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The prospect of having to lead the Sunday nuna without a freshly laundered white shirt was more than Miki could tolerate. His desperation reflected the anxiety of the eight families living in the solar (housing complex) that they may have to pass a third consecutive scorching day without running water. Most of the solar's residents belonged to the same nuna (branch) of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería, requiring them to prepare poultry and pork according to meticulous ceremonial guidelines that were impossible in the absence of fresh water. The blue plastic barrels inside the door of each family's unit were nearly empty, the residents periodically eyeing the small pipe in the corner of the courtyard for the unpredictable trickle to appear. The sun had already gone down when the excited voices of children playing in the courtyard announced, "Vino el agua!" ("The water has arrived"). The neighbors emerged from their units carrying an assortment of plastic and tin buckets, which they placed in a queue next to the pipe. Since each bucket took four or five minutes to fill, they also brought stools and benches into the courtyard and set about completing sewing projects and homework assignments, or exchanging manicures and hair styles while discussing the day's events.

The municipal government of Old Havana, with support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), had recently begun a housing improvement initiative to combat structural collapse, gas leaks, and water shortages. Along with a number of other houses in the neighborhood, the solar's internal architecture had been reinforced and its electricity system upgraded. A hosepipe had been supplied for the plumbing system, but the solar remained on a waiting list for a water pump. His patience exhausted, Miki explained to me that with a donation of twenty-five American dollars he could acquire such a water pump himself from a mechanic up the street.


The device, he said, would suck water from the pipe in the courtyard and transport it through the hosepipe directly to each of the unit's tanks, sparing residents the arduous task of carrying water-laden buckets by hand. Having lived in the solar for five months by this stage, I was easily persuaded, and within three days the new plumbing system was up and running.

The residents seemed impressed with the water pump, and were content to delegate the precarious task of connecting it to the solar's electricity grid to Miki or me. But the indisputable efficiency of the new water delivery system also made lining up with buckets unnecessary, effectively putting an end to the evening gatherings in the courtyard. Only a handful of children continued to gather, hoping, I suspect, for a repeat of the small explosion I had caused while connecting the machine one evening. Soon even they stopped coming.

One evening about a month later Miki switched on the machine to find the hosepipe spraying water from innumerable piercings along its length. The project had apparently been sabotaged, though to my surprise—and Miki's fury—nobody seemed particularly concerned, nor had they any idea who the culprit might be. A series of heated discussions in the solar did not reveal the identity of the saboteur, but did reveal general dissatisfaction about the new system's antisocial impact, and concluded that rather than replace or repair the hosepipe, the best solution would be to adopt a modified version of the old system. The machine would still be used to suck water from the pipe, but instead of delivering it directly to each unit's tank, it would spout it from a shortened hosepipe into the buckets one by one. It was never discovered who had vandalized the hosepipe, but over the following weeks and months the chairs, manicure kits, and public conversations once again became a feature of evening life in the courtyard of the solar, now to the background of the whirring water pump.

Daily life in the solar was a constant stream of visits from neighbors, plans for resolving daily problems, and unwritten social contracts. Some plans worked out and others didn't, but all drew on individual investments of time, energy, and trust in broad networks of community support. The solar's circle of collective trust was inseparable from the personal histories of local protagonists, and its wide radius had accrued over generations. Yet the solar is not unique; rather, it reflects a broad, increasingly public, expansion of local initiative and social capital in Cuba since the early 1990s. Particularly in the country's more economically dynamic zones the state has attempted to harness and assimilate this emerging human resource into official structures of governance, both to facilitate neighborhood development projects and to bridge a growing rift between official institutions and unregistered community actors.

This policy orientation has evolved in the context of the withdrawal of economic support from the Soviet Union after 1989 and the evaporation of trade with former Eastern Bloc countries, precipitating a 75 percent reduction in Cuba's import capacity and a host of apocalyptic predictions about the fate of the Castro government (e.g., Oppenheimer 1992; see Uriarte 2001:11). Suddenly forced to buy everything from food to heavy machinery on the global market, Cuba turned desperately to tourism and foreign investment for hard currency. As Andrés Oppenheimer puts it, "The Revolution's ideological principles were bent every which way in the bid for new tourist dollars" (1992:286). Struggling to keep its economy afloat, the Cuban government asked its anxious citizens for renewed austerity, self-sacrifice, and understanding until the passing of this horrendous financial nightmare that it called the "Special Period in Time of Peace."

The trauma of relinking with the global economy during the past decade can only be compared in scale and magnitude to the profound strain of delinking from it in the 1960s. Richard Fagen's 1989 account of that transformation, with the obvious omission of Lenin, is strikingly reminiscent of the present day. "In ten years Cuba has seen the advent of Leninist politics, agrarian reform, educational reorganization, economic transformations, and international realignments—all force-drafted at a rate that leaves outsiders as well as many Cubans bewildered" (1989:1–2). Fagen went on to identify the crucial role of popular participation in the formation of early revolutionary projects: "There arises a pervasive and continuous effort to mobilize the people and enlist their energies, loyalties, and skills in creating the new Cuba. Where existing energies, loyalties, and skills are found wanting by the revolutionaries, they have taken upon themselves the job of creating new ones" (1989:2). The literacy campaign and agricultural work brigades of the 1960s and 1970s were powerful examples of the new revolutionary emphasis on mass mobilization, but equally significant were the civilian-staffed comités de defensa de la revolución (committees for the defense of the revolution), which monitored the revolutionary loyalty of the population on a block-by-block basis and organized a range of social welfare activities, from school enrollment programs to blood drives (Fickstein 1994:12).

The committees survive to the present day, though their neighborhood activities, once generously subsidized by the central state, now consist of little more than the nightly guardia (street watch) of a vigilant and ageing few. But in spite of the hardships of the Special Period, life goes on even in the
most impoverished urban neighborhoods without the malnutrition, violence, gangs, and drug problems that ravage the marginal centers of so many contemporary cities. And despite the decline of the committees, ordinary residents have come together of their own accord to protect the social and physical well-being of their neighborhoods through forms of associational life based as often on religious, ethnic, and professional connections as political allegiance. In the following chapters I want to examine these emerging grassroots initiatives and the recent efforts of the Cuban state to incorporate them into official structures of governance. Studying the complications and opportunities arising from collaboration between neighborhood associations, decentralized state urban planning institutions, and international development agencies reveals that community groups have gained broader capacities for self representation over the past decade, and that understanding these capacities is critical for discerning the character and potentials of civil society in Cuba.

Social Capital: Vice or Virtue?

Since the mid-1980s development agencies, policy makers, and scholars have increasingly invested time and money in empowering and promoting the formation of voluntary civil society organizations in target communities around the world. By building cooperative relationships between individuals and groups, they reason, participation in collective projects is boosted, social delinquency is reduced, and bottom-up democratization is more easily realized (Cardoso et al. 2004:7–16, 24–35; Putnam 1993:88–96, 2000:15–19). Initiatives pursuing these goals have stressed the strategic importance of associational life at the grassroots and the value of “social capital” as a cost-effective, renewable resource that can help disadvantaged communities to generate new opportunities and help societies to become more tolerant, egalitarian, and prosperous (Cohen and Rogers 1995, Coleman 1988a, Diamond 1999, Fukuyama 1995, Inglehart 1999). Optimism about civil society and social capital has more recently been tempered by insights into their potentially detrimental influence on democratic governance when well-connected, often nonrepresentative groups, influence public opinion and policy makers to support their goals and objectives (Armony 2004, Fiorina 1999:395–403). An important aspect of this critical approach has been a wider vision of civil society and the public sphere that accounts for the social and political influence not only of formally registered groups but also of informal professional ties, the media, public debate, protest movements, and informal popular networks (Armony 2004:33).

I want to try to extend the debate by framing it in a context where the efficacy and meaning of civil and economic liberties are qualitatively different from that assumed in most studies of social capital and civil society. In Cuba these differences stem not only from the intended omnipresence of the central state but also from the rapid adaptation of the state to the pressures and opportunities of a liberalizing global market. Structures of representation and authority in such cases are not only shaped by the character of the economic and political context, but also by its constant transformation and evolution.

As the central state struggles to manage this transformation in a way that conserves its authority, allegiances at the grassroots, also in flux, carry a heavy political weight. The crisis of the 1990s forced the state to more openly recognize this weight and engage with independent community initiatives, from neighborhood gardening schemes and dance troupes to religious mutual aid and welfare projects, to incorporate their productive strengths into official, legally authorized programs. In terms of maintaining authority this was more effective than oppression, which would have forced emerging community initiatives underground and potentially alienated a broad range of local actors. The strategy was largely successful, in part because initiatives at the grassroots, while harboring high levels of internal solidarity, were often flexible and trusting enough to reach outward to develop cooperative relations with the state, and to an extent, with one another. What I am interested in here is how these kinds of initiatives, critical as they are to the maintenance of civic order and stability, depend largely on the functional integration of different kinds, or “dimensions,” of social capital. This process is crucial to understanding the character of civil society in Cuba and the broader role of social capital in influencing the course of rapidly changing societies.

The concept of social capital draws on a long line of sociological inquiry, whose trajectory has been effectively mapped by Nan Lin (2001), Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner (1993), Michael Woolcock (1998), and others. Portes and Sensenbrenner trace contemporary understandings of social capital to four theoretical roots: Marx and Engels’s discussion of “bounded solidarity” among social groups facing external pressure and adversity; Weber’s analysis of self-imposed collective conformity or “enforceable trust” at the grassroots; Simmel’s work on mutually beneficial favors or “reciprocity
transactions" among friends and neighbors; and Parsons and Durkheim’s "value introduction," which accounts for the influence of informal moral considerations on formal or contractual relationships. The contemporary development of social capital theory reflects this rather wide range of conceptual orientations, but as Nan Lin (2001:24) has argued, recent work on social capital also reflects a more fundamental rift between Durkheim’s interest in cross-societal "organic solidarity" and Marx’s emphasis on class antagonism. While the first concept evokes the biological metaphor of individual organs functioning cooperatively for the benefit of the larger organism, the second focuses on the economic inequalities that result from the domination of some sectors by others and the construction of exclusionary social boundaries between them.

This core tension finds contemporary expression in analytic distinctions between social capital’s introverted and extroverted dimensions, for example, in discussions of “bonding” versus “bridging” social capital (Putnam 2000:22–23), and the fundamental contrast of “particularized trust” that "strengthens in-group relations while discouraging members to trust beyond their kin" from "generalized trust" in "those whom we don't know and who are different from us" (Uslaner 1999:124–125; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994: quotations in Armon 2004:21).

A practical question emerges from this distinction: is it possible, or always desirable, for particularized trust to be transformed into a more generalized form? Many studies of social capital answer in the affirmative on both counts, arguing that a broad variety of overlapping voluntary associations is a crucial building block for inclusive and participatory civil society, and that countries with active civil spheres also exhibit more democratic systems of governance (Putnam 2000:22–23, Warren 2001). As a collection of voluntary associations spanning sports clubs to religious groups to debating societies, civil society at its brightest is envisioned as a cradle for learning essential civic skills such as dispute resolution, democratic decision-making, and the formation and articulation of collective desires and needs. Attributed most famously to Robert Putnam (1993, 2000), this “neo-Tocquevillian” orientation—as it has come to be known in reference to Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1856) classic study of voluntary associations in the formation of North American democracy—has been criticized by scholars who stress the influence of contextual sociopolitical conditions on the capacity of social capital to promote or erode civic democracy.

Johannes Federke et al. (1999), for instance, argue that different contexts develop different kinds of social capital, and that egalitarian strategies for incorporating local perspectives into national priorities depend on balancing the quality and quantity of relationships between community representatives and official authorities. Projects attempting to build up and harness local capacities should therefore approach social capital as a resource to be optimized rather than maximized (1999:713–717). Alejandro Portes elaborates this observation by showing that although social capital can benefit community groups by facilitating access to scarce resources through extramural networks, "negative social capital" can nevertheless reproduce scenarios of social intolerance and economic inequality (1998:15–18). Strong social ties within tight-knit communities, he argues, can restrict resources and favors to group members, potentially generating enclave communities and deepening inequalities between groups. Furthermore, internal obligations, for example in immigrant communities, can discourage ambitious members from developing relations with external sources of support and resources. As a result entrepreneurial members often find that the only way to live and interact as they choose is to leave the community altogether. The cumulative effect for disadvantaged sectors is that they maintain characteristically low, "downward spiraling" self-expectations. As Portes concisely concludes, "Sociability cuts both ways" (1998:18).

Ariel Armony (2004) has developed this line of thought by arguing that the "dark side" of civil society becomes visible when dominant—though not necessarily democratic—ideas become widely circulated and supported in the public sphere, subverting processes of bottom-up democratization. Citing such examples as the consolidation of Nazism in Weimar, Germany, in the 1930s, public support for racial segregation in the United States in the 1950s, and the inability of civil society to promote public interests in Argentina in the 1990s, he concludes that "we cannot take civil society’s democratizing potential for granted... [Civil] society in general—not just formal groups—tends to potentiate dominant features in the broader sociohistorical context" (2004:213, 215). His perspective resonates with that of Cuban sociologist Rafael Hernández, who writes that "civil society is not just a realm of economic relations and of pluralism but also a realm of inequality" (2003:104).

Armony’s analysis draws attention to the role of informal social networks in the consolidation of discriminatory movements and the resulting “dubious link” between civil society and democracy. In this light the public sphere is shown to be dynamic and contested, constantly responding to the conflicting influences of the formal and informal sectors (Cohen 1999:56–59; Newton 1997). Armony’s study shows that these conflicts often give way to the diffusion of dominant ideas throughout society as “direct relation-
ship[s form] between social movements and formal groups in civil society" (2004:229). In other words, informal expressions of local interests tend to evolve into more institutionalized modes of representation, but in the process often suffer an erosion of original commitments and priorities. As Cohen and Arato put it, from a "linear" perspective, "all social movements move from forms of non-institutionalized, mass protest action to institutionalized, routine interest group or party politics... Formal organization replaces loose networks, membership rules and leaders emerge, and representation replaces direct forms of participation" (2004:229).

Armony's attention to the potentially corrosive effects of institutionalization on local interests and commitments distinguishes his analysis of social capital and civil society from the optimistic assessments of Putnam and others. Nevertheless, behind their diverging conclusions, both scholars (and most others) draw to some extent from this "linear model" of evolution from informal expression of popular interests to independent formal representation. This is understandable because studies of civic democratization have typically focused on either postsocialist or neoliberal political contexts, where formal channels for asserting popular interests and autonomy from the state are legally protected, and where the concept of civil society has come to symbolize and champion this cause.

In Cuba, collaboration between state institutions and unregistered community associations since 1990 has raised local concerns about the loss of independence and autonomy, but the Cuban political context differs in important ways from postsocialist Eastern Europe and the neoliberal West. The following chapters show that Cuban modes of popular advocacy, civil society formation, and democratization do not conform to a "linear" path toward independent institutional representation, but rather to a less formal, often more spontaneous, process of exchange and negotiation between state and nonstate actors. This has come about in response to a constrained public sphere in which politically antagonistic publishing, broadcasting, and protest are generally not permitted, weakening the ability of popular associations and movements to openly develop a civic agenda (representative or nonrepresentative) independently of the state. Under these conditions semi-informal modes of communication have developed between unofficial neighborhood leaders and local state institutions, often linking together communities and organizations in a way that internal local solidarity and protectionism have impeded in other contexts (Portes 1998:15–18; also see Fiorina 1999:395–403, Heller 2001:138).

Comparative evidence suggests that unregistered associations in politically authoritarian scenarios tend to either evolve into tight circles of underground opposition to the state or devolve into loosely structured expressions of "self-protective apathy" (Foley and Edwards 1996:48). The Cuban civic landscape reflects a more subdued—though no more predictable—process of socioeconomic transformation led by a government undergoing something of an identity crisis as the forces of economic globalization rend the function and legitimacy of a centralized political system uncertain. Alternative informal systems of prestige, hierarchy, and economic exchange have expanded, but the state's response, informed by events in Eastern Europe, has been to officially recognize the social influence of these emerging systems and attempt to engage them rather than force them underground. This has ceded political space to interest groups willing and able to work within the state's administrative structures, though their capacity to represent and advocate local needs depends largely on how creatively and diplomatically they use this space to generate new opportunities. Recent years have seen a deepening of this process, resulting in an increasingly "mixed" civil sphere that is neither entirely independent of, nor entirely reliant on, the state.

Prominent on the Cuban civic landscape are religious communities, which harbor high levels of internal solidarity, and in some cases significant financial resources. Indeed, the resurgence of religious practice in Cuba appears to be directly related to the economic and psychological strains of the Special Period, providing stable structures of community and identity, and financial assistance from overseas religious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Clemente et al. 1995:55–57, del Rey Roa 2002). The state has prioritized engagement with religious communities for both of these reasons, but also because the fluid nature of religious allegiances in Cuba endows them with considerable practical potential. An active member of a Christian congregation, for instance, may also belong to an Afro-Cuban religious house, and simultaneously be a loyal member of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women, or FMC) and the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Union of Young Communists, or UJC). Overlapping networks of this sort carry important implications for understanding the ways that social relationships are employed for acquiring resources and resolving daily problems. As early scholars of social capital argued, individuals whose ties and loyalties are fluid enough to permit them to move between groups often function as important "bridges" for the flow of information and resources between them (Burt 1992, Granovetter 1973, Lin 2001:27).

While intergroup contact is often mediated by individuals with fluid ties
within their respective communities, mutual benefit at the collective level tends to be maximized through the collaboration of groups with complementary but different kinds of resources to exchange. Lin (2001:39–40) argues that models of “homophilous” interaction, which predict that groups with similar social standing and endowments of material and social resources generally “stick together,” need to be more sensitive to the complementarity of different kinds of resources. He therefore sets out to “extend the homophily principle to occupants of similar positions in multiple resource structures (e.g., authority, status, or class) because, by the rules of congruence and transferability of resources, interaction may engage partners with different kinds of resources as long as the values of their resources are equivalent” (2001:39–40).

Lin’s point is that intergroup exchanges are not guided so much by the organizational similarity or difference of “resource structures” as by the relative value that each group’s resources hold for the other. The intensification of interaction between the Cuban state and religious communities confirms this point, but also suggests that the value that one group’s resources holds for another fluctuates in step with contextual transformations. In the pre-crisis context the social and political resources held by religious communities vis-à-vis the state (and vice versa) did not carry the same exchange value, making the two unlikely collaborators. But the contemporary political importance of local allegiance to the legitimacy of the state, and the simultaneous opening of opportunities for community actors to achieve official recognition, has imbued the resources held by each with a high relative value. The coming together of previously remote social sectors or “resource structures” in Cuba has therefore resulted in cooperation between some unlikely official and unofficial actors. In short, changing socioeconomic conditions have brought distinct forms of social capital into close proximity, resulting in photographs like the one on page 89 depicting Fidel Castro shaking hands with a locally respected priest of the Afro-Cuban religions Santería and Palo Monte.

From the state’s perspective the goal has been to build new, broader forms of solidarity out of preexisting informal social ties. Both James Coleman (1988b, 1993) and Pierre Bourdieu (1985:248–249) have argued that the deliberate creation of official social networks out of grassroots allegiances produces a range of socioeconomic benefits for formal institutions, and in Coleman’s view, for society at large. Similarly, Federke et al. (1991) write that prospects for economic development in any context are improved by the incorporation of substantive local rules and values into a wider system of procedural norms, a process characterized by “the gradual replacement of informal associations and networks by formal administrative structures, and the impersonal market mechanism no longer tied to individual identities. . . .” Action premised on social capital with a rationalized mode of delivery is rendered more flexible, and stands a greater chance of successful adaptation to a wide range of environmental circumstance” (1999:719, 721). The tensions and conflicts that can result from this process are evident in the Cuban state’s recent attempts to integrate local circles of cooperation into a framework that facilitates national development goals, commercial engagement with the global tourism market, and cooperation with international development NGOs. As in many other contexts, this has provoked local concerns about the loss of community autonomy and substantive relevance as formal systems of mutual aid are “scaled up” through a process of formal rationalization. Cooperation with the state requires community actors to weigh this loss against potential gains and opportunities resulting from formal registration.

Social capital research has shown that the terms of this calculus are not fixed. Rather, as the sources of social capital transform, for example, from personal allegiances within a well-integrated community group to official legal recognition, so do its costs and benefits (Woolcock 1998:175). On the one hand, community-state engagement can bring recognition and empowerment to previously unregistered groups, transforming them from relatively small, closed circles of mutual assistance into officially endorsed networks reaching out to and consolidating international support from NGOs and other resource providers. But on the other hand, official collaboration may transform locally respected participatory associations into socially disconnected platforms for accomplishing instrumental, short-term objectives with little administrative autonomy. The case studies in this book show both results, but also that the costs and benefits of engagement can pass through phases of greater or lesser prominence over time as state and community actors learn to work with, or around, one another.

State and Civil Society: Cooperation or Conflict?

The character of contemporary relations between state and nonstate actors, particularly in the religious sphere, distinguishes the Cuban reform process from the political transitions of Eastern Europe in the 1980s. The harsh and sometimes violent treatment of Catholics and other Christians by the governing regimes in those countries was never replicated in Cuba, even when
church-state relations were at their worst (Albacete 1998:37). Furthermore, the Catholic Church's prominence in the struggle against communism, especially in Poland, may have contributed to a lack of social diversity and plural representation within political opposition movements. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argue that this lack of diversity, conditioned by an internal emphasis on unified opposition to the state, ultimately impeded democratic transition in Poland: “In any movement of liberation, an extremely high value is attached to ‘unity’ within the struggle, and the ideas of compromise or internal conflict are spoken of pejoratively... In fact, most of the values and language of ethical civil society that were so functional to the tasks of opposition are dysfunctional for a political society in a consolidated democracy” (1996:271–273, emphasis in original). In Linz and Stepan's analysis, mounting pressure for conformity within the Polish Solidarity movement resulted in a virtual blockade against the articulation of different interests (1996:273). If a healthy civil society is characterized by a diverse range of participatory and voluntary structures and a “democratic ecology of associations” (Warren 2001:12–13; see also Rosenblum and Post 2002:4), then the very cohesion of social elements that gave the Polish and other Eastern European opposition movements their strength may also have unwittingly undermined their democratic aspirations.

The gradual emergence of a wide variety of grassroots organizations in the Cuban context suggests an alternative, potentially more egalitarian process of social development. While a “democratic ecology of associations” does not in itself protect against cooption from above and the infiltration of dominant, potentially nondemocratic practices (Armony 2004:23), the political gravity of grassroots initiatives in contemporary Cuba has endowed them with a greater capacity to engage with the state on their own terms. As the decentralization and diversification of social welfare mechanisms progresses it is possible that Afro-Cuban religious networks could come to fill an expanded role in protecting the interests and rights of their constituents in a similar way to Afro-Brazilian organizations like Ilê Aiyê and Odllom (see Ireland 1999:127, 2000; Sansone 1996). Official moves towards dialogue and collaboration with Afro-Cuban religious communities strengthen this possibility, though as chapter 2 shows, this has sometimes led these communities to recast and modify their priorities.

Official anxieties about excessive local autonomy in Cuba are evident in many of the case studies presented in the following chapters, from the state's controlled empowerment of decentralized development projects in Havana to its careful mediation of contact between community groups and foreign development agencies. These concerns are driven in part by the stated intentions of U.S. foreign policy. Together with the 1996 Helms-Burton Act (which was drafted in order to strengthen the U.S. trade embargo by punishing foreign corporations that trade with Cuba), the Cuban Democracy Act, or “Track II” legislation, remains committed to “reach[ing] around” the Cuban government to support organizations that could eventually destabilize it. Inefficient implementation procedures have compromised the effectiveness of these schemes, and there is a general consensus that the Cuban “civil sphere” remains too weak to pose a serious threat to the state (Usagao 2006, Otero and O'Bryan 2002:29–30). Nevertheless, the prospect of internal dissent remains a concern for Cuban authorities, not least because senior North American analysts and advisors maintain the long-held view that “U.S. policy should continue giving highest priority to nurturing the growth of Cuba’s fledgling civil society” (González and Nuccio 1999:21).

Faced with ongoing international efforts to incite change from within, it is unlikely that the Castro government or any nationally nominated successor will relax the stern treatment of dissidents and would-be-defectors, which has consistently drawn criticism from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The arrest of sixty-one dissidents in 2003 adversely affected Cuba’s diplomatic relations with the European Union, though the damage was largely repaired when fourteen of these were subsequently released. Spain has actively encouraged greater European dialogue with Cuba since the 2004 election of José Luis Zapatero, but as in the past, crackdowns on dissidents in Cuba could compromise European investment (LaRue 2003:9). In June 2006 the European Council affirmed its long-standing vision of pluralist democracy in Cuba, though it also committed itself to constructive engagement and dialogue.

Recent Cuban reforms designed to attract foreign investment and facilitate decentralized social welfare will likely strengthen rather than weaken the legitimacy of the Cuban state because, unlike in Eastern Europe, they have promoted the stable coexistence of the state and nonstate sectors rather than pitting them against each other (March-Poquet 2006:91–93). The quest to find a functional balance of state and nonstate inputs, very much at the heart of the reform process, is naturally replete with tensions and conflicts, for instance over the management of resources that have historically been delivered by the state. But the emergence of such conflicts has not seriously destabilized broader public acceptance and endorsement of state authority. This is because the consensual subordination of many Cuban neighborhood
groups and organizations—in some respects a good example of Gramscian hegemony—is not based exclusively on coercion from above, although as Crahan (2000:26–27) points out this is a factor, but also on widespread popular recognition and identification with the Cuban revolution’s commitment to social justice (Uriarte 2001:10, Sinclair 2000).

The degree of social influence that neighborhood organizations retain from—and are capable of exerting on—the state is difficult to discern in a context where licenses permitting greater local management seek both financial and ideological compliance. Political and economic power continues to reside with the state, though the decentralization of administrative authority has relied increasingly on the social power of community loyalty and solidarity. Incorporating this social power into official projects has become a key state objective, both because of the positive impact this has had on their development and because of the potentially negative consequences of not doing so. The failure to engage ethnic, occupational, religious, and other social groups in public initiatives can produce marginalized communities whose high levels of internal solidarity and social capital can lead to societal segregation, the consolidation of illicit exchange networks, and in extreme cases insurgency (Pritchard and Hearn 2005). It is no coincidence that opponents of socialist regimes around the world have focused their efforts on building the institutional capacities and consolidating the internal cohesion of nonstate organizations; nor is it a coincidence that Cuban authorities have gone to great lengths to monitor and mediate local-international linkages.

While state attempts to preempt the emergence of oppositional sectors in Cuba are not new, the past decade has witnessed a shift from strategies of containment to strategies of engagement, designed not so much to suppress social diversification as to address the underlying causes of disaffection at the grassroots. The legitimacy of the Cuban state has become closely entwined with the outcomes of these efforts. This is not only because of the potentially explosive combination of local social capital and illicit structures of trade and exchange (see chapter 2), but also because, when managed effectively, local solidarity and compliance can drastically enhance the outcomes of state-directed development initiatives.

Recognizing local actors as legitimate social representatives entails a shift of authority away from the central state. While economic decentralization in Cuba has been slow, and according to some researchers insufficient (Fernández Soriano 1999), the conferment of certain administrative powers to local authorities signifies a modification of the state’s bureaucratic structure. Understanding how local empowerment in Cuba is related to transformations in the internal structures of the state clarifies how forms of social capital produced at different levels of society interact and adapt to each other. At the micro level, a number of studies have shown how distinct forms of social solidarity can adapt, compensate, and adjust to one another’s presence or absence (Gold 1995, Hagan et al. 1996, Portes 1998:31–12). These studies show that when extrafamilial networks are lost to immigrant families, for instance, they often compensate with higher levels of internal family solidarity. Recent developments in Cuba suggest that similar processes of interaction and adjustment can occur at the macro level between distinct forms of solidarity and cohesion produced by the state and nonstate sectors. The turbulent widening of avenues for local representation since the early 1990s, for example, has not only entailed a downward shift of administrative power but also concerted efforts to reassert state authority in new ways.

A useful language for describing this process is provided by Michael Woolcock, whose four “dimensions” of social capital permit an integrated analysis of micro- and macro-level forms of cohesion. Woolcock’s four dimensions are “community integration,” or local solidarity within close-knit social groups; horizontal “linkage” between such groups; vertical “synergy” between community representatives and state institutions; and “organizational integrity” within the state. Applied to the Cuban case, strong preexisting solidarities between groups at neighborhood scale (community integration) and the promotion of horizontal collaboration between such groups (linkage) have proven more effective for confronting emerging local development challenges than traditional top-down mechanisms. This has resulted in diminished centralized control and a modification of the state bureaucratic structure (organizational integrity). In turn, this has provoked official efforts to establish vertical relations with nonstate actors (synergy), designed to conserve political hegemony by incorporating a diversifying social base into state-led initiatives. For the state the goal has been to harness local social capital into programs that simultaneously address local welfare needs and consolidate its political authority.

The Impact of Religion

The increasingly short-term interactions of development institutions, commercial enterprises, and community groups involve an intense degree of sociocultural interaction and exchange. Sensitivity to local modes of cooperation, exchange, and knowledge does not deny the critical importance of material realities, but rather takes closer account of the agency of subjects,
their perceptions of one another, and the projects they get involved in. Tessa Morris-Suzuki writes of “the pervasive and irreversible interpenetration of the material and the symbolic... [D]evelopment, no longer simply a matter of modes of production, becomes a clash between forms of life embodied in different types of food, dress, music and dance. ... The colonization of the world by capital makes starkly clear the extent to which economic value is a function of moral and social value” (2000:73-74). Development institutions that fail to recognize this produce project analyses and progress reports that lack sensitivity to local priorities and reactivity about institutional values, overlooking the pervasive role of culture in the implementation and breakdown of projects. As Clifford Geertz (1973) might say, the professional ethos of contractual terms, development objectives, and economic policies is underwritten by the worldliness of development workers and community leaders, conditioned by spirituality, ideology, and personal conviction. By examining the interactions of project participants, this study, following John Tomlinson (1991:104) and Anthony Giddens (1977, 1990), locates cultural agency in the reflexive decisions of self-conscious actors.

In order to examine cross-cultural exchanges at the heart of collaborative alliances in post-1990 Cuba, I pay special attention to the emergence of religious communities as key players in urban neighborhood development initiatives. Since 1990 Christian congregations have augmented their community welfare activities, complementing the overburdened public service sector with welcomed overseas humanitarian donations. The injection of scarce medicine, clothes, food, and finances relies on the institutional legitimacy of Cuban Christian organizations, whose corresponding legal status distinguishes them from Afro-Cuban congregations (Pedraza 1998). In short, Christian-affiliated projects benefit from established modes of dialogue and cooperation with state authorities, while such lines of correspondence are only now tentatively beginning to open for Afro-Cuban religious communities.

Structures of popular religiosity and the strong circles of social capital they possess have not figured significantly in studies of Cuban civil society, but as Haroldo Dilla Alfonso has written, leaders of Afro-Cuban religions have risen to prominence in many neighborhoods as influential figures capable of mobilizing popular support for projects ranging from health education to housing construction (1999:33). The participation of Afro-Cuban religious groups in decentralized social welfare projects reflects the historical role of these religions in protecting the material and spiritual well-being of urban communities since the colonial era (Brandon 1993:69-73, Domínguez 1989:46, Orozco and Bolívar 1998:152). As early as the sixteenth century, mutual aid organizations called cabildos were set up in conjunction with Catholic churches to evangelize, house, and provide basic services for free and enslaved black Cubans (Portuondo Zúñiga 2000:85). In many of these cabildos the religious traditions of Yoruba, Carabalí, Arara, and other West African ethnolinguistic groups became integrated with Catholic practices. Catholic statues and images introduced by the ecclesiastical authorities of the day were adopted by cabildos, but were typically used as substitute representations of forbidden African deities (Ortíz 1997:61).

After Cuba’s independence from Spain (1898), a series of laws drafted by the U.S.-administered regime to regulate public association resulted in the fragmentation of cabildos into private temple-houses, which served as neighborhood centers for collective Afro-Cuban worship and social support (Brown 2003:56-57, Murphy 1988:33). These temple-houses emerged as the foundational basis of the religion called Santería, devoted to the veneration of a pantheon of Yoruba deities (orichas) and the practice of a divination tradition called Ifá. Consolidated by prominent Afro-Cuban religious leaders such as Lorenzo Samá, Lataún, and Tata Gayrán in the early nineteenth century, Santería gradually spread from the poor neighborhoods of Havana and Matanzas to towns and cities throughout the island (Bolívar and Cepero 1995:16-20).

In the 1930s Reynier Pérez, Aurora Lümar, and Rosa Torres brought Santería to Santiago de Cuba, setting up temple-houses and initiating the city’s first line of devotes (Millot 2000:i12). The religion’s associated tradition of sacred batá drumming was introduced to the city by Millán Galis in 1962, though it was not until 1989 that Galis and Vicente Portuondo Hechavarria brought the first fully consecrated batá drums to Santiago de Cuba from Matanzas and Havana.

Batá drumming is central to the practice of Santería. As Olavo Alé, director of the Centro de Investigaciones y Desarrollo de la Música Cubana (Center for the Analysis and Development of Cuban Music, or CIDMUC) explained, “The Oro Seko is an order of rhythms meant to salute and communicate with the orichas of Santería. Consecrated batá drums are believed to be alive; that is, they form a part of religious liturgy much more than, say, a pipe organ in a Catholic mass” (interview, 16 February 2002). Pedro Pérez Sarduy (1998:40) estimates that Santería and other Afro-Cuban religions are currently practiced in some capacity by approximately 70 percent of the Cuban population, particularly in poor, urban communities, while batá drummers and priests of Ifá divination command a great deal of respect: the
prior as channels of sacred communication, and the latter as neighborhood role models, advisors, and doctors of natural medicine (Amira and Cornélis 1992:18, Betancourt 1995).

Anthropological research on Afro-Cuban religions has largely followed two literary models: historical analysis of West African cultural adaptations in Cuba, and ethnographic description of firsthand experience and expertise in specific ceremonial techniques. The first of these trends, initiated by the classic works of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1950, 1973 [1966], 1985 [1971]), and William Bascom (1964a, 1964b, 1980), has provided detailed ethnological data on the ethnic foundations of Afro-Cuban religious traditions such as Palo Monte, Espiritismo, Santería, Abakú, and Arará.

Ortiz’s original interest in these traditions resulted from his study of criminology. His earliest books, entitled Los Negros Brujos (The Black Sorcerers, first published in 1966) and Los Negros Eslavos (The Black Slaves, first published in 1976), sought to establish links between Afro-Cuban religions and criminal social tendencies, while the title of his 1913 article, “Los Comedores de Niños” (The Eaters of Children), speaks for itself. The Cuban sociologist of religion Jorge Ramírez Calzadilla argues that soon after the publication of these works Ortiz adopted participant observation as his primary research method, bringing him into intimate contact with religious practitioners and leading him to revise his negative perspectives and assumptions about their activities (2000:8). In 1936 Ortiz openly lamented the errors of his earlier work (in particular The Black Sorcerers) in a public forum entitled Cómo Pensaba Yo Hace 30 Años (What I Was Thinking 30 Years Ago), and in 1942 one of his closest protégés, José Luciano Franco, quoted his mentor’s confession: “I began to conduct research, but soon realized that, like all my fellow Cubans, I was wrong” (quoted in Ramírez Calzadilla 2001:19).

Reflecting this existential transformation, Ortiz’s numerous books and articles from the mid-1920s onward recognize and celebrate the deep presence and influence of African ethnicity in Cuban national identity. Some, like his Centenario Cubano (Cuban Counterpoint, 1940) and the 1943 article Por la Integración Cubana de Blancos y Negros (For a Cuban Integration of Whites and Blacks), are clearly aimed at celebrating Cuba’s multiethnic heritage, while others, including La Africana de la Música Folklorica de Cuba (The Africanity of Cuban Folkloric Music, 1950) and Los Bailes y el Teatro de los Negros en el Folclor de Cuba (The Dances and Theater of Blacks in the Folklore of Cuba, 1985 [1951]), take a more descriptive, ethnological approach.

Ortiz’s research program, particularly its ethnomethodological branch, continues to guide the work and literary output of Cuban institutions such as the CIDMUC, the Casa del Caribe, and the more theoretically sophisticated Fundación Fernando Ortiz, while a more narrative-based, ethnographically oriented literary stream, inspired largely by the work of Lydia Cabrera (1971 [1954]), has sought to bring a detailed understanding of Afro-Cuban ceremonial practices to both aspiring and practicing religious readers (e.g., González-Wippler 1992, Hagedorn 2001, Karade 1994, Moreno Vega 2000). Responding to growing international interest in Cuba since the expansion of foreign tourism to the island in the mid-1990s, this commercially successful literature, written by practicing Cubans and foreigners, offers its readers an opportunity to explore alternative forms of spiritual awareness. While some Santeros (practitioners of Santería) and babalawos (practitioners of Ifá divination) criticize this literature for revealing secret ceremonial information, others eagerly embrace it as a practical guide to their religious faith (Palmié 1995:89, 91).

A small number of writers have explored processes of Afro-Cuban religious commercialization, performance, historiography, and social engagement from a critical sociological perspective (Dilla Alfonso et al. 1999; Mar-
tinez Puré 2001; Menéndez Vázquez 1995, 2002; R. Moore 1997; Palmié 2002). This literature has identified the broad social impact of Afro-Cuban religions, the power relations that continue to shape their role in Cuban society, and the importance of appreciating the dynamics of cross-cultural exchange in the Cuban context. Before presenting a brief outline of the book's four chapters I want to dwell for a moment on these issues and how they influenced my approach to conducting research and writing.

Counterpoint, Competition, and Power

Santería continues to be practiced predominantly by the poorer, darker sectors of Cuban society, but the expanding scope of people getting involved in the religion endows it with a level of social capital that is at least as influential as the financial variety. The social ties embedded in Santería are strikingly evident in public liturgies that often bring together hundreds of devotees, guests, and friends spilling out of home sanctuaries into the street, unified by a shared system of belief and identity. Interpersonal bonds of this sort have begun to attract the attention of domestic and international development organizations, which identify here an unparalleled emerging human resource for building voluntary neighborhood health and education programs. Indeed, strong allegiances at the grassroots have become a key resource that community leaders have started bringing to the table in negotiations with state urban welfare organizations and international development agencies.

It would be naive, though, to suggest that the social capital of community associations, the legal authority of the state, and the finances of international agencies each exerts equal influence or receives the same priority in project planning and implementation. Relations of power, shaped by both historical inequalities and contemporary processes of social transformation, condition the way these resources are exchanged. The analysis of collaborative initiatives between state institutions and Afro-Cuban religious circles is therefore also a study of power and dominance, not only between distinct socioeconomic sectors of Cuban society but also between different ethnic identities and philosophies of development.

Appreciating this cultural turbulence is crucial for understanding contemporary state-society relations in Cuba. As Ortiz (1940) argued, the "counterpoint," "transculturation," and ultimately interdependence of distinct philosophical traditions have always been at the core of Cuban nationhood. Ortiz's analysis of the cultural interactions of Europeans and Africans, whom he metaphorically described as Sugar and Tobacco, respectively, clearly signals a dynamic of power, but as Antonio Benítez Rojo has argued, it also signals a process of interaction that transcends binary opposition and outright antagonism. Ortiz described this tension as "counterpoint," which as Benítez Rojo reminds us, recalls the musical form of the baroque fugue.

Voice S (Sugar), which is the second to enter, tries to exert dominance over voice T (Tobacco), the one that began the theme. Note that if the fugue exists it is only because the second voice is present; it is this one that properly speaking generates the counterpoint and makes it possible as a polyphonic genre. It might be said the S carries a praxis or mechanics of a technical sort that T does not possess. But, as I have said, it would be an error to think that T and S relate to each other only in an antagonistic or exclusive way. I would say that they relate also in the complementary and diachronic sense of mutual interdependence that recalls the complexity of power relations. (1992:173)

This power relation, he goes on, is difficult to define because the elements that comprise it are qualitatively different and not, as a result, capable of reducing or overcoming each other in a zero-sum fashion:

It's clear that Ortiz's counterpoint, which is the relationship between the narratives of tobacco and sugar, does not imply a parity, or even a synthesis derived from the contradictions of thesis/antithesis, but rather there is another kind of difference here, specifically the difference between power and prestige, between history and myth, between machine and hand, between Industrial Revolution and agricultural revolution, between mass production and artisanship, between computer and drum. It's a question of voices that come from different centers of emission, from differing moments and discourses, which coexist beside each other in a complex and critical relationship, one that is impossible to clarify entirely. (1992:174)

Benítez Rojo concludes that an ongoing undercurrent of Cuban (and Caribbean) social life is the unsolvable tension between traditional wisdom and scientific knowledge. For the purposes of this study we might identify the persistence of this dynamic tension in the turbulent interdependence of state legal authority, foreign financial capital, and grassroots social capital in emerging Cuban development initiatives. Each of these is a necessary ingredient of effective projects and exerts a different kind of influence on them, with the result that none is capable of dominating the others entirely.
I tried to be sensitive to this interactive power relationship, its historical foundations, and contemporary implications in the way I conducted and wrote up the research. While I draw from my experiences of life in two Santería temple-houses in Old Havana and Santiago de Cuba, where I stayed for thirteen months and eleven months respectively (2000–2002, 2005–2006), I do not attempt to describe or analyze the daily ceremonial activities that took place there. This decision was personal as much as professional. Not only is it beyond my ability to “scientifically” convey the spiritual meaning of a living religious tradition, but having been entrusted with a degree of confidence in both houses it strikes me as inappropriate to even try. Thinking back to my childhood I can recall periodic Catholic masses held in the dining room of my parents’ home in London. These were not secret events, but the degree of privacy and interpersonal trust they involved would in my view preclude a public discussion of their spiritual intimacy and ceremonial procedures.

An Afro-Cuban liturgical ceremony in Havana differs in important ways from a dining-room Catholic mass in London, and yet both have a common profound respect for collective spiritual experience and trust. I made a decision early into the research that the intimate details of religious practice, despite their potential literary appeal, would not be included in my research diaries or the manuscripts that would follow. This decision was reaffirmed following a Santería funeral service in Havana, when Miki, the priest of the Havana temple-house, warned me that to write or speak publicly about what I had seen could bring serious spiritual consequences. For me these words strengthened an ongoing philosophical perspective that spiritual health, personal integrity, and the attempts of people to understand and trust each other are not foreign pursuits. It seems to me that to dwell on the description of private spiritual events and procedures would compromise this perspective and in the process fall short of the potential contribution that ethnographic writing can make to building cross-cultural understandings of social change.

At the heart of this potential is the distinctive capacity of applied social science, anthropology in particular, to vividly amplify voices and concerns that to the outside world might otherwise remain silent, or silenced. With this in mind the book examines a process whose significance has not been widely reported in academic literature or the media: the formation of sustainable collaborative relationships between informal community actors, formal state institutions, and foreign development agencies in post-1990 Cuba. In the chapters that follow I have tried to emphasize community perspectives and priorities by drawing from interviews and ethnographic research conducted over a total of twenty-four months. While much of the existing literature on Cuban popular religions is similarly engaged with the lived experience of local subjects, analysis of Cuban political decentralization has typically focused on legislative reform at the national level. Mindful of Rafael Hernández’s call for “an approach that restores the specificity and autonomy of the social as a factor that interacts with the institutionalized political,” I have attempted to frame religious practice in the context of political reform while drawing attention to the interpersonal exchanges and loyalties that underpin the design and implementation of specific projects (2003–30; emphasis in original).

The interdisciplinary character of the book reflects a range of personal interests developed since my youth in Europe. Some of my earliest memories are of Geneva, where my family lived for two years because of my father’s work with the World Health Organization. Sunday afternoons spent building miniature castles on the living-room floor with the children of my father’s colleagues, usually to the backdrop of grown-up conversations about world hunger and population growth, were in their own way my introduction to development studies. These encounters continued for ten years in London, though by this time persistent dinner guests had habitually taken to extracting my opinion in discussions spanning football to economic development.

At age fourteen I moved with my family to the United States, and at seventeen I began to study anthropology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. It was at this time that I became interested in researching the details of my Brazilian heritage, which my maternal grandfather, from Rio de Janeiro, had recorded in an intricately annotated family tree. One aspect of this interest, which soon came to encompass all others, was percussion. Employed by the UW-Madison Dance Program by the dancer and scholar Claudia Melrose to accompany classes and performances, I had the opportunity to study with leading Brazilian, Cuban, and West African percussionists, and the good fortune to conduct a year of musicological research in Senegal (Hearn 2004b). My experience with percussion was the original stimulus for my interest in Cuba, where a primary goal was to expand my musical horizons. This goal was given concrete form through my initiation as a bata drummer (Omo Afa, or Son of the Drums) in Santiago de Cuba in 2002, publicly recognizing my ability to contribute musically to ceremonial celebrations of Santería. The process of musical training and apprenticeship brought me into close contact with some of the same religious communities.
that have become, since the early 1990s, increasingly involved in collaborative partnerships with state development agencies. This book can be read as an attempt to reconcile my interests in sacred drumming and community development at a historical moment that has brought these two spheres of activity—the religious and the political—into unprecedented proximity in Cuba.

Studying simultaneously with religious leaders and development professionals meant engaging with actors with distinct cultural backgrounds and occupational priorities, which at times generated considerable tensions. The temple-house where I stayed for the first period of research was located in an Old Havana solar that suffered frequent power outages, water shortages, and gas leaks; precisely the kinds of problems that local development projects were aiming to resolve. Living in this setting by choice rather than necessity, and with the added luxury of a plane ticket out of the country, no doubt conditioned my participation in the experiences and interactions that form the basis of this book. I have tried to draw attention to my presence in the process of investigation and interpretation by supplementing analytic observations and data from interviews with excerpts from my research diaries.

If my privileged status as a foreigner at times faded into the background, then it was thrown back into sharp focus on the increasingly frequent occasions that I left the house for the day, wearing a shirt and tie, to attend meetings with international development delegations in exclusive hotel lobbies and bars. At one point I was asked by a Cuban development institution to translate its project reports into English and given a laptop computer by a foreign delegate for this purpose. But in the temple-house the computer seemed out of place, and although I followed the suggestion of the house’s priest to use it for teaching basic word-processing skills to the solar’s residents, it was a constant symbol of my access to a world of distant opportunities.

My residence in the temple-house and my intensive study of batá drumming did not go unnoticed by Cuban development officials. Some expressed alarm and even admiration for the “determination” my chosen home life must require, while others maintained the opinion (in public at least) that my interests amounted to little more than a study of superstition. One project director, encouraged by the laughter of his subordinates, was fond of exclaiming, “If we can’t fix the street lights, we’ll get Adrián to sacrifice a goat to the gods and ask for their help!” These comments disturbed me, not because I didn’t know the first thing about how to sacrifice a goat (nor would

I be permitted to do so by Santería codes of practice), but because they were usually based on trivializing the practices and traditions of the communities that these officials were employed to serve. The social distance between the government officials, religious practitioners, and foreigners discussed in the book is reflected in the way their collaborative projects matured. From the interactions of babalawos with development workers to the negotiations of foreign NGOs with the state to gain access to Cuban community groups, projects were characterized by the challenge of reconciling divergent political objectives and economic philosophies.

The scenarios discussed in the following chapters raise the issues of tourism and the commercialization of religious traditions, the consequences of political decentralization for local governments and community organizations, forms of dialogue between international NGOs and the Cuban state, and the capacity of Christian and Afro-Cuban religious believers to openly express their faith while enjoying the legal, economic, and spiritual benefits of public sphere legitimacy. These are historically contentious issues in Cuba that have long been charged with political energy, resulting in polarized and entrenched perspectives that tend to circumscribe opportunities for compromise and understanding. By focusing on emerging processes of consensus building and interdependence in actual projects and encounters, the book aims to identify potential points of practical and theoretical convergence.

The Book’s Four Chapters

Total economic collapse following the fall of the Soviet Union was averted in Cuba largely through the development of the tourism industry. Political collapse was averted through consequent economic recovery, and also through official attempts to “bridge the widening gap between state structures and community life” (CARTA 2001:1). Afro-Cuban religions have played an important role in both of these developments. Tourism promoters have increasingly relied on “heritage tourism,” with Afro-Cuban folklore as its emblem, as an integral part of their commercial strategy. This has involved establishing official institutions that portray Afro-Cuban religious practice for the tourism market, but that also claim—not without a measure of legitimacy—to represent the interests of religious devotees in a public and visible manner. Chapter 1 looks at these developments and a range of local responses to them. While critics argue that the institutionalization and “folklorization” of Santería has damaged its spiritual integrity and eroded
its networks of social allegiance, others view the emerging public and commercial dimensions of Santería as a reflection of its historically proven capacity for adaptation to changing socioeconomic conditions.

In the spotlight of this debate are the Casa del Caribe in Santiago de Cuba and the Asociación Cultural Yoruba in Havana, whose official promotion by the state as institutional representatives of Afro-Cuban religion is widely suspected to harbor political and commercial motives. Indeed, unregistered rival organizations that endeavor to resist the influence of the state and the market in their ceremonial practice generally attract broader popular support. The distinct orientations of official and unofficial forms of religious association reflect a fundamental tension between vertical modes of engagement with the state and the formation of horizontal lines of solidarity independent of it. For individual religious practitioners the resolution of this tension largely comes down to their ability to maintain relationships within close-knit religious communities while simultaneously reaching out to forge external links. The chapter concludes with an ethnographic encounter with an Old Havana priest of Santería as he forges a path between the responsibilities owed to his local religious community and opportunities arising from engagement with the state and with the tourism market.

Chapter 2 deepens the discussion of state interaction with Afro-Cuban religious communities through an analysis of decentralized community welfare initiatives in Havana. A key challenge for local initiatives is to leverage public benefits from community solidarity, and thus make local social capital work for the larger civic agenda. State urban development organizations have approached this challenge by attempting to build interdependence between informal community networks and official projects in a way that openly recognizes the legitimacy and value of grassroots loyalty and allegiance. It has become clear to Cuban development workers that working through community networks—rather than in competition with them—to design and implement programs, ranging from sexual health to literacy promotion, not only benefits disadvantaged communities but also better protects the interests of the larger public. The challenge, then, is to convert “bonding” or “particularized” social capital into a more “bridging” or “generalized” form.

In some of the most impoverished areas of Havana, state development agencies have attempted to do this by building collaborative relationships with locally influential priests of Santería, who command substantial respect and authority in their neighborhoods. The chapter examines three projects that have resulted from these efforts, looking particularly at their capacity to integrate commercial activities with community welfare needs. While the case studies show projects struggling to balance commercial and community interests, the accomplishments they eventually achieve result from a convergence of state intervention in project development and local creativity in the design and implementation of community welfare actions. The intensifying collaboration of grassroots associations with decentralized state institutions suggests their political significance in contemporary Cuba, the strength of their informal social ties, and the responsibility they increasingly share with the state for representing local interests.

Chapter 3 considers the politically controversial link between community empowerment and international NGOs in Cuba. Since the early 1990s foreign NGOs have played a crucial supporting role in Cuban social intervention programs, but their access to grassroots community groups has been closely controlled. Examining the interactions of foreign development agencies, state-affiliated partner organizations, and community groups opens a useful window into the state’s claim to represent and maintain stewardship over civil society. The state’s meticulous supervision of domestic international channels of contact reflects a socialist conception of civil society in which the activities of the paternal state are integrated with community interests through legally sanctioned neighborhood projects and government-administered social welfare organizations. Most international development agencies also prioritize community interests, local knowledge, and popular participation in their vision of civil society, but many also understand the concept, by definition, to signify administrative independence and autonomy from the state. Promoting this form of democratization is what earns many international NGOs the patronage of private, philanthropic, and government donors in their home countries. Those that operate in Cuba are therefore posed with the problem of satisfying the demands of their donors for projects that strengthen civil society and democratic governance while simultaneously complying with the tight regulatory requirements and administrative authority of the Cuban state.

A second, more serious challenge to the state’s claim of stewardship over civil society arises from the Castro government’s attempts to reintegrate Cuba into the world economy. Economic reforms have supported market-driven growth, but as in other countries, this has tended to prioritize commercial effectiveness over social welfare needs. The problem is particularly serious in Cuba because it directly compromises the legitimacy of the state’s claim to represent popular interests. The chapter presents four case studies (two from Havana and two from Santiago de Cuba) that reveal some of the
political and ideological tensions that arise from foreign-financed projects in Cuba and explore some of the positive and negative consequences of market-oriented development strategies.

Chapter 4 argues that the state’s ability to maintain legitimacy and authority largely depends on how effectively it draws together a diversifying social base into relationships of exchange and interdependence with its local institutions. This entails offering nonstate actors material concessions, broader administrative freedoms, and ideological flexibility in return for their political loyalty and assistance with providing social welfare services. By entering into this kind of collaboration, many community organizations have augmented their ability to protect their members’ interests while tentatively expanding relations with state and non-state organizations, ultimately strengthening their position as emerging civil society actors. The first part of the chapter discusses Christian communities, which have emerged as major players in delivering social and economic relief directly to the population, typically with financial support from overseas. With a growing base of popular support, Christian organizations are realizing long-held evangelical ambitions and beginning to show potential for political action much as they did in Eastern Europe in the mid-1980s. Key to this potential is the development of horizontal relations with allies, from domestic religious (including Afro-Cuban) congregations to foreign NGOs.

The second part of the chapter discusses the historical development of a community mutual aid organization, the Cabildo Carabali Isuana. Founded in conjunction with the Catholic Church in the early nineteenth century, the Cabildo enjoyed the legitimacy and power to represent the interests of free and enslaved black Cubans in Santiago de Cuba. After 1959 its symbolic value to the early revolutionary government as a focal point of Afro-Cuban identity and solidarity in Santiago de Cuba earned it national viability and state financial support. But officialdom also drove the Cabildo’s religious activities underground, supplanted its mutual aid functions, and visibly transformed it into a symbol of national rather than ethnic identity, complete with “The Triumph of the Revolution” as the new theme for its carnival parades. Since the early 1990s the Cabildo’s relationship with the state has transformed again, the evaporation of state subsidies resulting in a revival of its mutual aid functions and increasingly public celebration of its religious and ethnic heritage. It is unlikely that the Cabildo will assume representative capacities comparable to those it once possessed, but its contemporary experience shows that a changing political context has allowed it to develop the kinds of organizational prerequisites necessary for open civic engagement.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of a neighborhood welfare organization in Santiago de Cuba, whose combination of community-building activities, capacity to develop external linkages, and willingness to work within the prevailing legal framework have made it an effective intermediary between the central state and the local population. Although it is officially managed by the state the organization has worked actively to incorporate traditionally marginalized communities, including religious believers and homosexuals, into projects ranging from job placement to popular education. This convergence of local and national loyalties at the grassroots raises questions about the interdependence of state and society in the formation of Cuban civil society.

Recognizing and incorporating the power of grassroots social solidarity into state-led initiatives has become an increasingly critical task of Cuban development programs. Among the diverse forms that local solidarity takes, social capital embedded in religious circles of cooperation and exchange has emerged as both a potential threat and a key resource for the political leadership. Studying state engagement with religious groups therefore opens a useful opportunity for understanding the factors that consolidate and inhibit the formation of cooperative links between official and unofficial sectors, and the influence of these links on the formation of civil society. A crucial task in this pursuit is to clarify the place of Afro-Cuban religious groups in this process. As a historically enduring form of protection against oppression and racism, they harbor stronger ethnic and interpersonal bonds than other associations or groups, as well as a broader social influence. As Benítez Rojo writes, any study of a contemporary Caribbean society would be incomplete if it failed to acknowledge the profound and encompassing influence of African-based religions.

African beliefs don’t limit themselves to the worshiping of a given group of deities, but rather form an authentic body of sociocultural practices extending through a labyrinth of referents as diverse as music, dance, theater, song, dress, hair-style, crafts, oral literature, systems of divination, medical botany, magic, ancestor cults, pantomime, trance states, eating customs, agricultural practices, relations with animals, cooking, commercial activity, astronomical observation, sexual behavior, and even the shapes and colors of objects. Religion in black Africa is not something that can be separated from knowledge, politics, economies, or the social and cultural spheres; it can’t even be distinguished from history, since it is, in itself, history; we’re dealing here with a discourse that
permeates all human activity and interfaces in all practices. In black Af-
rica, religion is everything, and at the same time it is nothing, for it can’t 
be isolated from the world of phenomena or even being. Keeping this in 
mind, we can affirm that the influence of Africa upon the nations of the 
Caribbean is, in the final analysis, and in the totalizing sense that we’ve 
just spoken about, a predominantly religious one. So a scientific model 
applied to investigate Caribbean societies and to predict their movements 
and tendencies would turn out to be grossly inadequate if it were to try to 
do without the input of beliefs formed under the African cultural impact. 
(1992:159)

The chapters that follow attempt to keep this insight in focus by drawing 
attention to the elusive sources of popular energy and creative potential that 
official projects set out to harness. Their successes and failures in this objec-
tive, and their manner of going about it, provide what I hope are some useful 
insights into the way social loyalties at the grassroots are influencing pat-
terns of socioeconomic development and the evolution of civic democratiza-
tion in contemporary Cuba.

### SPIRITS IN MOTION: 
FOLKLORE AND 
FUNCTION

In May 2002, as I was nearing the end of my first stay in Cuba, I was invited 
to attend a theatrical performance of popular traditions in Santiago de Cuba. 
As with folkloric recitals in hundreds of hotels, cabarets, cultural centers, 
and nightclubs throughout the island, the spotlight focused on the most 
exotic, visually stimulating aspects of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. It 
was a night of drumming, dancing, spirit possession, and, to the fascinated 
shock of the audience, an animal sacrifice. The program for the perfor-
ance, printed in English and Spanish, noted the central importance of 
these ritual activities to the practice of Santería in Cuba. The following week 
I returned to the house of Miki Alfonso, a babalawo (priest of Ifá, a divina-
tion tradition related to Santería) and my teacher of bata drums in Havana, 
with whom I had lived for nine months. When I showed him the program 
from the performance he commented that its theatrical sketches of Santería 
deities were inconsistent with the religion’s spiritual teachings, but to my 
surprise, he also laughed and said that to get away with this, the perform-
ance directors must be adept salespeople and true abronés (literally “bas-
tards,” though used in Cuba to signify cunning).

Miki was no stranger to the folklore stage. He dealt frequently with 
foreigners, from percussion students and anthropologists to filmmakers 
and tour operators impressed with his lively explanations of Afro-Cuban 
religions. But he also had a substantial local religious following. He owned a 
set of sacred bata drums, consecrated by the renowned Pancho Quinto, and 
his house operated as a center of religious activity in Old Havana, drawing a 
wide range of relatives and friends into a network of community support. 
The ceremonial gatherings that took place there served the community both 
spiritually and materially: the pork, chicken, and goat meat used as cere-
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