CCDHRN's platform includes the denunciation of human rights violations, lifting of the U.S. embargo and normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations, and social democratic principles (del Aguila 1993, 170). The CCPDH was formed earlier, in 1976, led by Gustavo Arcos Bergnes. It, too, promotes respect for human rights, dialogue with exiles, and peaceful political solutions (1993, 170–72).

With Sánchez and the CCDHRN, one can see the overlapping of platforms between group types (in this case, social democratic politics). Indeed, prodemocracy groups are also human rights groups that focus more on political rights, and there are numerous organizations of this type in Cuba, among them the Harmony Movement, formed in 1990 and led by Yndamiro Restano (Baloyra 1994, 37), and Project Opening of the Island (PAIS), formed in 1991. The Harmony Movement has called for electoral reforms, pluralism, labor rights, and a market economy, while PAIS is another social democratic-oriented group that opposes the U.S. embargo, desires a normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations, and seeks nonviolent change and respect for human rights (del Aguila 1993, 169; 171). Youth and labor groups tend to share very similar platforms to those above.

Finally, there are also fledgling opposition political parties at work in Cuba, although again, there was little information in our sources—only brief mention to suggest they exist. Human Rights Watch merely reports that “unofficial political parties” are one of the sectors being subjected to government repression (1997, 109). It is likely that a number of the current prodemocracy and human rights groups will eventually be transformed into political parties, as happened with Solidarity in Poland.

As individual, clandestine groups (probably with small memberships), these organizations can have only limited (if any) effectiveness as an opposition force, but their social energy can lead to a broader and stronger array of forces in civil society over time (Bernhard 1993). The goal of these groups must be to try to broaden their membership as much as possible if they wish their aims to be embraced and adopted by their society as a whole through the socialization of democratic values (Hadenius and Uggla 1996, 1623). That these organizations would be part of Cuba's future democratization is clear, because they advocate pluralism, constitutional government, the rule of law, and other democratic policies (del Aguila 1994, 197).

In Cuba, the organization of political opposition seems to have peaked with the formation of at least three coalitions of smaller groups. First, the failed Soviet coup in 1991 had encouraged a number of Cuban dissident groups to form two different coalition organizations—the Cuban Democratic Coalition and the Cuban Democratic Convergence. The two groups differ tactically and ideologically; the Cuban Democratic Coalition is more hostile toward the Castro regime than the Cuban Democratic Convergence, which has a more social-democratic orientation (Purcell 1992, 138). At one time, the Cuban Democratic Coalition even appealed to Soviet leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin to withdraw their support from Castro's government (del Aguila 1993, 185). The Cuban Democratic Convergence, meanwhile, focused more on uniting domestic human rights, democracy, and labor groups (Cross 1995, 250), and was apparently the larger of the two coalitions (Domínguez 1994, 16). Both Sánchez with the CCDHRN and Arcos with the CCPDH are now members of Concilio Cubano, which has possibly absorbed the earlier groups (Amnesty International 1996).

Concilio Cubano (CC) is probably the most important development in the current rebuilding of Cuban civil society. The CC was formed by 40 smaller groups in October 1995, and grew to approximately 140 groups by February 1996. Member organizations are quite varied, including those of human rights, political opposition, women, youth, labor, and professions, such as engineers, ecologists, lawyers, and doctors (Amnesty International 1996). The membership seems to come, so far, from the more elite strata of Cuban society, but its geographical distribution extends all over Cuba, not just to Havana. In late 1995, the CC organized a National Council of 26 members, comprising two delegates from each of 13 separate subcommissions throughout the island.

The CC is headed by an elected five-person secretariat; Sánchez and Arcos, who are both members of the National Council, also have non-voting honorary membership in the secretariat, which denotes their personal importance to the Cuban opposition front. The CC has also formed seven working groups on specific concerns: trade union issues,

human rights, family affairs, economics, ethics, finance, and international relations (Amnesty International 1996). The CC's internal workings seem to be quite democratic. Each member group "retains its own identity, and the aim of the coalition is to find a common strategy, even if each group adopts different tactics" (Amnesty International 1996). Tactics are clearly limited to those involving nonviolent means. The CC's platform calls for a democratic transition in Cuba, including respect for human rights, free elections, release of all political prisoners, and economic decentralization, but it will only pursue these goals through peaceful means. It rejects any form of violence or terrorism to achieve its ends (Amnesty International 1996). The CC seems intent on not repeating the historical, negative tendencies in Cuban politics, taking a cooperative and unifying approach rather than one of polarized isolation and infighting.

What did these organized dissident groups accomplish during the 1990s? On the positive side, they organized into larger groups and were far more publicly outspoken than in previous decades. There are now increasing demands for deep systemic change (del Aguila 1993, 173). In terms of influence over state policies or society at large, however, all sources (no matter how optimistic) conclude that these groups have had a negligible effect so far (Pérez-Stable 1992, 25, n. 45; del Aguila 1994, 185-86; Werlau 1997, 65; McGeary and Booth 1993, 26; Schulz 1994a, 1, 1994b, 151-53, 1994c, 179; Zimbalist 1994, 37; Planas 1994a, 43; 1994b, 90-96; González and Ronfeldt 1994, 61).

This lack of success has been attributed to several factors. Foremost is the continuing success of government repression tactics, which involve both overt physical methods and equally successful psychological warfare. The former type involves harassment, arrest, interrogation, imprisonment, torture, exile, and even occasional executions of those opposing the state (Human Rights Watch 1997; Lago 1993; Bengelsdorf 1994, 174; Eckstein 1994, 118; del Aguila 1994, 199; Schulz 1994a, 1; Planas 1994a, 43). Virtually all the group leaders named earlier have spent some time under arrest. The CC tried unsuccessfully to hold a national meeting on February 24, 1996 (Font 1996, 580), but its timing unfortunately coincided with the incident in which the Cuban government shot down two planes of the exile group Brothers to the Rescue. As a result, "Cuba's security forces unleashed a violent crackdown against delegates to Concilio Cubano" (Werlau 1997, 69, n. 49), and they have been under siege ever since (Amnesty International 1996). In March 1999, four prominent dissidents were imprisoned for sedition, including René Gómez Manzano, cofounder of Concilio Cubano (Bellavance 1999, A1). In November 1999, some dissidents were temporarily arrested to prevent them from disrupting the Interamerican Summit held in Havana (NotiCen 1999).

The Cuban government attempts to undermine these groups' legitimacy in the eyes of the public by portraying them as traitorous U.S. puppets or a minority of deluded, isolated individuals (del Aguila 1993, 166; Planas 1994a, 43; Suárez Hernández 1992, 56). This attitude is hardly conducive to constructive dialogue between civil society and the state, nor does it suggest that Cuban civil society will accomplish Weigle and Butterfield's second stage of carving out a public space for autonomous activities in the foreseeable future. There is no evidence that average Cubans are aware of or interested in the opposition groups' activities (del Aguila 1993, 174; Baloyra and Morris 1993, 298; McGeary and Booth 1993, 26). Most groups, furthermore, have not yet attempted any mass mobilization for their cause (Baloyra 1994, 37). Even Concilio Cubano, the largest coalition, is not highly visible to the general public.

It is possible that economic hardships distract average Cubans too greatly from taking part in opposition activities, which are very risky (Werlau 1997, 65). It is difficult to determine how much the general public's seeming disinterest stems from fear, apathy, economic priorities, opposition groups' failure to reach the masses, or a combination of these factors (see Planas 1994a, 50, n. 3; Schulz 1994b, 153; del Aguila 1993, 180). There is as yet no clear picture of the membership or public appeal of these groups. Their short-term potential to effect a democratic transition seems slight even today.

Religion and Civil Society

Religiosity among the Cuban populace has increased in recent years, and so has political activism by the nation's Catholic and Protestant churches. This has coincided, moreover, with the government's relaxation of restrictions on religious believers, although religious dissident organizations and public demonstrations still are not tolerated (Human Rights Watch 1997; Eckstein 1994, 25, 122; Rabkin 1992, 44–46). Apparently, "syncretic religions" (Afro-Cuban faiths) and Pentecostalism have become increasingly popular during the Special Period (Eckstein 1994, 122), no doubt as people looked for emotional support during the crisis.

The new religiosity may stem from a vacuum of values (Baloyra and Morris 1993, 291) as the legitimacy of socialist structures erodes both abroad and at home. The folk religion Santería reportedly has the most adherents; Catholicism's popularity is less certain. The number of practicing Catholics greatly diminished during the early years of the revolution, but may again be on the rise, although almost the same number of people practice Protestant faiths (McGeary 1998, 25; del Aguila 1994, 200).

For years, the government sanctioned discrimination against religious observers. In the 1980s, however, it began to relax its stance, and Castro began to draw parallels between revolutionary socialism and

progressive Christianity (such as liberation theology) (Rabkin 1992, 11). In 1991, the government finally allowed believers to join the Communist Party, and even permitted two religious leaders to run for election in the National Assembly (Eckstein 1994, 25). Eckstein argues that the government's change of heart could be both a reaction to popular sentiments and an effort to channel this renewed religiosity (1994, 25–26).

The Cuban state has used religion as a political tool to garner support at home and abroad (Cross 1995, 267). The 1998 papal visit is an example. The long-sought visit was a perfect opportunity for Castro to hear Pope John Paul II publicly condemn the U.S. embargo, lending legitimacy to the Cuban state. It was also a popular gesture to Cuban Catholics (McGeary 1998, 26; Phillips 1998, 34–39; Larmer and Nordland 1998, 54–57). The government even allowed a Christmas Day holiday in honor of the visit, the first one in decades (*Province* 1997). Some people interpreted the papal visit as a weakening of the Cuban state, but it was more probably a well-orchestrated, strategic move and probably did the Cuban state more good than harm. The state gained international sympathy and appeared to be liberalizing some policies. Aside from that, however, the greater political situation remained largely unchanged.

Views conflict as to whether the Cuban religious community can nurture an opposition movement that can rebuild civil society. On the one hand, religious sources have expressed increased dissidence; for example, Cuba's Catholic archbishops have been speaking out more publicly against state policies. One archbishop distributed leaflets demanding religious freedom for Cubans and encouraged people not to participate in the rapid response brigades, violent groups organized by the state to help control public disruptions, originally during the 1991 Pan American Games (Purcell 1992, 138; Baloyra 1994, 31). The famous 1993 pastoral letter, issued by the two Catholic archbishops and nine bishops, lamented Cuba's "deteriorating moral climate" and urged the government to open dialogue with all Cuban citizens to avoid further political crisis (del Aguila 1994, 201; González and Ronfeldt 1994, 37; Schulz 1994c, 179).

On the other hand, several authors are less optimistic that the churches, Catholic or otherwise, will be the central institutions in the opposition movement (McGeary 1998, 25). While the state may permit greater personal freedom of belief, any public dissidence spawned from that freedom is still subject to repression (Human Rights Watch 1997, 109). González and Ronfeldt believe that Cubans see the Catholic Church as a new center of opposition (1994, 101), but there is little evidence to show that the church is capable or willing to perform such a prominent role (Schulz 1994c, 179). So far, the church has maintained an equal conservatism in both its critiques of and cooperation with the Cuban state.

The Independent Press

The disseminators of ideas—such as intellectuals and the press—are very important in the building and maintenance of civil society, especially in state-socialist regimes. Even if they remain underground through most of the transition, they can provide some freedom of expression, dissemination of new ideas and information, a voice independent of the state, and a unifying symbol of the opposition (Bernhard 1993, 318). For example, the Cuban state's portrayal of dissidents as a marginal batch of malcontents can be challenged only if people can obtain and debate countervailing information. Cubans cannot effectively assess their political and economic systems, or possible alternatives, without access to information.

Cuba was already informationally isolated before the Special Period, but the Soviet Union's glasnost policies, as well as Cuba's economic crisis, made the situation worse. The state began to ban Soviet publications as the press became openly critical of communist practices (Johnson 1993, 153). The later cutbacks in Soviet aid (specifically newsprint and petroleum) halted most of Cuba's newspaper production and publishing industry, and the energy crisis reduced hours of television broadcasting by a third (Eckstein 1994, 97–98; Cross 1995, 253). Of course, Cuban domestic media are rarely very informative in any case, caught between government monitoring and related tendencies for self-censorship by state journalists (Johnson 1993, 153; Padula 1993, 31). For example, the daily newspaper *Granma* has been described as “a paradigm of upbeat, tedious, and incurious reporting” (Padula 1993, 153). During a workers' parliament of news service workers of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (ICRT), reporters themselves complained about the lack of variety in news sources. They believed that they had lost public credibility. They also admitted to being trapped in the mentality of self-censorship when approaching issues (Roman 1995, 47–48).

Of course, government control of information can never be absolute. Because of infrastructural limitations (such as the lack of paper), no large underground publishing effort has taken place (Baloyra 1994, 26), but literature is smuggled in from other countries (Johnson 1993, 153). Radio Martí has broadcast from the United States since 1985, despite the Cuban government's attempt to block the signal (though it did succeed in blocking the later TV Martí, created in Miami) (Eckstein 1994, 25). Although Radio Martí's intellectual content is questionable, at least it provides one alternative point of view and challenges the state to evaluate its own programming (Schulz 1994b, 163; Eckstein 1994, 98; Edelstein 1995, 24, n. 4).

A small band of journalists has been struggling to maintain an independent press. At the forefront has been dissident Yndamiro Restano

(also head of the Harmony Movement), who founded the Cuban Association of Independent Journalists (APIC) in 1989. In 1995, this became the Independent Press Bureau of Cuba (BPIC), an umbrella organization for most independent press groups (Amnesty International 1996). BPIC markets Cuban stories to media sources in the United States and Europe (Arana 1996, 11). Following Restano's lead, a number of journalists founded small groups, such as Havana Press, Cuba Press, Patria, and Circulo de Periodistas de la Havana (Amnesty International 1996).

These groups are based all over the country, and they have made definite accomplishments with their writings. Olance Nogueras Rofe, "Cuba's leading investigative journalist," was 27 years old when he broke the story through BPIC of safety flaws at the Juraguas nuclear plant near Cienfuegos (Arana 1996, 11). Fidel Castro's son, Fidel Castro Díaz-Balart, was actually head of the Cuban Atomic Energy Commission, but was dismissed by 1994 for "inefficiency" (Falcoff 1994, 118, 125, n. 1). Nogueras Rofe's stories not only made world headlines but also discouraged any foreign lenders from refinancing the plant.

Other independent journalists have broken stories on a hotel bombing in Havana, an outbreak of dengue fever, and police corruption (Howley 1998, 47). Nogueras Rofe also broke this last story, interviewing a Catholic bishop on live radio regarding theft from a Catholic charity warehouse by agents of the Ministry of the Interior. He subsequently lost his job and became an independent journalist (Howley 1998, 47). The stories are smuggled over to Florida, mainly, then distributed over the Internet or broadcast back to Cuba via Radio Martí.

The journalists suffer greatly for their efforts. Imprisonment, both short- and long-term, has been the fate of numerous members of both Cuba Press and Havana Press (Morris 1996, 25; Human Rights Watch 1997, 109). Nogueras Rofe, for example, after being detained, arrested, and imprisoned for numerous short stints, was finally forced into exile in 1997 (Howley 1998, 47). Yndamiro Restano's dream in 1996 was that eventually the state would permit his colleagues and him to open an independent radio station or newspaper in Cuba (Arana 1996, 11). During 1997 the government made a determined effort to obliterate this sector from the country. Howley wrote in March 1998: "the Internet was full of stories filed by independent journalists . . . [but] the purge of *los independientes* through exile or imprisonment has cut the flow of underground news to a trickle" (1998, 49).

Socialist Entrepreneurs

Because the state controls much of Cuban life, any inroads into that centralized control are significant. They can represent important steps in developing an autonomous public sphere, thus potentially aiding the

transition to some form of democracy. Cuba's economic crisis in the 1990s exposed the failures of the centrally planned (and externally dependent) economy; unemployment rose and people's living standards plummeted. Under those circumstances, people's ability to make a living and to fill the gaps where the system failed to supply their needs became more an issue of basic human freedom to survive than anything else.

One result of the Special Period has been that the private entrepreneurial sector in Cuba has been granted more opportunities than any other group in Cuban society. It enjoys actual legal status (although it still faces heavy restrictions, taxation, and policy reversals from the state). The state's concessions stem both from economic necessity and from its own loss of legitimacy through the economic crisis. At the same time, the pressure created by the informal second economy deserves credit as a dynamic of its own. The Cuban people have been quick to exploit the reliberalization of self-employment and private farming—as Hungarians did in that country's transition (Szélenyi 1988).

The legal changes apparently originated in the 1991 Cuban Communist Party Congress, which relegalized private, home-based services (Eckstein 1994, 109). The Cuban state had experimented with the liberalization of farmers' markets and self-employment in the 1970s and early 1980s, but later reversed its policy during Castro's Rectification Campaign to reorient Cubans toward socialist values, begun in 1986 (O'Bryan 1999, 106–7). In October 1991, "trade artisans were given limited rights to sell their skills privately" (Cardoso and Helwege 1992, 54). Beginning in 1993, the state initiated a series of reforms in agriculture. State-run farms were dismantled and leased to private producers or cooperatives (Lisio 1996, 698). In September 1994, the farmers' markets (*agros*) were reopened (Roman 1995, 56). Surplus produce could be sold independently once again, and this helped to lessen food shortages (Font 1996, 579; Lisio 1996, 699). The increased autonomy of the farmers and cooperatives was an encouraging sign of decentralization of state authority (Schulz 1994c, 178).

The number of private farmers rose steadily from 144,300 in 1993 to 163,700 in 1994, 170,000 in 1995, and 175,000 in 1996. As a sector, private farmers represented only 4.1 percent of total employed people as of 1996 (Ritter 1998, 3). They are nonetheless one of the wealthiest and increasingly autonomous sectors in the current Cuban economy (Lisio 1996, 699), and are thus a very noteworthy component of the developing civil sphere.¹

Self-employment by individuals or families in more than 100 trades, crafts, and services was legally reestablished when the National Assembly passed Decree 141 in September 1993 (González and Ronfeldt 1994, 44). By 1995, the number of authorized categories had increased to 140 (González and Ronfeldt 1994, 45; Pérez-Stable 1997, 32). This change

included the state's reversal of its earlier crackdown on home restaurants (*paladares*), which were finally legalized by decree in June 1995 (Lisio 1996, 699). Approximately 1,000 *paladares* were already running nationwide (Pérez-López 1997, 183), with 2,000 in Havana alone in 1993, but the government closed all but a few hundred by March 1994 (González and Ronfeldt 1994, 45). Once the law was reversed in 1995, the numbers quickly rose again to at least 2,000 in Havana alone by early 1996 (Font 1996, 579).

Official figures reported that the number of microenterprises approved and registered was 169,098 in 1994, 208,786 in 1995, 206,824 in 1996, but only 159,506 by January 1998 (Ritter 1998, 2). Applications to register received were 248,552 in 1994, 390,759 in 1995, 439,268 in 1996, and an estimated 268,295 in 1997 (Ritter 1998, 2). Furthermore, these figures represent only businesses established through legal channels. Still other unregistered entrepreneurs are in operation, and there are countless illegal employees, even in the legal businesses (Lisio 1996, 699; León 1997, 44; *Economist* 1997).

Cubans have responded eagerly to the new entrepreneurial opportunities, despite a number of government restrictions and taxes (Lisio 1996, 699–700; González and Ronfeldt 1994, 45). Private vendors are subject to hefty licensing fees on top of taxes. The government introduced an income tax on self-employed people and independent farmers (among others) in 1994 (Roman 1995, 55). Tax rates apparently range from 10 to 50 percent (*Economist* 1997). The entrepreneurs complain angrily about these taxes. Some contend that the taxes virtually erase their profit margin, and many resort to illegal practices, such as underreporting of income, to keep afloat (*Economist* 1997). In reality, even if they retain only 20 dollars' profit in a month, they are still better off financially than most Cubans. State-sector workers, resenting the privileges of the budding microcapitalists, staunchly supported the imposition of the income tax on dollar earners in the 1994 Workers' Parliaments (Roman 1995, 51, 55).

There are further limitations on the self-employed. For one, the state can revoke someone's business license at any time (León 1997, 48). In May 1994, the state passed Decree 149, "regarding confiscation of goods and earnings obtained by unjustified enrichment," including theft, speculation, diversion of state resources, and black market activities (Roman 1995, 54). This antiprofitteering law, which can apply to any business garnering "excess profits" (Werlau 1997, 56), gave the Ministry of Finance the power to confiscate the cash, goods, and assets of any identified profiteers (Pérez-López 1997, 175). The authorities constantly make surprise raids and inspections on businesses; in 1997 a major purge closed down "scores" of small enterprises, such as "pizza makers, ice cream sellers, video lounges," street markets, and *paladares* (*Econ-*

omist 1997, 44). This may account for the fewer registration applications received in 1997.

Thus the entrepreneurial sector exists in a constant state of uncertainty. The government's antipathy toward the private sector stems from both symbolic and pragmatic concerns. Dollarization and market features undermine the egalitarian philosophy on which the revolution was founded and create schisms and resentment among the populace (Bengelsdorf 1994, 136–38). Pragmatically, the sector's success and relative independence threaten the state's centralized control (Werlau 1997, 61). Many of the entrepreneurial activities were already taking place underground before Decree 141 took effect. By incorporating the enterprises into the legal system, the state could better regulate their activities and divert at least some of the dollars in circulation back into state coffers—thereby reducing the autonomy of the second economy (Pastor 1996, 230). The government's concessions to capitalist enterprises represent a *de facto* transition to a mixed economy (Bengelsdorf 1994, 169), but there is no guarantee that the transition is permanent.

Like that of the other sectors, the potential role of the entrepreneurial sector in effecting a democratic transition in Cuba remains clouded. State concessions to self-employment arguably demonstrate the latter's influence on policymaking, albeit indirectly (León 1997, 44). The second economy also presents an attractive alternative that challenges the continued existence of the centralized state system (Pérez-López 1997, 176–77). No matter what kind of transition eventually takes place in Cuba, there is bound to be a continual move toward a more market-oriented economy, whether it occurs under a democratic socialist, social democratic, or liberal capitalist-oriented leadership. The current second economy is a good training ground for building entrepreneurial and managerial skills and getting familiar with market principles. Participants in the second economy have the potential to form the nucleus of a new entrepreneurial class (Pérez-López 1997, 184).

The private sector, however, would still have weaknesses to overcome. Cubans are largely unfamiliar with the intricacies of a market economy, and would be unprepared for any rapid change in the economic system (Pérez-López 1997, 184). This leaves the Cuban economy vulnerable to control bids by former exiles or others (Cardoso and Helwege 1992, 45), including eager foreign investors. Even today, only the embargo has prevented many U.S. firms from taking advantage of Cuba's liberalization of foreign investment. The Cuban state's continued insistence on centralized control of the economy may prove to be short-sighted, by preventing its citizens from playing the biggest role in any economic restructuring that occurs.

TRANSITION ON HOLD

One might argue that at this stage in the Cuban civil sphere's development, it has overcome amazing odds just by its continuing existence. The number of its organizations has grown, as has the quality of its opposition to government policies, which has become more open and vocal than in previous years. The emergence of umbrella organizations, such as Concilio Cubano, shows movement toward a "thickening" of the civil sphere, which increases the potential efficacy of civil society as an opposition force.

As our theoretical framework on transitions from state socialism holds, however, this progress represents only part of the necessary equation. Just as important to the autonomous development of the civil sphere is the structure of political opportunity in which it operates. So far, liberalization by the state has been minute. Repression of dissent is still the dominant policy, and even where this has been relaxed, such as the religious and entrepreneurial sectors, there are still heavy restrictions and ultimate government control. Much of this liberalization has been self-serving for the state to fill economic or legitimacy needs.

In terms of Weigle and Butterfield's descriptive model, we may say that Cuban civil society has made some progress into the second, emergent stage. It has expanded the numbers and types of organizations but has so far failed to reach the mass public or to wrest much autonomy from the state. At least one of these two advances will have to occur before civil society can expand beyond its present, narrow niche. This, moreover, will require further opening of political opportunities.

In this study, we constructed a model of the civil sphere under state-socialist regimes and argued that while common systemic factors produce similar results in the early, defensive stage of every case, later stages see local specificities become more salient in each civil sphere's contribution to the democratization process. Structures of political opportunities and constraints (for example, repression), moreover, must also be considered alongside the civil sphere's autonomous development, because the two have a reciprocal relationship, and no civil sphere can accomplish a democratic transition unilaterally (Cohen and Arato 1992, 51; Fox 1996, 1097). These are all important in evaluating the specifics of the Cuban case.

Civil society once appeared to be extinct in revolutionary Cuba. Instead, it turns out that, as in other former state-socialist regimes, the elements to rebuild a civil sphere were merely lying dormant in society, awaiting sufficient impetus and opportunity to reemerge. We have explored the multiple components of the new civil sphere that developed in Cuba in the 1990s; the progress so far, the obstacles, and their potential to effect democratic change. Growth has occurred in each

sector in terms of organization, open dissent, and proliferation of activists. The mass public, however, has yet to be incorporated into the opposition movement. What is worse, this development of the fledgling civil society has not been accompanied by the further opening of political opportunities. The state has refused to grant the civil sphere much autonomous space (with minor exceptions, some of which were conceded as part of the state's effort to retain legitimacy or address economic problems of its own). The result is an effective stalemate at this time. The voices for change remain stifled. What, then, lies ahead for Cuban civil society?

We outlined three potential scenarios for Cuba at the start of the twenty-first century. Numerous factors suggest that the first, continuation of the status quo, will persist for at least another five to ten years, barring an unforeseeable turn of events, such as foreign military intervention or Fidel Castro's sudden demise.

The first of these factors is that the Cuban state is still quite strong. Despite the severe tests it faced during the 1990s, it still has solid roots in its own society. The Cuban revolution had indigenous, nationalist origins that became the basis for its later ideological foundation. The Cuban state-socialist regime therefore holds greater popular legitimacy historically than did similar regimes in other Soviet bloc countries (Bengelsdorf 1994, 135; Baloyra and Morris 1993, 4; Planas 1994b, 86). In other state-socialist regimes where the revolutions were nationalistic in origin, such as China, North Korea, and Vietnam, the governments have also enjoyed relative longevity (Pérez-Stable 1997, 36).

Cuba's citizens, moreover, still see the revolutionary government as the provider of social benefits and the protector of Cuban sovereignty while the United States, especially sectors of the exile community in Miami, offers no equal protections in its recommendations for change in Cuba (del Aguila 1994, 199; Edelstein 1995, 23; Centeno 1997, 22). As long as dissidents are perceived as allies of these latter foes (a perception promoted by the Cuban government), they will have less legitimacy in the public's eyes than the state has.

The second factor, of course, is that the more traditional features of a loyal military and a highly effective security apparatus also support the Castro regime. It is quite unlikely that the Cuban military will rise against the regime with Fidel's brother Raúl at the helm as minister of the revolutionary armed forces (Centeno 1997, 14–15). Raúl Castro, unofficial heir-designate to Fidel, is reportedly more ideologically dogmatic than his brother (Eckstein 1994, 26; León 1997, 51, n. 6). The regime is well prepared to substitute Raúl in the leader's role, and Fidel has been explicit about his brother being the best person to succeed him. Raúl does not enjoy the same popularity as his brother, however, and might have to rule by force rather than by charisma (Eckstein 1994, 214).

Cuba's developing civil society would not do well under this successor, and a violent opposition movement could emerge instead. In that case, the regime might become even more repressive than it is under the current status quo.

The final element contributing to the state's relative strength in Cuba concerns the status of reformist members of the Cuban Communist Party. In Cuba to date, reformers have been either skillfully contained or eliminated. One conundrum for reformists is that a strong, organized civil society would help to support their assertions that drastic changes are required; the relative weakness of the civil sphere at this time does little to improve the reformists' position (González and Ronfeldt 1994, 36). Yet the civil sphere cannot develop much further without some opening to disseminate its platforms of democratization (and without freeing many reformist leaders from prison). This dilemma is likely to be resolved only when Castro and his hardliners die. Of course, some power struggles with unpredictable consequences could ensue for a time between Fidel's successor and a reformist bloc in the upper PCC echelons.

In the absence of state reforms that allow for autonomous public space, it is difficult to assess just how far the Cuban civil sphere can develop or to predict how much it can widen the political opportunity structures from below. Scholars diagnosing the situation have lamented, for example, that there is no opposition leader to match Castro's stature (Baloyra 1993, 38; Centeno 1997, 22; González and Ronfeldt 1994, 111). But how can we be certain that none of the current dissident leaders holds such potential? What might they be able to accomplish if they were not constantly harassed and imprisoned, or if it were easier to advertise their activities?²² Right now, more foreigners are aware of these figures and their struggle than Cubans themselves are. Similarly, it is not yet possible to say whether *Concilio Cubano* could become a coalition comparable to *Solidarity* in Poland (Baloyra 1994, 26), for the same reasons.

The economic sector is perhaps the least predictable element in the picture. Miguel Centeno considers foreign investment and the informal economy to be "wild cards" that may someday provide a political challenge to the regime (1997, 14). Certainly, the Cuban state has had to make more concessions in its economic policies than in the political realm in response to its own institutional requirements of crisis management. The entrepreneurial sector may serve as a wedge of influence against the state while the other sectors remain contained (León 1997, 48–49; Font 1996, 593). Economic decentralization, however, does not equal a democratization of the regime; China in the 1990s has proven that increased privatization need not be matched by political reform.

What factors might steer the country toward transition? If the opposition movement can broaden its support base to include reformers within the state, the equilibrium could be altered. One thing should be

clear to state reformers in considering their options: once the structure of political opportunities is finally opened, Cuban civil society is indeed capable of playing a meaningful role in the transition process. Cuba's history has provided its civil society with the solidarity and the ideological alignments necessary for vigorous growth. Cuba's deep-rooted nationalism and anti-U.S. sentiment would make an all-out market and political liberalization in the style of Central European countries quite unlikely. Cuba's specificities have prepared its people for a democratic-socialist experience. Continued pressure from the bottom up, with some help from state reformers, would thus represent the best hope for change in a democratic-socialist direction.

In the economic sphere, concerted efforts by state reformers at implementing "efficient redistribution" of assets would be in the best long-term interest for a market-based democratic socialism. Such a concerted policy could go a long way toward curbing the increasing influence of foreign capital while democratizing the control of national assets and enhancing their economic performance (Bowles and Gintis 1998). If Cuba could move toward both political democratization and efficient economic decentralization while maintaining its egalitarian thrust, it could then become a truly desirable model for many countries in Latin America.

NOTES

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1. Perhaps legally constituted entrepreneurs should be considered not as part of the civil sphere but as part of an expanded economy, now market-based. This accomplishment, though, could just as well be attributed to struggles in civil society, which have pushed the state out of sectors of state-controlled economy.

2. Since this article was written, opposition in Cuba has become more visible with activities such as *Proyecto Varela* (the Varela Project), a petition presented to the National Assembly in 2001 by dissident organizations requesting a referendum on issues of human rights and electoral reform. Predictably, the government countered this with its own national referendum, which showed overwhelming public support for constitutional reforms to entrench the regime's socialist character for a long time to come (Arreola 2002).

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