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# Greening the Revolution Revisited

Farmers, NGOs and the Cuban State Kathrin Blaufuss

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.  
Department of Geography  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Durham  
January 2006

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27 JUL 2006



# Abstract

In this thesis I revisit the acclaimed transformation towards organic agriculture in Cuba. Using Lefebvre's trialectics of space, I explore how dominant representations of 'organic' agricultural space in Cuba, the so-called 'Greening of the Revolution', was created through government institutions and public policy. I further investigate the locally lived gendered realities of farmers in a selected cooperative. I argue that the prevailing imaginary of a state-led nationwide transformation needs to be deconstructed and the role of NGOs, in particular Northern NGOs, to be fully acknowledged in the creation of 'organic' agriculture in Cuba.

Northern NGOs were attracted by the romanticist environmental imagery of Cuba's green agriculture. In securing funding from donors, they have framed agro-ecology in Cuba according to their own understandings as well as needs of 'logframes', budget codes and project cycles. Northern NGOs are acting as transmission belts for Western understandings of NGO characteristics and agency. This has resulted in a re-shaping and positioning of Cuban NGO identity, creating new dependencies and tensions in the process and introducing fashionable themes, such as gender. 'Gender mainstreaming' is an outsider-driven process, as donors and Northern NGOs have requested the integration of gender into projects. Their practices neither go beyond the 'incorporation of women in the workforce', nor engage sufficiently with the gendered realities of the everyday, as I show in my case-study in a cooperative. Farmers are performing, negotiating or at times resisting the dominant 'representations of space' – i.e. the state, regulations and policies, but also – increasingly - NGO discourses and agendas/frameworks. This thesis employs empirical data collected during a 10-months of research in Cuba.

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<sup>1</sup> Derogatory name for people from *Oriente*.

Kathrin Blaufuss University of Durham January 2006

# Declaration

I declare that this thesis, which I submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Durham, UK, is my own work and is not substantially the same as any which has previously been submitted for a degree at this or at any other university.

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# List of Abbreviations

<b>AAA</b>	Agro Acción Alemán German Agro Action (Deutsche Welthungerhilfe)
<b>ACAO</b>	Asociación Cubana de Agricultura Orgánica Cuban Association of Organic Agriculture
<b>ACPA</b>	Asociación Cubana de Producción Animal Cuban Association of Animal Production
<b>ACTAF</b>	Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forestry Technicians
<b>ANAP</b>	Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños National Association of Small Farmers
<b>ATAC</b>	Asociación de Técnicos Azucareros de Cuba Cuban Association of Sugar Technicians
<b>CCS</b>	Cooperativa de Créditos y Servicios Credit and Service Co-operatives
<b>CDR</b>	Comit por la Defensa Revolucionaria Committees for the Defence of the Revolution
<b>CEA</b>	Centro de Estudios sobre América Centre for the Study of America
<b>CECE</b>	Comité Estatal de Cooperación Económica State Committee for Economic Cooperation
<b>CEE</b>	Centro de los Estudios Europeos Centre for the Study of Europe
<b>CEEC</b>	Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana Centre for the Study of the Cuban Economy
<b>CIC</b>	Consejo de Iglesias Cubanas Council of Cuban Churches
<b>CIC-DECAP</b>	Consejo de Iglesias -Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos Council of Churches Department of Coordination and Consultancy of Projects
<b>CIERI</b>	Centro de Intercambio y Referencia sobre Iniciativas Comunitarias Centre for the interchange and reference about community initiatives
<b>CITMA</b>	Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y del Medio Ambiente Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment
<b>CPA</b>	Cooperativa de Producción Agropecuaria Agricultural Production Co-operatives
<b>CREE</b>	Centro por la Reproducción de Entomofagos y Entomopatogenos Centres for the Production of Entomophages and Entomopathogens
<b>CTA</b>	Consultorios Tiendas Agropecuarias Agricultural Consultation Shops
<b>CTC</b>	Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba Trade Union of Cuban workers
<b>DECAP</b>	Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos Department of Coordination and Consultancy of Projects
<b>DFID</b>	Departamento de Cooperación Internacional Department for International Development (UK)

<b>ECHO</b>	Servicio de Ayuda Humanitaria De la Comisión Europea Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission
<b>EJT</b>	Ejercicio Juvenil de Trabajo Youth Work Service
<b>EU</b>	Unión Europea European Union
<b>FAO</b>	Organización Mundial de Alimentos Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FAR</b>	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Armed forces
<b>FCMM</b>	Fundación Cumbre Mundial de la Mujer Women's World Summit Foundation
<b>FEU</b>	Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios Federation of University Students
<b>FLACSO</b>	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales Latin-American Faculty of Social Sciences
<b>FMC</b>	Federación de las Mujeres Cubanas Federation of Cuban Women
<b>FNH</b>	Fundación de la Naturaleza y el Hombre Foundation for Nature and Man
<b>GAO</b>	Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica Organic Farming Group
<b>GDP</b>	Producto Interno Bruto Gross domestic product
<b>GENT</b>	Granjas Estatales de Nuevos Tipos New Type State Farm
<b>GVC</b>	Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (Italy) Civil Voluntary Group (Italy)
<b>IFOAM</b>	Federación Internacional de Movimientos de Agricultura Orgánica International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
<b>IIPF</b>	Instituto de Investigación de Pastos y Forraje Institute for the Investigation of Pastures and Forage
<b>INIFAT</b>	Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Fundamentales de Agricultura Tropical National Institute for the Basic Research on Tropical Agriculture
<b>LISA</b>	Agricultura sostenible de bajos insumos Low - Input - Sustainable Agriculture
<b>MINAG</b>	Ministerio de la Agricultura Ministry of Agriculture
<b>MININT</b>	Ministerio de Comercio Interior Ministry of the Interior
<b>MINFAR</b>	Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Ministry of the Armed Forces
<b>MINVEC</b>	Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation
<b>MN</b>	Moneda Nacional National Currency
<b>NAFTA</b>	Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>NGO</b>	Organización non-Gubernamental Non - Governmental Organisation
<b>ODA</b>	Asistencia para el Desarrollo Mundial Overseas Development Assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organización para la Cooperación y el desarrollo económicos Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

<b>ONE</b>	Oficina Nacional de Estadísticos National Statistics Office
<b>ONG</b>	Organización non-Gubernamental Non – Governmental Organisation
<b>PCC</b>	Partido Comunista de Cuba Cuban Communist Party
<b>PDHL</b>	Proyecto de Desarrollo Humano a Nivel Local Human Development Project at the Local Level
<b>PMA</b>	Programa Mundial de Alimentos World Food Programme
<b>PNUD</b>	Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo United Nations Development Programme
<b>PPM</b>	Pan para el Mundo Bread for the World
<b>TOT</b>	Transferencia de Tecnología Transfer of Technology
<b>UBPC</b>	Unidades Básicas de Producción Cooperativa Basic Units of Co-operative Production
<b>UE</b>	Unión Europea European Union
<b>UJC</b>	Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas de Cuba Union of Young Communists of Cuba
<b>UK</b>	Reino Unido United Kingdom
<b>UMAP</b>	Unidades Militares de Apoyo a la Producción Military Units for Production Support
<b>UN</b>	Naciones Unidas United Nations
<b>UNAH</b>	Universidad Nacional de Agricultura de Habana National University of Agriculture of Havana
<b>UNEAC</b>	Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba
<b>UNDP</b>	Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo United Nations Development Programme
<b>US</b>	Estados Unidos United States
<b>USA</b>	Estados Unidos de América United States of America
<b>USSR</b>	Unión de Republicas Socialistas Soviéticas Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>WFP</b>	Programa Mundial de Alimentos World Food Programme
<b>WTO</b>	Organización Mundial del Comercio World Trade Organisation

# List of Cuban Vocabulary

Acopio	State food procurement agency
Agromercados	Agricultural markets
Aroma Weed	( <u>Acacia Farnesiana</u> )
Bestia	Beast
Boberías	Nonsense
Bodega	Food ration store
Bodeguero	Person working in bodega
Boniato	Sweet Potato
Caballería	land measurement (1 caballería = 43.7ha)
Campesino/a	Farmer
Campo	Field, rural area, agricultural field
Casas de la Orientación y Apoyo	Houses for orientation and support
Casas rusticas	Rustic houses
Circulo infantil	Crèche
Club femenino	Feminine club
Código de la familia	Family code
Comité Central	Central Committee of Communist Party
Consejo del Estado	State Council
Consejo Popular	Popular Council
Control técnico	Technical support staff
Cooperativista	Cooperative member
Cordeles	ropes (land measurement)

**Cuota** ration/pesos (in legal terms)

**Cubanía** 'Cubanness', Cuban way of doing things

**De referencia** reference

**Dirección** Management

**Divertidos** carefree, fun-loving persons

**Economista** Controller

**Empresa** Company (state company)

**En la calle** On the street/in the public space

**En usufructo** in perpetuity

**Faros** Lighthouses

**Fincas estatales** State farms

**Ganadería** Cattle farming

**Granja** Large Farm

**Granma** Cuban national newspaper/ boat Fidel Castro returned to Cuba in 1956

**Grupo Gestor** Management group

**Guajiro/a** Farmer/peasant

**Habaneros/as** People from the La Habana Province

**Inventar** to invent (in Cuba used as: to make ends meet)

**Jabita** bag (in Cuba used for monthly perks handed out in plastic bags)

**Jefe** boss

**Junta de bueyes** Pair of oxen (for ploughing)

**Junta directiva** Board of management/steering committee

**Latifundio** Large landed estate

**Ley de migración** Migration law

**Libreta** Food ration book

**Lombricultura** worm culture (applied to convert cattle excrement to fertile soil)

**Machismo** Sexism

**Machista** Sexist

**Marabú Weed** (Dichrostachys glomerata)

**Mariposa** Cuban national flower (Hedychium Coronarium Koenig)

**Maternista** Person attending to new born calves

**Medio básico** type of housing – rent-free, but not property

**Militante** expression used for party members

**Mini-apertura** Mini-opening

**Minifundio** Small-holding

**Ministerio** Ministry

**Moneda Nacional** National currency

**Muchacho/a** Boy/girl (used as expression to emphasize)

**Nacional** National

**No es fácil** It's not easy

**Objetivo social** Social objective (states the institutions aims and objective)

**Obreros agrícolas** Agricultural workers

**Orgánico** organic (in Cuba, this expression does not bear market connotations)

**Organopónico** Raised bed, intensive urban agriculture unit

**Oriente** Eastern Provinces (Santiago, Granma, Guantánamo. Holguín)

**Pamphleteros** Paper-pushers

**Paladar** Privately owned and run restaurant

**Palestino/a** Palestinian Name used for a person coming from the Oriente

**Parcelera** Person working a small plot of land

**Periodo especial** Special period in peacetime

**Pesos** Pesos (Cuban currency)

**Pesos convertibles** convertible Pesos (Cuban - dollar equivalent - currency)

**Pinareños** People from the Province Pinar del Rio

**Poder Popular** People's power

**Por fuera** 'to the outside'/Illegally

**Por gusto** for nothing



Por la izquierda 'to the left'/Illegally

Reuniones Meetings

Revolución Revolution

Tabacalero Tobacco growing farmer

Técnicos Technicians

Términos de referencia Terms of reference

Trabajadores Workers

Vanguardia Vanguard/outstanding

Vinculación Linkage

Vinculación del hombre a la tierra the linking of man to the land

# 1. Introduction



Source: *The ecologist* 1999 29(8)

In this thesis I aim to present a particular reality of Cuba that breaks with many commonly perceived imaginaries. The image Cuba often conjures up among outsiders is one of an island state, with defined physical borders and decisive political boundaries. The state is envisioned by some commentators as an inward looking paternalistic state that shields its society from what those commentators see as potentially beneficial foreign influences - an island contained and bounded by its territoriality and a restrictive government with a fierce dictator. Others portray Cuba as the last stronghold of the communist model, as a socially just society and a model island opposing the influences of capitalism and neo-liberalism. Both groups of international observers as well as the Cuban polity itself, fall prey to the conceptualization of place politics, which they understand in terms of spatially bound processes and institutions. They invoke the assumption of a defined geographical territory 'out there' - i.e. the island - over which local actors can have effective control, can cast dominant representations and can manage as a social and political space (Amin 2004). In reality, a multitude of actors, of local, national and, in particular, international character have been and are shaping place politics in Cuba. Kirk and McKena (1999:225-226) argue that the extreme ideological positions of both Havana and, more importantly, Washington, are frequently mirrored within the majority of the literature produced about Cuba, with the result that "a complex and multifaceted reality is flattened in a simplistic way". I seek to unpack one aspect of this multifaceted reality and explore the dominant discourses concerning Cuba's 'organic' agriculture sector, which are promulgated through the channels of 'development cooperation'.



## 1.1 The 'trigger' to this research

My interest in Cuba's agriculture was prompted by the reports that were circulating internationally amongst organic interest groups, about a nationwide transformation towards organic agriculture occurring in Cuba since the early 1990s. The reports were heralding a 'Greening of the Revolution' and stated that a large proportion of farms were functioning on an entirely agro-ecological basis and that a significant decentralization was being achieved by converting state farms into co-operatives (e.g. Rosset and Benjamin 1994a). They outlined how the Cuban state responded to the politico-economic shock of the early 1990s (see section 3.2) by re-thinking its development strategy in terms of self-reliance and sustainability.

Cuban development discourse had until then closely followed the Soviet model and had subscribed fully to the 'scientific-technological revolution', as common Marxist thought was not closed to progressivist and developmentalist ideologies (Levins 1993). Triggered by the major economic crisis and loss of trading partners with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba lacked financial resources to continue its highly industrialised and external-input dependent 'green revolution' agriculture. In order to mitigate the resulting severe food shortages, a nationwide transformation to resource-conserving methods was instigated. The aim was to develop agriculture and to increase self-sufficiency in food security by drawing on local resources. Thus it was reported that the transformation to a new, low input, organic agriculture replaced the classical 'developmentalist' rationality through building on local technologies, local knowledge and popular participation (Deere 1997, Díaz Delgado 1999, Funes et al 2002, Henn and Henning 2002, Rosset and Benjamin 1994). Cuba was perceived to have committed itself to the identification of alternative, sustainable models and livelihoods through a largely state- and policy-led transformation.

These international observers and organic interest groups pointed to a state that had redefined its agricultural sector in terms of a particular notion of sustainability and organic farming, rather than awaiting a locally generated activism emerging from 'civil society'. While 'environmentalism' is often placed within social movements, lobby groups, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and more widely speaking the civil society sector, in Cuba – so they reported – it was the state that had introduced an environmental discourse. I became interested in this state-induced environmentalism in a socialist political economy and explored the

institutional context in my MA thesis, 'Sustainable agriculture in Cuba: setting the context for a nationwide transformation' (Blaufuss 2000). Based on emerging question from my MA thesis, I then thought it important to address the gendered realities that result from such a development.

I set out to establish the extent to which this post 1980s transformation had re-addressed gender and had been shaped by gender realities: what gendered environmental rights and responsibilities were emerging within the complex political space of Cuban society? In the process of co-operativisation, who is gaining access and control over environmental resources and how? Gendered, situated knowledges are shaped by many dimensions of identity and difference, and gender differences usually deepen during environmental and economic change (Jenissen and Lundy 2001). To what extent do gendered identities, roles and power imbalances inform and mould the process of transformation?

Re-visiting the agro-ecological scene in Cuba at the start of my PhD field research, it became apparent that it was less the Cuban state but rather the agencies of Cuban and Northern 'NGOs' that were dominating the conception of *the* organic field. Due to evidence gathered early on in my fieldwork and also due to issues of access (see section 2.2), I started to query what the local realities of this 'state-civil society' interplay are in the agricultural sector. The following research questions consequently emerged and are explored in this thesis.

## 1.2 Research questions

- How have dominant representations of agricultural space in Cuba been created through government institutions, public policy and their respective discursive powers?
- What role do Cuban and Northern NGOs play in the conceptualisation of those new and 'green' environmental spaces?
- What implications do the politics and actions of Northern NGOs and donors have for Northern NGO-Cuban NGO relations and for NGO-state relations?
- What dependencies and power (im)balances are created?
- How does gender feature in the production of these new NGO-generated discourses?
- What does the emerging NGO activity imply for human agency and livelihoods in the everyday?

- How do farmers engage in, re-shape and resist the dominant spaces of 'organic' agriculture in their everyday?

### 1.3 The contextual embedding of this research

These questions had emerged from my theoretical and ideological understandings of development, civil society and the state and my early experiences in the field. The project is broadly informed by the disillusionment with mainstream development: not only the failure of 'development' to deliver, but increasingly the questioning of its intentions and premises. This deconstruction is informed by the textual turn, by rising criticisms of Western rationality and claims to 'know'. These writings challenge the modernist and Eurocentric character of development itself, proposing in its place various 'alternatives to development' (Escobar 1995, Illich 1997, Nandy 1997, Rahnema and Bowtree 1997, Sachs 1992) and a post-structural discursive understanding of the development project (Crush 1995, Slater 1992). Development was thus located as a discursive field, a system of power relations which produces what Foucault (1984) calls domains of objects and rituals of truth. These critical voices were looking at civil society as a source of agents of change. They perceived civil society as comprising a multiplicity of diverse groups and organizations, such as grassroots bodies and social movements, and were looking to local synergies between economic, political and cultural actors (Álvarez *et al.* 1998).

A different concept of civil society is equally strong within mainstream development institutions and propagated through the 'New Policy Agenda' or the 'Post-Washington Consensus' (Fowler 1998). These development institutions position NGOs as central to civil society and understand NGOs as legitimate, apolitical and representative of local developments (Pietersee 2001). Both conceptions of civil society de-emphasise the role of the state and need to negotiate a state/civil society dichotomy. The notion of a role for the state outside civil society is problematic. There is an understanding where the state does not stand outside civil society (Corbridge 2001) and civil society does not necessarily stand outside state actions. It is thus necessary to understand civil society actors as a "fluid contradictory web of relations" (Townsend *et al.* 2004:872) that embrace, transcend and resist the state. NGO activity in Cuba needs to be positioned in an

understanding where NGOs are perceived as “an arena within which battles from society at large are internalised” (Fisher 1997:449 quoted in Townsend et al 2004).

In this thesis I will examine the battles fought over environmental imaginaries in the agricultural sector. I will draw on notions of post-structural political ecology, which acknowledge that nature is socially constructed, both known and historically produced through discourses, social practices and knowledges (Escobar 1996). Adams (1995) for example explores how the phrase ‘sustainable development’ has provided a means through which new institutional actors, in the form of non-governmental environmental organizations, have sought to have an effective voice in debating the shape of development in the Third World, hence extending their *power over* (Said 1983). It becomes important to understand the ways in which environmental practices, institutions and knowledges might be subverted, resisted and reformed. I will look at the means by which control of and access to environmental discourses as well as resources are defined, negotiated, and contested within the political arenas of the household, workplace, civil society and the state (Hart 1991, Peet and Watts 1996). The political ecology framework allows the exploration of a politicised environment, and the role that diverse actors play in the ‘moulding’ of that environment (Bryant and Bailey 1997). Of interest are the interfaces between farmers, civil society (in terms of Cuban and Northern NGOs) and the state, where discourses and power are produced and reproduced. These are interfaces where “institutional and regulatory spaces in which knowledge and practices become encoded, negotiated and contested” are created (Peet and Watts 1996).

I will explore these interfaces through applying Lefebvre’s trialectics of space. In his understanding, ‘representations of space’ are dominant discourses informed and shaped by ideologies and knowledge systems as conceived by planners, scientists and others proliferating a hegemonic discourse of Western science. He introduces a category called ‘spatial practice’, which is the perceived and physical world. ‘Representational spaces’ are socially produced spaces that are directly lived in an understanding of everydayness. These spaces are created through the daily routines of individuals working within the framework of sustainable agriculture: the routines through which the individuals are performing, negotiating or at times resisting the dominant ‘representations of space’. Contradictory spaces arise through the inability of a dominant space to suppress entirely the diversity and difference within its bounds. This became most evident through my work conducted in an agricultural cooperative. There, those interfaces between dominant

representations, resulting from state regulations and NGO agency, need to be negotiated by cooperativists and their families in the everyday.

#### 1.4 What to expect from this thesis: content and structure

Following this introductory chapter, chapter **two** discusses the methodological approach adopted for this research. It emphasises the epistemological stance I took and situates my work firmly in the qualitative school of thought. I also closely examine the 10 month fieldwork experience, the opportunities granted and the shortcomings which result from working in Cuba. I emphasise the serendipitous nature of the research journey and my understanding of fieldwork as a network based on interactions that were unfolding in real time. I will outline how fieldwork became both a lived experience and a socially constructed performance, which required a different conceptualisation of one's 'field'; where the notion of the detached researcher taking a bird-eye perspective is challenged.

Chapter **three** introduces some of the cornerstones that have coloured and shaped Cuba and her people and that therefore form an essential backdrop to the research described in this study. I focus in particular on the Cuban revolutionary project, ideology and the phenomenon of '*cubanía*'. I also introduce at length the Cuban equivalent of structural adjustment – the so-called 'special period in peacetime' – that dominated the 1990s and is vital for an understanding of recent changes and developments in Cuba.

Chapter **four** discusses in more depth some of Cuba's realities most relevant to the later empirical chapters. Cuba's agrarian history, before and after 1989, is closely examined and the dominant representations resulting from these adjustment policies introduced. The spaces and non-spaces of a (contested) civil society in Cuba are sketched out. I discuss conceptualisations of Cuban civil society and address civil society - state relations. I briefly point to the issue of mass organisations. I then introduce the issue of gender in Cuba, considering both the realities and conceptualisations that exist.

In chapter **five**, I outline the theoretical concepts I have drawn upon for analysing and understanding the information carried home from the field. It sets the framework within which the empirical data needs to be situated. I point briefly to the nexus of development theory, civil society and NGOs before introducing a post-structural reading of political ecology. Henri Lefebvre's understanding of the

production of space will allow an examination of processes by which environmental imaginaries are conceived, perceived and actually lived in the gendered everyday. This chapter thus relates directly to the empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter **six** re-visits the 'green' imaginary that has been built around Cuba's recent agricultural changes. It explores changes in government policies as well as pointing to the discourse that emanates from the Northern NGO scene that takes such an active interest in Cuba's agriculture. I will deconstruct the notion that 'Cuba is going green' is a state-driven process, as presented internationally, and point to the substantial influence NGOs, in particular development NGOs, had and still have on this agro-ecological movement and development.

In chapter **seven**, I explore the role and spaces that Cuban NGOs have adopted and are being pushed to accept by foreign NGOs operating in Cuba. I point to the development and growth that Cuban NGOs have undergone in recent years. Of particular interest are the foreign NGOs' conceptualisations of Cuban NGOs in terms of state-linkages, NGO identity and professionalisation. The implications of local NGO activity for the agricultural sector as well as gender understandings are explored.

Chapter **eight** examines in detail the role of foreign development actors in Cuba. I map the existing aid flows and point to the politics of these aid channels. I argue that agriculture in particular is a preferred target for subliminal political messages pushing a neo-liberal agenda.

Chapter **nine** then presents the ethnographic work I undertook in one agricultural cooperative. The thick description in this chapter provides specific evidence of how the dominant discourses emanating from interviews with state officials, NGO staff and other persons in Havana are resonating, negotiated and re-shaped in the daily life of the cooperative.

In the conclusion, I draw together the lines of investigation developed in the thesis and summarize the core arguments presented.



## 2. Engaging with the field: research journey and methodology

"Ich sehe was, was Du nicht siehst..."<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I present the epistemological basis of my research work, which is crucial for the contextual grounding and the framework in which to read and understand this thesis. Furthermore, I want to discuss ethical considerations in detail, and draw attention to issues that are pertinent to working in a socialist country, such as Cuba. I will map out the journey my fieldwork has taken, pointing to the overwhelming importance of serendipity and chance encounters as opposed to a drawing board research design. The implications as well as the nature of this have to be discussed. Some of the Cuban peculiarities that have undoubtedly shaped the journey will also be examined.

Certain features of the thesis are best briefly introduced here, although they will take more shape later in the chapter. First, I shall be using active speech in the description of my work and the writing of the narrative. Since I see myself as an active, situated participant in the construction of accounts and representations (Turner 2000), it would present an epistemological break to suggest otherwise by writing myself out of the account through the use of the passive tense. A thorough discussion of the epistemological grounding follows later in the chapter. So, secondly, does discussion of my positionality. For the moment, to any Cuban I am clearly foreign in colouring and accent, and therefore a potential threat, particularly in an agricultural area, as Cuba has experienced foreign terrorism in agricultural areas<sup>2</sup>. As a young woman student, fair in colouring, who speaks German and English, I am always something of an oddity in Cuba. Thirdly, real place names are

<sup>1</sup> Children's game: I spy with my little eye...(literal translation from German: I see something that you cannot see...).

<sup>2</sup> Cuban allegations of US biological attacks against its agriculture: 1961-1962 as part of 'operation mongoose' spreading of chemicals on sugar cane fields, causing sickness to field workers, 1962 – Newcastle disease (a disease of chickens), 1971 – African swine fever (a disease of pigs), 1979 – Sugar cane rust (a disease of sugar cane), 1979 and 1980 – Blue mould disease (a disease of tobacco plants), 1990 – African swine fever, 1996 – *Thrips palmi* infestation (a destructive plant insect pest) [Blum 1995 also [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/Cuba/Biological/](http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Cuba/Biological/) accessed 29<sup>th</sup> August 2005].

used here, as the research was approved officially. Even if fictitious names were chosen, the research location could be easily identified through the public nature of the research. Names of interviewees were however changed to names of their choosing or selected by myself. The following chart provides a schematic overview of the major events during my research journey in the field:

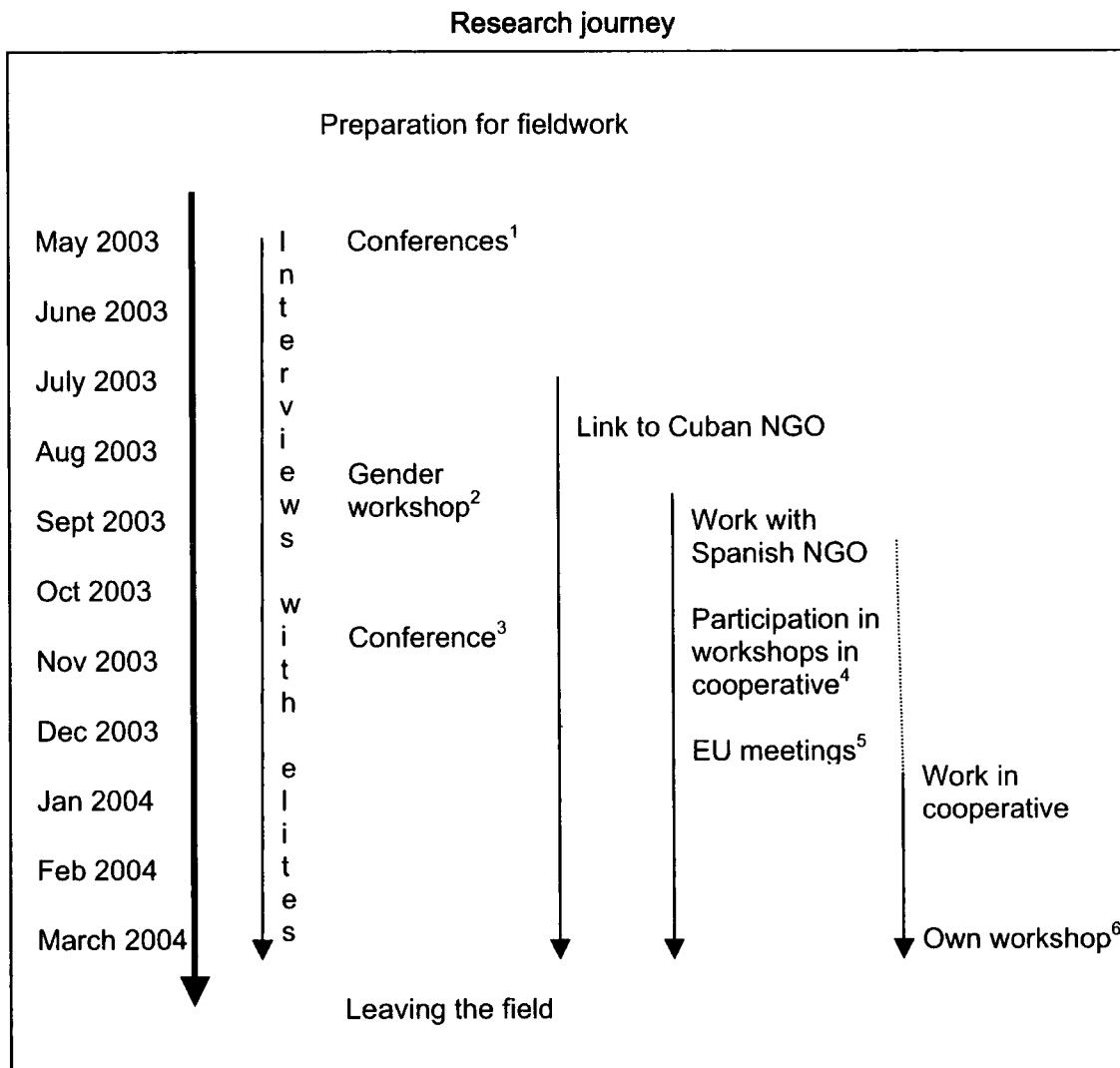


Figure 2.1

- 1: V Encuentro de la Agricultura Orgánica (27-30<sup>th</sup> May 2003)
- IV Encuentro Internacional sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (2- 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003)
- 2: Workshop hosted by Pan Para el Mundo (PPM) with their 8 Cuban counterpart organizations in Matanzas Province (16-19<sup>th</sup> September 2003)
- 3: Mujeres en el Siglo XXI; International conference (17-21<sup>st</sup> November 2003)
- 4: Since Sept 2003 participation in workshops held by the NGOs in the cooperative
- 5: Monthly meetings with the EU delegate and European NGO representatives in Cuba
- 6: Final workshop held by myself to present preliminary results in the cooperative 28<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

## 2.1 “Al fin se resuelvan las cosas” (Cuban saying: things sort themselves out in the end)

Looking back at my fieldwork (above), it almost looks as if I had always planned to conduct it in exactly that manner. The research journey seems to take shape as a linear progression from one logical level to the next in order to explore the research fields I was interested in.

I began my research with an interest in Cuba's state-promoted environmentalism that, as it was reported internationally, had led to an organic agriculture movement developed from above in a socialist political economy. I had wanted to set out to look at the Cuban environment-society interface and in particular at the local, gendered effects on lives and livelihoods of the recently adopted national discourses of sustainability in the agricultural sector. I wanted to elucidate the human, gendered responses to Cuba's changing environmental governance. What happens when the Cuban state engages critically with its environmental practices and decides upon a nation-wide project such as the organic/sustainable agriculture transformation performed in Cuba? How are new discourses shaped, performed and co-opted in power relations? What are the local realities of a certain 'state - civil society' interplay through emerging NGO activity for human activities and livelihoods in the realm of the so readily adopted 'sustainable development' discourse? The fields I knew I had to explore to address these questions were therefore:

- the agricultural sector at the official as well as the grassroots level
- the Cuban civil society debate and its actors
- the international development actors
- the farmers themselves.

The thesis was to focus primarily on questions of power, struggle and representation with regard to the environment. Connections of these struggles to the biophysical world in terms of incorporating ecological theories, were only to be made tentatively through the examination of the everyday life-worlds of farmers.

In the event, I can state that I was able to explore the different issues, gained access to most institutions and people I thought necessary and even managed to work in an agricultural cooperative that is involved in an NGO project on sustainable development. The issues explored in an array of institutions in La Habana thus neatly found their local grounding in that cooperative (see chapter 9). I am very

inclined to use a Cuban euphemism '*al fin se resuelvan las cosas*', literally translated as 'in the end things resolve themselves'. The fieldwork period in Cuba allowed me to explore the understanding of a particular 'field' that culminated in a final workshop held in the cooperative, where my preliminary results were presented and discussed. I was fortunate in having one of my supervisors, who speaks fluent Spanish, as a participant in the workshop.

At this final stage, I am looking back at bits and pieces carried back from Cuba in suitcases, bags, laptop, mini-discs, as well as in mind and body, that have resulted from 10 months fieldwork:

- 140 semi-structured interviews<sup>1</sup>, ranging from 10 min to 2h in length, of which 60 are taped (a more detailed list is provided in appendix I)
- participation in 4 international conferences
- participation in 3 national conferences
- 10 workshops, (with NGOs and within the cooperative)
- 3 EU-NGO meetings
- ethnographic work with a Spanish NGO and an agricultural cooperative
- numerous spontaneous conversations also termed narrative interviews
- my own workshop held in the cooperative
- as well as all the other everyday experiences that have significantly shaped the unfolding of my research and have constituted the actors in my fieldwork.

Prior to my fieldwork I had been able to make arrangements to be invited to Cuba by the Centro de Estudios de Economía Cubana (CEEC), a University institution that was vital for obtaining a student visa and the Cuban identity card for foreigners (which granted me a legitimate status in the country for a period of 10 months). I deemed it crucial to reside in the country officially and to lay open my research plan and strategies to the relevant institutions in Cuba. I opted against adopting the common practice of conducting my research disguised as a tourist. The nature of my research interest made it necessary to have access to formal state institutions, such as the Ministerio de la Agricultura (MINAG), to key informants in official positions, as well as to agricultural cooperatives, which are out of bounds for mere tourists. Furthermore, the practice of masquerading as tourist is debatable on ethical and moral grounds.

I was lucky to be able to arrange the start of my fieldwork in Cuba in May 2003 to coincide with participation in two international conferences hosted in La

Habana, *V Encuentro de Agricultura Orgánica* 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> May 2003 and *IV Encuentro Internacional sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo* 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> June 2003. These gave me an opportunity to make contacts as well as giving me an initial feeling for how the issue of organic agriculture is internationally portrayed in Cuba. I touched on issues that might be of interest to follow up. The conference itself became an empirical 'field' and provided useful data concerning the dominant representations of organic agricultural spaces in Cuba and how they are presented in front of an international audience. The conferences presented a microcosm of dominant spaces and networks of social relations of actors involved in organic agriculture in Cuba and internationally. It was also a rare moment where these interactions became visible in a confined geographical space.

I started interviewing experts in various research institutions, such as CEEC, sociology, and Instituto Nacional de Investigación Fundamental de Agricultura Tropical (INIFAT). I also approached state institutions such as MINAG and NGOs<sup>3</sup> such as the Federación de las Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) and soon realized that the emerging 'NGO sector' is an important actor in sustainable agriculture in Cuba. I hence decided (or the 'field' decided for me?) to shift the initial focus of my thesis to include an exploration of the role, positioning and implications of this newly emerging sector. I conducted interviews with in-country donors, mostly country embassies, EU representatives and some Northern and Cuban NGOs that work in agriculture, whether urban or rural. Through these interviews I developed good rapport with one particular Cuban NGO, Consejo de Iglesias Cubanas-Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos (CIC-DECAP), which had a specific interest in my work as the staff wanted to develop a strong 'gender mainstreaming' within their institution and their work. I was invited to participate in capacity-building workshops with other Cuban NGOs and was introduced to DECAP's Spanish collaborating NGO, *entrepueblos*<sup>4</sup> (*sic*), which is currently managing four projects in Cuba. From October onwards, I closely followed the work of that Spanish NGO and, in particular, its agricultural project in Guanabacoa, as an ethnographic study. From September onwards, I began to be invited to workshops held there. This allowed me to make contacts and build rapport as well as trust, well before the start of the actual ethnographic field study in January 2004. My presence with NGO staff supported my initial acceptance in the community, but I had to make sure that people were aware of my involvement and yet non-involvement with the

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter six for a thorough discussion of NGOs in a Cuban context.

<sup>4</sup> Meaning 'between peoples'.

NGO. I was initially concerned that I would be perceived as working for the NGO. During my work with the people of the cooperative, it soon became clear that they perceived me primarily as a student and not as an NGO worker or advocate.

In January 2004, I had my permissions and finally started daily work in the agricultural cooperative in the municipality of Guanabacoa of La Habana city. There was no legal possibility for me to actually live in the community. This meant living in La Habana and commuting, for which I needed to rent a car. While I was initially concerned about the differential power relations the status symbol of a car might radiate, I soon stopped being overly concerned. The car became a contribution to mobility for the cooperative and its members and I often found myself giving lifts to farmers who were walking between different farms and the administration building. It was always a good opportunity to chat to people in a private and informal environment. I took an active part in the cooperative's daily life, participating in voluntary labour<sup>5</sup>, *reuniones*<sup>6</sup>, and other official meetings. Between these activities, I visited farmers and their families on their farms or homes for interviews and participant observation. The only part of the cooperative's life to which I was not granted access, and which occurred behind closed doors, was the Communist Party Nucleus meetings. Since the cooperative links to an *empresa* (state company) for farming inputs and sales, some interviews were also conducted with staff members of the *empresa* 'Pecuaría-Bacuranao'. The *empresa* as such is under the auspices of MINAG. The MINAG staff member who was assigned to the work with the *empresas* could not be accessed for interviews<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2 Carefully designed research plan or serendipity?

What may read like a well planned and timed research journey was more the result of a zigzag course along which I was pushed by exactly that reality I was

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<sup>5</sup> Calls to voluntary labour are an integral part to Cuban society and occur frequently within the work-place or are called through the membership-based organizations. In the cooperative, voluntary labour was organized about once per month. In the cooperative voluntary labour was usually conducted on one farm and activities ranged from weeding (done by men) to cleaning and cooking lunch (done by women).

<sup>6</sup> Reunions are meetings held in the cooperative. They can be meetings with the executive board, or with external people, such as extension officers, research or NGO staff. Meetings were also called with the farmers at irregular intervals and I was also able to attend the General Assembly of the cooperative. The General Assembly is a monthly meeting with all cooperative members where cooperative-relevant issues are voted on (see section 9.4).

<sup>7</sup> I was consistently delayed by the MINAG staff member assigned to deal with requests from international clients whose responsibility it was to arrange an interview or meeting with the MINAG staff member attending the *empresa*.

wishing to disentangle. The sheer extent and implications of 'encounter' and 'experience' presented themselves to me in the unpredictable journey that my fieldwork took. Before leaving for the field I had carefully developed a detailed research design, with much rigorous planning, as suggested in various methodology textbooks (Esterberg 2002, Limb and Dwyer 2001, Shurmer-Smith 2002). I had pondered over my research questions and decided on appropriate methodologies. I had spent time in considering the ethical implications of my work and how it might be possible to negotiate them. Before long I had created an imaginary of my fieldwork, chosen on the drawing board according to selected themes and indicators that would help to explore my research objectives. The selection was based on my understanding of Cuba from a two month visit in 2000 for my MA thesis research '*Sustainable agriculture in Cuba: setting the context for a nation-wide transformation*' and my reading of available sources in the UK. I was aware that some scholars (e.g. Cook and Crang 1995) acknowledge that fieldwork is often messier than anticipated and I felt confident that I had made ample room in my mind to allow for enough flexibility and adaptability to deal with the messiness. However, I never doubted that I would be filling my tick boxes, maybe not to the same time schedule as that generated on the drawing board, but I was confident of remaining in charge of my research process. I had acquired the impression of an underlying 'a priori' assumption in the literature consulted that, despite having to make adjustments, I would very much remain in a position to make decisions over, for example, making contacts and achieving access (even if access were denied, it would be so in response to my enquiry). The image of a puppet master skilfully pulling on various strings to advance a story/research agenda comes to mind. After a few months in La Habana I came to acknowledge that I was just another puppet on the stage of my very own research, trying to follow a plot that was in the making in front of me. Serendipity and chance encounters became the guiding forces rather than the black diary filled with names and numbers of people I wished or deemed necessary to speak to, which now took second place. Suddenly I was on my own stage and there was no longer a distinction between research and personal space. Every day and all spaces became the unfolding stage of fieldwork which had taken me up in its midst. And I came to realize that I need to understand fieldwork as a network based on interactions that were unfolding in real time, as Reid-Henry (2004:188) writes: "My fieldwork was more a process of interaction between field actants in a network than it was a product of reflexive strategies deployed by myself as the central actor/director of the play" (Reid Henry 2004:188). Once one understands one's own

fieldwork as both a lived experience and a socially constructed performance, a different conceptualization of one's 'field' is required. I wish to quote Reid-Henry (2004:190) at length here:

“... a 'field' emerged in which I could work. This field was not a spatially discrete container I might enter into or leave but instead, developed as a milieu of sets of relations between actors (through whose networks I moved), key issues, particular projects and so on, that were brought together as interpersonal relationships, engagement with issues and other aspects of living in the field converged. To some extent, the way I lived in the field produced them in certain ways, but they also affected the way I lived in the field. Realizing that the field was in this way not entirely my doing was rather like running down an escalator.....”

...or the realization of dangling on a puppet-master's string. Hence the notions of the detached researcher with “some part held back, some intellectual 'distance'” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:115), or some recommended position of 'marginal native' (Walsh 1999:226) are challenged. The understanding of the fieldwork as network, and the ethnographer merely as an actant within this, is reflected strongly in this thesis. This requires the reading of the fieldwork as an unfolding of events where personal experience interjects with ethnographic research and writing embedded in the specific way in which the practice of fieldwork relates to the production of knowledge through intertextuality.

Some of the more important and path-breaking encounters that significantly redirected my research, particularly in its last months, arose from my connection to the Cuban NGO Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos (DECAP), working in collaboration with the Spanish NGO *entrepueblos*. A snowball effect of contacts started with a casual chance encounter with an American student in one of La Habana's urban vegetable gardens in mid June 2003. This student introduced me to a personal friend, who used to work in the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG) and is now involved with various Cuban NGOs as consultant. It was this Cuban consultant, who has extensive links with DECAP, who presented me to DECAP as a 'gender person'. Since my research focus on gender fitted well with the 'agenda in the making' of the NGO, I was considered potentially useful and allowed to work in close collaboration with DECAP. Furthermore, my positionality as a young German student supported my quest, since I reminded one project staff member of his lost love during his youth, as he confessed to me towards the end of my research. This



is one example where private interests - in this case nostalgia - became an actor in my fieldwork network, opening certain doors and closing others. I had already gained and received the authorization from the Vice-minister of MINAG to be allowed to work in agricultural areas. This had been yet another favour that had been achieved through the intervention of others on my behalf, but in this case a string was pulled for me without my prior knowledge by the father of my sister-in-law<sup>8</sup>. The Cuban NGO then lobbied in MINAG to secure my access to the particular agricultural cooperative where they were conducting a development project in conjunction with the Spanish NGO 'entrepueblos' and wanted my involvement. These encounters and chances had made it possible to collect the ample interview transcripts, grey literature etc as stated in section 2.1 page 11.

## 2.3 Knowing the social world

My research process has placed an emphasis on an understanding of the particular rather than the general, the subjective in preference to the objective (Bennett et al 2002). The research relies on the notion that the social world is something that is changing, being regularly constructed and reconstructed through the intersection of cultural, economic, social and political processes (Limb and Dwyer 2001). The concept of a subjective understanding of social reality is now seen as a more valid goal than is any search for generalizable predictions (Limb and Dwyer 2001, May and Williams 1998, Shurmer-Smith 2002,). Hence, truths are statements within socially produced discourses rather than objective 'facts' about reality. A 'real' world existing independently and situated outside the relationship between the researcher and the researched, so that it can be looked upon from a bird's eye view, can no longer be assumed. Rather, the relational construction of knowledge between researcher and the researched and their intersubjective values inform our understanding (Limb and Dwyer 2001, Scheper-Hughes 1992). Chodorow (1999) refers to this as the 'ethnographic third', where knowledge is relationally based and created through the meeting of both the informant's and the ethnographer's perspective and experience.

The social world is a contested space. It consists of competing social constructions and performances, implying that academic knowledge is partial and situated and always hermeneutic, existing only in the performance of the research

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<sup>8</sup> My eldest brother is married to Beatriz, a Cuban, and it was through this family link that my initial interest in Cuba had been aroused.

encounter. It is an embodied process of emplaced and situated knowledge, where local knowledge needs to be given precedence over grand theory (Geertz 1983). Social constructivism fails to fully acknowledge that despite being constructions, concepts, ideas, knowledges are very real as they are performed in the time and space of everyday life. Research no longer discovers a dormant 'knowledge', but knowledge evolves, transforms and progresses as the world is in a process of continuous creation, in action, and there is no conclusion to it, no end-point of ultimate understanding to be achieved (Thrift 2000). Research in this vein is a mode of inference and encounter as part of an unfolding network, of sensing and experiencing a culture of complex reflexivities, rather than simply reading and writing culture.

## 2.4 Getting to know the social world: qualitative methodologies

My research relied on qualitative methodologies, with a strong focus on ethnographic studies<sup>9</sup>. I wanted to access the subjectivities, networks and everyday realities that provide the rich texture to Cuban society. Ethnographies can provide non-replicable insight into the processes, meanings and performances that sustain and motivate social groups. These processes and meanings vary across space, and are central to the construction and transformation of society as they are both place-bound and place-making (Herbert 2000). It is through ethnographic research that insight might be gained to how "macrological social structures are reproduced and challenged through the everyday processes of everyday life" and understanding of the "intersubjectively constructed sets of meanings that code these everyday processes" (Herbert 2000:553). Ethnographic work was of the first importance for my research questions as it allows the depiction of fundamental forces that are shaping meaning and process (Betts 2002). Proponents of this approach have often struggled with accusations that it is unscientific; that it is too limited to enable generalization and that it fails to consider its inherent representational practices. According to Smith (2001), the choice of methodology in social research is not only shaped by the nature of the research questions, but is a political act and a statement about how the researcher believes the world is and should be. Qualitative methodologies are useful to explore feelings, understandings and knowledges of others, in order to gain a *verstehen* of what shapes our social worlds (May and

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<sup>9</sup> Ethnography is here understood as research based on people

Williams 1998). It can deal with the messiness and the complexities of everyday life and seeks to explore this complexity through in-depth studies, rather than through numerical and extensive methods. Feminists were among the first to criticize positivist methods and stress the potential of qualitative research to address issues of power, ideology and subjective meaning as well as challenging dominant discourses (Bailey et al 1999). They have called for methodologies (quantitative as well as qualitative) that are collaborative and non-exploitative and reflect on the unequal power relationship between the researcher and researched (Madge et al 1997, Maynard, 1998, McDowell 1992,).

One such methodology is action research, that seeks to increase the ability of the relevant community or of a member organization to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so (Greenwood and Levin 1998). Such action research is collaborative in nature and attempts to minimize imbalances of power through the active involvement of the stakeholders in all stages of the research. Action research has a strong political grounding and seeks to generate knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. It is by nature messy and often unpredictable and poses ethical challenges that are often at odds with more conventional approaches (Kobayashi 2001). Rather than attempting not to disrupt the lives of the people, one is seeking to promote social change, even if only an increase in self-realization. And the researcher is no longer able to remain in a neutral position, which in conventional research is thought to be needed to avoid contaminating the data. I saw my work in an agricultural cooperative as motivated to a certain extent by action research, as I not only wanted to address issues of gender, but was hoping to generate knowledge that would support social change in the form of an increased self-awareness for the participants, as well as providing the cooperative and NGO with a detailed gender analysis useful for future policy decisions and project proposals capable of addressing real gendered needs.

A major limitation on following truly action research principles in my ethnography in the cooperative was that my research agenda had been developed mainly in conjunction with the Spanish and Cuban NGOs, not directly with the study community. It was the expressed desire of the Cuban and Spanish NGOs to gain a gender analysis of the cooperative, in order to be able to include a well worked gender focus in their future project proposals. While my research was discussed with the administrator of the cooperative and his permission granted, individual farmers had not been given the chance to voice their opinion or actively participate

in the initial phase. This strongly reflects the hierarchical nature of decision-making as well as work relationships in Cuba. I see this experience as endemic and almost unavoidable when working through the lens of the NGO sector, as there are clear issues in terms of achieving links to the grassroots<sup>10</sup> (Hudock 1999), while working within and through the Cuban bureaucratic system, where the decision as to where a foreign researcher may work is made at high levels in the relevant Ministry. Hence my research agenda was already decided before members of the community had a stake. Throughout the period of rapport building and getting started, however, I made every effort to include farmers' concerns and issues as far as possible, such as housing difficulties and migration issues.

A final workshop held in the cooperative at the end of my work not only allowed the people living in the cooperative to discuss and verify or reject my preliminary results, but also provided a platform for women to speak in public and make their voices heard, which I had not seen at any previous workshops or meetings I attended during my 3 months work in the cooperative. The presence of a 'critical mass' of women in a mixed group, the atmosphere of legitimacy for them to be present as well as to talk about issues of their concern, enabled and empowered these women to speak (for many for the first time) in front of fellow cooperative members, some of them men, as well as outside 'experts', such as NGO officials and foreign researchers. I hope that the experience has been at least transformative, in a small way, in the sense that these women will feel the confidence to speak again at future meetings.

## 2.5 "¡Que calor hay!" Conducting interviews or gossiping?

Within my ethnographic research, interviews with elites in La Habana as well as in the cooperative have played a significant role. Just as the journey of my fieldwork was guided through coincidence and serendipity, these had further implications concerning the nature of interviews. Many textbooks on research methods faithfully list the various interview techniques possible. In order to explain to the student the differences involved in structured, semi-structured and informal interviews, these tend to get treated as separate entities. This generates an implicit either/or division and the sense that in one's own interviews one will be able to follow the various guidelines and hints given in the ample literature. Even in the

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<sup>10</sup> This will be discussed in detail in section 9.4

ethnographic literature, differences are drawn between an informal interview and mere conversation (Fetterman 1989), although most acknowledge that they merge “forming a mixture of conversation and embedded question” (Fetterman 1989:49). I argue that to be able to make such a distinction is virtually impossible, especially in an ethnographic setting, where I was no longer given the opportunity to step in and out of fieldwork, but every day and physical location had grown to be part of the stage on which I was as much an active participant as my respondents, as discussed above. Conversation flowed readily, from the sickness of a child to the appointment of a new administrator for the cooperative. During the research process we engaged in discussion of topics central to my research questions, at times instigated by my questioning, but at other times because the respondent felt the need to talk about certain issues. These crucial pieces of information were however always embedded and intermeshed with thick conversation to a point at which they can no longer be disentangled. Conversation thus becomes an integral part of the research encounter and can be understood as interpretative performance (Livingston 2004). Such research conversations require modesty, they imply the plurality of the moment in as far as the moment is experienced differently by me and by the person I am engaging with. The conversations thus need to be understood as fractured space (Massey 2004). Gudeman and Rivera (1990:4) suggest in a similar vein that “fieldwork itself is a perpetual discussion, and we propose the model of conversation as the practice of anthropology and as the activity of other cultures – which, incidentally, are surely not ‘texts’. Texts are frozen, they are conversation-stoppers that deny the continuous remaking of social life.”

What one might classify as ‘semi-structured’ interviews facilitated other learning. The most valuable information often resulted from chance meetings in the street, at conferences or in other social settings. At times the conversation would circle around lamenting the heat, but very often casual comments relevant to my areas of interest would be dropped in. I feel at a loss to classify these chance conversation, as they had neither been informal interviews, nor a fully participant observation in its more orthodox sense, but resulted often from polite, but interested conversation with acquaintances and friends in my ‘network’. These chance conversations pose specific ethical issues in terms of my positionality. While the other person was talking to me (I felt) as a mere acquaintance and friend, I always wondered whether she/he was fully aware that I was gaining invaluable insight into the workings of the issues at stake, as they themselves as well as the encounters had already become an integral part of the field-network. These chance encounters

naturally became more frequent over time, as I had come to know more people and my network came to extend to their professional and sometimes 'social' spaces. Gudeman and Rivera (1990) in their book 'Conversations in Colombia', speak of an expansion of conversation and forming of new communities. To me, the methodology literature does not adequately acknowledge the relative importance of these snippets of information and chance encounters, but rather continues to set the researcher aside, as somewhat separate to the researched and even the field, even so these boundaries tend to implode. Rather I would like to see my fieldwork, analysis and written text as a complex network enacted through a long conversation. As Gudeman and Rivera (1990:1) put it: "Good conversations have no ending, and often no beginning."

## 2.6 Exploring positionality and reflexivity

These emerging epistemologies acknowledge the non-neutrality of the researcher and the inherent power relations involved in the research process (Rose 1993). They recognise that the research process requires a more reflexive approach to enable the fieldwork encounter to address these power relations. While qualitative methods are generally able to address such power imbalances better than other methodologies, they cannot be *assumed* to be empowering in themselves and the question of the vulnerability of the researched has to be continuously acknowledged. Even though I did not desire unequal power relations, my control over circumstances and how I had been perceived in a community was most often circumscribed by others. I had to continuously negotiate my positions between friend, neighbour, partner, family member, researcher, interviewer etc. in an elitist expert setting in La Habana and even more so in the close relationships developed with people in the cooperative, where the nature of the research was to a certain degree activist, ethnographic and hence even more personally engaging. I had to carefully juggle my position between Cuban NGO, Spanish NGO, cooperative administration and individual farmers and negotiate the various expectations attached. Particularly the personal nature of the relationship that had developed with Antonio, the representative of the Spanish NGO, was on the one hand very rewarding and rich, but also posed different expectations and roles on me as a partner and researcher<sup>11</sup>. I was considered a useful eye into the 'action on the

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<sup>11</sup> The issue of partners during fieldwork is discussed by Cupples (2002).

ground' and 'real issues' in the cooperative, that Antonio would be unable to grasp, but had a strong interest in, as a result of his empathy with the farmers. These expectations and my sense of obligation and reciprocity to the support received from both NGOs to conduct my research, triggered numerous ethical dilemmas. How far is such obligation morally and ethically binding while pursuing a research project? Is it different in a context where authorisations are difficult to obtain, where there might be political risks attached? Does that increase my moral obligation and when do I undermine my independent researcher status, in so far as one can actually be independent?

Was I to advise Antonio to intervene to redirect a course of action when, as I saw it, injustice was being done to the farmers and the project's progress was going to be affected? Did farmers perceive in me a justifiable means to communicate their worries with the hope that some action would follow? These decisions were left to my discretion of what to tell, based on careful reflection and positioning in my own moral grounding. I had to decide when to remain silent to avoid jeopardizing my own position in the cooperative or that of the Cuban and Spanish NGOs, which had supported my access. I felt the burden of the balancing act. Wolf (1996) calls this the feminist dilemma of fieldwork, i.e. the power often displayed in contradictory, difficult and irreconcilable positions for the researcher.

In the conclusion I shall refer to the issue of leaving the field (see section 10.7). Leaving is a methodological imperative (Maines et al 1980 in Kindon and Cupples 2003). Methodology books focus largely on the preparation of fieldwork, yet fewer actually give you valuable support while in the field and hardly any sources can be found that deal with the theoretical, political and practical issues of leaving the field (Esterberg 2002, Kindon and Cupples 2003). This is despite arrival and departure being intrinsically connected and one bearing implications for the other (Maines et al. 1980 in Kindon and Cupples 2003).

A high degree of reflexivity was required in the research encounter to address these power imbalances and ethical dilemmas, which forced me to reflect vigilantly on my own positionality. I recognise however that indulging in an obsessive self-reflexive hermeneutics could have threatened the research project as the positioning of the value laden researcher brings dangers of self-centrism (Scheper-Hughes 1992, Shurmer-Smith 2001, Smith 2001,). Geertz goes so far as to argue that self-reflexivity now unfortunately tends to be viewed more as a means of establishing authority than visualizing how alternative worlds might be imagined and made (Geertz 1988). Gillian Rose (1993, 1997) considers the limits of subjectivity

and acknowledges that there is always the inexplicable unknown self. One often falls into the fallacy of correlating increased reflexivity with increased transparency and the subsequent notion of getting closer to the truth (Dewsbury et al 2002).

## 2.7 Ethical dilemmas in the narrative: representing or presenting?

The production of knowledge, especially in the light of post-colonial critiques, gives rise to a crisis of representation, especially when trying to give a voice to 'marginalized groups' (Parr 2001). The crisis arises from two dilemmas, firstly the unequal power relationship as the researcher interprets the lives of others and portrays 'whose truth' (Mohammad 2001) and a more epistemological question about the extent to which interpretation is actually possible, resting on the thought that all interpretations are fictional representations and embodied. I needed to consider how to write and speak the voices, the texts produced and the performances witnessed in an environment not familiar to myself; a cross-cultural setting (Mullings 1999). I had to deal and work with this social and cultural privilege to interpret 'the other', while trying to limit unequal power relationships and having been just one part of the wider network. "While the *empirical* work of knowledge production may be shared with others (allowing other voices to have a say for example), the *conceptual* work of (the *way* those voices, relationships, trends, and things are put together) remains almost solely that of the author at the point that that knowledge is conveyed to the (largely metropolitan) world" (Reid-Henry 2004:195 emphasis in original). Questions have been raised as to whether this [representation] is ethically justifiable, especially as the researcher's knowledge will enter into the shared pool of wider knowledge used and may be adopted by others for purposes which are unintended by me.

The question remains as to how to demonstrate the necessary 'rigour' or credibility in one's results emanating from fieldwork based on qualitative methodologies (Baxter and Eyles 1997). The dimensions of self-reflection such as responsibility and honesty in the research process and in the presentation of one's results are paramount. My own confidence in my field-data (see section 2.1 page 11) and respective research findings was established through the rigorous application of evaluative criteria. As will be apparent in ensuing chapters, I made use of a variety of methods, to enable data triangulation. Participant observation, with its conversational part involving talking/conversing with people on a face-to-face



basis, was coupled with in-depth interviewing and with textual analysis of grey literature. All three methods did not always directly address the same research question, as the nature of the research questions and the respective methodology would not permit this, but a considerable overlap did occur and I was able to check the reliability of specific sources with care. Interviews with farmers crosscut those with officials, academics and key informants, and vice versa. Allowing the interviewees to speak out from the page through direct quotations can yet again ensure certain credibility, even if this needs to be embraced with a certain caution. Using quotations un-reflected can easily slip into anecdotal description and a certain implied representativeness of such accounts (Silverman 1993). It is also argued that long field-seasons develop rapport with the respondents and/or enable deep understandings of the research situation (Baxter and Eyles 1997). It is undeniable that any shorter stay in Cuba would have yielded a more limited understanding of the country than I have at present, but it would be pretentious to claim that I am now in the possession of an extensive understanding of the idiosyncrasies of Cuba and the Cuban people. Often enough I was favoured with the joke that even Cubans themselves, having lived their entire life on the island, are unable to grasp Cuba. Whenever possible I did try to re-visit interviewees to verify previous statements. This occurred most often in an informal setting to avoid suggesting that I had not believed them the first time round. Towards the end of my work in the cooperative, I held a workshop with people living in the cooperative and those with whom I had been working the past 3 months, as mentioned above, so as to present my preliminary results for public debate, discussion and verification.

Within nonrepresentational theory, representation is not so much seen as a representation of 'voices' but the construction of new ideas (Shurmer-Smith 2001) and as a new performance in itself, which rests surely on the previous performances, but is not a simple attempt to represent and interpret the foregoing. It is a re-working and a new performance. In this thesis I attempt to write an ethnography that acknowledges that the representation can never be equal to the actual events it tries to capture. "Non-representational theory takes representation seriously; representation not as a code to be broken or as an illusion to be dispelled. Rather, representations are apprehended as performative in themselves: as doings" (Dewsbury et al 2002:438). These doings can only ever try to be 'good enough' (Scheper-Hughes 1992). "If I did not believe that ethnography could be used as a tool for critical reflection *and* as a tool for human liberation, what kind of perverse

cynicism would keep me returning again and again to disturb the waters of Bom Jesus da Mata?" (Scheper-Hughes 1992:28).

The social sciences harbour a vivid debate on presentation and representation, but few scholars have taken the debate beyond issues of representation and presentation to a political argument, where texts are fully acknowledged as weapons in a battle for ideologies, change and transformation (Brettell ed. 1993) and the writing of an ethnography becomes a highly political and constitutive act (Dudwick and de Soto 2000). In my writing, I have to carefully consider the potential impact of ethnographic representation on the field community, which goes well beyond issues concerning anonymity and confidentiality. I have to consider the potential for appropriation and manipulation of my work by factions inside and outside the community, the state and international politics (Dudwick and de Soto 2000), which becomes particularly serious in a society living under acute political conflict, threat and past experiences of terrorist acts including within the agricultural sector. I am aware of the dangers of becoming a resource in ongoing struggles internally as well as externally, or of causing physical harm by providing information to militant terrorist groups. I need to negotiate closely in the text whether I am finding a bridge or reinforcing cultural suspicions fuelled by remnants of ideological cold war speak. The extent to which the text will be read under distorted and mistaken assumptions about a Cuban socialist society, as Sampson and Kideckel (1989) experienced with their work in Romania during cold war times, is however beyond my control. During the writing process, I find myself negotiating the possible readership. Could it do harm if in the hands of militant terrorist groups? How will it impact "when they read what we write" to use Brettell's (1993) book title? I have taken steps in my presentation of the narrative to avoid harm by avoiding certain details, especially those that could lead to the identification of individual persons and locations. I shall also consider placing a temporary ban on free access to the thesis.

## 2.8 "Are you a spy?" Ethical considerations in a socialist country

Anthropologists engaged in post-socialist countries have identified a specific 'something' that is peculiar to research in these countries, which stems from their socialist past (Barsegian 2000, Brown 2000, de Soto and Dudwick 2000, Dudwick 2000). Hence I needed to ask, is there maybe also something peculiar to

geographical research in a socialist country, especially in conducting ethnographic research. As most of the socialist block had remained relatively inhospitable to Western scholars (Barsegian 2000), accounts of ethnographic research and thick discussions of the implications of research in a socialist setting are few (Beck 1993, Hann 1987, 1993, Kideckel 1997 a, 1997b, Sampson and Kideckel 1989).

Fieldwork in Cuba shares many commonalities with fieldwork in any socio-political and cultural context. Many of the issues which have been discussed above are valid and vivid implications for any research and research location. But there is more to fieldwork than the field worker (Nash 1975) and all research is shaped by its specific time-space location. In Cuba this is particularly coloured by an extended cold war politics, most prominently US-Cuba relations and their respective ideological baggage. I needed to ask whether there were ethical considerations I had to frame distinctively due to that legacy?

Thoughts and concerns about claims to the existence of a Cuban Stasi<sup>12</sup>-like apparatus accompanied my journey throughout. Never did I actually witness or become subject of politically motivated surveillance or did accounts reach me of friends and acquaintances whose liberties had been infringed. Nevertheless, not even the Cuban government denies the existence of political prisoners and the international press repeatedly reports on them<sup>13</sup>. For Cuba, these political prisoners are mercenaries in allegiance with the USA and their imprisonment is hence justified. For me, having grown up and been educated in a Western understanding of democratic rights and liberties and being exposed to numerous accounts on Stasi-action in Eastern Germany prior to 1989, this official justification sits somewhat uncomfortably in one's stomach. But was I on this account, to avoid working in Cuba, to make a political statement? I chose to work in Cuba notwithstanding, maybe for the pragmatic reason that worse infringements of human rights are to be found even where research is regarded by academia as more acceptable. The worst human rights abuse currently occurring on the Caribbean island of Cuba is, after all, at Guantánamo Bay, a United States dependency.<sup>14</sup> Under a stringent philosophical application of ethics, it is arguably foul play to justify one's course through a relativism of two wrongs. In reality, however, this is not easily avoided and it is necessary to engage with Cuba through a critical, but constructive dialogue. Maybe

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<sup>12</sup> *Stasi* was used to depict the East German state security system, which was used for the suppression of what was considered dissident acts. Excessive observation, manipulation and control are linked to this system.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4361991.stm>,  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3495075.stm> [accessed 30th August 2005].

<sup>14</sup> Guantánamo Bay has been under US rule since the Platt amendment of 1902.

due to this unsolvable political dilemma, I chose not to extend my responsibility in ethical judgments beyond issues of immediate concern for my research. I am unaware whether there are political prisoners from the cooperative, MINAG and other institutions I worked with, as I did not ask. My major concern was to guarantee that my actions and activities would not cause any difficulties for my interviewees and myself. I tried to mitigate risk, by avoiding potentially incriminating questions and seeking to ensure confidentiality wherever possible.

The issue of confidentiality and anonymity was difficult to negotiate. Whenever explained to the respondents at the start of an interview or conversation, it was understood by the respondents as if I was wanting to venture on illegal terrain or assumed that the respondent was hiding something. Rather than generating a sense of confidentiality and trust for the respondent, it often caused more distress and certainly mistrust in me as a researcher and in the interview process. This experienced was shared with other foreign researchers currently working in Cuba (Kobayashi pers. comm. 2003, Krull pers. comm. 2003). Hence, I soon no longer talked about confidentiality when I thought it would arouse suspicion, but treated all respondents automatically with the highest level of anonymity unless the respondent explicitly stated that they wanted to be named. I was aware of the implications this might have had in terms of information trusted to my notebook, but I am confident that, certainly towards the end of my work in the cooperative, sufficient rapport and trust had been established that even a verbal granting of confidentiality and anonymity would not have affected the conversations and information readily provided.

The building of trust and clear positioning of my intentions were crucial to my fieldwork. While sowing lettuce seeds in nursery pots and chatting away, Amanda suddenly asked me, in all earnestness, whether I was a spy. I could not have been more puzzled. I had already spent a week with her, during which she had entrusted me with what I considered to be sensitive information and had allowed me to openly observe her activities, many of them semi-legal or prohibited. It was my last day with her and this question emphasized for me the sheer implications of doing fieldwork in Cuba. Other people were concerned whether I was going to plant a plague in the garden as an act of terrorism, or why I had such a vivid enthusiasm for Cuban agriculture and its newly emerging technologies. Some respondents surely will have remained suspicious for the entire course of my fieldwork.

Government recognition of me as a student bestowed on me a 'Cuban passport for foreigners', which granted me a legitimate status and verified that some

institution had taken responsibility for my actions, that I had been cleared by higher authorities. It served as an entry passport to many institutions where I would otherwise not have been granted access. It often reassured the respondent and at times established a certain level of trust. Scholars (De Soto and Dudwick 2000, Nordstrom and Robben 1995) have noted that for fieldwork in socialist countries “considerable limits and/or monitoring [exist] particularly for graduate students who are unlikely to have long-established contacts or demonstrated an ‘objectiveness’ in research practice that might assuage suspicion” (quoted in Reid-Henry 2004: 189).

My institutional affiliation to Centro de Estudios de Economía Cubana (CEEC) and that institution’s contacts with other gatekeeper institutions proved to be a help but also a hindrance. With hindsight, an affiliation to the Agrarian University with ample links to the agricultural sector would have facilitated my fieldwork much better. As it was, I only managed to obtain authorization to work in agricultural areas through the personal intervention of a friend of the Agricultural Minister, who happened to be the father of my sister-in-law.

I had signified myself as a “gender person” and hence had constructed a particular research path. When my explorations showed that I needed to focus more on the emerging NGO sector as players in the ‘new’ agriculture in Cuba, I was presented at times with difficulty or suspicion as to why I was meandering into a topic not perceived as connected directly to gender. At times being the gender student had favourable outcomes, as I was officially perceived to be working in a potentially less politically sensitive topic, but at other times it increased the difficulty in accessing informants.

I am committed to making a difference, to encouraging and supporting social change, if my research is to have meaning. Thus I do not merely see research as creating understanding, but acknowledge its potential to address social inequity. Since I position my work loosely within the realms of action research as discussed above, there are serious ethical contradictions and demands of ethical positionality (Kobayashi 2001). I cannot claim neutrality or even non-intervention. Even the researcher who claims neutrality will do so in vain, as he or she will inevitably bring consequences to the people whose lives he or she touched, if merely as a memory. One cannot claim non-interventionism. However, the researcher can often have some influence on how this interventionism occurs. Noblit and Engel (1992) emphasize the ‘moral imperative’, which recognizes that the subjects’ lives are multifaceted, interconnected, contextually situated and deeply meaningful. This implies a high degree of sensitivity to the subject’s needs, but at the same time

recognizes that these are changing according to time, place and group. Ethical standards are not necessarily seen as fixed principles that guide research actions, but are seen as the ontological starting point (Kobayashi 2001). This became evident already in earlier parts of this chapter, where issues such as reflexivity, positionality, representation and especially the inherent power imbalances have been discussed. However there are further ethical considerations that had to be closely followed during my research actions. They formed around issues such as participation, consent, confidentiality and privacy, reciprocity and collaboration as well as cultural sensitivity, avoidance of detachment and empathy (Miles and Huberman 1994, Valentine 2001), some of which became particularly complex due to the socialist setting I was working in.

## 2.9 Obstacles and Shortcomings

The serendipitous nature of my fieldwork with its multiple actants and the loss of authority over my research process implies that there remain many paths that I was not able to explore in depth. Some doors remained firmly shut and pushed me to follow different directions in the research process. Some of them are no longer directly identifiable, but all major and minor ruptures and obstacles in the path had caused the re-orientation of the research journey and re-configured the network.

As already mentioned briefly above, the issue of trust is not to be underestimated, especially in a country that sees itself under siege from a super-power and has suffered various economic, political and terrorist blows. Hence, foreign researchers are not necessarily invited with open arms to wander over the island and gain information for the advancement of their own careers or to be used as information that will eventually be turned against Cuba. One Cuban scholar stated during an international conference<sup>15</sup>: 'there are four types of foreign researchers that come to Cuba: those that have good intentions, but they can be either weak or strong academically; and those with bad intentions, that can equally be academically weak or strong. You never quite know, who you let into your backyard.' Cuba has every intention of engaging academically sound researchers, who think favourably about the Revolution, to work in Cuba in order to disseminate their research findings amongst the international community. However, for researchers with less standing who have not yet established a track record of

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<sup>15</sup> *Mujeres en el Siglo XXI*; 17-21<sup>st</sup> November 2003.

publications about Cuba, the entry to Cuba and Cuban research community is more difficult. Cuba is particularly unhappy to have foreign researchers roam rural areas, which is partly explained by the history of terrorist attacks against the agricultural sector (see footnote 2 in section 2), but also by the political historicities of the ideological importance of the 'rural'. The rural continues to be seen as the cradle for the Revolution, but also the field where counter-revolutions were harboured in the 60s. The relative weakness of the social sciences in Cuba further inhibits the understanding by bureaucrats of this kind of academic research. This, although it applies equally to rural as well as urban settings, raises more suspicion if research is intended in the rural sector.

I did not manage, for example, to gain access to Cuba's private cooperatives. The authorization of Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP) would have been required for such access. A string of plausible and possible reasons for my exclusion could be adduced, but the truth lay beyond my knowledge and I can only speculate. It would have been a politically sensitive issue to have a foreigner, whose real intentions were difficult for ANAP to gauge, living and working for an extended period of time in a rural cooperative. The qualitative nature of my research, together with my insistence that a short visit of 3 days would not be sufficient, raised certain doubts, especially as in-depth qualitative methods are not yet widespread even in the social sciences in Cuba. From a Cuban perspective, the question remained why a foreign student would want to spend the extended period of 8 months in a cooperative, if not to gain detailed information that could easily be turned against them in hostile propaganda, fed to exile Cuban terrorist groups who have a history of targeting the agricultural sector, or even used directly in trying to subvert the farmers in the cooperative through subtle political indoctrination. That may have been a risk too high to bear for ANAP, and a risk that they could not mitigate by any careful screening of my personality. They opted to deny me access. One consequence of the firm 'no' from ANAP was that my formal links in CEEC thought it unwise to use informal contacts to set me up in a private cooperative and withdrew their active support in facilitating access for me. It was through the contacts I made personally with local and Northern NGOs that I was finally able to gain access and work in a state agricultural cooperative.

Whenever one story is told, many others remain unspoken and the one told becomes the only existing truth. The various obstacles that presented themselves during my fieldwork had in themselves become actors who were actively (re)directing my journey. Whether it was through a missing stamp on an official

letter, or the inaccessibility of certain data, whether mistrust or lack of resources, these obstacles effectively closed certain doors and forced me to find doors which might not be locked and where entry might be granted. However, there inevitably remained many doors that could not even be tried for entry permission. Some of these would have extended the 'field' and network considerably and I will list a few below:

I think the work would have benefited from a comparative study of a cooperative that had a different NGO-donor relationship. A large project with EU money in collaboration with a Cuban mass organization would have been most interesting. Limitations on time as well as access prevented such a study. More time could have permitted enquiry into the project work conducted in a nearby state farm, where a large EU-funded project was underway through the auspices of a German NGO in collaboration with the Cuban counterpart Asociación Cubana de Producción Animales (ACPA). It would further be interesting to explore the different nature of collaboration in development projects when the funding Northern NGO has no representation in the country. Does this allow more flexibility in the development of discourses, or less?

I would have liked to include a more upward link into my ethnographies, whereby the *empresa* and MINAG could also have become subjects of a detailed ethnography. This would have allowed me to explore in detail the networks and linkages these institutions have with foreign and national NGOs and, in particular, the farmers.

There were limitations in prying into the more intimate intra-household issues. This resulted in shortcomings in addressing the underlying gendered power networks to adequate depth. I recognize that this poses a real limit to claims made of working with a feminist framework.

And of course on a more personal level, I would have liked to continue the relationships and friendships that had been forming with many individuals. I would have liked to deepen the growing friendships through the trust bestowed upon me by the people in the cooperative, where contact had gone beyond the minimal rapport often established for working relationships. I had accompanied the joys and worries of these farmers for three months and had begun to build friendships beyond a researcher-subject link. I would have liked to spend more time with the people in the cooperative to follow up issues raised at the final workshop and to explore more on the transformative nature this workshop might or might not have had. And I strongly felt that I had an ethical commitment to do so.



The chapters which follow are the outcome of the information collected (see section 2.1 page 11), using techniques and methodological approaches outlined above.

### 3. Understanding Cuban realities: background and context

"Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams"  
(Yeats 1962, cited in Kapcia 2000)

In this chapter I aim to provide a broad context; a textured backcloth identifying some of the cornerstones that have shaped Cuba and her people within which the empirical work and results can be placed. This chapter has not been easy to write, as it relies on secondary literature laden with the particular positionalities of its respective authors. While my fieldwork experiences surely colour my reading of these texts, I have insufficient engagement with their respective arguments to accurately gauge the reliability of their claims. For decades now, the Cuban Revolution has provoked passion and controversy and continues to do so, more strongly since the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe (Azciri 2000). The bulk of literature from within, on and about Cuba is highly emotive and tends to emerge from either side of the ideological divide, often dwelling on inflated stereotypes. The Cuban Revolution - and particular its continuity- has become the source of strong ideological disputes, reinforced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolving of the socialist block. A passionate binary driven either by bitterness and ideologically driven opposition, or by blind loyalty and enthusiasm, lives in and is perpetuated by the literature about Cuba. Hence, writing my account of present day Cuba and its historical, economic and social trajectories becomes in itself a political process of positioning, of taking sides. It becomes an attempt to present both the hegemonic and alternative narratives. The resulting text relies on a selection process that is dependent on my choice of inclusion and exclusion. In an account of this nature it is also easy to fall prey to a narrowly conceived structuralism, which I aim to avoid.

Certain themes have been appropriated by the respective ideological camps. The 'anti-Castro' group focuses most closely on questions of democracy and human rights, condemning Cuba as a totalitarian or fascist state, ruled by a dictator, whose people are living in a constant oppression. They point to the absence of a thriving civil society, freedom of speech, free press and multi-party state. They are quick to

point at failures of the state in bringing about racial and gender equality, despite those having been specific goals of the Revolution and government. The 'pro-Fidel' writers by contrast dwell on the achievements Cuba can note in terms of social infrastructure and human development. This is particularly valid for the health and education sectors, where Cuba ranks highest among Latin American countries (see section 3.2 footnote 10).

These binaries are locked in their positions and the points of dialogue are faint, very much resembling the deadlock of Washington, Miami and La Habana. Constructive engagements with the idiosyncrasies and complexities of Cuba and Cubans are few and get easily co-opted or coerced. Too often the Cuban Revolution has been misunderstood, resulting from an over-reliance on *a priori* assumptions based on theories derived from European socialism, Latin American authoritarianism or revolutions, Western political structures and systems or even theories of revolution in general (Kapcia 2000). The prism of their own experiences and national contexts shapes the tendency to see and react to Cuba by those who justify everything Cuba does, as much as by those who reject Cuba out of hand as 'totalitarian' (Hernández 2003).

### 3.1 The Cuban Revolution and Cuban socialism

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and European socialism more than a decade ago, scholarly, journalistic and polemic texts have all predicted the imminent collapse of the 'Cuban Revolution'<sup>1</sup>. The phenomenon of the survival of the present regime and its longevity has become an issue of vivid debate and academic research (Blackburn 2000, Kapcia 2000, Saney 2004). For some, the transformations -or lack of them- during the past decade in Cuba are just another cycle in what is perceived as a zigzag course with frequent policy switches and changes of directions within the revolutionary project. It is debated whether these frequent changes of direction are due to the behaviour Cuba displays when acting on geopolitical matters. Cuba was and is situated, inevitably, in a global economic and political context that indirectly shapes the Revolution's character socially, economically and politically. Alternatively, the policy shifts observed are attributed to the cynical search of legitimacy by an ill-conceived revolutionary project that seeks its survival by whatever means.

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<sup>1</sup> In texts on Cuba, the term 'Revolution' does not only signify the singular event in history in 1959, but also stands synonymously for the processes in the decades after.

Many historians identify distinct phases in the revolutionary trajectory (Amaro 2000, Cole 1998, Kapcia 2000, Suchlicki 2002). The 'history by phases' approach is tempting because it illustrates the contradictions that have characterised the whole revolutionary process<sup>2</sup> by carving out periods, hegemonies and directions. It can, however, also serve to complicate more than explain, since the categorization of each phase is countered by apparently contradictory evidence at each turn (Kapcia 2000). One has to bear in mind that such an approach creates unnecessarily clumsy categorisations and overlooks the inevitable overlapping of characteristics for each period. The boundaries of each period are very fuzzy.

The first post-revolutionary phase is usually identified around the years 1959-1962, and is also termed the 'independent path model' (Amaro 2000). Analysts claim that this period was characterised by political pluralism, liberalism, idealistic spontaneity or even a romantic anarchy displaying developmentalist economics and a fragile and uncertain relationship with the United States (Cole 1998, Kapcia 2000). No single group had total hegemony over the political discourse, despite Fidel Castro's "26<sup>th</sup> of July movement<sup>3</sup>" being one of the most popular and charismatic. During these early years, the Revolution seemed to defy all categorisations and was celebrated as a "Revolution without a blueprint', a Communist Revolution without Communist Party, a socialist Revolution in the underdeveloped 'backyard' and a nationalist revolt against both imperialist United States in the neo-imperialists Soviet Union" (Kapcia 1996:247). The years 1961 and 1962 saw an increasing political radicalisation with strong mobilizations that ensured a deeper process of political and social change. Greater economic centralisation commenced and agrarian land reforms were put in place. Emigration of the middle-class, a dramatic break with the United States, and the development of tentative links to the Soviet Union also occurred during these early years. The following years until 1970 seemed to display uncertainty about external alliances and internal political configurations and were further identified by a centralized pragmatism as well as an economy that was increasingly framed in terms of a moral obligation to support Revolutionary goals, exemplified through the 1970 sugar harvest. The

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<sup>2</sup> Important in an understanding of Cuba's history is the perception of the Revolution as a process rather than a 'system' (Pérez 1988, Kapcia 2000).

<sup>3</sup> The name stems from the first up-rising against Batista's regime on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1953 with an attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Many of the revolutionaries had been killed, Fidel Castro arrested, sentenced to prison and later exiled to Mexico, from where he organised the Revolution to start in the mountains Sierra Maestra in the eastern provinces of Cuba. Against popular belief, Fidel Castro did not belong to the communist party and in fact eyed its members with suspicion until the early 60s, some years into the triumph of the Revolution.

failure of the harvest forced the country into deep discussions and a five-year period of debates on the political economic system. The period 1975 to 1985 was marked by a coherent institutionalisation, standardisation and consolidation of the political structure, economic policy in the form of centralized planning and external relations. The latter years of the 80s, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, was marked by renewed debates, known as the 'rectification of errors campaign'<sup>4</sup>. Discussion about the implications of ideological certainty emerged from the rectification of the errors process and internal debates about party economic policy were conducted. The latest period starting from the 1990s was declared the 'special period in peacetime'<sup>5</sup> and is characterised by a dramatic economic crisis triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and intensified by the tightened embargo put in place by the USA (see section 3.2).

For some these continuous policy shifts reflect the weakness of the Cuban project, of its incoherence and lack of vision (Amaro 2000). Others (Kapcia 2000) identify a certain pattern or element of continuity with periods of strong policy certainty followed by intermittent periods of debates marked by ideological introspection. A cyclical pattern emerges where crisis leads to debate to certainty until the next crisis. "Thus what seems from the outside to be in perpetual state of flux, change and uncertainty in the Revolution may rather be seen as the continuing inevitable competition between discourses over the agreed alternative project that has been offered by a revolutionary ideology that was counter-hegemonic before 1959 and subsequently (after 1959) aspired to be truly hegemonic" (Kapcia 2000:19). As Azciri (2000) notes, there was a historic progression starting in the 19th century that culminated in the 1959 Revolution. Ideas such as nationalism, socialism, anti- imperialism and social justice were political and social objectives sought-after and fought for before Fidel Castro. A thinker most prominent in this arena is José Martí, who is celebrated across the ideological divide by Cubans in Cuba and in exile in Miami<sup>6</sup>. Kapcia's (2000) interpretation of the historical events

<sup>4</sup> 'Rectification of errors campaign' begun in 1986. This epoch was marked by a public review of Cuba's acceptance of the Soviet model of 'real socialism', as the early 1980s displayed a slowing of the economy, stagnation in public participation and interest, the occurrence of social problems etc (Hernández 2003). The political as well as social impacts of the process of the rectification campaign are considered significant, because public discussions were held throughout the country. These debates expressed themselves formally in the third and fourth Cuban Communist Party Congresses in 1986 and 1991. The discussions held around the document known as the Call to the Fourth Party Congress were particularly large-scale, public and, to a degree innovative (Hernández 2003).

<sup>5</sup> This will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> It is curious how this figure gets appropriated by both sides as their political as well as ideological forefather and idol.

and the phenomenon of the Revolution and particularly its survival is what he terms '*cubanía*', a Cuban way of doing things, a Cuban ideology, a Cuban nationalism and patriotism that is central to the understanding of the Cuban Revolution and the relatively high – often to the surprise of outsiders - support by the people for the Revolution and its leader.

One other very critical element of continuity and probably one of the most obvious and internationally recognized as well as politically exploited is the domination, survivability and popularity of Fidel Castro himself. It is not surprising that the Cuban Revolution is often equated directly, in particular by opponents, with him alone. While there is little doubt that Fidel's political thought and leadership were and are central to the Cuban Revolution, his role as sole actor and bearer of ideas is contested (Azicri 2000, Cole 1998). One cannot doubt that at critical moments and for crucial developments of long-term significance to the Revolution, or major ideological shifts, Fidel Castro's approval takes centre-stage, but there is little evidence that these decisions are Fidel Castro's alone. Kapcia (2000) instead suggests that there is evidence that, particularly in periods of debate, consensus emerges from discussions led in wider circles.

### 3.2 The 'special period in peacetime' and Cuba's structural adjustment

Castro's leadership featured prominently during the 1990s to buffer Cuba against the most radical political and economic transformations experienced since 1959. Cuba's affiliation with the superpower Soviet Union had provided essential economic and military assistance. With Soviet reformist concepts of '*perestroika*'<sup>7</sup> in the mid 1980s, and the subsequent '*glasnost*'<sup>8</sup> when the Soviet Federation began to crumble and was formally dissolved in 1991, Cuba had to face the demise of its relationship with the East. The Cuban government firmly opposed '*perestroika*' and '*glasnost*' as 'capitalist' and 'counter-revolutionary'. As a consequence, Cuba was isolated economically and ideologically since external trade relations had amounted to about 88.5% with the socialist block and 70% with the USSR alone in 1987. Sixty-three percent of sugar, 73% of nickel, 95% of citrus fruits and 100% of electronic goods were exported to socialist countries in 1987, while Cuba imported 63% of its foodstuffs, 86% of raw material, 98% of petroleum or oil, 80% of machinery and technical equipment and 74% of manufactured goods from the same set of countries

<sup>7</sup> Russian for: re-structuring

<sup>8</sup> Russian for: openness

(Carranza Valdés 1996). Due to the absence of trading partners, as well as worsening terms of trade in international markets, Cuban import capacity dropped overall from \$US 8.139 billion in 1989 to \$US 2.2 billion by 1992. Cuba lost 73% of its purchasing power and 42% of its gross national product (Vandermeer et al. 1993). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba not only lost favourable terms of trade, but a more widely integrated economic embeddedness, exhibited not only through conventional trade, but easy access to credits, co-ordination of economic plans and policies, development aid through mutual technical advice and consultancy as well as common projects. The increasing shortages led to the declaration of the 'special period in peacetime'<sup>9</sup> in 1990, widely referred to as '*periodo especial*', which referred to a scenario of minimum resources and maximum austerity which had been imagined for a wartime contingency (Hernández 2003).

Even though the '*periodo especial*' forced Cuba into some paradigm shifts, it certainly has not lost its overall commitment to socialist principles and the 'project of *cubanía*'. In fact three socialist principles were declared not to be touched or reformed, such as 1) the maintenance of the social achievements<sup>10</sup>, 2) political stability and 3) national sovereignty (Burchardt 1997). Within the large-scale transformations experienced in the 1990s in Cuba, there were certain issues which remained nonnegotiable and the cornerstones of the new socialism: these included national sovereignty and independence, socialism, a one-party system, free education and public health care and an interventionist and active state role in the economy and society, with central areas of the national economy reserved as public property (Azicri 2000). Carlos Lage, the Vice President announced: "Our opening is not an opening toward capitalism, but rather a socialist opening towards a capitalist

<sup>9</sup> '*Periodo especial en tiempos de paz*' and later known only as '*periodo especial*'. In a speech by Fidel Castro in front of the Federation of Cuban Women in March 1990, he noted that the country might enter 'a special period in peacetime', characterized by austerity and scarcity (Deere 1991). According to Blackburn (2000), the locals called this period and in particular the years 1990-1993, 'Armageddon'.

<sup>10</sup> Even the former World Bank President James Wolfensohn acknowledges the 'great job' Cuba has done in topping all other poor countries in health and education according to the World Development Indicators (WDI) (Lobe 2002). The Human Development Report (2003) ranks Cuba under the High Human Development sector on place 52 worldwide. Some of the achievements have been: Life expectancy increased from ca. 60 in the late 1950s to 75 in 1989; Infant mortality dropped from 70 per 1000 live births in the late 1950s to 7.9 in 1996 and is thus amongst the top 20 countries with the lowest infant mortality (de la Osa 1997 in Cole 1998); Population/doctor ratio improved from 1038 in 1960 to 303 in 1989 (Waller 1993 in Cole 1998); Population/hospital bed ratio improved from 216 in 1960 to 136 in 1989 (Eckstein 1994 in Cole 1998). Illiteracy was reduced to 4-5 % through a massive literacy campaign in 1961 (Cole 1998) and has at present an adult literacy rate of 96.8 % (UNDP 2003).

world. It is based on certain principles that guarantee the preservation of socialist order over our economy and our ability to meet our economic and social objectives.” (quoted in Pérez-López 1994:191).

Numerous scholars have documented the economic transformations during that period, whether policy reforms and structural changes or economic performance, and have commented on the marked difference Cuba's economic adjustments had taken in comparison to other countries (Azicri 2000, Brundenius 2002, Brundenius and Weeks 2001, Carranza 2002, Hoffmann 1996, LeoGrande and Thomas 2002, Mesa-Lago 1998, Monreal 2002a, Monreal 2002b, Pastor and Zimbalist 1995, Pérez-López 2002). Some of the most important policy changes<sup>11</sup> were the transformation of the export sector to meet international market criteria, the opening towards foreign investment, the legalization of the dollar in 1993, the authorization of self-employment in more than 150 occupations, the re-opening of the agricultural farmers' markets and the decentralisation of state farms in 1993<sup>12</sup>.

Others have focused on the social and political implications of the '*periodo especial*' (Azicri 2000, Mesa-Lago 1998, Monreal 2002a, Pearson 1998, Rosendahl 2001). Monreal (2002a) stresses the fact that the Cuban government continued to provide essential social services and health care even during the most severe periods of the crisis. He lists the subsidised food provisions guaranteeing a minimum nutritional standard and a continuation of social justice principles in policies adopted. However, while these services continued to be the benchmark of government policy, they were subject to severe shortages and their levels reduced to a minimum, and often no longer to sufficient levels. Shortages in hospitals and nutritional deficiencies were the norm during the worst years of the crisis and Mesa-Lago (1998) calculates a lack of 300 medicines, vaccines, surgical materials and spare parts for medical equipment. Vitamin A deficiency in combination with malnutrition caused the outbreak of an epidemic called 'optic neuritis' between 1993 and 1994 that affected 45,584 people and about 20,000 went blind (Gay et al 1994 in Mesa-Lago 1998, Hatchwell and Calder 1995). As the epidemic rose to national crisis level, the government responded by distributing multivitamin complexes. Mortality rates rose amongst older adults from 48 to 53 per 1,000 between 1989-93 (Mesa-Lago 1998), infant mortality however continued to decline in the same period from 11.1 to 9.4 per 1000 live births. Calorific intake reduced drastically from 2845

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<sup>11</sup> These are only the macro-policy changes. A more detailed account and discussion of the various policies adopted and/or later amendments can be found elsewhere (e.g. Azicri 2000, Mesa-Lago 1993, 1994, Carranza et al 1995, Pastor and Zimbalist 1995).

<sup>12</sup> This will be discussed in detail in section 4.2, 6.4 and 6.5.



kcal/day to 1948 kcal/day which is below the recommended World Health Organization's minimum standard of 2400 kcal (ONE 1997, Wright 2005) and malnutrition re-appeared<sup>13</sup>.

Despite a history of full employment, the crisis contracted labour demand and by 1995 8% of the labour force was openly unemployed, rising to a possible 20-27% with the dismissal of workers from closing state enterprises and the withdrawal of subsidies from unprofitable public enterprises (Mesa-Lago 1998). This instigated the government to re-authorize<sup>14</sup> self-employment in 1993 for specific sectors under strict bureaucratic rules for registration and inspection, licence fees and taxes to avoid illegal and private enrichment (Mesa-Lago 1998).

While Cuba had achieved one of the world's most egalitarian societies by the end of the 1980s where the extreme wage<sup>15</sup> ration no longer exceeded 5 to 1, the reforms undertaken in the '*periodo especial*' generated significant inequalities in Cuba. The self-employed, those active in the informal sector and those receiving remittances in dollars<sup>16</sup>, have considerably higher incomes than people employed on a state salary. Mesa-Lago (1998) estimates that in 1995 a small restaurant (known as *paladar*<sup>17</sup>) owner was making 414-829 times the average monthly wage of a state employee. He lists people with high-income earnings as people renting their homes to tourists, prostitutes, self-employed taxi drivers, bartenders in tourist hotels and

<sup>13</sup> Since 1962, an extensive rationing system had provided Cubans with a *canasta básica* (food basket) that was obtained at subsidized prices at local *bodegas* (food rationing outlets). As domestic production of some foodstuffs increased in the decades prior to the '*periodo especial*', items were taken out of the food ration system and added whenever they became scarce again (Álvarez 2004 in Wright 2005). By 1971, food rations provided a daily quota of 1427 kcal and guaranteed a basic food security for all. Additional subsidized food could be accessed through canteens at factories and schools or through purchases in the parallel market. Álvarez (2004) notes that during 1980-1991 Cuba exceeded the minimum daily intake of 2400 kcal and Amador and Peña (1991) state that apart from a minor iron deficiency, no other chronic nutrition deficiencies were identified in Cuba prior to 1990. During the crisis however, the items available through the rationing system were cut-back substantially and were not always available (Scarpaci 1995). Many claim that the foodstuffs obtained from rationing only last for 10-14 days now; the additional requirements need to be purchased at relatively high prices in the re-opened farmers' markets.

<sup>14</sup> Self-employment was permitted in 1980, criticised in 1982 and restricted thereafter (Mesa-Lago 1998).

<sup>15</sup> The wage did not include the money spent on purchases on the ration book. The rations are heavily subsidized and very cheap even for low income earners.

<sup>16</sup> Foreign remittances are estimated to lie in the range of US\$800 million to US\$1.2 billion per year around 2003. US policy enforces an annual ceiling of dollars permitted to be sent to family members in Cuba. This lies at about US\$1200 per person per year. It is important to note that those benefiting from remittances in Cuba are predominately white, as only 3% of the Cuban exile community is white, but about half the population in Cuba itself are black or mulatto (Mesa-Lago 1994). Also revolutionaries who had cut all ties to family in exile for political and ideological reasons are now cut-off from possible remittances (Burchardt 1997).

<sup>17</sup> For the role of *paladares* in Cuba's emerging private sector see also Jackiewicz and Bolster 2000, Scarpaci 1995 and Scarpaci et al 2002.

also private farmers. Interesting to note here is that the private farmers are the only prosperous group that are not directly or indirectly linked to tourism and the dollar economy. Mesa-Lago (1998) estimates that private farmers earned up to 31-52 times the average monthly wage of a state employee in 1995<sup>18</sup>. The dual economy of *moneda nacional* and dollars<sup>19</sup> exacerbates the social tension and has led to increased inequality in purchasing power: private consumption is increasingly determined through the dollar (Burchardt 1997, Rosendahl 2001). Some items, especially those imported, are only available in dollars and are not affordable to those sectors in society that are unable to obtain hard currency. For many products there exists a 'peso' and a 'dollar' version (e.g. beer) and it is becoming a status symbol to be consuming the 'dollar' item. Social class differences are deepening along purchasing powers in dollars<sup>20</sup>.

Few studies have sought to look at the gendered impacts of the crisis and economic reforms. Many of the effects of austerity have to be buffered by women as they most intensely affect the reproductive and household sector, which continues to be an almost exclusively female space (Bengelsdorf 1997, Bunck 1997, Jenissen and Lundy 2001, Molyneux 2000, Pearson 1997)<sup>21</sup>.

The '*periodo especial*' became a trial for the reinvention – remaking - of Cuba's socialist system and ideology<sup>22</sup>. Some term the present era nationalist rather than socialist, based on the discourses and trajectory the reinvention is taking, since Cuba no longer has ideologically binding links with any country. Rather it seeks international links well beyond its historical allies and is trying to reinsert itself in the geopolitical net of world trade and global capital.

Apart from having to bear shortages as a result of the diminished trade with

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<sup>18</sup> This was mainly due to sales of excess agricultural products on the free agricultural markets where prices are set according to offer and demand principles.

<sup>19</sup> In 2004, 1 \$US was equivalent to 26 MN (*moneda nacional*) Cuban pesos. Since November 2004 the \$US is no longer legal tender in Cuba, and transactions need to be made in pesos, or *pesos convertibles* (dollar equivalent value). \$US can be exchanged to *pesos convertibles* at a tax surcharge of 10%. *Pesos convertibles* have the same purchasing power as US dollars used to have.

<sup>20</sup> I use dollar economy for simplification here. Since November 2004 the \$US is no longer legal tender in Cuba, and transactions need to be made in pesos, or pesos convertibles (dollar equivalent value). \$US can be exchanged to pesos convertibles at a tax surcharge of 10%.

<sup>21</sup> See also section 4.6 and 9.9 - 9.12.

<sup>22</sup> And by 1996, the economic market reforms came under heavy critique from Raúl Castro when he attacked the respective policy reforms for their corroboration of nationalist, anti-capitalist and socialist ideology. In the same speech he also criticised the NGO activity in the country. "Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are useful for the state but also dangerous because of their independence, reception of foreign donations and goals different than those of the government; they are susceptible to external manipulations and infiltration" (in Mesa-Lago 1998:874).

the East, Cuba's reintegration in a global economy faced additional difficulties. The USA did not fail to enforce their 'starvation' policy<sup>23</sup> with newly gained confidence, as soon as the protecting Cold War superpower had dissolved. The Torricelli Act in 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act in 1996 were aimed to further restrict trade and compounded the country's economic problems. Other countries did however continue to trade with Cuba. Reforms to open to an external sector and to global market mechanisms and capital to buffer the embargo's effects had started tentatively already before the '*periodo especial*', as early as 1982, when the decision to establish joint venture operations between state enterprises and foreign capital was taken. This development was further boosted in 1991, so that by 1994 there were 180 such enterprises. Decisions had been taken early on to give considerable autonomy to state enterprises in the external sector, hoping to attract capital and allow them to function efficiently and expand. By 1995, there were 225 enterprises engaged in foreign trade compared to 80 in 1988 and in 1993 the constitution was altered to permit unprecedented foreign access to Cuban property and labour (Kapcia 2000). International reintegration was sought in three ways: intensive use of natural resources for export promotion, access to external revenue, and the entry of loan and investment capital (Monreal 2002a). La Habana's new foreign policy is slowly overcoming international isolation and has led to a slow recuperation of the national economy. But recent set-backs with Europe resulted from Spain's Aznar and Italy's Berlusconi lobbying in the European Union to modify the EU's stance on Cuba to a position less palatable to Cuba.

The most severe years of the '*periodo especial*' were from 1990-1994 and a slow recuperation of the economy has taken place since (Weeks 2001). By 1996, economic growth was at 7.8% and the state budget deficit was lowered to 2.4% (Burchardt 1997). During this period, the second economy<sup>24</sup> developed rapidly. For many Cuban families it was a significant change to shift from a planned to a second economy that implied an adaptation to a more multifaceted household economy engaging in many different economic activities outside the salaried job, whether

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<sup>23</sup> It had been US policy to enforce a political change in Cuba through a discontented population, as basic necessities would be lacking as well as forcing the leaders to open to the world market as shortages increase. The embargo items even entailed medicinal and food provisions.

<sup>24</sup> Rosendahl (2001) borrows the concept of second economy from Pérez-López (1995), where a second economy is understood as related to a socialist political system including both legal transactions in the market sector and semi-legal and illegal transactions carried out in the black market. She (2001:87) however notes that the "division between planned economy and second economy is not so important on the household level, because the household engage in economic transactions they feel necessary and their principal interest is the reproduction of the social unit."

legal or illegal (Rosendahl 2001).

Some point to the remarkable resilience Cuba showed by almost replacing overnight the gross dependency on the Soviet Union. Others interpret Cuba's crisis in the early 90s as the failure of the system and Cuba's erroneous economic as well as political path taken since the triumph of the Revolution. Writers acknowledge how remarkable it is that Cuba has withstood for decades a strong embargo and a collapse of the economy, when other systems would have sunk without trace: the revolution is still ongoing. And this has led to many speculations on the reasons. Has this been achieved through brutal coercion and oppression from the government, or through alternative explanations beyond the stereotypes? Kapcia (1996, 2000) claims that "perspectives which seek to explain survival through the continuing coercion not only ignore the high levels of political awareness in an educated and articulate Cuban population but also neglect the complexities of a far from monolithic polity." (Kapcia 1996: 249).

### 3.3 Support for the government or a repressive state?

One of the most frequent questions posed about Cuba by interested friends and acquaintances upon my return from fieldwork was the level of actual popular support the government enjoys and about coercion, control and manipulation. The issue of democracy, political oppression and the legitimacy of Fidel Castro's regime is pertinent to the discussion in the West, given the West's strong educational and cultural grounding in Western understandings of democracy. The Revolution's survival is not through - as often claimed by Miami based sources - social and political control and oppression alone. Azicri (2000:4) points out that while none deny that social and political control have always existed and are diligently enforced, repressive police techniques alone could not have saved Cuba's socialism from a fate similar to that of Eastern European socialism. To have resisted the adversity and undertaken the systemic transformation that has occurred in Cuba in recent years, it is necessary for the government at least to have enjoyed a relative level of sustained legitimacy (Parker 1999). Kapcia (2000: 268), seeks to explain the high levels of support through the concept of *cubanía*.

"This [*cubanía*] is a vital element in understanding Cuba today and at any point in the last four decades, for the dogged survival of commitment, hope and a depth of identification has much to do with

the shared 'dream', and the processes of 'customisation' (of the myth)...and of 'mundanization' (of the ideology and its codes) are essentially interpreting the 'high' beliefs, and dreams, at a manageable, 'lower' - but no less powerful or important- level. Thus, the average Cuban is still (often to the surprise and puzzlement to the outsider) remarkably committed to many of the basic ideals and precepts of *la Revolución* and understandably defensive about outside criticisms, about threats to the familiar 'canon' of the ideology of - *cubanía* - and about the possibility that the structure of the ideology might unravel and, with it, destroy the 'dreams' that are a fundamental part of the 'global' existence in which they all live, and also the daily identification with that existence."

Just after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many commentators were convinced that it would only be a matter of time before Cuba followed suit. In the early 1990s no one would have predicted the continuation of the Cuban socialist project up to today. It was widely assumed that after the failure of socialism in the East, nothing could stop the globalization project as appropriated by neo-liberal ideology and the ultimate victory of the market. Many in the West were not, and are not, able to conceptualize any alternative apart from a rapid move to capitalism and the unleashing of what is perceived as 'dormant market forces'<sup>25</sup> in the former socialist countries and the perfecting of the market everywhere else. Socialism certainly was not considered a viable alternative any more. Numerous articles emerging from that period discuss and speculate on what critics perceived to be the inevitable transition in Cuba, whether they called it 'transition to democracy' or 'Cuba after Castro'. These proclamations often originated within the community in exile in Miami or other more orthodox-inclined scholars particularly in the US (Horowitz 2000).

For those concerned about the ugly face to which neo-liberal market mechanisms expose the poor, the search for a viable alternative could not cease. It is not surprising then that the question is asked: "Is there room for alternative development paths with a human face, i.e. Third World Socialism?" (Brundenius and Weeks 2001:10). Rather than retreating defeated to silent acceptance of the status quo, authors like Dilla (2000:41) reject the "fatalistic acceptance of those rules [neo-liberal globalization] or the impossibility of finding alternative paths that substantially

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<sup>25</sup> Expression appropriated from Brundenius and Weeks (2001).

modify the existing scenario." Vásquez (2002) argues that Cuba provides a positive alternative vision for many impoverished people in the Third World through its achievements, especially in providing social services, and makes a case for the need to consider non-traditional societies and their effort to maintain "collective socioeconomic rights outside the western, individualist, neo-liberal development paradigm...under threat from modern corporate consolidation of global economic power, consumerism, and the presumed 'failure of socialism'" (Vásquez 2002:185). It would be highly erroneous to assume that Cuba had a single trajectory throughout its recent history, uniform and stagnantly fixed with the proclamation of the revolutionary project and the "socialist new man" in 1959<sup>26</sup>.

Kapcia (2000:256) suggests that "it helps to understand the Cuban system and its survival by seeing it in terms of a process of 'revolution' rather than as a 'communist state' given the political baggage of the latter term". Despite its revolutionary goals, especially social equity, the means and path towards these goals have been highly varied and in some aspects reflect the changing nature of mainstream development in the West. A differing ideological framework characterized by social justice based on morality and ethics distinguishes Cuban development paradigms from the widespread belief in 'rational economic man' in the West. Various notions and understandings of development have continuously changed and shaped the post-revolutionary era. This process, despite taking place within the context of an authoritarian regime, was supported by and large through the regime's high degree of reflexivity and acknowledgment of errors. Discourses on the role of the state, participation and civil society have undergone considerable change and gained new understandings. An internal debate of Cuban Marxists exists about the role Marxism should still play in Cuba (Azicri 2000).

### 3.4 Development and postmodernist thought in/about Cuba

The general direction and development of discourse throughout the Revolution closely followed the Soviet Model and subscribed to the 'scientific-technological revolution', since common Marxist thought was not closed to the liberal insertion of progressivist and developmentalist ideologies (Levins 1993). Despite the unquestionable links to the Soviet Union, it remains vital to distinguish Cuba's development from the Soviet path alone. Hernández (2003:40) writes: "The

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<sup>26</sup> For a detailed historical account of the revolution see Garcia Luis (2001).

Soviet formula affected Cuba only later [after 1970] - and when that happened, the effect was not a uniform one, either on Cuba's international stance or on all aspects of the Cuban system at home. However much emphasis may be placed on Cuba's imitation of the Soviet model after 1972, the specific path followed by the Cuban process in the 1970s cannot be reduced to that imitation." Progress was, however, conceived as a single progression from being less developed to more developed, in a similar structuralist fashion to the history of European and North American development. This development idea is administered elsewhere in the 'underdeveloped' world through the donor agencies. However, "in contrast to the advanced capitalist societies post-revolutionary Cuba did not enter a phase of postmodern disenchantment; Cuban society experienced a re-run of the realism-modernism-avant-garde sequence. It is as if the Cuban social totality switched from one master narrative to another, from a capitalist to a non-capitalist version of modernity, precisely when the West shifted toward the postmodern." (Davies 2000:103-104).

While it has become evident that postmodern writers have so far failed to provide alternatives to the impasse in development, the postmodern discourse can be considered valuable in terms of fine-tuning reflexivity and requesting more complexity. Many Cuban authors (e.g. Cano and García 1994) dismiss postmodernism out of hand (cited in Davies 2000:109-110): "They [Cano and García] confirm...that it [postmodernism] is a product of late capitalism, associated with nihilistic social movements...Postmodernism is not reflexive or revolutionary, but self-sufficient, pessimistic, sceptical and irrational, and it ignores the class struggle and social injustice;" and is evidently a property of the intellectual elite. Similarly others have argued that postmodernism is a theoretical diversion, an ideological trap and a waste of time (Vidal 1993). It is, they say, out of touch with contemporary reality and the recrudescence of social inequality. Those authors doubt that postmodernism challenges capitalism and they are sceptical about the nostalgic notion for capitalism's return, which they see as intrinsic to postmodernism. Ravelo (1996) points out that postmodernism is projecting the 'own crisis' elsewhere and converting it into another universal meta-narrative, one that Cuba does not conform with, as it still functions within its structuralist developmentalism. "The significance of the 1959 Revolution in terms of modernity/postmodernity was that the Cuban collectivity opted to switch from the narrative of late capitalism to a Marxist/nationalist alternative" (Davies 2000:17). The Marxist/Leninist model lost its paramount acceptance in Cuba in the early 90s, when

the more humanistic ideas of José Martí, the celebrated hero of the Cuban independence struggle, were revived once again after having had their prime influence in the 60s (Rosendahl 1997). Hence the Cuban 'nationalist alternative' is not without awareness and adaptations to major intellectual trends (Kapcia 2000). Various Cuban authors (e.g. Reinaldo Arenas) have written literary pieces that Western scholars engaged with through a postmodern reading. The engagement with postmodernism thus largely remains within literature circles and has not been embraced by the social science. One exception might be Antonio Benitez-Rojos<sup>27</sup> (1992) work 'Repeating island: the Caribbean and the postmodern perspective'. This Cuban author's book is a re-reading of the Caribbean (not only Cuban) literature and culture.

### 3.5. Summary

Cuban realities are multifaceted and are in continuous negotiation, creating an array of lived experiences. In this account I could merely point out some of the macro-processes that will have had a bearing on the life-worlds of Cubans. Important to note is, that the Revolution needs to be understood as a process and a continuous negotiation. Recent events such as the '*periodo especial*' with its reforms have had an array of impacts that could only be touched upon here in a rather structuralist account, but need to be considered for an understanding of the agricultural sector, which will be introduced in the following chapter together with necessary background information on Cuban civil society, the mass organisations and gender.

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<sup>27</sup> He resides in the US and no longer lives in Cuba, though.



## 4. Introducing Cuban agriculture, civil society and gender



Source: Rius 1971

This chapter further establishes the textured backcloth for the empirical chapters later in this thesis. Here, I will focus on particular aspects of Cuba's realities that are fundamental for the development of my argument. These are a) the changes in the Cuban agriculture, particularly during the last 15 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, b) Cuban civil society, and c) short introductions to Cuban mass organizations and to Cuban gender issues.

### 4.1 The Cuban agricultural sector up to 1989

Cuba's history and development of the agricultural sector can hardly be compared to any other agricultural system in the Latin American sphere and it remains unprecedented in the context of a small tropical island setting. The land distribution before the Revolution was characterised by strong dualism with large-scale - mainly foreign - ownership like sugar mills and the American United Fruit Company alongside small-scale ownership and landless peasant families. In 1958 when 56% of the Cuban population lived in the rural areas, 9.4% of them owned the vast majority (73.3%) of the land. More than 200 000 families were landless and 85% of the *campesinos*<sup>1</sup> were paying rent for their smallholdings (Funes 1997). Ideologically, the code of agrarianism in the 1950s might have been said to have expressed the value of 'agrarian-ness', expressing the belief that the essence of the 'real' nation was to be found in its countryside, its rural dwellers, or in certain undefined or general rural 'values' and therefore that its future lay there too (Kapcia 2000). Some even declared that this Revolution was not a proletarian but an

<sup>1</sup> Spanish for smallholder, farmer.

agrarian revolution, fought and supported mainly by the 'rural proletariat' (the sugar plantation workers) and the *campesinos* (peasant farmers) (Munck 1988, Saney 2004). The importance of the countryside and peasants was made clear through the implementation of two radical agrarian reforms, which made large-scale land redistributions possible in 1959 and 1963. Their result was an upper size limit for individual ownership and the conversion of large proportions of the land into state enterprises. The first agrarian reform eliminated large ownership and limited private farm size to a maximum of 390ha, while the second agrarian reform further curtailed farm size to 65ha. By 1989, the following land distribution resulted (Figure 3.1), divided between the *Fincas estatales* (State farms), the Co-operativa de Crédito y Servicio (CCS, Credit and Service Co-operative), the Co-operativa de Producción Agropecuaria (CPA, Agricultural production Co-operative) and individual private farmers. The state sector holds the largest cultivable land, which after 1993 was reversed to private land holding being the largest sector (see table 3.2; section 5.5 and 5.6).

Land distribution according to farming systems, 1989

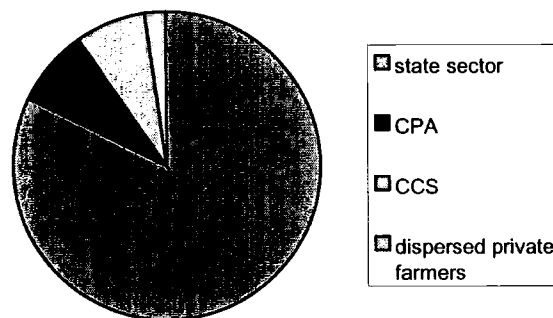


Figure 4.1

Source: ONE 1991

**State farms:** They were the main producers of staple foods (under the Ministry of Agriculture) as well as sugar (under the Ministry of Sugar) and received priority for the receipt of production inputs, technical assistance, credit, investments and new technology (Wright 2005). Workers received housing and social services as incentives and all products went to the State food procurement agency Acopio (Wright 2005).

**CCS:** Since 1962, the State encouraged independent, private farmers to organise themselves into co-operatives of 35-75 members, each with an elected

management consisting of president, vice-president and administrator. Land was held privately, but assets belonged to the State. Credit relations were between the bank and the co-operative rather than directly with each farmer, and services offered to members included the sharing of equipment such as a truck for marketing purposes, or a tractor for cultivation. Produce could be marketed by a co-operative representative. Each CCS member made an individual production plan with Acopio, for some of the produce (Wright 2005).

**CPA:** This type of co-operative was initiated in 1977. Here private farmers were pooling their land, labour, livestock and materials into collective property and all investments and production outputs were shared. If land holdings were dispersed, the State could give the co-operative intervening land in usufruct. This attracted non-land owners and skilled staff to join the co-operative (Wright 2005). Members who pooled their resources were compensated. Often communities with social services such as schools, a small clinic, recreational areas, houses and electricity were established. Membership ranged from 50-200 per co-operative and the administration unit was larger consisting of heads of production, economic, machinery, veterinary resources, plant health and politics. Members were commonly grouped in work brigades of between 10-20 people. Production plans were made for the majority of production with the administrative staff and heads of work brigades. In 1998, there were 1148 CPAs with 52,360 members whom 10,937 are women (Cardenas 2003).

**Individual, private, “dispersed” farmers:** Some farmers chose to remain independent on their own land or land received *en usufructo*. They did not form part of any State organisational enterprise and while they could sell to the State, it is likely that this comprised only a small part of their total production. Access to inputs was controlled and they were the lowest priority for production inputs by the State. These farms rarely exceeded 26ha and were mostly for subsistence purposes (Cárdenas 2003).

The average state farm size in 1984 covered 50,000 acres, which was 38 times the size of the average co-operative and 2,000 times the size of the average individual farm. The co-operatives tripled in average size between 1979 and 1983 from 350 acres average to 1,300 acres (Benjamin et al. 1984). This occurred due to a new policy directive, which was based on a belief expressed by José Ramírez in

1979. As head of the Small Farmers Association (ANAP), Ramírez declared that "indisputable socio-economic advantages" result if smaller co-operatives are united into larger units, which affords "greater development possibilities and more efficient use of technical resources" (quoted in: Benjamin et al. 1984:179). It becomes evident that Cuba's policy-makers had fallen for the "bigger is better" attitude, fuelled by the image of the transformation of a backward agriculture into a modern industrialised production sector. Hence larger state farms portrayed the favoured agricultural production model and the state / non-state division became an important feature in Cuban agriculture. "The state sector outweighs the non-state sector in terms of land area (4:1), number of workers (615,000 to 200,000) use of inputs and total production" (Benjamin et al 1984:178).

The mere size of state farms and the relatively large size of many co-operatives, particularly the CPAs, as well as the general agricultural policy, clearly favoured modern agricultural methods characterised by high specialisation, capital-intensive mono-cultivation and intensity. A high degree of dependency on external inputs, e.g. fertiliser, agro-toxins, concentrates, mechanisation, and irrigation, was the outcome of the Green Revolution in Cuba. Exported from the Soviet Union to willing political partners, the Green Revolution, which favoured the portrayal of progress and technology, found a willing victim in Cuba. However, imported technologies from the USSR were generally ill-adapted for the tropical context and high inputs had to be employed in order to mimic conditions needed for successful cultivation.

The state farms were exclusively organised into 'process-orientated' brigades until 1981. This meant that each brigade was responsible for one particular task such as ploughing, weeding or maintenance etc. (Gey 1990). The identification and bond of the farmer with the overall production cycle and the cultivated land was lost, making the farmer a mere labour factor, free of responsibility for anything beyond the fulfilment of the fragmented farming task. Hence, the scale of agricultural production was not in scale with the consciousness of the agricultural worker in the countryside. This, in turn, led to economic irrationality that had to be counterbalanced by increasing external inputs.

Agriculture thus developed into a high energy-consuming sector, despite the lack of developed Cuban energy sources. Cuba was entirely dependent on oil imports from the USSR. By the 1980s Cuba had stocked its machinery to an average of 21 tractors per 1,000ha (FAO 1989:65), which is the highest recorded ratio for Latin America and closely resembles figures for Northern America. This

high degree of mechanisation decreased labour demand significantly and encouraged rural to urban migration (Funes 1997). The agrarian technology was based on techniques requiring high modern input. These were more comparable to Californian standards than agricultural techniques observed in neighbouring tropical islands. Monocultures, which are often detrimental for the environment, prevailed in highly specialised production units. As such, monocultures were and are incapable of developing their own pest controls or maintaining soil fertility and other environmental services. They require external inputs in order to decrease vulnerability to pest, diseases and soil exhaustion as well as to ensure high output (Carroll et al. 1990 and Altieri 1987). For Cuba, annual fertiliser use, estimated by the FAO in 1989, was close to 179kg/ha. In 1989 over 300,000t chemical fertilisers, 17,000t herbicides and around 1,000t of pesticides were imported (ONE 1991:282-3). The agricultural sector was highly dependent on these imports. In the late 1980s, 48% of fertilisers and 82% of pesticides were imported (Deere 1992), but it has been suggested from import coefficients that the actual dependency was much higher. Pastor (1992) (reprinted in Rosset and Benjamin 1994b) reveals an even stronger dependency on fertiliser and herbicides. In his estimates they were relying to an estimated 94% and 98% respectively on import due to domestic production being provided by imported oil derivatives. Animal feedstock was calculated to rely to about 97% on foreign resources.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and trade between the two countries reduced drastically, conventional agricultural practices could no longer be pursued due to the lack of inputs. Foreign exchange was missing to import the amounts of agriculturally related inputs obtained in previous years to meet national demand. Agriculture, modern and industrialised to standards found in California, was faced with a dual challenge, "the need to essentially double food production while more than halving inputs; and at the same time maintaining export crop production so as not to further erode the country's desperate foreign exchange position" (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a:4). The 53% reduction in oil imports between 1989-1992 had not only affected fuel availability for the economy and the agricultural sector, but also reduced the foreign exchange that Cuba had been able to obtain from the re-export of petroleum.

Even before the Revolution, Cuba was characterised as a food import country. This fact is closely connected to the historical orientation to sugar cane production. The Revolution in Haiti forced the European sugar plantations to find a new home on Cuba. Political and economic developments up-graded Cuba to the

major sugar exporter for the United States and Europe. There were hence few incentives to develop domestic agriculture to increase food self-sufficiency. After the Revolution, trade relations with the Soviet Union made it more economically profitable for Cuba to export sugar and import necessary foodstuffs. In turn this resulted in an increased import dependency, as relatively little agricultural land was made available for food production. In 1989, 60% of the cultivable land was planted with sugar cane, accounting for 7.4% of the volume of world sugar trade (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a). Cuba's sugar and its derivatives were accounting for close to 75% of Cuban export earnings. The foreign exchange gained from the sugar trade<sup>2</sup> allowed an excessive dependence on imports to supplement local resources. The demand for some products had to be entirely met by imports as table 4.1 shows for 1989:

Main agricultural imports and their contribution to national food requirements  
in 1989

Crop	% of national demand imported
Wheat	100%
Beans	90%
Canned Meat	39%
Poultry	33%
Rice	50%
Oil and lard	68%
Butter	64%

Table 4.1

Source: Deere 1992

It is estimated that a total of 57% of calories in the Cuban diet in 1989 was imported. Food security at the individual level was ensured by a comprehensive rationing system, introduced shortly after the Revolutionary victory, which included everyone regardless of occupation, residence, or income (Benjamin et al. 1984). All foods considered essential for a healthy and balanced diet were included in the rationing and special allowances were made for illness requiring specific dietary treatments. The rations changed during later decades, but the general underlying principle was never abolished and the '*libreta*'<sup>3</sup> is an integral part of Cuban life-style.

<sup>2</sup> Cuba received very favourable terms of trade for their sugar export with the USSR. Prices were fixed and were much higher than on the international market, while prices for Soviet oil were much lower.

<sup>3</sup> The '*libreta*' defines the rations for each family and this blue booklet is taken to the '*bodega*' the national shops in order to obtain the daily/monthly rations.

For particular periods of time the state-run parallel markets and the private free agricultural markets, the '*agromercados*'<sup>4</sup>, did supplement rationed portions<sup>5</sup>.

## 4.2 Changes in Cuban Agriculture since 1989

The years of austerity and scarce food resources during the '*periodo especial*' (see section 3.2) have meant a political as well as ideological revival of the countryside. The public response to the crisis was in the form of 'back to basics'. In practical terms, this meant a recognition of land and people as Cuba's basic dependable resources. This resulted, in the early 1990s, in an economically forced retreat from mechanization to a revived dependence on human and animal labour for basic agricultural tasks, including cane-cutting and transport. While this was simply an economic necessity, it also reflected a political imperative - to reinvigorate a sense of solidarity and defensiveness - and a political recognition of the fact that the political 'heart' of the Revolution, and its historic base, and deepest support, had always been in the countryside (Kapcia 2000). The fear of a moral loss of the Revolution during the years of severe austerity, triggered the government to look for moral and political values 'in the *campo*'. Farmers once again became a critical factor in the political equation. And agriculture's ideological importance has been signalled by the reluctance to contemplate entry of foreign capital into this sector (Kapcia 2000, Azicri 2000).

The shortages of agriculturally-related inputs as well as foodstuffs on a national level forced the Cuban government to launch a national effort to convert the nation's agriculture from high-input to low-input, self-reliant farming in order to overcome the food shortages. By 1992 rumours had reached the ears of scientists in the United States that Cuba was currently undergoing a large-scale unprecedented transformation towards 'organic farming' resulting from the dire economic constraints. A delegation visited Cuba in order to investigate and report on this conversion, which they accounted for in detail in "The Greening of Cuba: A

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<sup>4</sup> The *agromercados* are free peasant markets where goods are sold under supply and demand principles. They were active in the period of 1980-1986 and re-opened in 1994.

<sup>5</sup> In the international debate Cuba's rationing is either perceived as proof of a just society having eradicated extreme poverty and hunger persistent under previous regimes or criticised as inhibiting the society's free choices for their diet. This debate is interesting to follow as it soon leads into underlying ideologies, but it cannot be pursued here.

national experiment in organic agriculture"<sup>6</sup> (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a). Input substitution was reported to be being applied on a large scale, which meant the replacement of chemicals with locally produced biological substitutes such as bio-pesticides, natural enemies of insects, resistant varieties, crop rotations, microbial antagonists, cover cropping and the integration of grazing animals to restore soil fertility. Chemical fertilisers were substantially replaced with bio-fertilisers, usually microbial products, earthworms and compost. Organic fertilisers, natural rock phosphate, zeolite, animal and green manures, and other soil amendments were now widely applied to conserve and restore soil fertility (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a, Rosset and Benjamin 1994b). Decentralised centres located on agricultural co-operatives and state farms had been established to produce the means for biological control and bio-pesticides. Furthermore, in place of tractors, for which fuel, tyres and spare parts were largely unavailable, animal traction had been revived (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a). Some progress in labour mobilisation and participatory methods for generating new technology was also mentioned (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a).

The report also identified that the application of low input technology was not uniform across the entire agricultural sector. The state / non-state dichotomy was repeated in the adoption of agro-ecological techniques. Large state farms were far more challenged in coping with a conversion, due to their former extremely high reliance on inputs. Smaller farmers were more readily able to adopt farming methods with reduced inputs, as they were descendants of generations of small farmers with long family and community traditions of low-input farming. They were said to still be able to remember techniques such as intercropping and manuring, methods that their parents and grandparents used before the advent of the Green Revolution<sup>7</sup> and modern chemicals (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a).

The fact-finding mission on Low Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) in Cuba in 1992 points out numerous developments towards an ecological agriculture through newly applied biological and organic technologies. However, relatively little emphasis is given to socio-economic indicators, which are vital for any development of a sustainable agro-ecology (Pretty 1995). Thus, while ecological improvements were discussed and presented in detail (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a, Rosset and

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<sup>6</sup> The title of this book 'Greening of the Revolution' has inspired the title to my PhD thesis. In my use, this expression refers to the imaginary created and circulating among international organic interest groups (see section 6.7)

<sup>7</sup> Please note that the Green Revolution is usually associated with intensive breeding techniques with high input and food staples such as maize and wheat. In Cuba the Green Revolution extended to the vast monocultures of sugar plantations.



Benjamin 1994b), the report gives little emphasis to economic factors such as food security and economic viability, or to social indicators such as empowerment of the rural poor, social equity or health and safety issues for the people. All these indicators have been identified as vital for the functioning of a sustainable agriculture (Thrupp 1996). The notion of 'Cuba going organic' had nevertheless experienced a momentum and triggered a growing interest in the local as well as international scientific community who were keen to examine its unprecedented conversion more closely<sup>8</sup>.

Another shift has been evident from 1993 towards the decentralisation of the large state farms into smaller co-operative units - Unidades Básicas de Producción Cooperativa (UBPC) - in 1993 (see section 6.5 and 6.6). The smaller units are conceived as allowing a greater opportunity for locality-specific systems and associated sensibility to relevant needs of the ecosystem. Support structures, including sources to acquire credit and inputs and other services remain available to the units. The following pattern (table 4.2), expressed in percentages of cultivable land, has developed since 1993:

Changes in land distribution during the 1990s

	1993 (until Aug.)	1994	1996	1998
State	75%	33%	27%	24%
CPA	10%	10%	10%	10%
CCS and private farmers	15%	15%	15%	17%
UBPC	-	42%	48%	49%

Table 4.2:

Source: Jimenez (1996), ONE 1996, ONE 1998

The decreasing proportion of state farm enterprises is evident, while the UBPC as well as the private, independent farmer and CCS structures have gained in land.<sup>9</sup> The state sector decreased, from occupying three quarters of the cultivable land to less than one quarter in a period of 5 years.

Former state farm workers were given the possibility to form UBPCs by leasing land from the state, rent-free and in permanent usufruct, while the land itself

<sup>8</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> The increase in the CCS / independent *campesino* sector between 1996 and 1998 is due to policies encouraging the return of city dwellers to the rural areas. This is part of a labour mobilisation policy in order to compensate for the greater demand on labour caused by less application of machinery.

remains national property. Their size is on average 943 ha and they comprise on average about 84 members: by March 1994, about 2,446 UBPC had formed (Deere 1997; Díaz and Muñoz 1994). Workers in the UBPC sector now comprise a third of the entire agricultural labour force. Accompanying this structural change, the management organisation also changed. Members of the co-operative now have the right to elect their own management team and are integrated into the decision-making process regarding production. "Most decision making has now shifted from central planners to UBPC members" (Álvarez and Puerta 1994:1663). This increased opportunity for farmer participation in decisions concerning the production of their unit has been warmly welcomed by academics and studied intensively (Deere 1997, Díaz and Muñoz 1994, Pérez Rojas and Echevarria León 1998). More flexible mechanisms to ensure co-operation within the production process have evolved. Monreal (2002a, 2002b) however views this development with more suspicion and claims that, in reality, the old agro-industrial structure still prevails with regard to total production. These debates will be further explored in the empirical chapters (see chapter 6 and 9). The case study presented in this thesis in chapter 9 was undertaken in an UBPC '26 de Julio' at the outskirts of La Habana city and provides thick descriptions of the everyday in this particular type of social organization. The concepts of agro-ecology and development cooperation through projects form the framework for the analysis of the functioning of the UBPC and its cooperative members as well as family.

Just over half of the total land area, 6.7 million ha, is currently in agricultural use, with 4.5 million ha under cultivation (MINAG 1996, Wright 2005), and 12% of total land area is under irrigation<sup>10</sup>. Only 8% of the soils are highly productive, whilst over 60 % of this agricultural land is of low productivity, largely due to erosion, acidity, low organic matter and salinisation (Duran 1998 in Wright 2005). Although agriculture only accounts for 6.9% of the GDP in Cuba at present (ONE 2001), historically it had made major contributions to the Cuban economy, with sugar coffee and tobacco being the major export products.

The Eastern provinces<sup>11</sup>, known as the *Oriente*, have less fertile soils, soils subject to erosion and shallow soils and are used predominantly for grazing and permanent pastures. Large-scale horticulture is concentrated in La Habana and Matanzas provinces, which are characterised by fertile and deep soils with 75-90%

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<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cu.html#Geo> [accessed 15.05.05].

<sup>11</sup> Namely Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba, Granma, Holguín, Las Tunas.

of the soil being red clay and can reach depths to 8m or more (Weeks and Ferbel 1994, Hatchwell and Calder 1995). The *Oriente* is considered poorer and the average monthly salary in 2001 was at 231.4 pesos, which was below the national average of 245 pesos (ONE 2001)<sup>12</sup>. Access to the dollar economy through employment in foreign or dollar operated business<sup>13</sup> is also limited as these are often located in La Habana. While tourism extends across the entire island, the *Oriente*, however, receives comparatively little and hence employment in this well-sought after sector is very limited. On average Cuba's GDP calculated with purchasing power parity amounted to \$2362.00 per capita in 2000<sup>14</sup>.

### 4.3 The spaces of civil society in Cuba

The recent international focus on "civil society" (see section 4.4 and 5.2) has not passed Cuba by unnoticed. On the one hand, Cuba has become a target of international debate in respect of its perceived relative lack of a thriving and independent civil society (Espinosa 1999, Gunn 1995, Pumar 1999). These discussions are mostly held within the international sphere, apart and distant from any inside analysis and knowledge of Cuba. On the other hand, Cuban intellectuals have debated the concept of civil society existing within the realm of a socialist system (Acanda 2002, Hart 1996, Mora 2001, Dilla 1999, 2000, 2002, Hernández 1994, 2003). In 1999, an entire debate amongst Cuban intellectuals (Recio et al 1999) was published in the Cuban journal *Temas*, which was entitled: '*Sociedad civil en los 90: el debate cubano*'<sup>15</sup>. This is testimony to the relative weight that the concept of civil society has achieved in Cuba.

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<sup>12</sup> Average monthly salaries for the Central provinces (Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spiriti, Ciego de Avila and Camagüey) was at 245.2 pesos and for the Occidente (Western Provinces) was 247.3 pesos.

<sup>13</sup> Employees of businesses operating in the dollar economy apart from receiving 15%-30% higher salaries as compared to the sectoral average (Regional surveys of the World 2000) also receive additional benefits in the form of goods, bonuses or gratuities. For example a monthly stimulus can vary between US\$10-US\$20 and/or a monthly food parcel '*la jabita*'. The content of the '*jabita*' can vary but can include desirable items such as meats, cooking oil, toiletries, soft drinks etc. In 1996 about 5% of the work force was estimated to be working in companies tied to foreign capital (Dilla 2000) and this is likely to be more now, as foreign investment and companies dealing in dollars have expanded (in 1996 alone, there was a projected growth of 27%).

<sup>14</sup> <http://aol.countrywatch.com/includes/grank/globrank.asp?TBL=ALPHAPPP&SORT=Sort&COUNTRY=17&TYPE=GRANK> [accessed 19.09.05]

<sup>15</sup> 'Civil society in the 90s: the Cuban debate'. Participating scholars were Milena Recio, Jorge Luis Acanda, Berta Álvarez, Haroldo Dilla, Armando Hart, Rafael Hernández, Miguel Limia, Isabel Monal and Raul Valdés Vivo.

Under the auspices of a civil society understood as an antithesis to the state in the mainstream, Cuba has been vigorously attacked for the absence of an internal civil society. Cuba is criticized for its overarching and totalitarian regime, for arms of government stretching into far corners of public and even private spaces, so as to eliminate any prospects of a civil society. Hence, the increase in NGO activity in Cuba during the past 15 years is seen by many outsiders as the baby steps of an emerging civil society. Catchy titles such as "Cuba's New NGOs: government puppets or seeds of civil society" (Gunn 1995) exemplify well the grounding of an understanding of civil society in terms of NGOs. The focus on NGOs rests on the implicit assumption that no civil society had existed in Cuba. The Cuban scholar Rafael Hernández (2003:94) attributed this outside image of civil society to two factors: "The first has been the weakness of Cuban social sciences. The second is the persistence of an image that identifies society with political system and reduces the political system to the Party and the figure of Fidel Castro. In the realm of political sociology there is the tendency to ignore the existence of civil society as such in Cuba."

It is vital to explore and to acknowledge the particularities of Cuban understandings of civil society. One should not forget that concepts of civil society are products of discourses or, in Lefebvre's terms, dominant representations. Civil society is historically embedded as much in the state as it is in civil society (van Rooy 1998). An application of Western current thinking about civil society to Cuba neglects to acknowledge the historical and social prerequisites for a civil society. Gellner (1995) states that the creation of atomized liberal individuals that are needed for a civil society is rare outside Western states. It is important to recognize that civil society is not simply an abstract space of free relationships between individuals and groups not directly controlled by a centralized power, but the specific product of historical and cultural conditions, which result from both social and political practices and cultural patterns and traditions (Castiglione 1994 in van Rooy 1998). These conditions include links to colonialism, religion, authoritarianism, presence of a middle class and the nature of development ideology. The historical specificities of Cuba imply a qualitatively different understanding of civil society. I will quote Hernández (2003:28-29) at length:

"A kind of distortion characteristic of the discourse about contemporary Cuban civil society is expressed in the abuse of this concept, especially by writers who study Cuba from afar. They paint state and civil society as paired in a mutually exclusive antagonism in

spite of the fact that...this reductionism has little to do with the majority of recognizable uses of the concept in theoretical work...I have taken a position in opposition to the polar division of state and civil society. I believe that socialism does not manifest itself only in a political system and an ideological discourse, nor can it develop organically if it does not have roots in civil society, as became obvious in the tragic case of Eastern Europe....in Cuba the revolution was not a change of regime...but a fundamental social transformation.....But socialism has meant a system of organization of the whole society, not only the state or the political system. Socialist civil society has grown more and more complex and heterogeneous since the 1960s”.

The debate surrounding civil society within Cuba is equally not a homogeneous one and different conceptualisations circulate ranging from a liberal reading of civil society within the Catholic Church of Cuba to a Marxist-Gramscian reading, emerging from various research centres and confirmed officially. One of the cornerstones of the discussion was the 1994 published document: “*Reconstruir la sociedad civil: un proyecto para Cuba*<sup>16</sup>”, which emerged from the *II Semana Social Católica* in December 1994 in La Habana. In this document the classical liberal notion prevails, where civil society is identified as the assemblage of independent voluntary organizations independent from the state and acting as a sphere contrary to the state (Acanda 2002). This interpretation of civil society was contested by Rafael Hernández (1994, 2003). He explicitly rejected the antisocialist connotation of the Church’s usage of civil society and proposed a Gramscian interpretation of civil society, where the social and political are implicated within each other. Politically most important was the document released by the *V Pleno del Comité Central*, in which the concept of civil society was explained and a concept of ‘socialist civil society’ introduced (Acanda 2002). It was the first time that a communist party used this concept as part of its theoretical understanding and thus legitimised the concept. And Hart (1996a, 1996b) went further to argue the importance of civil society in the consolidation of the Cuban Revolution and as an integral part of the socialist transformation.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Reconstruction of civil society: a project for Cuba’.

#### 4.4 Contested institutions: civil society and the state

Resembling to a certain extent the increasing emphasis on civil society within a neo-liberal market economy and liberal democracy in the West, the notion of civil society has gained in significance - at least on political levels - in Cuba lately. Civil society, especially in terms of social movements, was one of the fundamental principles of alternative development theories and has now been co-opted into mainstream development thinking. However, they (alternative development theorists) are often criticized as depoliticising development, and as failing to define the role of the state. This would be erroneous in Cuba, where the State certainly plays a vital role and civil society cannot be understood outside the consideration of the state apparatus. While the notion of civil society did not feature with any weight in earlier decades of the revolution and was not a concept much spoken about or appreciated<sup>17</sup>, Fidel Castro gave a speech about civil society at the Rio Summit in 1992 and launched a debate over whether civil society would be positive or negative in rebuilding Cuba's political consensus. But the speech did not, according to Dilla (1999), launch a debate over the definition of civil society or attempts to study civil society. The rise or demise of civil society in Cuba is not uncontested. Dilla (1999) identifies two key constraints to the debate: awareness of US interest in using civil society for subversive ends and the Cuban political class, which is not inclined to allow competition in the control of resources and values.

It is hence not surprising if voices speak out that warn against advocacy of more autonomy of civil society, as they fear that many actors from the economic sphere or conservative spheres such as the Catholic church would gain in power, challenging and subverting the socialist process. In 1996 an article was published in *Granma*<sup>18</sup>, with the headline "Civil society or a sleight of hand trick" that denounced civil society as a neo-liberal excrescence. This promoted an official definition of civil society by the Central Committee of the PCC stating that those belonging to civil society are those that are socialist in their goals. Dilla (1999) sees that as an attempt by the state bureaucracy to control and administer civil society, to define what belongs and what not. "Civil society is not a socialist construction simply because officials declare it to be so in a party forum" (Dilla 1999:31).

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<sup>17</sup> Partly because it was associated much with American based anti-Cuban activities using civil society for subversive ends.

<sup>18</sup> Cuban national newspaper.

Dilla (1999) refers to Philip Oxhorn's notion of civil society, as a cultural and historical construct which is thus shaped by the national and local community in which it emerges. With this premise, Dilla (1999:31) then argues that "civil society in Cuba has emerged from the bosom of the socialist project and numerous participation spaces characterized by solidarity and collective action on behalf of the common good." He further argues that within the emerging civil society, there is a deep popular consensus in support of the political system, support for socialism, defence of social equality and repudiation of US intervention; all products of the discourse rooted in a new civility shaped by the revolution. According to Dilla (1999) the continuous rectification processes and increased decentralization by the state has opened up spaces for civil society, which increasingly is demanding its own sphere of actions. As Dilla (2000:41) states "in Cuba we are dealing with a participative practice [in new forms of social organization] that includes highly qualified subjects with broad political experience acquired through decades of local mobilization and participation...but these embryonic social movements and their citizen suffer from the misunderstanding or the utilitarianism of the bureaucracy, trained in the control and vertical allocation of resources."

While binaries between the state and civil society are difficult to draw in most cases, Cuba seems to blur these even more (Pearson and Lewis 1995). The traditional mass organizations, outside the party and government, nevertheless act as transmission belts between the state and party and civil society. The similar political aims might render any clear distinctions of civil society and state difficult, but furthermore the limited autonomy civil society organizations are granted (Dilla 1999) makes it difficult to identify organizations outside the ideological framework, which is intrinsically political. Dilla adds that, in practice, "they [mass organizations] do adapt their own positions on specific problems affecting their spheres of action" (Dilla 1999:32). Pearson and Lewis (1995:18) state that "they [Cuban academics] argue that the Cuban state's objectives resembled those of NGOs in other countries, and that most people have been content to work with the State, rather than form autonomous organizations. However this had led to complacency and inflexibility, which is possibly intrinsic to any institutionalization of that kind". Pickel (1998:77-78) does not yet see a vibrant civil society and argues that while "the community is active, a civil society can be considered to exist at best in 'statu nascendi'. However "these new forms of social organization are in a preliminary way to offer an alternative to the traditional market-state antithesis that has dominated public discourse in Cuba for so many years" (Dilla 2000:41).

As NGOs grow in Cuba, one has to consider sources of funding. If relying on national funding, then the clear autonomy of the NGO could be questioned and it can be argued that many services that NGOs traditionally provide are already covered by various state institutions. For an NGO to exist in Cuba with outside funding, there is the issue to consider that, as development aid is increasingly channelled through NGOs, their objectives and methodologies might get increasingly limited to the mainstream approach to development and therefore limited to certain practices. It is not surprising then that the growth of NGOs as experienced in other countries is not matched in Cuba (Pearson and Lewis 1995).

What some scholars perceive as being part of a socialist transformation, others see as the emergence of new civil society organizations seeking autonomy from the state. The latter group frame this development as a change in the nature of the communist-party regime challenging the state's coherence and legitimacy (Espinosa 1999). Espinosa<sup>19</sup> identifies the creation of the non-government organization sector as among the most significant political changes that have affected state-society relations. He perceives this as a revitalization of a public sphere and a slow reconstitution of civil society originating from well outside the confines of the Communist party-state and its model of a socialist society. These organizations emanate from five major sources: (1) the state itself; (2) remnants of pre-revolutionary civil society, especially the churches and fraternal organizations; (3) revisionists and dissidents from the Cuban Communist Party; (4) dissident and human rights movements; and (5) informal personal and social networks (Espinosa 1999). He argues (1999:352) that "by the end of 1995, a very different public sphere had replaced the sterile, monist arrangement of the Castro-Leninist state." He dissects the Cuban public sphere according to legal status, level of organization and ultimately the party-state relationship and distinguishes three main groups (1999:352): Espinosa's classification of civil society organizations in Cuba:

**Socialist Civil Society (Authorized)**

- Mass organizations
- Legal NGOs
- Associations recognized under Decree-Law 54

**Alternative Civil Society (Not authorized, or Illegal)**

- Public groups not recognized legally by the state.

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<sup>19</sup> Espinosa's positionality plays a vital role in his perception of civil society in Cuba. He is the director of the Felix Varela Centre for Cuban Studies at the University of Miami. His work does not rely on empirical research undertaken in Cuba itself.



- Pre-revolutionary institutions that remain outside official civil society.
- Groups involved in dissident, opposition, or independent social activism.

#### **Informal Civil Society**

- Personal networks
- Spontaneous groupings for single purposes
- Private associations with no outward manifestations toward the sphere of public interaction.

Other scholars, however, have suggested that a socialist civil society has always existed and is currently thriving (Dilla 2001, Hernández 1994, 2003, Mora 2001). These scholars refer to a wider understanding of civil society actors and are less concerned about the state-civil society distinction. They point to the plurality of organizations currently present. It has to be understood that in the case of a socialist society like Cuba, many of the organizations, such as church, NGOs, trade unions, cultural groups etc are found, not in the private but in the state sector. "This situation has led some observers-especially those who still confuse civil society with free enterprise - to jump to the conclusion that those organizations are nothing but tentacles of the state bureaucracy, divorced from civil society. The news for those given to such thinking is that in a socialist society like Cuba, the universities, professional and religious associations, community and labour organizations, and cultural and academic publications are *also* spaces of civil society where the cultural and ideological variables in the equation of hegemony are daily reproduced" (Hernández 2003:128).

This results in the fuller defining characteristics of civil society in Cuba being based on a more inclusive understanding of actors and agency. In mainstream development civil society has often been seen as being constituted almost entirely by NGOs as sole agents and actors. In mainstream development and understandings of civil society, trade unions, social movements and other less compliant versions of civil society are rarely mentioned (Mawdsley and Rigg 2003). Texts and discourses in Cuba often refer to different types of civil society organizations: Mora (2001:89) for example lists: "relation between European NGOs" and "an important group of the Cuban civil society (NGOs, associations, foundations, mass organizations, trade unions)." Others have included universities and research institutions to the list of organizations understood as an integral part of civil society in Cuba (Hernández 2003). The Cuban discourse is more inclusive in terms of the breadth and spectrum of civil society actors. The inflated sector of NGOs within mainstream development thinking has not received equivalent

attention in the Cuban discourse on civil society. Particularly during the early years of intensified cooperation between Cuba and mainly European NGOs, the early 90s, many publications as well as the general discourse did not yet necessarily refer to NGOs as such, but drew reference to Cuban institutions, associations, foundations etc. It was not until the latter part of the 90s that the vocabulary and usage of the specific term "NGO" penetrated the general discourse.<sup>20</sup>

Another peculiarity of Cuban understanding of civil society is that state-civil society relations are not framed as problematic but as complementary. "Relations between government institutions and civil society do not have an objective or a subjective basis for the development of antagonism, but instead for the broadest and strong cooperative relationships"<sup>21</sup> (CEE 1996a:22). Unlike many developing countries, where NGOs often represent non-state interests, in Cuba, NGOs are often in agreement with the state and are working and are active within general macro-policy. This argument is based on the social character of state policy and hence the congruence with general NGO policy.

It is undeniable that there exist close ties between the civil society sector in Cuba and the state. This is for historical reasons, resulting from the Revolution, which in itself had become a popular movement emanating from the grassroots. It remains to be seen whether or not these close ties based in an alternative understanding of civil society in Cuba might not yield the desired development goals better. As Bratton noted already in 1989 (585): "government-NGO relations are likely to be most constructive where a confident and capable government with populist policies meets an NGO that works to pursue mainstream development programmes...and most conflictual where a weak and defensive government with a limited power base meets an NGO that seeks to promote community mobilization". The understanding of civil society in Cuba is framed within an understanding of a Hegelian concept, which suggested that a civil society that is too free might be conflict-producing and hence need state control. Hegel argued that it was necessary for the state to harmonize competing interests in society. For him the state was the protector, suggesting that civil society cannot remain civil unless it is ordered politically, subjected to the higher surveillance of the state (van Rooy 1998).

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<sup>20</sup> A more detailed discussion and reasons for this will follow in the next chapter.

<sup>21</sup> In original: las relaciones entre las instituciones gubernamentales y las de la sociedad civil no tienen una base objetiva ni subjetiva para que se desarrollen antagonismos, sino para que se desarrollen las mas amplias y solidas relaciones de cooperacion...

## 4.5 Mass organizations

An important element in Cuba's political reality and the realm of civil society are the mass organizations, most of which had been set-up shortly after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 (see section 4.3). Amaro (1996) credited these mass organizations and the institutional setting they created with the government's ability to extirpate any organized opposition and to exercise that kind of leadership that would lead to the installation of Fidel Castro's unilateral project. These organizations each have very specific functions and responsibilities and cater to distinct sectors in society. The larger organizations are the Communist party (PCC), the Young Communist League (UJC) and the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), as well as the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC) (see section 4.6.3), the Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDR), the Federation of University Students (FEU) and the National Association of Small (private) Farmers (ANAP)<sup>22</sup>. These large organizations are supplemented by various professional and other associations that represent the specific interests of other sectors, including not only writers and artists, journalists, economist and lawyers but also agricultural technical staff. For Alarcón (1999:8) "these associations and organizations embrace practically the entire universe of activities, interests and problems of all Cubans". Mass organizations work in close relationship with local government and are believed to work for greater efficiency in production and service activities, strengthening of popular participation and an improved quality of life for ordinary citizens (Amaro 1996). Some scholars (e.g. Alarcón 1999, Beverly 2002 and Saney 2004) hence conclude that this particular constellation of organizations and associations reflect and represent the ambit of all social sectors in the polity, thereby challenging the notion that Cuba has only "one voice –the voice of the party, the voice of Fidel Castro...that the only ethically and intellectually honest positions in Cuba are those of 'dissidents', that ideological pluralism and independence of thought exist only among those who have left Cuba" (Beverly 2002:2). The Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDRs), initiated in 1960, are for example the largest and most grassroots of all mass organizations with units present on neighbourhood level for each block. They have a membership of more than 7 million people. They were initially established to organize the population to "repress counter-revolutionary activity, i.e. sabotage and terrorism" (Lorimer 2005:25) and to defend the Revolution, but according to Saney (2004), they have

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<sup>22</sup> These are the farmers who own their land.

now evolved to encompass a wide range of social and community functions and are particularly good in mobilisations and organizations at community level. For example during the mass campaigns for vaccines against poliomyelitis, the CDRs were required to take a census of all children, to organise the campaign and to facilitate its working at neighbourhood level. They have also led campaigns in the recent emphasis on urban agriculture and move to cultivating back-yards. These activities contribute to generate community cohesion and have "created a social network that is critical for all sorts of activities" (López-Vígil 1999:266). Thus, for some (e.g. Saney 2004), the mass organizations constitute a key feature of a participatory culture that typifies Cuba and are considered "national and inclusive, augmenting the representative governmental structures by providing organizational and institutional means by which civil society both expresses itself and intervenes in the decision-making process" (Saney 2004:66). Alarcón (1999:8) states that: "no decision on matters that concern these organizations is made without their consent".

Other scholars (e.g Aguirre 1998, Amaro 1996) perceive these mass organizations as extension arms of the government, more to "ensure that every citizen makes his or her contribution towards the construction of socialism than to express their members' particular aspirations" (Hatchwell and Calder 1995). In particular the CDRs have been perceived as localized nuclei for 'spying' on neighbours activities and form part of the political observation established by state security. Despite the achievements and status of these mass organizations, Martínez Heredia (1994 cited in McCaughan 1998) states that their tendencies towards authoritarianism and paternalism have prevented civil society from becoming more than an appendage of the political system. Existing institutions such as mass organizations and workers' collectives have not gained their autonomy (Gras 1994 cited in Aguirre 1998) and the top hierarchy of mass organizations are interchangeable with the top hierarchy of the Communist Party. Party leaders often shift position in mass organizations and vice versa (Amaro 1996). For example Leiner (1994:66) believes that the FMC had never provided women with an autonomous voice, because "like the unions and other mass organizations, [it] functions as an institution for carrying out or 'transmitting' formulated policies" of the Cuban Communist Party and state agencies. The issues of gender and the FMC will now be discussed.

## 4.6 Gendered realities in Cuba

There exist very many gender issues and gendered realities in Cuba, which cannot all be presented here. However, the larger macro-context of gender prior to and since the Revolution will be sketched out. In Cuba, as elsewhere, there is not a single female reality, but many.

### 4.6.1 Legal achievements

It was not until the twentieth century that laws were passed moving towards the equal standing of men and women. In 1917, women received the right to manage their properties and in the same year the '*club femenino*' was set up by women who had begun to organize for political and social action (Smith and Padula 1996). In 1923, the club mobilized 31 women's organizations for Cuba's First National Women's Congress, which stressed the social role of the state rather than charities as appropriate vehicles for social welfare (Smith and Padula 1996). These clubs were almost exclusively upper- or middle-class based, but aimed at aiding the less fortunate, stimulating culture and promoting healthful motherhood (Smith and Padula 1996). A law to legalize divorce was proposed in 1918, but it was not until 1930 that the death penalty for women committing adultery was abolished. By 1925, working women received basic medical attention and security. In 1934, the right to vote, maternity rights and a law for equal salary for women and men were agreed (Bunck 1997). The constitution of 1940 made any discrimination based on sex, race or class illegal.

Since the Revolution in Cuba, many laws concerning the equal rights of men and women have been passed. During the 1960s and 70s, women's issues and objectives took on a more visible and important role and culminated in the passing of the family code in 1976. The family law, Law no. 1289, came into action in 1975 under the name '*código de la familia*'. It was modelled on East German legislation and encompassed a section making husbands equally responsible for the household and the education of the children. This 'revolution within the revolution' (FMC 1996) was directed towards a greater emphasis on improving women's situation overall, an emerging critique of gender divisions in everyday life and increased sensitivity to the kinds of issues which had been raised within women's movements (Molyneux 1996). This can be attributed to the increased expectations and self-assertiveness of women who thus made more claims, as well as the

outside force of a self-confident international women's movement, which had strong counterparts elsewhere in Latin America (Molyneux 1996). However, it was also part of an acknowledgement by the state that it cannot take on the entire role of education and socialisation of the children of the Revolution and hence the need to articulate a conscious policy with relation to the family (Bengelsdorf 1985). Continuing legal achievements now mean that, legally speaking, men and women in Cuba have equal rights. In discussions on gender issues with Cubans, these legal achievements are always mentioned and stated with a certain pride. Other gender related issues are however less eagerly shared and the intimate intra-household issues are more difficult to access and understand (see section 4.6.4 and also 2.9 and 9.9-9.12).

#### 4.6.2 Women in the workforce

Literacy campaigns, through which women were able to advance their educational standing, and these legal achievements have meant an increased possibility of incorporation of women into the work-force. Today, 40% of the entire workforce are women. The achievements presented in statistics are impressive. Women hold 52.5% of management positions in trade unions: 34.6% of lawyers and 61% of judges are women. In education 69% of workers are women and in health even 72%. In the academic world, the proportion of women lies at 58% and female students amount to 60% of all students. In terms of education, women overall hold a higher level than their male counterparts (Campuzano 1996). Within the technical and professional sector, women hold 66% of jobs (Valdés 2004).

The possibilities of work have meant a relative economic independence for women and have certainly contributed to their liberation, but the core problem lies within the socio-cultural circumstances (Kollenz 2003). Despite the advances due to equal standing in educational opportunities and achievements, many antiquated traditions have remained in people's consciousness and dominate an identity formation still deeply embedded in a patriarchal society. This was most probably reinforced by a history of 'protective' labour legislation until 1992 that sought to 'protect' women by legally restricting their access to jobs that supposedly endangered their reproductive capacity. These policies were a factor in the feminization of certain fields (Smith and Padula 1996). "Deriving from European laws, which, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and influenced by the women's rights movement, were aimed at defending working women's maternal role. The intent of

these laws was not to limit opportunities for women, but rather to support their employment while also guarding their socially valued role as mothers" (Smith and Padula 1996:122). As motherhood is understood as a cornerstone of national revolutionary culture (see below), in 1965 Resolution 48 was passed that classifies 498 jobs as dangerous to women's reproductive functions, including subterranean work, quarry work, work under water, work where physical force is required, work at heights, work with equipment that produces large vibrations, work at high and low temperatures, and work in 'dangerous places'. This restrictive policy was never full-heartedly accepted by the FMC, which lobbied for an abolition of such "an obstacle to women's advancement" (FMC 1980). Only in 1992 was any reference to sex-based labour restrictions abolished legally. But the long history of sex-based employment policies resulted in a considerable sexual division of labour, which was according to Smith and Padula (1996) most pronounced in the agricultural sector, where certain chores were identified as women's work, such as the picking of peppers, whereas the 'hard' chores and spraying of crops were exclusively men's jobs. The notion of work 'suitable' for women prevails strongly at present (see section 9.10 and 9.11).

A large majority of household duties remain as women's responsibility (Campuzano 1996). This continues despite attempts by the state to socialize women's domestic role through day care centres and other support services, which never satisfy the demand (Safa 1995). In 1962 for example, the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) was given the task of creating a national network of nurseries and by 1975, the numbers of nurseries had increased from 109 in 1962 to 658 (Murray 1979). Aguilar and Chernard (1994:104) point to the nub of the problem: "women are integrated into social production, but men aren't integrated into reproduction."

Particularly in the '*periodo especial*'<sup>23</sup> the burden on women increased, through trying to meet household needs under austere circumstances and grave shortages. This human cost of the '*periodo especial*' is seldom mentioned. The social effects of the macro-economic policies adopted by the Cuban government as a result of the '*periodo especial*' have affected women disproportionately. Since they constitute a greater proportion of vulnerable groups-such as the elderly and

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<sup>23</sup> The effects of the '*periodo especial*' are similar to the impacts structural adjustment programmes had on women during the 1980s and 1990s. The impact resulting from structural adjustment policies was reported widely and had generally resulted in an increased burden on women, the exacerbation of social inequalities and a deepening of gender divisions (e.g Afshar and Dennis 1992, Gladwin 1991).

infirm, single parent households and low paid workers, their employment is most likely to be threatened and their workloads increase as they attempt to survive in conditions of scarcity, cuts in public welfare and declining living standards (Molyneux 1996:30). With the legalization of self-employment, 73% of the licences granted went to men, which suggests that women play a subordinate role in this economic activity (Dilla 2000). Considered a lucrative sector where earnings can be substantially higher than state salaries (compare Mesa-Lago 1998), it seems that women are not equally participating in this opportunity.

Despite these difficulties the UNDP continues to grant Cuba high achievements in terms of the GEM-Index, which calculates the professional, political and economic opportunities for participation by women. In 1996, Cuba reached place number 21 on a worldwide survey, which is ahead of Japan (37<sup>th</sup>), France (40<sup>th</sup>) and Chile (59<sup>th</sup>) (UNDP 1996:40 in Burchardt 1997).

#### 4.6.3 Federation of Cuban Women (FMC)

Founded and enacted in 1960, the FMC was created by state authorities and revolutionary heroes with the aim of bringing women into the revolutionary process. The FMC is the largest mass organization in Cuba and in 1999 it claimed a membership of about 3,600,000 women, which is about 81% of the female adult population (FMC 1999)<sup>24</sup>. Membership in the FMC is voluntary and is open to all Cuban women from the age of 14 years. It has a presence in rural as well as urban areas and is structured within the municipal, provincial and national levels with different committees and active secretariats (Allahar 1994). The FMC is, in terms of membership, the largest women's organization ever seen in Latin America (Molyneux 1996). The FMC was acting to organize the female masses and reflect their interests and worries (FMC senior official, pers. comm. 10.12.03). The primary goals were identified as organising and mobilising women for the defence and consolidation of the revolution, in order to consolidate political power and to implement a socialist programme of economic and social transformation (Molyneux 1996). "These goals were expressed in terms of an ethical commitment to 'women's emancipation', premised on women's entry into work, formal juridical quality and social rights to health and education" (Molyneux 1996:7).

Until now the goals are still those as proclaimed by the Revolution and the "struggle for the objective and subjective conditions that permit the full exercise of

<sup>24</sup> The sex ratio in Cuba is 0.999 (ONE 2001).



the equality of women" (FMC 1995:169). The formation of the institution is supported by the constitution's definition of mass organizations as representing "specific interests" (Lutjens 1995). The FMC lends a voice to Cuban women and provides certain mechanisms, such as representation on the highest political boards, to ensure that issues that affect women are taken up by the Cuban government. Centrally defined goals of Cuban macro-policy have strongly shaped the FMC's agenda while changes and development within FMC have shaped macro-policy. "The content of the party policy is derived in large measure from information and proposals made by the FMC" (Evensen 1986:304). It can thus perform the role of a mild pressure group (Molyneux 1996). In accepting state macro-policy, the FMC has advantages such, in that it has the full support of the state, is considered a vital mass organization and also has some funding and state resources. Its status as the sole organization of women permits comprehensive planning that is reinforced by the orientation of all mass organizations to national goals (Lutjens1995). Following strong hierarchical structures, the FMC however cannot be defined or assigned solely a role of unreflected authoritarianism and simple transmission belt.

The objectives of the FMC are (FMC 1995:169):

- To integrate the women in the revolutionary process through supporting their integration in all educational and labour levels.
- To defend the rights of women and the equality of gender
- To increase the self-confidence of women
- To promote the ideas and practices of socialism, not only at national but also international level.

The FMC's representation and mandate ranges from policy-making on the highest political committees to attending to its members at the grassroots through locally embedded representatives. The work on the defence of women's rights puts special emphasis on the incorporation of women into the labour force, and it is through the workplace that access to benefits such as housing and paid vacations or access to resources for leisure can be obtained (Jennissen and Lundy 2001). Given that the FMC is the largest and only organisation dedicated exclusively to the necessities of women, it acts as a reference point in the discourse and methodology of issues that are considered gender-related. The FMC generates theories and practices and these are propagated through the organizational structures to the grassroots level.

#### 4.6.4 The gendered space of Cuban women

The Cuban Revolution aimed at a state where universal social and economic rights are guaranteed at a societal level, which often contradicts individual rights. The assumption was a total unity of interests and identification between the individual, state and society. This social structure implies the abolition of public and private spaces<sup>25</sup>. Society is formally structured not around the individual or family nucleus, but on the neighbourhood level through various community institutions. Many of these have the explicit mandate to enter the 'private sphere' for example in making sure that pregnant women are attending the compulsory preventive medical check-ups (Lang 2004).

While such a societal structure and degree of social control might suggest that domestic violence could be easily recognized and acted upon or even prevented, recent studies (e.g. Asén and Infante 2000, Proveyer 2001) point to severe failures in the system to deal with domestic violence issues. It was only since 1990 that the government officially recognised the existence of domestic violence in Cuba<sup>26</sup>. Two main factors had contributed to the fact that the state started to take an interest: Firstly, with increasing feminist thought within social movements in Latin America the FMC opened its ideology to embrace elements of feminism; secondly, with a shift in international gender politics that became apparent throughout the UN-conferences of Vienna, Kairo and Beijing, the state start to take an interest in gender specific violence in Cuba itself (Lang 2004). Various measures have since been taken, such as the commissioning of investigations into the issue<sup>27</sup>, institutional adaptations such as the creation of Casas de la Orientación y Apoyo in each district and the formation of a national working group in 1997. This national group for the prevention of domestic violence Grupo Nacional de Trabajo para la Atención y la Prevención de la Violencia Familiar (GNTV) is coordinated by the FMC and is drawn from the Ministries of Health, Education and Justice, as well as the University, the media, the Institute of Legal Medicine and the National Centre for Sexual Education. Despite these efforts, Lang (2004) concludes that they are inefficient and the

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<sup>25</sup> Please note the vivid debate surrounding the division of private-public spaces, which is increasingly also contested for capitalist systems in the recent feminist literature.

<sup>26</sup> The government heralded the triumph of the Revolution, as offering dignity to its citizen including gender equality achieved and hence argued that under such advances in emancipating women, no such thing as domestic violence could exist. Furthermore the monopoly of the FMC, who did not in this follow the Latin American feminist movements, delayed putting this topic on the public agenda as had already occurred in other Latin American states in the mid 1980s (see Alvarez 1998).

<sup>27</sup> This is considered a big step as the existence of domestic violence had been denied.

problem lies mainly with the missing perception of the injustice of domestic violence. She reports the notion prevailing among all her interviewees (from doctors, policemen, FMC-functionaries to ordinary citizens) that a woman living in a violent relationship does so, because she likes it (Lang 2004). Since the state is assumed to provide comprehensive social and legal guarantees, the woman is thought to have the freedom to leave. Since violence against women only began to be studied this decade, precise figures are not yet available. Acosta (1999) reports that in 1991 and 1992, 150 cases of sexual abuse against women - 70 percent of which involved rape - were brought before the La Habana Provincial Court, a possible gross underrepresentation of the real figures. According to local experts (and also to cooperative members I worked with), levels of violence in Cuba are nevertheless much lower than in most other Latin American countries (Acosta 1999).

Cuba is known for its high divorce rates (by Latin American standards) that lie at about 3.54<sup>28</sup> per 1000 inhabitants. Cuba's very liberal divorce laws are often held responsible. Cuba legalized divorce in 1869 and introduced divorces by notary public in 1994 if mutual consent exists. The latter is literally a matter of walking into an office, paying the very low peso fee and obtaining a divorce within 20 minutes. Other explanations attribute the rate to housing shortages and living with in-laws, the economic difficulties and women's young mean age at first marriage (19.8)<sup>29</sup>. The general trend is to more divorce and more consensual partnerships. The responsibility for child maintenance lies with both parents regardless of whether they are married as declared through the family code in 1975, but the code had no provision for ensuring the payment of child support (Smith and Padula 1996). It lies within the efforts of the Employment and Social Security Commission, the Civil Registry and the police to ensure the payment of alimony, as regulated by the law. A study of 108 single mothers in the late 1980s showed that 59% of the fathers did not provide any child support while 31 percent paid only sporadically (Rodriguez 1990).

A conflictual development is the issue of sexual freedom. Traditional sexual culture was complicated by race and class, but persons at large were assigned a passive and active role in the partnership, with the active role of power and domination reserved for the male (Smith and Padula 1996). Increasingly the mutual dependency and natural antagonism between the sexes was recognised and by 1975 a sex education programme was launched with the tenet of sexual equality

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<sup>28</sup> This is slightly below the USA divorce rates at about 4.1 per 1000 inhabitants.

<sup>29</sup> Greenstein and Davies (in press) associate a young mean age at first marriage with a higher probability of divorce, because much sociological research on divorce at the individual level has suggested a strong negative effect of age at marriage on probability of divorce.

and that men and women should be "equally free and responsible in determining their relations in the area of their sexual lives" (Hernández 1973 quoted in Smith and Padula 1996: 174). The fact that both women and men wield sexual power is now celebrated in Cuba, but despite the more balanced sexual activity and freedom, women continue to be judged by 'appropriate' behaviour more than men (Smith and Padula 1996). Sexologists found that there was hardly any difference between men and women in the frequency of extra-marital affairs (Ares 1990).

Sexual freedom was not extended to lesbians or homosexuals. (Awareness of lesbianism was very low, and there is little or no information on its history.) For many years after the establishment of the Revolution, homosexuality was not accepted, and was even persecuted in the early years, when many homosexuals were deported to labour camps Unidades Militares de Apoyo a la Producción (UMAP)<sup>30</sup> (Ocasio 2002). The societal legitimatisation of sexism and the numerous internal policies that, for example, forbade homosexuals to become members of the Communist Party, to take on a leadership position, or even to study certain subjects, spoke of a gross discrimination (Acosta 2004). The biography of Reinaldo Arenas (1994) *Before night falls* tells a personal story of fear and prosecution based on sexual orientation in Cuba. His book and its film adaptation<sup>31</sup> became famous worldwide. At Cuba's 1971 First Congress on Culture and Education, homosexuality had been declared 'antisocial behaviour' and the general perception of the public was that being homosexual is having an illness. In 1988 homosexuality was penalized according to Article 303a of the Penal Code of April 30 1988 in which "publicly manifested" homosexuality was penalised, with between three months and one year in prison or a fine of 100 to 300 *cuotas* for people "persistently bothering others with homosexual amorous advances". The latest discriminatory provisions targeting homosexuals were removed from Cuba's penal code when it was reformed in 1997. However, homophobia remains widespread in Cuba, where "machismo" is a predominant feature of mainstream culture (Bejel 2001). Despite the Oscar-nominated Cuban film *Fresa y Chocolate*<sup>32</sup> in 1993, which for the first time put homosexuality and homophobia in the centre of public attention and had a positive reception with audiences standing and clapping in the movies, homophobia prevails even if certain levels of tolerance have been achieved (Acosta 2004). Within the

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<sup>30</sup> These camps opened in 1965 and were intended as a system of work and rehabilitation camps for social 'misfits', including homosexuals (Johnson 1993). The exact dates of closing of these camps is debated but is thought to be around 1968 (Bejel 2001).

<sup>31</sup> *Before night falls* released in 2001 by director Julian Schnabel.

<sup>32</sup> by directors Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Tito) and Juan Carlos Tabío.

group of homosexuals, lesbians are now the most marginalized and least tolerated group (Acosta 2004).

#### 4.6.5 Gender conceptualisations and feminism

The treatment and understanding of gender are still based well within the concepts of Women in Development theories.<sup>33</sup> The FMC has not yet fully incorporated the discourse of Gender and Development<sup>34</sup>. This can be partly attributed to the relative hostility that the FMC harboured against 'feminism'. Feminism and in particular Western feminism "was seen as 'bourgeois' and divisive, and its insistence on autonomous organizational forms, at variance with the FMC's acceptance of 'democratic centralism' under overall Party control" (Molyneux 1996:12). Cuba also has an ingrained suspicion of concepts and discourses generated outside Cuba, especially those that it perceives as propagating Western neo-liberal understandings. And Vilma Espín<sup>35</sup>'s claim in 1974 that the Women's movement in Cuba was about feminine, not feminist ideas, fits this trend (Domínguez 1987)

Many of the concepts that are managed by the FMC are based entirely in promoting women's access to work, without entering into an analysis of the social construction of gender. Neither do they engage with conceptualisations like masculinity and often use narrow understandings of identity. In fact, the FMC's ideology and conceptualisations such as motherhood are in line with the Revolution and predominate in the gender discourse in Cuba. The role of motherhood has, throughout the Revolution, received considerable importance. This is not necessarily unique to Cuba: Davies (1997) claims that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the relative importance of family and motherhood has supported the socialist project. She however also claims that this cultural tradition has secured the success and continuation of the Revolution and that Fidel Castro has consciously used the significance of motherhood in his political program. In 1960, Vilma Espín emphasised the physical weakness of women and called for male protection. In

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<sup>33</sup> This is based in an understanding of women's equality with men, focusing the strategies on the female population, without questioning the patriarchal foundations of social organization or development activities.

<sup>34</sup> Where gender is understood as a social construction, readily expressed through power relations. The objective is to de-institutionalise the privileges that are usually generated by the development policies suggested by men. Hence, the aim is not to integrate gender in existing policies but to radically transform these policies from a different perspective.

<sup>35</sup> Vilma Espín is head of the FMC since 1960 and is the sister-in-law of Fidel Castro. She had been active in the revolutionary movement.

1975, Fidel Castro called women to incorporation into the workforce, but still emphasizing 'primary roles', such as motherhood (Davies 1997). These stereotypes persist to the present. The following promotional bill-board (photo 4.2) was seen in a rural area in the Pinar del Rio province.

Figure 4.2: Bill-board advertising the Women's Federation (Pinar del Rio March 2004)



The image displays strongly a female identity as Revolutionary that does not shy away from arms and actively participates in an armed struggle if need be. Equally strong is the message that is conveyed with the baby in her arms. It points directly to motherhood. How deeply this identity is ingrained was illustrated in an anonymous exercise conducted with men and women in the cooperative where they were given the chance to respond to the question: *¿Por qué me gusta ser mujer? ¿Por qué me gusta ser hombre*<sup>36</sup>? respectively. Answers from the women such as: *"porqué me gustan los hombres; tener familia; ayudar a la Revolución; ser madre*<sup>37</sup>" were not uncommon. The wish to be revolutionary or supporting the Revolution was voiced in the same breath as being mother, having children and being feminine. Curiously enough, none of the male respondents referred to the Revolution or took a political stance, they focused much more on men being the "stronger sex".

## 4.7 Summary

The broad introduction to Cuba's agricultural changes in this chapter has set the scene to explore later the recent changes in terms of the organic agriculture movement. In this debate the role of NGOs will be fundamental and hence the context of the vivid debate surrounding Cuba's civil society was necessary to provide the foundation for the later arguments. The specific gendered realities will form part of this analysis and hence the above description had been necessary to

<sup>36</sup> Why I like to be a woman? Why I like to be a man?

<sup>37</sup> Because I like men; to have a family; to help the Revolution; to be mother.

provide an understanding of the Cuban case. The empirical chapters that follow will flesh out the intricacies as well as the complex interlinkages between those three themes.

## 5. Framing the research: introducing theoretical concepts

Things should be as simple as possible, but not simpler  
(Albert Einstein)

This chapter provides a conceptual framework detailing the theoretical underpinnings through which agricultural change in Cuba has been approached, analysed and understood for this research. The framework borrows from alternative development theories and explores them through post-structural political ecology, a concept which borrows from post-structuralism a fascination with discourse and institutional power. It nevertheless remains within a tradition of political ecology, which sees imaginaries, discourses and environmental practices grounded in the social relations of production and their attendant struggles. The concept takes into account Marxian notions of ideology, post-structural critiques of Enlightenment and of Reason and the post-modern questioning of development. Processes by which environmental imaginaries are formed, contested and actually practised and experienced are examined here through the work of Henri Lefebvre. In particular his understanding of the production of space allows a close analysis of linkages between hegemonic discourses on nature, in this case the environment of sustainable agriculture, the social gendered space and the actual conceptualisation of local practices by the farmers themselves through the everyday.

### 5.1 Exploring development theories, civil society and the role of NGOs

My research project is informed by the disillusionment with mainstream development, which has recently been perceived more and more as merely the universalising discourse of Westernisation. This has triggered a rigorous academic deconstruction not only of the failure of 'development' to deliver, but increasingly of its intentions and premises. Petras and Veltmeyer (2002:282) speak of "how foreign aid is part of the arsenal of policy instruments used by aspiring hegemonic states to conquer markets and promote the interests of their capitalist classes against competitors and their nationalist and socialist opponents" and consider aid as



catalyst of regression. The academic deconstruction is informed by the textual turn, by rising criticisms of Western rationality and by claims to know. These writings challenge the modernist and Eurocentric character of development itself, proposing in its place various 'alternatives to development' (Escobar 1995, Illich 1997, Nandy 1997, Rahnema and Bawtree 1997, Sachs 1992) and a post-structural discursive understanding of the development project (Berger 2001, Crush 1995, Slater 1992). This school of thought found it to be necessary to look at development as a discourse, as texts and words of development, the

'vocabulary deployed to construct the world as an unruly terrain requiring management and intervention,...their modes of establishing expertise and authority and silencing alternative voices, on the forms of knowledge that development produces and assumes; and on the power relations it underwrites and reproduces' (Crush 1995: 3).

Development was thus located as a discursive field, a system of power relations which produces what Foucault (1984) calls domains of objects and rituals of truth. Escobar's writings (1995a, 1995b, 1997), informed by Deleuze's work, identify development discourse as a series of statements and visibilities linked together as a '*dispositif* or a diagram of power'. The discursive field of development is, in this sense, a cartography of power and knowledge where the language of development constantly visualizes landscape, territory, area, location, distance, boundary and situation (Slater 1992). Development thus came to be seen by 'post-development' writers as an apparatus that links a form of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, where power is exercised as *power over* (Said 1983). These Western forms of power-knowledge have formed a hegemonic discourse on development with the intention of ensuring the conformity of the developing countries to Western modernity (Peet and Watts 1996). These discursive settings of development and the resulting '*power over*' in Cuba will become evident in chapters 7, 8 and 9, in which I will explore how Northern NGOs are employing a canon of a specific language, forms of knowledge and particular mechanisms of control. The Northern NGOs and other donors are able to employ a hegemonic discourse that is shaping the Cuban polity, although Cuban NGOs play their part.

Many post-development writers would like to see a complete disengagement from practising development at all. While post-development discourses are firm in their critique of what the writers term the 'Western project', these very discourses have been accused of suffering from their paralysing notions of development and

lack of instrumentality (Corbridge 1998, Lehmann 1997, Pietersee 2001). This post-development immobilization seems almost symptomatic of the problem of reconciling fundamental research and theory with practical dilemmas of policy making and intervention. Simon (1997) refers to the concerns of 'development in practice' as opposed to 'development in theory', the latter standing for the post-development critique. This emphasises the notion of two knowledge systems (quoted in Long 1992): "knowledge for understanding" and "knowledge for action". But what if the two knowledge systems are inseparable and are informed by each other (Long 1992)? Under this premise, post-development deconstructions would advance to a continuous cross-checking of the alternative project, enlighten presumptions in development talk and practice and force reflexivity. The post-development debate fully acknowledges the discursive constitution of development as project and practice and is seen as a prerequisite to re-building a plurality of the understanding of development (Pietersee 2001). Post-development is radical in the sense that it requires 'a new way of looking at the self and the world, or in other words, offers an epistemological turn' (Rist 1997:244 quoted in Corbridge 1998). We are reminded of the need for greater self-consciousness, reflexivity and encouragement of difference and heterogeneity (Slater 1997). And it is this aspect of the post-development discourse that has informed my gaze on Cuba and my analysis of development cooperation enacted in the agricultural sector.

The concept of civil society resonates strongly in both the neo-liberal mainstream and alternative development thinking. Within each of these two camps of development theory, however, there exist different imaginaries of the make-up of civil society. Many alternative development discourses de-emphasize the nation-state in favour of social agency and civil society, seen as comprising a multiplicity of diverse groups and organizations, such as grassroots bodies and social movements, and associated with local synergy between economic, political and cultural actors (Álvarez *et al.* 1998). There is a prevailing notion in the post-development advocacy literature that grass-roots movements are necessarily concerned with the common good, both natural and social. This literature thereby neglects the underlying power struggles in civil society. The weakness of alternative development approaches is that the role of the state is neglected while the local/global nexus is undertheorized (Pietersee 2001:166).

The mainstream development corpus and the World Bank very much identify civil society in terms of NGOs. These development institutions position NGOs as central to civil society and understand NGOs as legitimate, apolitical and

representative of local developments (Pietersee 2001). However, critics have argued that the emphasis on the role of NGOs does not take sufficient account of legitimacy, of downward accountability or of the new hegemonic institutionalisation occurring through NGO activity. NGOs tend to advocate participation, without reference to a broader and more fundamental discussion on deliberative democracy or the political agenda of participation itself. The NGO discourse often fails to adequately to explore or even recognise the power relations permeating civil society (Cooke and Kothari eds. 2001, Hudock 1999, Keane 1998, Mohan 2002 and Tvedt 1998). It is ironic that both the World Bank, with its totalising discursive development based on the post-Washington consensus, and the anti-development authors with their discourses embedded in the rejection of rationality and the Western modernist project look equally to *civil society, participation and ordinary people*. My perspective differs from the post-development discourse in as much as I challenge the suggestion that civil society is the sole agent capable of addressing the practical challenges of social injustice and inequalities in the majority world. It will become evident in later chapters that the emerging civil society actors – NGOs - in Cuba are not necessarily capable of delivering, rather they are engaging in new dependencies, conforming to Western ideas that can be counterproductive in a Cuban context.

## 5.2 Civil society and the state

The development debate is locked in a civil society versus state dichotomy (Howell and Pearce 2002). Various scholars (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, Hann and Dunn 1996, Karlstrom 1999, Lewis 2002, Mamdani 1996) warn of this ethnocentrism of contemporary civil society debates and call for greater openness to the particular ways in which human communities create their own versions of civil society. It is important in any specific study to see the politics of civil society – the ways in which civil society as a normative ideal is contested, how relations of power are produced and reproduced, and how power is itself played out within civil society and the state and the linkages between the two. Watts (1995) identifies this confluence on civil society and emerging populisms as the reason for the current impasse in development. And it seems that despite the post-structural rejection of universalising discourses, a new discourse has been born, more totalising than before, the discourse of civil society.

Since the early 1990s, mainstream development cooperation has increasingly been following what became termed the 'New Policy Agenda' (Edwards and Hulme 1996). This agenda is rooted deeply in recent trends of economic and political thinking and is hence firmly embedded within neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory (Moore 1993). An old concept – civil society – was re-shaped and adopted and now incorporated into the Post-Washington consensus. The role attributed to this amorphous civil society was to fill the gap between a small and controlled state and the unleashing of market forces (e.g. Bernhard 1993, Ignatieff 1995). Hence, the magic realm of civil society was thought to be able to keep both the state as well as the neo-liberal market at bay. Civil society was encumbered with the responsibility of being the agent of change that could cure all ills created by both a failing state and the unjust marketplace (van Rooy 1998). Especially following the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the emergence of the New World Order, civil society was described as the main agent for democratization and an essential, if not the only, agent for building democracies. Armony (2004), however, argues, that economic equality and not civil participation plays a more important role in strengthening the quality of democracy. Armony (2004) stresses the fact that contextuality is important for democratization, more so than normative affiliations. "I argue that civil society may or may not lead to democracy because what matters is the context in which people associate, not because association is inherently and universally positive for democracy" (Armony 2004:2). The existence and health of a civil society is often attributed to membership in formal associations (Salamon *et al.* 1999). That this is a gross underestimation and restriction on the understanding of a vibrant society is obvious.

For the large and powerful development agencies, it is an anti-hegemonic, anti-state notion of civil society that dominates the usage and understanding of civil society. Civil society became framed – theoretically and practically – "as a space of freedom, separate from the state, and constituted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs)" (Mohan 2002:125). Civil society and the state became locked in a binary opposition, where civil society lies firmly outside the state sphere and is located loosely somewhere between the private and the state. Civil society was framed as being in conflict with the state and assigned the duty of guarding against the encroachment of an over-bearing state (Markovitz 1998). The notion was created and re-enforced that the state needs to be controlled and to be kept within its premises. However this, as Mohan (2002:125) argues, "...ignores the reciprocal

linkages between state and society, the constraining effects of market forces, and the underlying ideological agenda of the major lenders.”

This present understanding and application of the concept of civil society arguably does injustice to the historical development and transformation of this concept. The notion of a civil society is deeply rooted in the long history of political philosophy. Definitions and understandings have been altered by Roman, Lockean, Hegelian, Marxist and Gramscian interpretations (to name a few), long before its resurrection and current framing in the 90s (van Rooy 1998). It was not until the Scottish enlightenment, argues van Rooy, that the governed and governors were perceived to be positioned at opposing poles. Only then emerged clear boundaries as to what was to constitute the state that needed to be defended against and a civil society that has to keep the state at bay. A line was drawn between the state and civil society that had not existed before. Rather, the state had been seen as an instrument of civil society and not as an antithesis to it (van Rooy 1998). This notion of a reciprocity between state and civil society was taken up again by Gramsci, whose theorization suggests: “state and society are entwined and mutually constitutive, but by not seeing one as simply a reflection of the other allows greater room for political agency.” (Mohan 2002:127) Bebbington and Bebbington (2001) criticize the overdrawn difference between popular organizations and the state, and the treatment of the distinction between the state and civil society. Similarly, “boundaries between civil society and the state often become blurred in the practices of Latin American social movements” (Álvarez 1998).

The nation state has been de-emphasized in favour of civil society and local government, and good governance is now associated more with local synergy between economic, political and cultural actors. Within this entire debate on ‘who’ and ‘how’ development should occur, the focus on the means rather than the ends has meant an alienation from actual development achievements. It might be less important to identify agents of development, than to explore whether anything has actually changed. “The process through which a society governs itself, its differences and its capacities, and through which it allocates resources across these differences - becomes pivotal to alternatives. This necessarily implies a concern for both civil society and state. Indeed the two become part of the same question: namely under what form of state-civil society embeddedness and relative autonomy are more inclusive development alternatives likely to emerge?” (Evans 1996 in Bebbington and Bebbington 2001:9). Until the late 1980s Cuba had been following the technocratic vision of modernity closely, encouraged by its political, ideological

and economic ties to the Soviet Union. Since the early 1990s Cuba has had to re-think its development path and is hoping to build a new project originating from its very own understandings of society. The emerging NGO sector could either come to aid that process, or hinder it by complying too easily with Western agendas and concepts.

### 5.3 Political Ecology: an overview

Environment - society relationships in the form of political ecology have received increased attention since the 1980s through a research framework that focuses on the socio- economic and political forces that surround environmental change. It is "an analytic approach integrating environmental and political understanding" in a context of intensifying environmental problems and their greater political significance (Bryant 1992:12). Deficiencies of mostly technocratic research on environmental problems emerged in the 1970s. This technocratic approach had been based in a neo-malthusian understanding of overpopulation and managerial solutions to the perceived poor management of resources. The political ecology approach contested this notion of crisis (grounded in Hardin's (1968) thesis on the tragedy of the commons) and started to stress the argument that environmental change was more a result of political, economic and social inequalities. Despite this broader emphasis within the research agenda, scholars have pointed out that early political ecology, which was deeply engrained in Neo-Marxist thought, had an undeveloped sense of politics (Peet and Watts 2004, Bryant 2001). There was "no serious attempt at treating the means by which control and access of resources or property rights are defined, negotiated and contested within the political arenas of the household, the workplace and the state" (Peet and Watts 2004:12). Early political ecology was concerned about economic issues engrained in class struggle. Only after the absence of politics in the research agenda had been criticised did a more thorough understanding of the political and the state develop. And in particular the very importance and hermeneutic nature of the 'political' in environmental change becomes more apparent, as Harvey (1993:25) notes:

"All ecological projects (and arguments) are simultaneously political-economic projects (and arguments) and vice versa. Ecological arguments are never socially neutral any more than socio-political arguments are ecologically neutral."

Recent work also tries to capture the logics and dynamics of global capitalism and its environmental outcomes. Scholars on the one hand celebrate the diversity of approaches taken to address environmental change in using the looking glass of political ecology, but on the other hand note, if not lament, the absence of a strong common theoretical grounding. Bryant and Bailey (1997:1) observe that political ecologists have largely “eschewed theory in favour of empirical analysis”, and Peet and Watts (1993) noted that the research field is less grounded in a coherent theory than in similar areas of inquiry. This inquiry is based in making explicit the “causal connection of the logics and dynamics of capitalist growth and their specific environmental outcomes.” (Peet and Watts 2004).

#### 5.4. Political ecology and socialism

On a philosophical level, the realization of the contradictory nature of capitalism and its exploitation of the natural environment has led to numerous re-theorisings of Marxism and ecology, ecosocialism and green socialism. However, few works have focused on theorizing the specific dynamics of actually existing socialisms and the environment (Herskovitz 1993, Knabe 1993). Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) acknowledge that there exists environmental degradation in the socialist context, but they do not establish whether there is a distinctive socialist environmental management and what that might entail. Such an analysis would depend on the theorization of a socialist political economy. Kornai (1992) points out that while environmental degradation cannot be directly related to markets and profits, environmental degradation is however a result of the economics of shortage. He is implying the complementary and contradictory rationalities of centralised state planning on the one hand and reciprocities and networks at the enterprise level on the other.

The body of literature on political ecology does not only hold capitalist forces accountable for adverse environmental effects and exploitative management, but also points to the role that state action and policy play in environmental degradation. The state often politicises conflicts with the aim of maintaining capitalist accumulation (Peet and Watts 2004). Bryant (1992:18) notes:

“state policies play a pivotal role in contemporary human-environmental interaction. As well as suggesting the priorities and practices of the state, such policies help to structure social discourse

about environmental change, and are crucial to a broader understanding of the politics of such change. Thus, their origins, content, implementation and impact require analysis."

The state in many cases intervenes in economic activity to promote practices, which happen to be environmentally destructive, whether to serve capitalist expansion, a ruler's interest in political power, national security or personal enrichment (Bryant and Bailey 1997). These state deficiencies operate under capitalism, but are also a pertinent feature for socialist regimes, as Shapiro (2001) discusses at length. Shapiro's work (2001), based on Maoist China, points to the openly coercive state behaviour of that country, such as forcible relocations and suppression of intellectual and political freedoms, which contribute directly to a range of environmental problems such as deforestation, desertification and ill-conceived engineering projects. Sheridan (2004) explores how Tanzania's socialist policies affected environmental conditions indirectly through increasing the ambiguity and negotiability of resource entitlements.

Hence environmental degradation and exploitation are not unique to a specific type of political economy, but can only be understood through a closer analysis of the various conceptualisations that exist of nature in its dialectic linkage to society. Apart from theorizing a socialist political economy, the philosophical exploration of human-nature dichotomies or indeed sameness is important. The very constitution of nature has come under scrutiny (Castree and Braun 2001, Whatmore 2002). Shapiro (2001), in particular, emphasises the stark binary Mao had drawn between nature and society, where nature was an object outside society to be conquered and dominated.

"few cases of environmental degradation so clearly reveal the human and environmental costs incurred when human beings, particularly those who determine policy, view themselves as living in oppositional relationship to nature –as well as to each other- and behave accordingly" (Shapiro 2001:xii).

While early research in political ecology was formulated around understandings of economic determinism and notions of reductionism, the importance of the differentiated concerns and complexities of actors, whether at local, state or inter-state level, has increasingly been recognised. Place and non-place-based actors in environmental conflict, and the significance of varying scales, are increasingly focused upon in political ecology research. While micro-level



political conflicts allow for thick description in ethnographic accounts of environmental change, scholars are arguably wrong to suggest that the research agenda should solely centre around local 'land' users. Rather the whole of economic, political and discursive narratives occupying all the varying levels, from local to global, form a vital part in understanding environment-society relationships. Separate studies have explored these politics of scale, ranging from "*the body* to the locally imagined *community to state* and *intra-state struggles* to new forms of *global governance*" (Peet and Watts 2004:4 emphasis in original) Global ethnographies which focus on multilateral institutions add to the diverse research body (Burawoy et al 2000, Goldman 2001, Watts 2001).

Analytical links between power relations, institutions, and environmental regulations and ecological outcomes have moved into the focus of political ecology studies (Rich 1994, Sand 1995.). The actual relationships and linkages between and within these varying scales have, however, so far received less attention (Peluso 1992). According to Leach et al. (1999) intra-community social difference had not been sufficiently addressed in the political ecology literature. This is pertinent in particular for community based studies, where intra-community differences have often been neglected. Within a political ecology literature however, Rocheleau et al. (1996) have examined the significance of gender in accessing natural resources. Other studies, not necessarily within the political ecology body of work, have addressed the way different social identities undermine and crosscut the boundaries of community, such as caste, religion, age, origin, race, wealth (e.g. Agarwal 1992, Agrawal and Gibson 2001, Hart 1991, Jackson 1998, Thomas-Slayter 1992). Leach et al. (1999) are adamant in stressing the implications that intra-community dynamics and internal differentiation have on interactions with the environment. They reject the notion of a community homogeneous in its environmental priorities and natural resource claims. They rather suggest a detailed analysis of how access to and control over natural resources is mediated and negotiated by a set of interacting and overlapping institutions, both formal and informal. They (Leach et al. 1997, 1999) propose what they call an extended or disaggregated environmental entitlements framework. They ground their approach in Amartya Sen's (1981, 1999) work on endowments translating into entitlements and hence forming capabilities through evoking institutional means and mechanisms. However, they extend his 'static snapshot' framework by focusing on the dynamic mapping process of how endowments are distributed and how they are mediated through various forms of

institutions embedded in different hierarchical as well as time scales (see sections 9.2, 9.4 and 9.6)

## 5.5 Post-structural political ecology

While it is important to address different socio-political, economic and ecological scales at which interactions between humans and the environment take place, political ecology (or the environmental entitlements approach for that matter), can further gain from the incorporation of theoretical insights from post-structural philosophy. Walker (2005) refers to the structuralist phase of political ecology during the 1980s and 1990s, where the concerns of ecology were combined with a broadly defined political economy. "These 'macro-structural frameworks' of political ecology in the 1980s however failed to address the micropolitics of peasant struggles over access to productive resources and the symbolic contestations that *constitute* those struggles" (Moore 1993:381 emphasis in original). Studies in the 1990s increasingly focused on the local-level of environmental movements, the everyday negotiations of access to and control over resources, the discursive and symbolic nature of politics as well as the institutional nexus of power, knowledge and practice (Walker 2005). Discourse and the politics of meaning and the production of knowledge and power were taken seriously (Escobar 1996, 1999, Foucault 1980). Recent studies have increasingly incorporated concepts from the post-structural turn and borrow from cultural and social theory (Bryant 2001, Keil et al. 1998, Raffles 2002). The post-structural turn allows unpacking of some of the increasingly hegemonic discourses on environmental management and conservation and their presentation of the South as ridden by crisis, disaster and ecological degradation. Leach and Mearns (1996) contest the dominant environmental imaginary of the poor peasant degrading his/her environment and point to the power of discursive narratives that are increasingly shaping a global environmental discourse. The purpose of the work by Leach and Mearns (1996) is to lay bare the underlying political projects inherent in the production of expert knowledge, power and practice. Bryant and Bailey (1997) acknowledge that conflict over environmental resources is also typically a struggle over ideas as to what constitutes 'appropriate' environmental use and management. They, however, are also concerned that a "turn to discourse may result in a turn *away* from the material issues" (Bryant and Bailey 1997:192 emphasis in original). Nonetheless, they agree that discursive formations have potentially something very

interesting to say about the material practices of actors involved in conflict. However, they argue that the relationship between discourse and practice is not sufficiently theoretically grounded.

Some critics of the post-structural turn point to the absence of the biophysical environment in political ecology (Vayda and Walters 1999, Walker 2005, Zimmerer and Bassett 2003) They announce that political ecology has become a 'politics without ecology' that has rendered the environment as a mere "stage or arena in which struggles over resource access and control take place" (Zimmerer and Bassett 2003:3). Post-structuralism is generally critiqued for focusing entirely on representation and meaning, without allowing for a political project (Moeckli and Braun 2001) and ignoring historical-material conditions (Agarwal 1992). Haraway (in Moeckli and Braun 2001:125) however points out how "material and discursive practices are always implicated in each other, such that environmental struggles are never simply about 'nature' or about 'meanings' but about how the material world is rendered legible in and through ideas and concepts (and these are themselves constructed within particular historical and material conditions)". While this thesis primarily focuses on questions of power, struggle and representation in and over the environment, connections of these struggles to the biophysical world in terms of incorporating ecological theories are made tentatively through the examination of the everyday life-worlds of farmers (see section 9.4, 9.5 and 9.6 in particular).

## 5.6 Agriculture as a useful means to explore the nexus of nature and society

Nature and in particular the 'nature of nature' has featured prominently in the social sciences, due to the emerging debates surrounding social constructivism. Scholarly titles reflect this trend, such as *Social Nature* (Castree and Braun 2001), *Constructing Nature* (Escobar 1996), *Marxism and the Production of Nature* (Castree 2001). The nexus of society and nature, including an exploration of the respective realms and borders as well as linkages, has received considerable attention. Vigorous debates are fought along the faultlines of epistemological divides, ranging across the spectrum from epistemological realism to neo-Kantian social constructivism. The binary is situated in its extremes as the real, objective, and therefore true position or as the artificial, subjective and thus socially constructed position (Demeritt 1998).

Agriculture illuminates -materially- the relationships of 'society' and 'nature' in their most intimate entanglements and can hence serve as an interesting contribution to the debate that is often situated in abstract theorems. It is through food production that "every group of people in history [has been] connected in the most vital, constant and concrete way to the natural world" (Worster 1990:1091-1902, Vos 2000). Agriculture is artefactual, clearly a product of science, technologies and also social relations in the context of a produced and discursive nature.

Apart from the ontological discussion about nature, the nexus of society and nature is also being addressed through an emerging environmentalism and its connected political underpinnings. This environmentalism, whether deep ecology or technocratic managerialism, originates from the recognition of environmental crisis, degradation and widespread pollution. Hence, an environmental problem is placed as the object of inquiry. 'Modern,' industrial agriculture, for example, has been identified as in a state of crisis in environmental and ecological terms that needs to be addressed. This recognition has triggered a vivid discussion on alternative, ecological, organic or holistic ideologies.

## 5.7 Understandings of space: Henri Lefebvre

In the following section I want to examine the apparent deficiency in linkages between discourse and material practice as touched upon above. Escobar (1996) appreciates that everyday processes that shape people's practical lives necessitate an analysis of discourse, since questions of material or lived reality are inseparable from the ways in which that reality is portrayed (Bryant 2001). I want to explore this through Lefebvre's trialectics of space, which allows for complex mediation between concepts, ideas and discourse and the everyday material lived world. The reconciliation of spatial scales where the global whole is actually dependent on the local lived level is integral for the understanding of spatial practices (Merrifield 1993).

At this point I would like to engage with the notion of spatial scales and space-place relations, which are being discussed widely in the geographical literature. The engagement with space/place rests on the formed understanding that conceptualisations of space are one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualise the world (Massey 1992). Thus, the concept of space has been

increasingly understood in terms of relational spaces (Massey 1991, Massey 2005, McDowell 1999, McDowell and Sharp 1997). Place is no longer understood as a defined location framed by geographical coordinates, boundaries and fixed territory, but place needs to be understood as contested, fluid and uncertain. "Socio-spatial practices define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion" (McDowell 1999:4). Places thus get defined, maintained and altered through the impact of unequal power relations (McDowell 1999, Okely 1996). They get constructed "through sets of complex, intersecting social relationships that operate at a variety of levels and which are affected by beliefs and attitudes, images and symbols that are themselves increasingly variable and complex" (McDowell 1999:30).

These conceptualisations of spaces resonate strongly with recent developments in the understanding of gender and femininities. These feminist conceptualisations form an understanding of gender/place as interconnected and mutually constituted and embedded within the context of symbolism, representations and subjectivity (McDowell 1999). Gender relations are differentially constituted in places, both affecting and reflecting the nature of these sites and common expectations about acceptable ways of being masculine and feminine (Laurie et al. 1999). "Gender thus is a spatially variable phenomenon across a range of different scales...not only between countries and historical time, but also in everyday spaces and interactions" (McDowell 1999:14-15). Laurie et al. (1999) argue that attention needs to be paid to how gender is constituted within and through women's own narratives e.g. of work and how these conceptualisations are reproduced through gendered practices. It is an iterative process through which femininities and spaces are mutually constituted and everyday spaces become "sites and networks in and through which powerful ideas about femininities operate (Laurie et al. 1999:161). Everyday spaces are identified as places for reiteration, reproduction, but also resistance that can create contradictory spaces. These "places, in other words, touch the ground as spatially located patterns and behaviours" (McDowell 1999:29). While the locale or locality exists, they are constituted by sets of relations which cut across spatial scales (McDowell 1999). The notion of local place thus needs to be placed within an understanding of scale and spatial practices. According to Smith (1993:101), it is the "scale that defines the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted and contested." Scale has thus become a central organizing device for differentiating different kinds of places. This notion of spatial-

scale should however not be read in terms of local/global binaries, but allow for engagements with scales that problematize that distinction (Massey 2005).

Lefebvre's understanding of space reconciles spatial distinctions and advocates a true dialectics of space, where spatial practices are aimed at overcoming separation and dissociation between the global whole and local everyday, as "it is fatal to ...keep the moments and elements of social practice away from each other" (Lefebvre 1991:366). Lefebvre's work offers many a reconciliation between the lived and acted experience in place and "how this relates and is embedded in, political economic practices that are operative over broader spatial scales" (Merrifield 1993:517). Based in a spatialized reading of Marx's materialist dialectic, Lefebvre is careful to avoid economism and argues that the overall formation of space and place production is a deeply *political* event. Space is the locus where conflictual and contradictory social forces are mediated and are thereby 'inscribed in place' (Merrifield 1993, Elden 2004). The capitalist mode of production has successfully constructed and reconstructed the relations of space, including the everyday life and its location –the social space (Elden 2004). But space itself is also an object of struggle and an understanding of how it is socially constructed and used is important. The emphasis in Lefebvre's work lies in taking place and space interactions seriously, while overcoming dualistic conceptualisations such as the Cartesian understanding of space. To Lefebvre a Cartesian spatiality favours the social and technological domination of space, as it is perceived as calculable and controllable. Descartes rendered space to a mere scientific quantification where the experience of space is removed. Space understood in this manner then becomes intangible to thought. Lefebvre recognises this contradictory division of space through *res cogitans* and *res extensa* in Descartes' writings and uses this insight to formulate his own understanding of space:

"that space needs to be understood not in two ways –as conceived, abstract thought of space, or perceived, concrete reality of space-but in three ways, with the addition of space as *lived*, which resolves the conflicts between the previous two, without being reducible to either"  
(Elden 2004:187 emphasis in original)

Lefebvre strove for a unified theory of space, a *rapprochement* between *physical* space (nature), *mental* space (formal abstractions about space) and *social* space (the space occupied by sensory phenomena...). Hence Lefebvre recognised the need to take the realms of perception, symbolism and imagination seriously and to

not foster an ontological separation from physical and social space (Merrifield 1993). To render intelligible the complex interplay, Lefebvre introduces a conceptual triad:

*"Representations of space:* conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocrats...all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived...This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)" (Lefebvre, 1991:38). They are "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations (Lefebvre 1991:33). It is always a discursive space, a conceived and abstract space since it subsumes ideology and knowledge within its practice (Merrifield 1993).

*Representational spaces:* "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols..." (Lefebvre 1991:39). It is alive and speaks, "it embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic" (Lefebvre 1991:42). It links to the clandestine or underground component of social life (Lefebvre 1993). It is the "dominated, passively experienced space that the conceived, ordered, hegemonic space will intervene in, codify, rationalize and ultimately attempt to usurp" (Merrifield 1993:523).

*Spatial practices:* "The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it..."(Lefebvre 1991:38). Spatial practices structure daily life, they ensure continuity and some degree of societal cohesion (Lefebvre 1991). It is the *perceived* space, which embodies the interrelations between institutional practices and daily experiences and routines (Simonsen 2005).

Lefebvre is adamant that this triad of perceived (spatial practice), conceived (representations of space) and lived spaces (representational spaces) should not be treated as an abstract model, but as resonating in the concrete. "If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the immediate) then its import is severely limited, amounting to no more than one of the ideological mediations among others" (Lefebvre 1991:40). His model which integrates representational as well as material practices allows us to meaningfully to address the contradictory possibilities of the

everyday and the various scales at which the everyday needs to be understood and is acted out. The importance of place – space relationship can therefore not be understated. Spatial contradictions – political conflicts between socio-economic interests and forces – express themselves in place (Merrifield 1993).

“Place is not merely abstract space: it is the terrain where basic social practices – consumption, enjoyment ...- are lived out. As a moment of capitalist space, place is where everyday life is *situated*. It can be taken as *practiced space*. Place bound practices are simultaneously operative over varying spatial and temporal scales. They are operative over the domain of space. Space is not an abstraction separated from the concrete, but space and place are equally embodied in material processes – namely real human processes.” (Merrifield 1993:522).

This results in an interesting hermeneutic mediation of place and space, where place is not innocent and passive in the formation of capitalist spaces, on which capitalist forces unfold. Rather, place itself is highly political and takes an active role in the formation of capitalist social space. Place hence shapes space as well as meaning centering around everyday life. Lefebvre’s writings on the production of space therefore allow the exploration of the nature of place and its relation to the broader spatiality, the social whole.

Lefebvre’s work is based on an understanding of the geographical landscape in a capitalist mode of production. Through his trialectic relationship of varying space, he established the different dimensions of capitalist social space (Merrifield 1993). His work illustrates how the material landscape and practices of everyday life occurring in different places under capitalism are inextricably embedded within the global capitalist whole. However, neither he nor other scholars have much to offer for the theorization, conceptualisation and understanding of *actual* socialist spaces, though there is an acknowledgement that the space-place dialectic is not uniquely capitalist in orientation. The dialectic relationship would seem to hold for non-capitalist social formations though the form and constituent processes embodied in the space-place interconnection are specific to particular modes of production (Merrifield 1993). Lefebvre himself raises the question:

“Has state socialism produced a space of its own? The question is not unimportant. A revolution that does not produce a space of its own has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not



changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space..." (Lefebvre 1991:54).

He and other scholars however offer no analysis, or answers to the lived space-place dialectic in a socialist context. Theorization remains highly abstract, intangible and removed from any *actually existing* socialist spaces and are certainly not based in empirical work. This is a striking conclusion that resonates with the political ecology school.

## 5.8 Lefebvre and socialist space

While numerous publications centre around abstract theoretization of the environment and socialism manifested in ecosocialism, green Marxist thought etc, the question of whether there is "a distinctive socialist environmental management" (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987:208) remains unexplored. The absence of theorizing around the specific dynamics of the environment in a socialist context has been pointed out (Herskovitz 1993, Peet and Watts 1996, 2004). Only a few empirical studies exist (Herskovitz 1993, Knabe 1993, Shapiro 1999).

Lefebvre's thesis has not been specifically applied to a socialist context, with the exception of a paper by Jackiewicz and Bolster (2003) who explore the 'Working world of the *paladar*'<sup>1</sup> by drawing on the production of contradictory space in Cuba's period of fragmentation during the '*periodo especial*'<sup>2</sup>. Using Lefebvre's trialectic of space<sup>3</sup>, they explore how *paladares* have come to reflect the struggle for society and state to mediate the multitude of external and internal pressures amongst the current geopolitical climate and the deeply conflicting and contradictory values of state-society relations. Lefebvre's 'representations of space' are considered by Jackiewicz and Bolster (2003) to be those spaces such as e.g. the legalization of self-employment, created by the Cuban government. Representational or lived spaces are created through the daily routines of individuals who operate the *paladares* and can be in tension or contradiction to the goals of the state and may

<sup>1</sup> Family owned private restaurant

<sup>2</sup> For details on '*periodo especial*' see section 3.2.

<sup>3</sup> Even so they mainly focus only on two aspect of the trialectic in depth i.e. the representations of space and representational or lived spaces.

thus produce contradictory spaces. They conclude that "socialism and its policies are being contested by a segment of society [in their case the *paladares* and their operation] via social mechanisms, the vehicles of social reproduction. In my work, the operation of the legal and illegal market is in direct tension with state policies and creates contradictory spaces (see section 9.3, 9.6 and 9.7). State and society are thus interlocked in a dialectical relationship in which each relies on yet contests the other" (Jackiewicz and Bolster 2003:381). They also refer to Lefebvre's observation of political power and contradictory space, where he states that "such is the action of political power, which creates fragmentation and so controls it – which creates it, indeed, *in order to control it*" (Lefebvre 1991:321). And thus this fragmentation is the vehicle to stabilize socialism, for fragmentation is a process through which political power becomes omnipresent.

Nor has Lefebvre's thesis been applied to resource conflicts (Unwin 2000). In developing areas the only exception of which I am aware is Sletto's (2002) work in Trinidad. By drawing connections between Lefebvre's writings and post-structural political ecologists, Sletto (2002) engages with the linkages of hegemonic discourse on nature and conceptualizations of local practices in the context of natural resource conflict in Trinidad. This discourse as well as conceptualizations are lending the power of 'representations of space' to conservationists fighting to evict commercial rice growers from the wetlands. Sletto (2002) explores how these hegemonic representations were refracted and reformulated by swamp dwellers, who conceptualized their everyday practices through verbal and cartographic counter-representations. In my research, the tensions between the dominant state and NGO representations concerning agricultural practices and the farmers' lived experiences are crucial for an understanding of the use of space in the 'cooperative' (see section 9.5 and 9.6).

Even so Smith (1998:60) notes that "Lefebvre's analysis [of nature] is passingly sympathetic with a socialist environmentalism." Lefebvre's work is based on an understanding of capitalism and modernity and the majority of his work focused on the urban context. Unwin (2000:15) points out that Lefebvre had "little to say about rural life, or about the conditions of people living in other parts of the world". Nor do critiques grant Lefebvre a good grasp of natural space. Unwin (2000:16) suggests that his "discussion of the complex relationship between the physical world of nature, and human responses to it, ... remains ambivalent and uncertain". Janzen (2002) acknowledges a certain equivocation in Lefebvre's own conception of nature, but further states that:

“Rather than space itself providing a conceptual centering for discussions of the relation between nature and society, it is Lefebvre’s *problematic* of the *production* of space that provides a useful point of departure for thinking about space and nature in the politics of socialist ecology” (Janzen 2002:97 emphasis in original).

The linkage of political ecology understandings with a theoretical framework for the conceptualization of space forms the basis for the exploration of Cuba’s agriculture in this thesis. Cuban agriculture – and in particular the *en vogue* organic agriculture - is viewed as visualized dimensions of space, produced in accordance with specific ideologies and material priorities, resulting from the actors involved. Dominant discourses that get enacted are the organic agriculture debate as presented by Cuban state authorities and by international actors, such as the organic agriculture community and development cooperation actors. Their conceptualizations result in specific representations of the agricultural landscape and the peasant and thus enact social relations of power that are inherent in the reading of agricultural landscapes. Increasingly important actors in these relations of power are, on the one hand, the organizations of a civil society and, on the other hand, the conceptualizations of how a civil society should be formed and exist. These political struggles over dominant representations of civil society space are also significant for an understanding and reading of the organic agriculture landscape in Cuba (see chapter 7.9).

## 5.9 Gendered spaces in the environment

A comprehensive reading of the agricultural everyday life-worlds of Cuban farmers cannot be undertaken without a thorough exploration of gendered realities. For this purpose I will draw on a theoretical framework that came to be known as ‘feminist political ecology’. Rocheleau *et al.* (1996) stress that gender cannot be understood merely as a variable added to an analysis of variables within an investigation of the politics of resource access and control over environmental decision-making. A feminist political ecology builds rather on analysis of identity and difference, and of pluralities of meanings in relation to the multiplicity of sites of environmental struggle and change (Hart 1991, Ghai and Vivian 1992, Pankhurst 1992, Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau 1995, West and Blumberg 1990). The school

emphasizes complexity and interconnectedness of ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions of environmental change. It recognizes the relationship among global, national, and regional policies and local processes and practices<sup>4</sup>. "Feminist political ecology focuses on the ways in which site-specific ecological livelihood systems are linked into national and global environmental, economic, and political systems [or, using the language of Lefebvre, 'dominant representations of space'] which shape, enable, and limit the opportunities and constraints occurring at the local level" (Rocheleau 1996:296). Women and men must be situated in the context of particular ideas, actions and practices and the analysis must proceed within the localised situation as it is linked to the broader context.

Rocheleau et al. (1996) explore the nexus of politics, ecology, development and gender in order to clarify diverse sources of female oppression and multiple sites of women's resistance. The literature had moved on from the debates over essentialism that had been prominent several years earlier (e.g., Shiva 1989; Agarwal 1992, Jackson 1993) to assess the ways in which gender may play a role in the construction of scientific knowledge, the distribution of environmental rights and responsibilities, and grassroots activism (Carney 1996; Joekes et al. 1995; Rocheleau et al. 1996). Jackson (1998) argues that feminist political ecology provides a generally stronger framework for understanding these issues than ecofeminism, but cautions against a reversion to materialist approaches in reactions to ecofeminism that, like ecofeminism, can be static and ignore the agency of women and men. She thus stresses the subjectivities of women and their embodied livelihoods as a more useful approach where *agency* is emphasised. "It is important to focus on gendered human agency and social structure in shaping pivotal environmental policies and decisions. Feminist political ecology links an ecological perspective with analysis of economic and political power and with policies and actions within a local context" (Rocheleau et al 1996:289). While the feminist political ecology school focuses on how gender relations are important in structuring power other feminist researchers emphasise that gender relations are also constitutive of other social and cultural processes (e.g. Bondi 1993, Massey 1994).

Ideologies – particularly those formulated within a patriarchal mode- create gendered access to information, knowledge, resources, and the technologies for improving livelihoods. A patriarchal model, which situates women in the private

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<sup>4</sup> Postcolonial feminists (e.g. Mohanty 2002 ) also stress that cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes.

sphere, conditions both men's and women's responsibilities, and determines the social value assigned to each. These ideologies can be understood as dominant representations of space that are conceptualised and conceived as masculine/feminine and expressed through systems of verbal signs and other symbolisms. The codification of those forms the basis of social interaction in a gendered system. But while these imaginary and symbolic spaces are important for the constitution of the self, so is their material inscription in social space, i.e. the everyday activities as perceived, and also lived experience.

Lefebvre's work is largely silent on gender and women's experiences in the everyday. In particular Shields (1999) points out that Lefebvre in all his approximations of everyday life, has not engaged with women's experiences and he states that Lefebvre had been ill at ease with the elaborations of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Shields (1999), Lefebvre views women as mediators between the world and ideas and as 'muses' within a framework of masculine adventure. Vaiou (2001) argues that patriarchal ideology undermines many of his arguments. Some scholars however elaborate on Lefebvre's space-body relationships (e.g. Elden 2004a, Gregory 1994, Merrifield 2000, Shields 1999). The emphasis on space-body relations resonates with recent feminist theories of the body and embodiment. Simonsen (2005) explores Lefebvre's contribution to a geographical theory of the body. She states that Lefebvre's interest in the "body is founded on a conception of practice...and it ranges in scale from gestures and corporal attitudes, over everyday activities, to overall practice in the economic and political spheres" (Simonsen 2005:2). She relates the body to Lefebvre's trialectics of space. The trialectic is composed of the representations of space, also described as the conceived or mental abstract space. The spatial practice, which is the perceived and physical space and also the representational spaces, i.e. the lived and social space (see section 5.7). Spatial practice, which is performed at the level of the perceived, presupposes the use of the body -of the hands, members and sensory organs, performing gestures of work or of activity unrelated to work (Lefebvre 1991:40). As for Lefebvre's conceived, i.e. the representations of space, these understandings derive from scientific knowledge, from abstract conceptualizations of gender and gendered spaces. In order to bridge the duality between the perceived, concrete and material as well as the conceived, abstract and mental space, socially lived spaces depend on material as well as mental constructs (Simonsen 2005). Hence Lefebvre has an interest in the concrete, material, bodily practices, an interest he shares with feminist scholars (e.g. Grosz

1994, Young 1990) and with the recent turn in cultural geography away from 'text' and representation towards performance and practices (Nash 2000).

Judith Butler's (1993) feminist political imaginary resonates with Lefebvre's contribution to embodiment and performativity. Butler (1993) suggests that transformation of gender relations takes the form of ubiquitous revolution, taking place everywhere and - as Lefebvre would state - in the practices of the everyday. This assumes that "gender identities and gendered power relations are fundamentally unstable, and the ubiquitous sources of their possible transformation are to be found within the present moment" (Robinson 2000:287). Butler (1990, 1993) argues that 'gender identities' are produced in the performative (re)-iteration of culturally specific understandings of masculinity and femininity (see section 9.9-9.12). In the process these gender discourses are both re-inscribed and displaced, locating transformation in the present, rather than in some distant future. In Butler's account gender identities are constituted through performance and do not arise 'naturally' as a priori characteristics of individuals but are rather as attributes, a set of secondary narrative effects (Robinson 2000). Gender is a fantasy enacted by "corporeal styles that constitute bodily significations." In other words, gender is an act, a performance, a set of manipulated codes, costumes, rather than a core aspect of essential identity (Robinson 2000). It is these gendered performances in the everyday that create and use the contradictory spaces that will be explored in later chapters, in particular in sections 9.9-9.12.

## 5.10 Summary

Borrowing from Lefebvre's conceptualisations of space, his understanding of the production of space allows a close analysis of linkages between discourses on nature competing for hegemony in Cuba. His conceptualisation, on the one hand, allows for a true integration of discursive constructions and the lived world and, on the other hand, re-integrates spatial scales beyond a local/global dichotomy. His trialectics of space provide a lens through which to explore the dominant spaces of sustainable agriculture, and the actual conceptualisation of local practices by the farmers themselves through the everyday. Lefebvre's concept of contradictory space (see section 5.8) is particularly useful for the thorough exploration of Cuba's reality. Despite Lefebvre's weakness regarding his understanding of gendered spaces (see section 5.9) and nature (see section 5.8), he nevertheless provides a



powerful tool for engaging critically with spatial relations in the locality (McDowell 1999). Theoretical frameworks explored in this chapter permit the following empirical chapters to explore some of the linkages of globally hegemonic discourses on nature to conceptualizations of local practices in the context of the development of ecological agriculture in Cuba. The dominant representations of space by the various agents in the agricultural sector with their respective gendered webs of power will be held in particular focus.

## 6. Agro-ecology negotiated and contested: farming in the dominant Cuban space today

Cuban agriculture: to be or not to be organic?  
(Kost 2004)

In this chapter I seek to demonstrate the discursive construction of the new environmentalism in Cuba with particular reference to public policy in the agricultural sector. The creation of new hegemonic discourses on the environment and agriculture is my main focus here. This 'greening of the revolution'<sup>1</sup> imaginary<sup>2</sup> used in the title of this thesis has to be understood through its discursive construction of concepts such as organic/agro-ecological/low-input/sustainable agriculture. These discourses are situated in and emerge from specific ideological underpinnings of nature, constructions of nature and of the enlightenment. The various actors engaged in the agricultural sector employ these concepts exerting differing discursive powers and are readily adopting and co-opting them as required or desired.

My concerns in this chapter are the dominant representations of agricultural space through government institutions, public policy and their respective discursive powers and the role of NGOs in the international promotion of Cuban organic discourse. This chapter lends itself to a Lefebvrian understanding of representations of space (see section 5.7). Those representations rely on specific productions of agricultural imaginaries based on certain ideologies, signs and symbols and material priorities implicit in the historicities of government and policy. The linkage between discourses on green/organic agriculture and conceptualisations of the traditional *campesino* (farmer) have produced particular 'representations of space' in Cuba. I will point to similarities as well as differences in Cuban representations of 'organic' agriculture compared with the 'organic' movement in other countries. This requires us to bear in mind the spectrum of organic agriculture elsewhere, ranging from

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<sup>1</sup> This play with words is taken from a book title, which brought Cuba's recent agricultural developments into the international limelight.

<sup>2</sup> Peet and Watts (1996) introduce the concept of the 'environmental imaginary.'



market opportunities based on organic production in the form of large-scale production to the small-scale individual farmer embedded in a strongly holistic and ecological understanding of the agricultural process. It is important at this point to clarify the terminology I use regarding 'organic'. Throughout the text I will use the Spanish word '*orgánico*' whenever I am referring to the Cuban use and understanding of 'organic' that excludes market and certification connotations. I also use the terms ecological, agro-ecological and low input to signify the Cuban use, which is now "A low input agriculture, with high efficiency, economically viable, with biological and organic paradigms, compatible with and protective of the environment". Whenever 'organic' is used, I am explicitly referring to the international community using organic in the value-added, certified sense.

The following empirical chapters discuss how these '*orgánico*' representations are refracted and reformulated by other actors, such as Cuban and international NGOs as well as local farmers. Cuba's recent reported shift to ecological agriculture has received considerable attention worldwide. The international imaginary holds that there had been a state that had embarked on a national transformation towards 'organic' agriculture, triggered and implemented by the state. First I will spell out some of the policy shifts that might have fostered such a reading by the international community before unwrapping the international imaginary that is now prevalent.

## 6.1 Accidentally green? The framing of the new agriculture as economic necessity rather than environmental necessity

The framing of ecological agriculture in Cuba during the early 90s was reported by scholars (e.g Rosset and Benjamin 1994) to be largely created by the official support and facilitation of low-input agriculture initiated in order to mitigate the worst food shortages experienced for decades (see section 3.2 and 3.5). The national scale of transformation is to date unprecedented. It has been conceded (e.g. Altieri 1993, Carney 1993) that the key difference between Cuba and other countries is that the agricultural sector has now been framed by state policy in terms of a discursive imaginary of the 'ecological' and the 'sustainable'. Isolated individual examples of organic farming practices are the dominant pattern internationally, whereas in Cuba official government policy has produced hegemonic representations of agricultural space embedded in an emerging environmental understanding.

A striking feature of the Cuban adoption of this new agriculture is its basis, less in the awareness of environmental damage caused by high input agriculture than in dire economic necessity. Adequate food production was no longer possible under high input production techniques from the 1990s onwards, since inputs had become scarce when trade with the Soviet Union and the socialist block collapsed (see section 3.2). Hence, these new green concepts arose and were framed within a backdrop of economic crisis, rather than environmental crisis. It might seem surprising that an economic shortage can lead to increasingly environmentally benign practice, but Cuba's case is not unprecedented. While ecological modernisation is usually not considered a result of economic necessity, Gille (2000) presents the case of Hungary's waste management under socialist rule, as similarly implemented to maximise scarce resources. She recounts that during state socialism, Hungary had already instituted a production-centred, preventative approach to industrial wastes akin to principles of 'industrial ecology'.

"While industrial ecology and the project of ecological modernization may be seen as revolutionary approaches in the West, a strikingly similar social experiment was initiated in state socialist countries half a century ago. That social experiment, while not flawless and originally not framed in terms of environmental protection, had progressive elements that have been dismantled and forced into oblivion after the collapse of socialism" (Gille 2000:204).

Despite various accounts that herald the Cuban experience as a state supported large scale-transformation, the ideological transition beyond meeting necessities in an economic crisis is contested. Just how strongly this whole movement was driven by economic necessity rather than a changing ideology at the highest political levels is shown in Fidel Castro's repeated praise of state farms and large-scale companies<sup>3</sup>. He states that he does not believe in small-scale agriculture, which in the international organic agriculture movement is considered a fundamental characteristic for energy efficient production.

"I believe in large scale exploitations, I don't believe in the *minifundio*, I say this in earnest. The *minifundio* is valuable for the self-provision of a family, but it does not work to meet the alimentary necessities of a

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<sup>3</sup> One however needs to bear in mind, that while Fidel Castro certainly has sufficient political clout and his leadership is undoubted, his actual single-handed policy making is contested, as briefly discussed in chapter 3. His speeches should thus be read more as a representation of common thoughts on the agrarian issue, rather than as direct inputs for the making of agricultural policy.

growing and numerous population. With the *minifundio* you cannot apply machinery, harvesters for sugar cane or rice, you cannot use the airplane, you cannot construct large irrigation systems, you cannot sow, cultivate large areas of sugar cane with elevated productivity."<sup>4</sup>

(Castro 1998b: 276-277)

Even in speeches in 1994, at the height of the '*periodo especial*', Fidel Castro esteems the revolutionary achievements in the agricultural sector based on mechanization and principles of the Green Revolution. He failed to acknowledge the merits of agro-ecology despite it being already introduced widely through the MINAG. He viewed animal traction critically and depicts it as '*regresar al buey*<sup>5</sup>', a step back rather than forward, but framed it within the necessity of a compromise to continue in agriculture during times of scarcity. This perspective is reinforced by his speech in 1994 for the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution:

"35 years mechanizing the country so that all this sugarcane that was cut by thousands of workers, could be cut by machines, 35 years mechanising the agriculture, so that the work could be done in a much more humane manner, 35 years mechanizing the construction, mechanising the harbours, constructing sugar.....for using the most modern systems for loading and unloading in the harbours, 35 years mechanising crops such as rice, which used to be harvested by hand <sup>6</sup>" (Castro 1998a:268)

Fidel Castro certainly envisions the development of the country firmly within the modernist technocratic advances of machinery and technology, understood as an indicator of development. He does not acknowledge the adverse impacts this has had on the environment and neglects to point to the advances scientists had achieved in new techniques within alternative agriculture. Thus, the greening which

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<sup>4</sup> In the original: "creo en las grandes explotaciones, no creo en el minifundio, lo digo sinceramente. El minifundio sirve para autoabastecer a una familia, pero no sirve para abastecer las necesidades alimentarias de una población creciente y de una población numerosa. Con los minifundios no puedes aplicar maquinas, cosechadoras de caña o de arroz, no puedes utilizar el avión, no puedes construir grandes sistemas de canales y regadío, no puedes sembrar, cultivar grandes áreas de caña con elevada productividad."

<sup>5</sup> 'Returning' to the ox.

<sup>6</sup> In original: "35 años mecanizando el país para que toda aquella caña que cortaban cientos de miles de hambrientos obreros, se cortaran con máquinas, 35 años mecanizando la agricultura, para que el trabajo se pudiera hacer en forma mucho más humana; 35 años mecanizando las construcciones, mecanizando los puertos, construyendo terminales de azúcar a granel y muelles con grúas modernas, para utilizar los más modernos sistemas de carga y descarga en los puertos; 35 años mecanizando los cultivos como el arroz, cuya cosecha se hacía todo al mano."

has occurred appears to be more of an accidental by-product of an economic crisis and shortage, rather than an ideologically supported movement. Nevertheless, the agricultural policy shift had shaped fundamental changes that lean towards an alternative agriculture approach. The perception of a unified movement, supported by the entire polity needs to be questioned.

Agricultural policy during the first years of the special period focused on self-sufficiency in terms of food security, which had become the main driving force for policy change. "One searches all the time for a better nutritional self-sufficiency<sup>7</sup>" (MINAG 2001). This implies that the vision of this new agriculture is embedded within the national quest for food production at the societal level. The discourse relies on production increases for the achievement of national food security in order to continue the socialist project. It is important to note that the proposed agriculture is not embedded, as in so many other countries, within an argument of poverty alleviation for the subsistence peasant sector.

## 6.2 Positioning of the environment in policy issues

In Cuba, with the sudden lack of inputs following the collapse of the eastern bloc, the extent of environmental degradation caused by high input agriculture became very evident. The soils were depleted. Without artificial and chemical fertilizers to buffer the lack of nutrients, yields plummeted (Nieto and Delgado 2002). Hence, slowly, an environmental awareness already present within groups of Cuban scientists was allowed to move towards the centre of the stage and a series of environmental laws were passed. In the early 90s, insufficient environmental conscience, awareness and education as well as an absence of major environmental demands in negotiations were identified by Cuban academics as cause for the inadequate incorporation of the environmental dimension into development politics, plans and programmes in Cuba. This was prompted through the increasing voice of researchers that had recognized the extent of environmental degradation (Díaz-Silveira 1999). Cuba has since taken steps to include environmental issues and has moved towards green policy-making, re-addressing and shaping discursively the Cuban agricultural landscape.

Environmental issues have gained weight in the general political scene and have found their way into the visual realm of the everyday e.g. through billboards

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<sup>7</sup> In original: "Se busca cada vez una mayor autosuficiencia alimentaria."

advertising environmental campaigns. The following billboard can, for example, be found throughout the country and similar messages regarding saving water and energy are reiterated throughout public space.

Bill-board advertising 'saving energy'

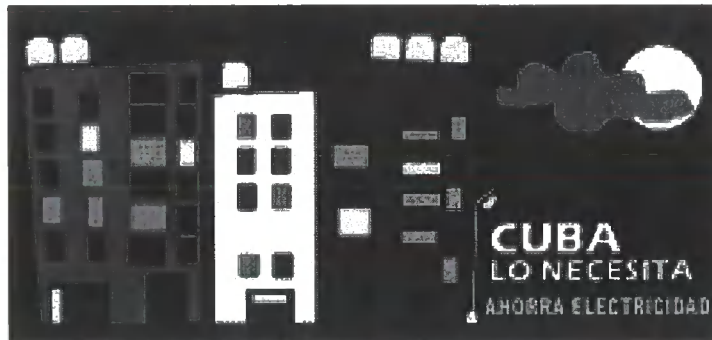


Figure 6.1

Source: <http://www.energia.inf.cu/PAEC/index.htm> [1.11.05]

Important modifications since the early 90s were the promulgation of the Decreto-Ley 118 from Jan.1990 identifying the "*Estructura, Organización y Funcionamiento del Sistema Nacional de Protección de Medio Ambiente y su órgano rector*"<sup>8</sup>. Amendments to Article 27 of the Cuban Constitution were made in 1992, which was altered to include the integration of the environment within economic development and social sustainability. The formal approbation of the *Programa Nacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo*<sup>9</sup> followed in 1993, and identifies clear guidelines for the protection of the environment. The Agenda 21 was adopted and is a further milestone in the recent policy shift. The *Ley de Medio Ambiente*' (Ley 81)<sup>10</sup>, was created in July 1997 and devotes a chapter to sustainable agriculture, making it legally the new development strategy. November 1997 saw the promulgation of the *Estrategia Ambiental Nacional*<sup>11</sup>, whose objective is to indicate suitable paths to preserve and develop environmental achievements. It is meant to remove the errors and detected insufficiencies in environmental protection while identifying the principal problems of the environment that require most attention (Blaufuss 2000). The environment is now being framed as a manageable sector upon which the policy arena is to act.

Congruent with the shift to environmental emphasis in general politics, 'sustainable agriculture' came to feature strongly in Ministerio de Agricultura

<sup>8</sup> Structure, Organisation and Operation of the National System to the protection of the Environment and its control agency.

<sup>9</sup> National Programme of the Environment and Development.

<sup>10</sup> Law of the Environment (Law 81).

<sup>11</sup> National Environmental Strategy.

(MINAG) language. MINAG changed its aim: "To contribute to obtain a sustainable development of the Cuban agriculture based on the protection of the environment and which corresponds with the mission of the Ministry of Agriculture"<sup>12</sup> (MINAG 1998:33) as noted in their new *'Estrategia Ambiental del MINAG.'*<sup>13</sup> Already in the early 90s, an alternative model charter acting as a new policy directive regarding agriculture, was distributed amongst the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture (see appendix II for details). The new model emphasises resource-conserving strategies, including a focus on locally adapted species and diversification. It also promotes the effective use of extension services as well as co-operation among producers.

Cuba further removed incentives and subsidies for chemical inputs, including credit policies tied to chemicals (Thrupp 1996). As inputs and services are generally not freely available on the market, but are distributed for purchase through state enterprises, this allows rigid control over the nature of products in circulation. The government does not only operate by setting incentives via market mechanisms and tax, but is in the unique position to control distribution more closely and effectively. This monopoly has proven to be a favourable condition for the dissemination of alternative products, such as bio-fertiliser and bio-control agents, while restricting access to harmful inputs. 'Economic regulation' is identified as an instrument for environmental management in the *"Estrategia Ambiental Nacional"* as following:

The use of economic regulation as an instrument of policies and environmental management, is conceived on the basis, amongst the employment of others, of tax and tariff policies or of differentiated prices, for the development of activities that have an impact on the environment".<sup>14</sup> (CITMA1997:32)

The adoption of policies by the Cuban government to encourage the re-orientation of research, support-structures and organisation as well as the decentralisation of agriculture has ultimately brought about a "greening of the revolution". This implies both the 'greening' of agriculture including Cuba's highly industrialised agriculture and Green Revolution crops and the greening of the

<sup>12</sup> In original: Contribuir a lograr el desarrollo sostenible de la agricultura cubana sobre la base de la protección del medio ambiente en correspondencia con la misión del Ministerio de la Agricultura.

<sup>13</sup> Environmental Strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture.

<sup>14</sup> In original: El uso de la regulación económica como instrumento de la política y la gestión ambiental, se concibe sobre la base del empleo entre otras, de políticas tributarias, arancelarias o de precios diferenciados, por el desarrollo de actividades que indican sobre el medio ambiente.

political Revolution through the incorporation of environmental considerations in the changing consensus. According to Lane (pers. comm. 2000), the long-term consistency in leadership has enabled a more consistent set of policies and long-term rational planning than is evident in many multi-party states.

### 6.3 Policy changes in the agricultural sector

The Ministry of Agriculture is the organization responsible at the national level, in overall charge of directing and regulating agricultural production, whether for national or international destinations. "Although there is no evidence of direct policy on ecological agriculture, specific institutional strategies and plans provided an indication of State objectives" (Wright 2005:118). These strategies generated in the Ministry regarding the respective framing and vision of the newly developing agriculture, are outlined here (Funes 2002:7):

- Decentralization of the state farm sector through new organizational forms and production structures
- Land distribution to encourage production of different crops in various regions of the country
- Reduction of specialization in agricultural production
- Production of biological pest controls and biofertilizers
- Renewed use of animal traction
- Promotion of urban, family, and community gardening movements
- Opening of farmers' markets under 'supply and demand' conditions.

The main objective of agrarian policy during the early 90s was to move to a low external input form of agriculture. This move was supported by the diversification of land tenure and the social organization of production (see section 4.2 and 6.4). Policies also entailed decentralisation measures including commercialisation and the diversification of production methods as well as crop diversification.

Considerable emphasis was given to technological production methods and their specific adaptations to the scarcity of inputs. It has been documented that agrarian scientific staff in the various research laboratories and institutions had been engaging with alternative technology since the early 80s (Blaufuss 2000, Funes 2002, Rosset and Benjamin 1994). Their scientific results were then framed as an important building block for this new agriculture. Great emphasis was given to the scientific nature of these techniques, already considered as high-tech, state of the

art knowledge and technology. It was hence scientific knowledge, planners and technocrats, that were forming the new imaginary of the agricultural sector. Their scientific results and policy recommendations were shaping the dominant representations. These 'officials' were moulding agriculture in the form of a conceived/abstract and mental space and thus a discursive space subsuming ideology and knowledge within its practice.

The principal techniques receiving widespread application, by 2005, have been limited to 'input substitution' and 'horizontal conversion'. This narrow technical focus has not yet allowed farmers to take significant advantage of the mechanisms of synergy that a more agroecological conception of agricultural development would entail. The methods currently widely applied usually involve:

- Organic fertilization and soil conservation
- Ecological management of pests, diseases, and weeds
- Crop and livestock management
- Ecological soil management
- Successful organic farming experiences: urban agriculture, popularization of small rice production, medicinal plants,
- Incipient organic development programmes: organic sugar production, organic fruit production, organic coffee and cocoa.

The relevant state policies are framed largely within concepts of technical science through input substitution and low input agriculture. The ideological underpinning of the environment remains external, as something to be acted upon by society through technological advances. The MINAG (2001) policy proposes: "A low input agriculture, with high efficiency, economically viable, with biological and organic paradigms, compatible with and protective of the environment<sup>15</sup>"

A country as deeply embedded in the developmentalist ideology as Cuba could not politically endure being criticised for going back in history to low input farming practices bearing the connotations of peasantry and pre-revolutionary. Hence, biotechnology, a field in which Cuba has achieved international recognition, is ideologically a strong integral part of this new sustainable agriculture. The green discourse of Cuba is increasingly institutionalised in the various government institutions, such as the research centres of MINAG. The development of the discursive understanding of this new agriculture has come to lie strongly within expert knowledge rooted in a modernist, enlightened understanding of science. In

<sup>15</sup> In original: Una agricultura de bajos insumos, alta eficiencia, económicamente viable, con paradigmas biológicos y orgánicos, compatible y protectora del medio ambiente.



this expert realm, the re-iterations and performances of particular slogans, language and conceived concepts including certain symbolism and signs are striking. Agro-ecology has been adopted widely in research institutions and circulates as actors through the offices and corridors of Ministries and institutions. Agro-ecology finds its way on to posters on walls, in reports and documents on experts' desks and into numerous pamphlets produced by state organizations or Cuban NGOs with foreign funding (see section 7.6). Cuban experts from research institutions are invited by Cuban NGOs to hold workshops and seminars on agro-ecology and *orgánico* farming for the grassroots. These experts, thereby propagate specific definitions and understandings of the concepts involved, are thus employing a certain *power over*. Agro-ecology has become a science that farmers need to learn, internalise and be educated about. During workshops it is common for discussion groups to be presented with the following questions and in the end the 'expert' will provide the 'right' answers: How do you define organic agriculture? List the principles of organic agriculture; at the general level and the practical level!<sup>16</sup> These experts stress, sometimes uncomfortably, that the *orgánico* agriculture is not traditional agriculture. "It is not traditional, since the *orgánico* agriculture uses modern techniques such as the CREE<sup>17</sup> ...[although] there are issues in traditional agriculture that are looked for in the *orgánico* agriculture; traditional knowledge is important"<sup>18</sup> (expert at workshop 25. Sept 2003).

The rooting in expert knowledge resonates closely with the international organic scene, where critics have noted "practices at the point of production [the 'doing organic'] also are privileged in related discussions of sustainability, healthy eating, and the role of small farms in rural communities. This centrality reflects a long-term option to pursue a technocentric politics of production over a progressive social politics" (Goodman 2000: 216). Buttel (1997) makes a similar point, characterizing the environmental ideology of the sustainable agriculture research community as 'alternative-technologism', in view of its recourse to modernist epistemology to advocate an 'alternative' instrumental rationality of environmental managerialism. This 'technologically-led vision' of organic agriculture and sustainability is identified with the hegemonic and legitimising technologies

<sup>16</sup> In original: Como usted definen la agricultura orgánica? Enumeran los principios de la agricultura orgánica; Al nivel general y al nivel practico.

<sup>17</sup> Centres for the Production of Entomophages and Entomopathogens.

<sup>18</sup> In original: no es tradicional; porque la agricultura orgánica usa técnicas modernas, como los CREE... hay puntos de la agricultura tradicional que se busca en la agricultura orgánica; conocimiento tradicional es importante.

emanating from within US public agricultural research institutions and policy agencies. The preoccupation with technical farm practices leads to an acceptance of a 'shallow' sustainability of allowable inputs. Sustainable agriculture can then be equated with chemical-free cultural practices (chemical-'lite' products), which essentially reduces the organic to a health claim, one among thousands, and reifies the social division of labour (Goodman 2000).

In the West the crisis in modern agriculture is perceived on a single axis as one affecting and solved by addressing the environment and technology alone, not the socio-economic. This understanding leads to the prevalence of input substitution, which emphasizes 'safe' alternatives to agrochemical inputs. Monoculture and land concentration of agricultural systems remain unchallenged and greatly diminish the potential for sustainable agriculture. By taking a narrow view on environmental concerns, this approach offers little hope of either reversing the rapid degradation of the resource base for future production, or of resolving the current profit squeeze and debt trap in which so many of the world's smaller farmers are caught. By the same token, socialist approaches, which address only socio-economic dimensions, such as the nationalization of plantations, without altering the technology or scale of production, have not permitted escape from the crisis either (Rosset 1997).

In Cuba, apart from technological changes, a social-political project has accompanied the reforms. Issues such as decentralization, land distribution and the diversification of agricultural actors as well as raising wages<sup>19</sup> have been addressed. The new policy directions emerging during the 1990s emphasize sustainability, with the following essential features (MINAG 2001):

- The co-existence of different systems of property and management
- The combination of market and centrally-planned economic mechanisms
- Progressive modification of agronomic practices
- Sustainable agriculture based on technological change
- The development of a more participatory economy with a tighter linkage between workers and farmers and the profits of their labour.

This shift, however, is ideologically less supported by a "socio-ecological" imaginary of alternative material and social relations with nature, than on principles of increasing productivity on the farm.

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<sup>19</sup> The average monthly salary in the state sector in agriculture increased from 184 pesos in 1995 to 235 pesos in 2001. The monthly salary continues however to lie just below the national average for all sectors which was at 194 pesos in 1995 and 245 pesos in 2001 (ONE 2001).

## 6.4 Diversification of social organization of production

An important and often-cited component of this new agriculture is the diversification of the social organization of production. These changes were considered necessary to address problems of labour shortages, low productivity and inefficiencies of central state planning in the state farm sector (Wright 2005). This advanced through changes in land tenure as well as new organizational structures. Within the state sector, where state companies employed agricultural wage labourers and owned land and means of production, a new form of state enterprise was created. The 'new type state farm', or Granjas Estatales de Nuevos Tipos (GENT) resulted from the reorganisation of state farms in 1993. It includes those farms that were unsuitable for conversion to Unidades Básicas de Producción Cooperativa (UBPC) (Martín 2002) (see section 4.2 and 6.5). The GENT were to continue to produce on a large-scale industrialised basis and favoured with high levels of inputs. These enterprises were to have a greater administrative autonomy and decision-making capacity in order to better address the personal interests of their workers. "As with State farms, 50% of the profits were distributed amongst the workers, including management staff, 25% went to investment and capital growth, social development and contingency reserves, and 25% to the State budget. Additional labour incentives could be made through bonuses to the fixed salary for the production of surpluses that could be sold through farmers' markets. Average monthly income was 254 pesos" (Wright 2005:81). This new type of enterprise is framed as having a strong socialist character and contributes to key agricultural areas. A small but growing sector is the mixed sector, where foreign capital is linked to state enterprises in joint ventures. These exist only in selected projects and are always exclusively linked with state enterprises.

A new form of organization, the UBPC was created from former state farms and is now considered to be part of the non-state sector. This particular organization of production will be discussed in detail later (section 6.5), as it was the most important policy shift in terms of diversification of the social organization of production. Individual farmers benefited from these policy shifts, as small sized land plots were given to farmers in usufruct. They do not own the property, but as long as they farm it, they can keep it without having to pay rent. As we shall see, they have little autonomy compared to, say, Mexican farmers with usufruct tenure. The

cooperative '26 de Julio' in Guanabacoa, in which I spent several months and which is the subject of the ethnographic account in chapter 9 is a UBPC.

Another policy shift was a strengthening of the existing non-state farm structures, particularly within the Cooperativa de Créditos y Servicios (CCS) sector (see section 4.2). Through two CCS combining together to co-operate closely over services, it was thought that this would increase their productive potential through drawing upon a better range of facilities, professional services and making production plans with ACOPIO<sup>20</sup> as an entity rather than with each individual farmer member (Figueroa 1996). By 1997, some of the CCS had undergone this kind of fusion and were then renamed as *CCS-fortalecida*.

Hence, the policy shift is marked by the emergence of new social agents in agriculture: new socialist enterprises (*empresas*), cooperatives on state lands, private farmers with land in usufruct and workers in joint venture enterprises as well as self provisioning gardens. By 1999, the agricultural landscape of 6,660,000 ha was divided into:

- 34.2% in state farms
- 9.3% CPA (Cooperativa de Producción Agropecuaria)
- 11.0% CCS (Cooperativa de Créditos y Servicios)
- 5.2% dispersed *campesinos*
- 40% UBPCs<sup>21</sup> (Unidades Básicas de Producción Cooperativa) (ONE 2001)

In addition, 71,000 individual workers were holding 103,334ha of land *en usufructo*. There were also *organoponicos* and intensive urban gardens contributing to the agricultural scene (MINAG 1998, Wright 2005). 62 New Type State Farms, 75 *Granjas* operated by the Ejercicio Juvenil de Trabajo (EJT) and 19 *Granjas* operated by Ministerio de Comercio Interior (MININT) and Ministerio de de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (MINFAR) are now also part of this diverse agricultural sector. Table 6.1 lists the various forms of production that now co-exist in the agricultural sector. Those marked in yellow are new additions directly resulting from the changes in agricultural policy since 1989.

<sup>20</sup> "ACOPIO is the state food collection and distribution enterprise. It was responsible for making production/delivery plans with farmers, for collection, transport and distribution, marketing of produce for the ration and to other outlets. It worked with both State and non-state producers. Almost 100% of State production and about 50-80% of non-State production was moved through ACOPIO" (Wright 2005:85). At present for many UBPC, the *empresa* linking them to the state is taking on that role.

<sup>21</sup> The figures refer to total agricultural land.

Organizational structures of agricultural production in 1998

State sector		State farms (21,986) GENT (177) FAR EJT (49) MININT Self-provisioning farms at work-places
Non state sector	Collective production	UBPC (1,710) CPA(757)
	Individual production	CCS (2,196) Individual farmers in usufruct Individual farmers, private property
Mixed sector		Joint ventures between the state & foreign capital

Table 6.1

Source: (Martín Posada 2002:59)

The following diagrams illustrate this change in land tenure between 1989 and 1998. The increase in land attributed to production in the form of UBPC shows significantly. Also the private sector in the form of CPA and CCS has increased in terms of land tenure.

Land distribution in 1989

Land distribution in 1998

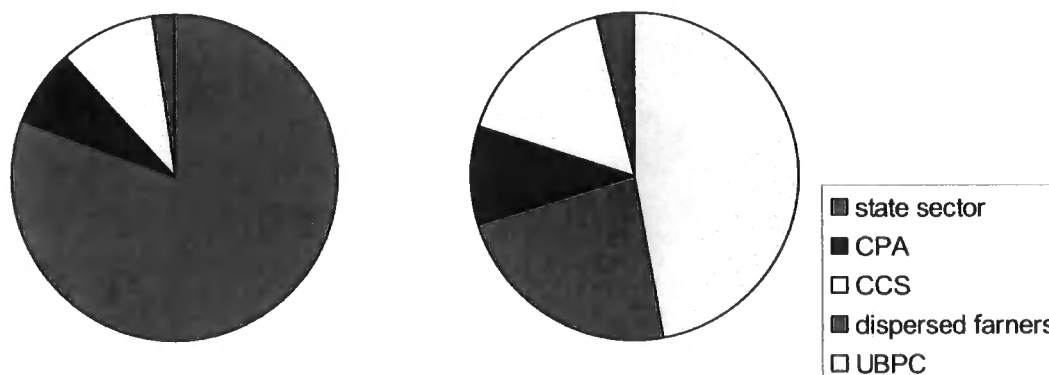


Figure 6.2

Source: One 2001

MINAG policy now favours private land tenure. While one cannot speak about classic privatisation, MINAG does acknowledge the importance of the new land tenure structure, where over 70% of land is located within the non-state sector (MINAG 2001). There is now a greater numerical and economic importance of

private farmers, whether farming on private land or on land given in usufruct. This also implies a greater numerical prevalence of cooperativists. With the formation of the UBPC, cooperative production embedded within the private sector has become the preferred social organization of production for the government.

With respect to the application of green technologies in government discourse, the following trend can be identified. Independent farmers and cooperatives are perceived as having the greatest potential for ecological production. This is a direct result of their historical trajectory of having applied low input farming techniques throughout the height of the Green Revolution. The historical absence of strong and direct links to government agencies and lack of incorporation in the socialist project of large scale farms implied their relative difficulties in obtaining farming inputs including chemical fertilisers, pesticides and heavy machinery. These *campesinos* are now considered positive examples and act as 'points of reference' in terms of ecological production techniques. Meanwhile, many of the state farms are continuing to produce what are considered key crops such as potatoes and sugar, and continue to be favoured for access to external inputs. They are considered less *ecological*, and many are trying to continue with high input agriculture. Figure 6.3 depicts a generalized trend of ecological production in relation to the different social organizations of production<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> This is only a generalized trend, as access to agrochemicals is also dependent on the crop variety grown. Crops considered priority crops by the state will have higher inputs assigned through the state mechanisms. CCS are more in control of their own production cycles and this means less links and commitment to the state. This however also meant that they are in receipt of fewer state inputs, such as agrochemicals and other inputs. Those are then purchased, if available and possible, on the black market at high prices.

Ecological production according to social organization

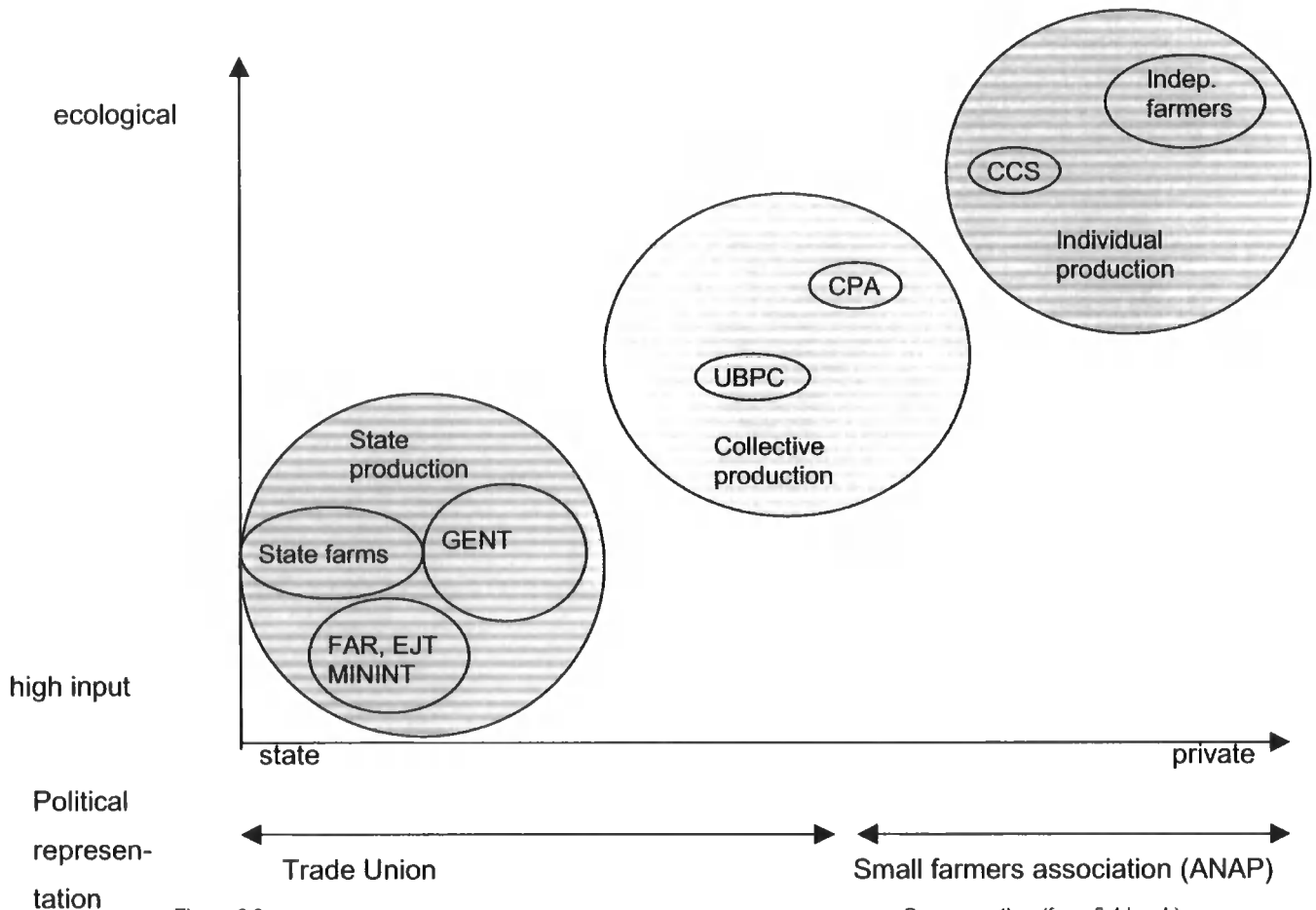


Figure 6.3

Source: author (from fieldwork)

### 6.5 UBPC conversion

From figure 6.3, it becomes apparent that the Unidades Básicas de Producción Cooperativa (UBPCs) take on an interesting middle position and in fact are considered by many to be 'state-private hybrids' (Sinclair and Thompson 2001). There has been a major shift towards the decentralisation of the large state farms into these smaller co-operative units – UBPC – since they were formed in 1993. The smaller units allow a greater proximity to locality-specific systems and associated sensitivity to the relevant needs of the ecosystem. State support structures, including sources to acquire credit and inputs and other services, remain available to the units.

Former state farm workers had been given the possibility to form UBPCs by leasing land from the state, rent-free and in permanent usufruct, while the land itself

remains national property. Their size is, on average, 943 ha and they comprise an average of 84 members. By March 1994, about 2446 UBPC had formed (Deere 1997; Díaz and Muñoz 1994). Workers in the UBPC sector now make up a third of Cuba's entire agricultural labour force (Jiménez 1996). Accompanying the structural change, the management organisation has also changed. In this transition the workers became associates and had to purchase the farm's capital infrastructure. Members had long-term credit arrangements, owned the produce and received an equal share of profits (Deere 1997). Members of the co-operative now elect their own management team and are highly integrated into the decision-making process regarding production. "Most decision making has now shifted from central planners to UBPC members." (Álvarez and Puerta 1994:1663). Burchardt (1997) states that these UBPC have supported the democratisation of the organisational structures of agricultural production. Hence, the '*junta directiva*' – the steering committee – needs to be regularly confirmed in elections by 75% of all members. This is considered to increase opportunity for participation in decisions concerning the production of their unit and has been positively welcomed by academics who have studied it intensively (Deere 1997, Díaz and Muñoz 1994, Pérez Rojas and Echevarria León 1998; Jiménez 1996). The cooperative member is now framed as a fully engaged democratic citizen, who actively contributes to shaping the new management and running the cooperative. From a mere state employee with political rights only in the sphere of the Workers' Union, the cooperative members are now given more possibilities of participation.

More flexible mechanisms to ensure co-operation within the production process have also evolved. Decision-making on production was decentralised, yet centralised planning was retained for overall resource management and food distribution (Sinclair and Thompson 2001). The cooperatives were conceived and formed with a vision of their potentiality to apply more agro-ecological methods, and to allow a greater diversification of crops. The smaller size was understood as fundamental for the rebuilding of the bond between the farmer and the cultivated land, which fosters awareness of local needs. The UBPCs have, however, inherited a highly mechanised, large-scale agricultural system as well as specialised workers trained under Green Revolution principles. Wright (2005) states that 95% of UBPC members had been agricultural labourers and only a few had been farmers prior to joining the UBPC. While this is certainly possible at the point of UBPC formation in 1993, there is evidence that suggests that considerable flux in membership has occurred and *cooperativistas* have more diverse backgrounds now (see chapter 9).



Awareness about environmentally benign techniques is often lacking and increased environmental education is considered essential to train new generations of highly specialized agricultural workers. It is recognized that a certain element of technology transfer and extension services is needed in order to facilitate the adoption of alternative technologies. The necessary environmental education, through seminars, workshops and training courses, led by experts, is often organized by Cuban NGOs with financing from abroad (see section 8.4 and also 9.4) or through University degrees initiated recently specialising on agro-ecology. This is aimed at ensuring well-informed decision-making in the future, allowing a maturation process towards full participation. And as Röling (1994) points out: "of course, technology development and transfer is also applicable to enhancing sustainable agriculture": transfer of technology (TOT) should not be rejected categorically in Cuba. The historical affiliation with Green Revolution techniques as well as functioning extension services is seen to provide a context for technology transfer, which can be beneficial to the co-operative unit and the transformation process towards sustainable agriculture. However, an environmental awareness is required and Funes (1997:13) comments: "There appear to be alternatives and they have to convince the basic producers, technicians, investigators, professors and leaders that we can have an agriculture with a different vision"<sup>23</sup>

These newly formed cooperatives are being framed by government policies and discourses as '*cooperativistas*', deliberately drawing on connotations of the '*cooperativistas*' that have already existed in the private sector and are now organised in CPA and CCS structures. These private sector farmers had, throughout the Revolution, been identified and labelled as '*cooperativistas*' with a sub-identity as '*campesinos*'. '*Campesino*' always implies their private status and independence from state structures. It is curious that in Cuba, the largest private sector in the economy is the agricultural sector. This deliberate association was to foster and mimic the efficiency encountered in private farms. However, the relatively high contribution per hectare of private farmers to national agricultural production was fully recognised only during the '*periodo especial*'. The private sector rose in prestige based on the argument of economic efficiency. The newly formed UBPC were designed to mimic the private sector with the aspiration to increase production outputs in the context of ailing state farms. The cooperative members were to take

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<sup>23</sup> In original: "Aparecen alternativas y se convencen productores de base, técnicos, investigadores, profesores y dirigentes de que podemos hacer una agricultura con otra visión".

on an identity as private actors, with the connotation of 'economic men'. In practice, however, the cooperative members remain within a process that is not yet fully completed, as MINAG statements continue to count UBPC members as workers within the MINAG workforce (MINAG 2001). The new cooperativists remain represented politically through the trade union of Cuban workers rather than by ANAP, the Cuban farmers association, which represents private farmers at the highest political levels.

The government wishes to create a new rural class of farmers, offering incentives for people to move to rural areas, while giving the traditional low-input '*campesino*' lifestyle a higher standing. Figure 6.2 depicts the organisational linkages that are common for a UBPC. The link to the *empresa* - the state company - constitutes a key element in the positioning of the UBPC. Other politically democratic structures exist, such as the general assembly, but they have not established a similar weighting yet.

Organogram for a UBPC cooperative

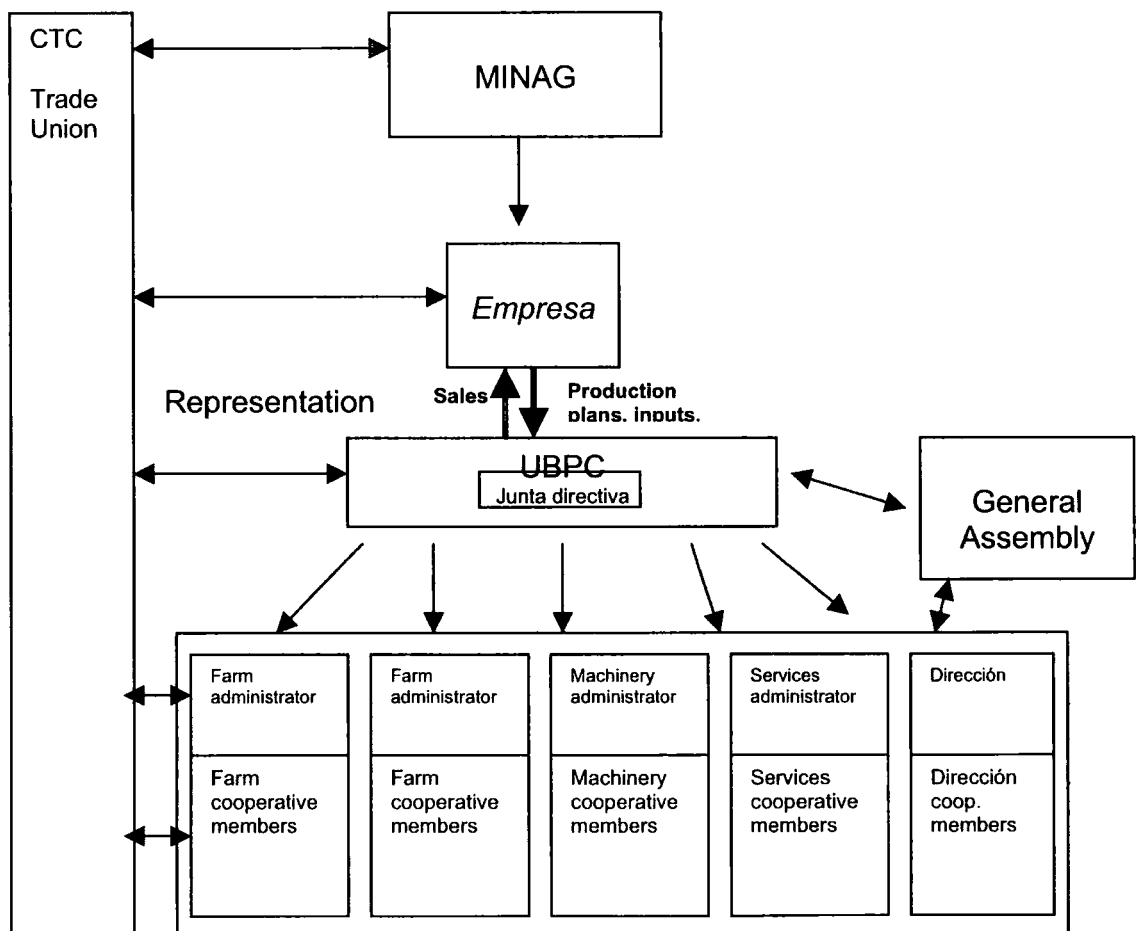


Figure 6.4

Source: author (from fieldwork)

"The Cuban leadership shrewdly chose not to pass on the state's weaknesses to the individual, instead promoting cooperative organizations and collectives wherever possible. The UBPC are undoubtedly the revolution's best socialising measure of recent decades. It must be recognized, however, that they have lacked a clear political purpose and consequently they continue to be considered a utilitarian emergency measure" (Dilla 2000:37). A new sector in society was conceived by planners, technocrats and the Cuban polity: *cooperativistas* in UBPC structures. They were assigned particular identities, their UBPC identified with revolutionary names such as '26 de Julio' and 'Desembarque del Granma' to stress their socialist character through links to historical events and heroic individuals. In terms of the everyday, it however remains to be seen to what extent this conceived space is refracted and re-shaped by the daily action and non-actions of the UBPC members and their families using the actual material space provided by the land and infrastructure of the UBPC. The ethnographic view in chapter 9 (see section 9.3 in particular) will provide the opportunity to explore this nexus in detail and suggest answers.

## 6.6 Gender in Cuba's agro-ecological space

The national policies described above are remarkable for their silences on gender. All new policies, regulations, decrees and laws are embedded within the old assumption of gender neutrality, but enacted within the realities of male domination and male hegemony (see section 4.6). This implies that policies are drawn up with an understanding of male spaces in society, while female spaces remain neglected. Agrarian development since 1959 has been partially shaped by historical discussions held on women and gender, which largely remained within an understanding of the integration of women in the work-force. For example during the first cooperative movement during the 70s when CPAs were largely formed, rural women were among the more ardent supporters of voluntary collectivisation, based on the possibility of gaining amenities in the new cooperative villages, the relative ease of working collectively as opposed to individually, and achieving a measure of economic independence from fathers and husbands (Stubbs and Álvarez 1987). These new cooperatives were a qualitative change in the social fabric of rural Cuba in particular. For the first time in Cuban agrarian history a specific agricultural policy was spelled out that encouraged women to join cooperatives and ensured them of

the identical statutory rights that men had (Stubbs and Álvarez 1987). Stubbs and Álvarez (1987) comment on the sudden visibility of women in the private agricultural sector that was not mimicked to similar degrees in the state sector. Aspirations were associated with the cooperative movement as part of a rural urbanization ideology. As areas become less rural, changes would also encompass the gender-based division that was identified as more pronounced in rural rather than urban areas. Stubbs and Álvarez (1987) point out that the more rural the area the more resistant it was to change and the more traditional the gender roles. This was thought particularly relevant to educational difference, the low percentage of women defined as economically active, higher fertility rates, early marriages, multiple teenage pregnancies and larger families. It was hoped (Pérez-Rojas and Echevarría León 1998) that the cooperative movement would bring about fundamental changes in the position of women, particularly in the more rural areas. What has become known as rural urbanization (the excessive development of infrastructure in smaller clusters) was expected to change gender discrimination, as in access to education and health care services for women and girls. Through this urbanization, the socialization of women's domestic work and roles would be facilitated through easy access to day care centres and other support services provided by the state.

The cooperative movement in the 1993 cooperativisation of state farms into Unidades Básicas de Producción Cooperativa (UBPC), by contrast was linked to the idea of the '*vinculación del hombre a la tierra*'<sup>24</sup> and is based on the repopulation of previously vacated land. This is yet another example where the tension between economic development and the quest for the implementation of feminist ideals is apparent. The relative discursive strengthening of the rural, of *el campo* in the early 90s<sup>25</sup>, ignores the traditional and backward gender roles widespread in the rural sector. The discourse of moving into the hinterland, which is perceived as necessary to efficient agricultural production, has avoided a thorough debate on the implications this will have for exacerbation of gender divisions or of any positive opportunities that may arise. In the relationship between socialist revolution and women's emancipation, there is a fundamental question as to when and how women's specific interests are served. The question is whether Cuban women had

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<sup>24</sup> The linking of man (*sic*) to the land.

<sup>25</sup> It is striking how during the early years, urbanization was the grand paradigm and developments were directed to create small urban centres. This is to the extent that the rural population in Cuba statistically declined since the Revolution, and a mere 24.7% in the last census of 2001 (ONE 2001). This is exaggerated by the statistical classification where towns with amenities such as electricity, running water, education and health service get classified as urban, even if they only have a population of 200 people.

surrendered their specific needs to the universal struggle for a different society, as they did for the overthrow of Somoza in Nicaragua. Are these interests ever rehabilitated, legitimated, and responded to by the revolutionary forces or by the socialist state (Molyneux 1985 in Domínguez 1987)? The discussion of this tension is explored (e.g. Safa 1995) in socialist societies where high rates of female labour force participation arise out of necessity as well as principle; women are employed to meet the state's need for their labour power rather than for their own liberation (Molyneux 1981).

In the first cooperativisation movement in the 1970s, reproductive issues had featured prominently as reasons for participation in the movement. In the latest cooperativisation move, considerations of gender issues are not part of either the rural imaginary or of the agricultural policies suggested and implemented. Policies such as the promotion of settlement in rural areas do not take into account the implications this might have for women. The infrastructure to meet reproductive tasks, which largely remain the responsibility of the women, is not as densely distributed as in built-up areas. No understanding of these implications and their buffering through respective policies has developed. The only consideration given to gender in national policy issues is the incorporation of women into the agricultural workforce. Women moving away from urbanized centres to farm the land with their husbands rarely make the decision to move and often lose the reproductive infrastructure previously gained in urban centres. Reasons for moving are entirely of a productive nature, through accepting work and integrating into the cooperative and/or the acquisition of land available to be farmed for self-sufficiency and small scale sales in the legal and black markets. The incentive to people 'going rural' is the productive and hence economic gain. Already in studies conducted prior to the free agricultural markets in 1994, the private sector achieved the highest income levels and this will have increased with the opening of the free agricultural markets. Other sources of income besides agricultural production have been identified as vital to the well-being of most agricultural households (Deere et al 1995). For those living in the rural area, it is difficult to gain access to other income-generating activities. This is particularly vital for women who are restricted (often by their partners) in their physical mobility. Wright (2005:118) also states in her study that "Women appeared to play a minor role on the CPA cooperative, in both productive activities and direct decision making". Women's recorded employment in Latin America has long been higher in urban areas (Townsend 1991).

Statistics about the relative employment of women in the different sectors are available, notionally to support the increasing incorporation of women into the workforce, which is in line with the general macro-policy of Cuba's government. The current employment of women in the agricultural workforce is presented in table no. 6.2:

Women's participation in the agricultural labour force

Social organization of production	% women employed
State sector	28.8
UBPC	17.7
CPA	18.0
CCS	9.3
Land holders in usufruct	7.7
Urban agriculture	12.2
Other <i>campesinas</i> and support staff	25.0
Administration	34.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.1</b>

Table 6.2

Source: MINAG (2001)

Fidel Castro's take on gender is congruent with the national policy on gender, which has its sole focus on bringing women into the work force, without taking into consideration the wider implication of women's total work including reproductive tasks or whether this specific work might be suitable or not for women to conduct, culturally as well as physically. Fidel Castro in his speech before UBPC in 9<sup>th</sup> October 1994 (Castro 1998a:260).

"I see with delight that there are many young people present, I see that the average age is relatively low, I also see that women are participating, and this is very important, as it is that the participation of women in UBPC rises. I don't know how many have incorporated in the UBPC, all voluntarily one assumes, but it is very important that the women also participate<sup>26</sup>."

<sup>26</sup>.In original: "Veo con agrado que hay mucha gente joven, veo que el promedio de edad es relativamente bajo, veo también que hay una participación de la mujer, eso es muy importante, ojalá crezca la participación de la mujer en la UBPC, no sé cuántas aportará el contingente que también se incorporará a la UBPC una gran parte, todo esto voluntario como se supone, pero es muy importante la participación también de la mujer."

The emerging sector of urban agriculture in the 90s was identified by politicians as a source of employment for women. Here characteristics such as proximity to the household and relatively light labour (as compared to rural agriculture) have been identified for its suitability for women. This discourse is heavily embedded within the understanding of the incorporation of women into the work-force with less emphasis on the double or even triple role women perform including their reproductive as well as political tasks. Hence any policy claiming to address gender issues by focusing entirely on the possibilities of the job market falls short of a deeper understanding of the socially and culturally reproduced gender roles performed by women and men in Cuba.

There is a strong conviction, also firmly rooted in the constitution, that women should be given jobs in keeping with their physical make-up. (Constitution 1976, chapter 5 article 43) (Bengelsdorf 1985). The sources of the sexual division of labour result from the family and from the concept of sexuality, with a tension between the heritage of classical Marxist thinking and in the specific historical reality of the family and the sexuality in colonial/slave Cuba, in post-colonial Cuba and in revolutionary Cuba (Bengelsdorf 1985).

## 6.7 The international imaginary of Cuban *orgánico* agriculture

International recognition of Cuba's organic agriculture movement cumulated with the award of the Alternative Nobel Peace prize, the *Right Livelihoods Award* that was presented to Asociación Cubana de Agricultura Orgánica (CAAO) / Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales (ACTAF) on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1999 in Geneva (see section 6.8). It was particularly through the work and subsequent publications of an American NGO called FoodFirst, that internal developments in Cuba reached the awareness of the international community. Through publications such as '*The greening of the Cuban Revolution: A national experiment in organic agriculture*' (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a) and '*Two steps back, one step forward: Cuba's national policy for alternative agriculture*' (Rosset and Benjamin 1994b), Cuba's agriculture achieved celebrity status. In 1992, 20 delegates travelled to Cuba on what was termed the 'International Scientific Delegation and Fact-finding mission on low-input sustainable agriculture in Cuba', which was organized by Global Exchange. The purpose of the visit was to report on what had been leaked to the international press, that Cuba was in the process of a

massive switch in agriculture. The results are presented in "the spirit of international scientific exchange" (Rosset and Benjamin 1994a:2). FoodFirst, the organisation to which the delegation leader Peter Rosset belongs, subsequently published more accounts, articles and reports on Cuba's developments in this sector (Rosset and Benjamin 1994c, Rosset 1996 and Rosset 1998). Currently various information materials on Cuba's agriculture can be obtained and purchased from FoodFirst. This includes policy briefs<sup>27</sup>, articles and even a video, called 'The Greening of Cuba'<sup>28</sup>. The imaginary that had been created internationally of Cuba's agriculture reaches as far as World Resources 2000-2001 with a four page account (World Resources Institute 2000:159-162). This is entitled 'Cuba's Agricultural Revolution: a return to oxen and organics'. It is stated that "Cuba is now in the midst of the largest conversion from high input chemical agriculture to organic or semi-organic farming in human history" (World Resources Institute 2000:159). The account is based primarily on the key texts published by Rosset (1996,1998) and Rosset and Benjamin (1994a) and hence is propagating the dominant representations and imaginaries that were created and shaped through their texts. The higher the international profile accorded to Cuba's organic agriculture experience the more the study tours and visits, including those from political party members across the EU<sup>29</sup> and Canada and from NGOs. This includes the development of experimental organic farms with Swiss and Austrian collaborators (Wright 2005) and a collaboration with Canada to produce and process organically (Holme and Pither 1999 in Wright 2005). According to Wright (2005:252) "all these initiatives were effective in that they were bringing in foreign revenue, knowledge and prestige".

Cuba, organic and agriculture have now become linked concepts in the consciousness of an international community. International scholarly and less scholarly attention has also hit Cuba and various papers and reports have been published internationally (e.g. Altieri 1993, Carney 1993, Gersper 1993, Kaufmann

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<sup>27</sup> Enriquez, L. (2000) Cuba's new agricultural revolution. The transformation of food crop production in contemporary Cuba. Development Report 14. Institute for Food and Development Policy. Oakland.

Murphy, C, (1999) Cultivating Havana: Urban agriculture and food security in the years of crisis. Development Report 12. Institute for Food and Development Policy. Oakland

Rosset, P. and Cunningham, S. (1994) The greening of Cuba. Organic farming offers hope in the midst of crisis. Food First Action alert. Institute for Food and Development Policy. Oakland.

<sup>28</sup> The video dates from 1996 and was shot in Cuba but is produced by FoodFirst, the Institute for Food and Development Policy located in Oakland, USA.

<sup>29</sup> The Scottish Green party just recently published an account of the Cuba's green experience in their party publication: McCormack in: Newsletter of the Scottish Green Party; summer 2005:7.



1993, Kilcher 2001, Kost 2004, Levins 1992, Levins 1993a, Levins 1993b, Murphy 1997, Vandermeer et al 1993, Warwick 1999, Wright 2005). The news made headlines such as "Fidel's sustainable farmers' (Economist 1999). Many of these accounts are based on mere anecdotal evidence or short trips organised as part of study tours or 'fact-finding' missions, where the delegates are presented with model case cooperatives, farms and institutions as well as the brochures, leaflets and publications that circulate (see section 6.3). Talking to one scholar at a conference in Cuba, who had published extensively on organic agriculture in Cuba, it turned out that this person has merely been in Cuba on study tours, had been unaware of less official discourses and understandings of the Cuban experience and was surprised when presented with the statement that a black market for pesticides and fertilizer exists widely. A certain notion of wishful thinking for a model case study for the international promotion of pro-organic movements seems attached to these reports. Few scholars have conducted in-depth studies and explored the agricultural changes in detail (with a few exceptions such as Wright 2005). These latter accounts read less like advocacy papers and present more balanced, well-researched and scientifically grounded views.

Cuba's organic agriculture has been appropriated as a model case for other agro-ecological movements and struggles elsewhere, but particularly in Latin America. In most countries organic production is localised and insights drawn from these experiences thus remain small scale. Most evidence for the positive impacts organic agriculture can have in environmental as well as food security terms emerges from fragmented small-scale research stations, on-farm trials and individual farmers (Pretty 1995). There are few studies that operate on community let alone national level (Wright 2005). Hence the Cuban experience is attractive for two reasons. It is reportedly a large scale transformation at national level, and is thus perceived as providing valuable insights into the scaling-up of organic processes and the impacts this can have on the environment and food security. And second, Cuba so far is the only country to have made a 'perceived' state policy commitment to a nationwide organic agriculture (and one which is positively commended by various international scholars). In recent years, some countries have made certain commitments to organic production, such as Switzerland, Sweden, the Cook Islands, but have not achieved comparable levels to Cuba<sup>30</sup> (Wright 2005). Lower-income countries with their own state-supported organic conversion and

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<sup>30</sup> Some action plans and subsidies are available from the EU for the maintenance of or conversion to organic agriculture in the latest policy shifts (Wright 2005).

production strategies are scarce, only Thailand and China playing any visible lead by the end of the 1990s (Parrott and Marsden 2002). Generally, the production as well as certification, inspection and export of organic produce remains largely under the auspices of foreign bodies, usually in the importing countries and primarily in Europe and the USA (Wright 2005). For the international community, Cuba became a pilot example to explore what types of support, strategies and institutions as well as policy formulations might be needed to be able to scale up organic production to nationwide levels.

In actual fact however, until 2000 there was no legislation in Cuba on organic agriculture. Even so the international community continues to report on the organic policy in Cuba (Wright 2005). Wright (2005:250) traces the highest-level endorsement towards organic production to a speech held by Fidel Castro at the 1996 World Food Summit where he stated that "Enhancing food security demands extending sustainable agricultural techniques so that the various economic units operate as agro-ecological farms". This however was presenting Cuba and Cuba's fame in agro-ecology to an international audience that was likely to view this perceived development in Cuba in a favourable light. There is little evidence that similar announcements had been made internally to the same level of commitment. Only in 2000 did MINAG declare its intention to produce organically [organically here refers to certified, commercial organic produce] for export (Wright 2005) and start working to develop a national certification board for organic agriculture (interview; scientist, UNAH, 26.09.03). According to Wright (2005) it was the Organic Agriculture Group within ACTAF that was in 2000 given the responsibility of developing organic agriculture in Cuba. By 2003, however, there was evidence that developments of a certification board were undertaken within the Department of Quality Control of MINAG itself, despite it being ACTAF that pursued organic agriculture in its stricter sense and ACTAF continued to seek to develop organic production. Some leading members of ACTAF, however, perceive the work on certification of organic products as less central to the work of the organization than for example food security.

Altieri (1993) explores the implications of Cuba's organic agriculture conversion for the general agro-ecological movement in Latin America. A certain level of romanticism resonates within those debates among advocates of organic and sustainable agriculture movements. Within the discussion, the distinction between urban agriculture and organic agriculture became blurred, but both had achieved significant international awareness. The Cuban experience with urban

agriculture, considered to be the most organic production in Cuba, has also been adopted as show-case by the international community. For example, its international fame was acknowledged by the International Conference held in Cuba in October 1999 termed 'Growing cities Growing food: Urban Agriculture on the Policy Agenda' organized by international donors and NGOs<sup>31</sup>. Some international NGOs actually started working in Cuba due to the world-wide recognition of Cuba's urban and organic agriculture movement.

"We [international NGO] have always worked in urban agriculture and were interested in urban agriculture and wanted to strengthen our work in urban agriculture and trying to match our work with what is going on in other parts of the world and what we have in Canada. And Cuba is, and we also had our eye on Cuba, that would be a good match, because Cuba is the place for urban agriculture. It sprang out of the mid 90s, as a crisis response, urban agriculture started and gained a lot of international recognition for its work on urban agriculture. So that's why we struck up a relationship with ACTAF" (Northern NGO staff member, 19.03.03).

The international organic agriculture community is also starting to transcend the Cuban discourse on two levels. What was internally termed as agro-ecology and organic did in the content of the concept refer to different imaginaries from those in the international world. Organic in an international context is filled with associations of products with value added through certification and directed at a health-conscious consumer market. Thus all international participants at the Cuban '*V Conferencia de Agricultura Orgánica*' gave papers on organic agriculture topics based on an understanding of 'organic' in a narrow certification sense. Some scholars writing on Cuban organic agriculture apply an equally narrow focus on the development of certified organic products for European clients (Kilcher 2001). Kilcher claims that it was this market potential that had swayed the Cuban MINAG towards organic production in the 90s. Other accounts however emphasis the food security aspect of the policy change and do not consider the international marketing potential as a

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<sup>31</sup> This conference was sponsored and organized by following institutions: German Foundation for International Development (DSE), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Centre for Technical Co-operation in Agriculture (CTA), German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ), Cuban Association of Animal Production (ACPA), German Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ), Consultants in Development Programmes (ETC) and German AgroAction (AAA). The resulting publication was Bakker et al (2000) *Growing Cities, Growing Food. Urban Agriculture on the policy Agenda. A Reader on Urban Agriculture*.

major factor (e.g. Sinclair and Thompson 2001). The Cuban contributions to the conference did not lean on such narrowly defined organic imaginaries, but rather focused on agro-ecological methodologies in a wider sense. The organisers of the conference now want to disassociate themselves from the narrow foreign understanding of 'organic' that resonated badly with Cuban discourses. They want in future to call the conference '*Conferencia de Agricultura Sostenible*' and the proposed name for the next conference in May 2006 is "*VI Encuentro de Agricultura Orgánica y Desarrollo Agrario Sostenible*". "Our focus now is sustainability. Organic is a commercialisation concept, but we are now fighting for more sustainability. The conference is still called organic, but it should be called sustainable. Organic closes the concept a lot<sup>32</sup>" (Cuban NGO staff member 01.07.03). Hence the amorphous term of sustainability will be the dominant signifying labelling of Cuba's agricultural movement. With the adoption of a language of sustainability, there is the danger that Cuba is losing its clearly defined goals and objectives for her agriculture and will fall prey to a managerialist sustainability discourse. In the journal of ACTAF, the V conference receives a short review, in which the prominence of NGOs can be noted. In the list of participants, and as highlighted introduction to the text, it states: "with the participation of 317 national delegates and 153 international delegates from 32 countries as well as invited guests from NGOs represented in our country, international personalities who work in the area of organic agriculture, and also 13 displays, amongst which the organic certifier BCS ÖKO Garantie and the representation of the Consultorios Tiendas Agropecuarias (CTA) - agricultural consultation shops<sup>33</sup>" (Agricultura Orgánica 2003a:37).

Overall, Wright (2005) presents in her analysis a certain tension surrounding agro-ecology between the state and NGOs. She claims that within Cuban state structures, mainstream thinking is of conventional industrialised agriculture while organic essentially lies within NGO sector both in terms of the main driving forces in the early development of organic agriculture in Cuba and at present. She states that (Wright 2005:117): "Farmers themselves identified NGOs such as ACAO and ANAP as promoting ecological agriculture, rather than MINAG. "

<sup>32</sup> In original: "Ahora nuestro enfoque es la sostenibilidad. Orgánico es un concepto comercial, pero nosotros estamos luchando por mas sostenibilidad. El encuentro todavía se llama orgánico, aunque tendría que llamarse sostenible. Orgánico cierra mucho el concepto."

<sup>33</sup> In original: "con la participación de 317 delegados nacionales y 153 delegados internacionales de 32 países así como invitados de ONG representantes en nuestro país, personalidades internacionales que trabajan en la temática de la agricultura orgánica, así como 13 expositores, entre ellos la certificadora de productos orgánicos BCS ÖKO Garantie y la representación de los Consultorios Tiendas Agropecuarias (CTA)."

In a postal survey conducted by Wright (2005:256) on people's interest in organic agriculture, she finds that 33% of respondents identified information sources coming from outside the country, and this was particularly marked by the early part of the Special Period, suggesting that it played a key role in the commencement of the development of organic agriculture. Female respondents were more likely to see the future as organic than male respondents. The largest group of respondents became interested in organic agriculture in the 1990s and the most frequently named institute and source of information on organic Agriculture was ACAO (Wright 2005).

## 6.8 The NGO role in the *orgánico* movement

### 6.8.1 The development of ACAO

During the agricultural transformation in the 90s (see section 4.2, 6.1-6.5) a group of professionals and academic staff from various agricultural institutions emerged which aspired to support the introduction of an agro-ecological vision in the re-structuring of the Cuban agricultural sector. By 1993 they formally formed an NGO as *Grupo Gestor de la Asociación Cubana de Agricultura Orgánica*<sup>34</sup> (ACAO) and had members from various sectors such as production and different educational institutions (Funes 1997). It is important that the founding members were all specialists with expert knowledge, rather than from grassroots farmer associations, drawing on lived experience and embedded knowledge from daily life. This was a group based on scientific and academic knowledge distinct from the everydayness of the farmer's livelihoods. Almost all members were government employees, whether in the Ministry or research institutions. ACAO comprised a president, an Executive Committee of 11 who met monthly and a Steering Group of 36 that met quarterly (Wright 2005).

ACAO set out with following objectives (Funes 2002:11)

- To develop a national consciousness of the need for an agricultural system in harmony with both humans and nature, while producing sufficient, affordable, and healthy food in an economically viable manner
- To develop local agro-ecological projects, and promote the education and training of the people involved in this new paradigm of rural development

<sup>34</sup> Management Group of the Cuban Association for Organic Agriculture.

- To stimulate agro-ecological research and teaching, and the recovery of the principles on which traditional production systems have been based
- To coordinate technical assistance to farmers and promote the establishment of organic and natural agricultural production systems
- To encourage the exchange of experiences with foreign organizations (with emphasis on the Latin American tropics and subtropics), and with specialists in sustainable agriculture and rural development
- To promote and publicize the importance of marketing organic products.

Towards the end of the 1990s, non-paying membership had grown to 800 and various activities had been undertaken, including the regular publication of its magazine '*Agricultura Orgánica*' with a print run of 1000 copies (Wright 2005). These magazines are distributed both abroad and to members at home. Wright (2005) states that by the mid 1990s, ACAO was highly effective in its reach and achievements, especially given that they had neither an office nor core financial support from the Ministry. ACAO actively works in collaboration with national institutions, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Sugar, Education, Higher Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment and maintains very strong links with the Council of Churches (CIC) and National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP); the latter in order to assure a strong participation from *campesinos* and producers. The association takes an active integrating position in promoting the co-ordination of the sectors involved, acting as a facilitator for the combination of efforts and success achieved in the sectors. ACAO soon received international cooperation money from various actors, such as UNDP and international NGOs, such as Bread for the World (PPM), Hivos and Oxfam America, for the execution of particular projects such as for example the building of agro-ecological 'lighthouses' (demonstration farms). During the early years of their existence, the legal framework and policies regarding cooperation were less firmly established than now, and they channelled funds initially through ACTAF for expediency, while they acted and engaged in their work quite independently of ACTAF. Even so, members of ACAO who were also members of ACTAF, ACAO achieved further international recognition with the winning of prestigious prizes for their work such as in 1996 the 'Saard Mallinkrodt' Award at the IFOAM meeting and in 1999 the 'Alternative Nobel Prize or Right Livelihood Award' mentioned above. With this international recognition the pressure grew to formalize and legalize the association and as they were not registered with the Ministry of Justice, it was ACTAF who integrated ACAO into its

structure. In April 1999 ACAO became a section in ACTAF where it is now called the Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica - Organic Farming Group (GAO), achieving officially recognized status in the country. GAO continues to work from the same premises of the promotion and development of agro-ecological agriculture. ACAO and now GAO aim to facilitate links between the various producer initiatives and the state sector as well as forming links with the international community. They actively encourage collaboration with international NGOs and foster the exchange of experiences with organic agriculture world - wide (pers. comm. Monzote 2000). GAO is composed almost entirely of technicians and the organization aims to increase links to the grassroots, which at present are established only marginally.

The relationship between GAO (former ACAO) and ACTAF is, however, not one of sweet harmony. Various power struggles and legitimacy claims are being fought out. As development cooperation channels were increasingly consolidated in Cuba and cooperation formalized, ACAO was in need of a legalised structure. It was decided that ACTAF should take on this role. ACAO members were in disagreement and did not perceive ACTAF to have a sufficiently legitimate claim or even knowledge in agro-ecology to continue the pursuit ACAO had started. ACTAF is perceived as a state-created organisation that had not been active for many years until taking on the role and impetus from ACAO. The relationship is so conflict ridden that some former members of ACAO now refuse to continue working for GAO and have broken links with ACTAF, which has essentially weakened the movement.

“Ricardo, the president, doesn't know anything about agro-ecology or organic. It is like putting you in charge of a cosmonautic project. So they are not doing anything good. It [the organic agriculture movement] has lost its momentum. They are all liars and one of my objectives is to recuperate ACAO and discover and open up all those lies...They [ACTAF functionaries] are *pamphleteros*, - paper pushers - and have never actually worked in agriculture on the ground, they don't know anything. Initially it was a financial stimulus for ACTAF to take us over, since we had all the international financing secured, we had projects with cars and all” (former ACAO member, a scientist, pers. comm. 02.03.04).

A number of factors may have contributed towards this institutional change and to the loss of state support (Wright 2005: 262, own fieldwork). ACAO had fallen into disregard with the government, when the president of the association defected by failing to return from an international trip undertaken under the auspices of an

ACAO mission. The association hence lost trust with the government and, in order to be able to receive the Alternative Noble Peace Prize, the agricultural vice-minister thought it necessary to accompany the ACAO representative on that trip.

- Pioneer individuals within the organic movement may have become too autonomous, possibly flamboyant, for the socialist regime, especially in terms of international travel, access to foreign exchange and knowledge. The movement became seen as a collection of individual personalities, rather than a faceless collective representing the Cuban people, and jealousy may also have been stirred
- An increasing number of foreign visitors were coming to the island to look at organic agriculture and provide funding for it, and the state might have felt it was losing control over the activities
- ACAO's status had never been fully approved by MINAG. This was in line with Cuba's general antipathy towards (autonomous) NGOs, which were suspected of being vehicles for US infiltration
- A small number of key actors associated with the organic movement had used their international travel opportunities to seek residency in other countries over the decade
- The relatively centralised planning of agriculture did not allow for farmer agency over their cultivation strategies or over formation of their own organic groups which would have provided a stronger grassroots basis, and therefore stability, for the organic movement
- ACAO, for all its apparent attempts to maintain institutional allegiance, was perhaps too non-conformist or *avant garde* for the establishment. Despite government lip-service, organic production strategies were not the main thrust of State agricultural policy, and were frequently seen as producing low yield.
- Because of its work as behind the scenes facilitator, up to the mid 1990s ACAO was unable to provide quantitative evidence of its achievements or impact. Although this lack of impact analysis is not unusual in the Cuban research sector, such evidence would have provided a useful line of defence for organic agriculture as well as for the movement.



### 6.8.2 Background to ACTAF:

ACTAF was founded in 1987 as a network of agricultural specialists, technical staff and researchers. It was described to me in 2003 as a rather dormant organisation that did not pursue specific responsibilities until its 'reactivation' at the end of 1990s (ACTAF senior staff member pers. comm. 21.01.04). ACTAF's policy as set out in 1999 was 'Support for the development of a productive, efficient and sustainable agriculture, capable of guaranteeing national food security and agro-industrial needs whilst taking into account the safeguarding of the environment and man'. Specific objectives translated into: assisting with the maximised exploitation of harvest and by-products', contributing to farm workers' development and technical training, stimulating and supporting research and extension project activities both for sustainable agriculture and agro-industry, fostering international co-operation including professional exchanges and diffusing results and overseeing meetings (ACTAF 1999).

ACTAF is successful in procuring international funds, even if their technical agenda has changed slightly, focusing more strongly on urban agriculture. From proclaiming organic agriculture, ACTAF has changed focus and the proposed mission for ACTAF during the second congress of ACTAF in 19-20<sup>th</sup> October 2004 was: "to integrate activities and resources in order to contribute to the development of sustainable agriculture<sup>35</sup>" (Agricultura Orgánica 2003b:45). Hence the focus has changed to sustainability and no longer follows strict agro-ecological or orgánico concepts. The extent to which this is due to increased international links and the respective appropriation of less stringent terminology can only be speculated.

One of the earlier projects, which was developed under ACAO, were the '*faros agro-ecológicos*' (agro-ecological lighthouses, CPA) at the end of 1994. They were experimental/demonstration farm units integrated into existing cooperative structures. Funded by the UNDP Programme<sup>36</sup>, the principal objective was to develop ecologically-based production systems through appropriate soil management, the reduction of chemical inputs, and improved environmental relations (ACAO 1999) One farm unit of a cooperative is chosen for conversion in the experiment, and a research programme designed in participation with cooperative members. It was these *faros* that have received international attention, as all study tours and visits were shown those sites. For example one of the

<sup>35</sup> In original: "Integrar acciones y recursos para contribuir el desarrollo agrario sostenible."

<sup>36</sup> Known as SANE project.

participating CPA called 'Gilberto León' in Havana province features in most international publications on Cuba's organic agriculture experience. That these '*faros*' had been supported by project money in dollars and hence had sufficient resources to actively implement the 'agro-ecological' ideal with sufficient support structures is not mentioned. Hence, what the study tour participant perceives as 'Cuba's move to organic' has in fact been made possible through financing from international resources.

## 6.9 Summary

This chapter has examined state discourse and the creation of dominant spaces of representation concerning the agricultural sector. While this discourse is important in the setting of certain structures and formats, Cuban society can hardly be understood sociologically "as a puzzle pieced together out of political discourse [alone]...Cuban society cannot be inferred from the discourse of Fidel himself, and even less so from that of his less brilliant followers...[but] this discourse does continue to have a level of resonance in the population, a resonance that it would be erroneous to discount as pure emotional reaction or mere expression of necessity" (Hernández 2003:16). In this chapter it was argued that the *orgánico* aspect of the Cuban transformation, despite the international proclamations, is less a product of state actions and discourse than of specific activities situated in what can be called the NGO sector.

## 7 ■ Re-shaping or creating spaces of civil society? Development cooperation in Cuba via NGOs

"The question is" said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." "The question is", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all." (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

Having identified in the previous chapter that NGOs were a pivotal force in organic agricultural development in Cuba, I aim to unpack in this chapter the relative spaces of civil society actors, expressed in particular through the NGO sector. It will be important to unfold the positions taken and the representations forged through international and national NGO links. This chapter will thus focus on the emerging spaces of Cuban NGOs, while the following chapter will explore the role of international NGOs in Cuba and in Cuban agriculture. An analysis of the differing understandings of civil society is central to the argument presented. The following chapters emerge directly from my fieldwork observations and results (see section 2.1).

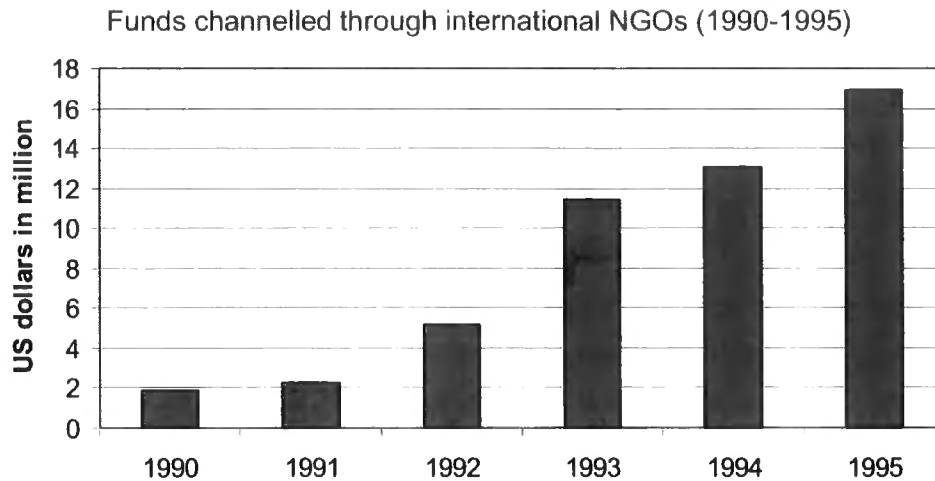
### 7.1 Brief outline of the current situation

To many, Cuba might not feature on their mental map as a developing country in need of foreign aid. Only recently has Cuba become more and more a subject of debates in international cooperation (see also section 4.4, 8.1 and 8.2). While it is important to unpick the dominant imaginary that development cooperation<sup>1</sup> is something entirely new to Cuba and being carried out for the sole purpose of channeling funds, there has still been a notable increase in development cooperation in the past 15 years. By 1996 Cuba maintained relations with more than 170 NGOs in 42 countries and an estimated 50 Cuban NGOs were benefiting from international cooperation in sustainable development projects (CEE 1996b). This

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<sup>1</sup> International development cooperation, is often understood as technical and financial aid through money transfers, but I want to stress that my understanding requires firmly the expression of solidarity from NGOs with the poor people in the world.

influx of northern money via Cuban NGOs needs to be scrutinized for the implications this has in terms of power imbalances, dependencies and structural change (see section 8.2.4 and 8.4).

Figure 7.1<sup>2</sup>

Source: Mora 2001

## 7.2 Emerging NGOs in Cuba: variable patterns of growth in recent years

Internationally, southern NGOs burgeoned in numbers partly in response to funding opportunities (Hudock 1999) that had become available especially since the mid 80s. While some grew from existing membership organizations, others are direct outgrowths from their Northern counterparts. Some originate from their local initiatives with an aim to identify local solutions (Hudock 1999). Despite certain variations, the organizational structure and operation often resembles that of Northern NGOs, which is partly because this is a prerequisite to being acknowledged as an NGO and thus considered for development cooperation. They are required to display certain institutional capacities in order to manage projects. Personnel trained by Northern NGOs and projects aimed at capacity-building often shape southern NGOs into homogenized moulds as decided by Northern NGOs.

In Cuba, there has been a reported boom of NGOs in the 1990s (Hoffmann 1999), talk about an emerging sector, and a recent emphasis in the academic as

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately it was impossible to obtain data for subsequent years. The trend upwards however would increase at least until 2000 when the EU stopped its humanitarian aid programme for Cuba.

well as popular literature on this third sector. This representation fails to recognize that many associations, foundations and institutions had, however, already existed long before the 1990s. Some date from prior to the Revolution in 1959 (e.g. freemasons, and in effect the Catholic Church<sup>3</sup>) and others were founded within the first years of the Revolution (e.g. Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP) 1961, Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) 1960) and yet others in later years (e.g. Asociación Cubana de Producción Animal (ACPA) 1974, Centro de Estudios Europeos (CEE) 1974). Popular movements are an integral part of Cuban history and society. They had constituted an active sector and had certain financial capabilities for their agency, even if originating from patron-client relationships with the state. "The organizations of the popular movement, that have always existed in our country and that are numerous, every time that they needed something sincerely, they knocked on the doors of daddy, the government and the party, and we actually did obtain sufficient resources to do our activities<sup>4</sup>" (Valdés 1996:8). He acknowledges that this had created a mentality of dependency undermining the health and potential of Cuban NGOs. Rather than focusing solely on the recent boom, it is thus important to document the relative changes that existing organizations are undergoing. New policy environments and state attitudes as well as the relationship with Northern donors have strong impacts on changing NGO identities, spheres of agency and their respective role in society.

An analysis of the development pattern and emergence of NGOs is highly dependent on the definitions and ideological positioning applied. Some see a liberalization of the state and claim "the government allowed slight changes in the model of state-society relations by permitting the so-called 'NGO boom' within the parameters of Decree-Law 54 (Ministerio de Justicia, 1985)" (Espinosa 1999:358, Medea 1997). They date this opening precisely to 1992 with the formation of the Centro 'Félix Varela'.

"The availability of alternative sources of funding facilitated pockets of autonomy within this emerging sector, which in turn created new loci for the generation of social capital and for the representation of more diverse interests. This liberalization or *mini-apertura* and the shrinking of the Cuban state also encouraged the mushrooming of

<sup>3</sup> Religious organisations are not usually seen as NGOs, but the roles of churches in Cuba often overlap with those of NGOs.

<sup>4</sup>In original: "las organizaciones del movimiento popular, que siempre han existido en nuestro país y son bastante numerosas, cada vez que necesitaban algo sencillamente tocaban las puertas de papá, del gobierno y del partido y realmente obteníamos los recursos suficientes para nuestra actividad."

unofficial, dissident, and opposition organizations “from below and the revitalization of the few remaining institutions of pre-revolutionary civil society such as the Catholic Church and the freemasons” (Espinosa 1999:358).

Espinosa, however, neglects to mention the existing mass organizations as well as other institutions that are considered a firm and integral part of civil society by others. Espinosa also makes the claim that permission for NGO activity was granted by the Cuban government solely due to the necessity of obtaining foreign funds. Gillian Gunn (1995:1) follows the same line of argument “Cuban NGOs grew because the government deemed them useful financial intermediaries and because citizens desired self-help organizations capable of resolving local problems the state was unwilling or unable to address” She claims that the Cuban government’s support for NGOs “is a matter of necessity”. However, others do not share this reductionist view on the purely financial motive for the NGO boom (e.g. Cisneros 1996). While few deny the possibilities NGO cooperation offers in terms of providing support during a difficult situation, they do however situate this ‘NGO boom’ within a richer context. Mora states (2001:89) “the difficult situation due to collapse of USSR and consequence of necessity to obtain external financing: these factors were fundamental in the making of the cooperation for development, the association for the design, execution and financing of projects for sustainable development in Cuba, but if people only see this aspect of the phenomenon, they don’t take into consideration that this is only one of the manifestations and cannot alone explain the fundament and objective of these relations.” With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was: “A call to play a more active role, more self-defined and autonomous. The Cuban NGOs in this form had to occupy the space for the preservation of those successes that we had achieved<sup>5</sup>” (Valdés 1996:8).

The 90s were a time and context of large transformations not only triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also set in context by the ‘rectification of errors’ campaign that was begun in 1986 (see section 3.1). This epoch was marked by a public review of the assumption of the Soviet model of ‘real socialism’, as the early 1980s displayed a slowing of the economy, a stagnation in public participation and interest, the occurrence of social problems etc (Hernández 2003). The political as well as social impacts and process of the rectification campaign are considered

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<sup>5</sup> Un llamamiento a jugar un papel mas activo, mas propio y mas autónomo. Las ONG Cubanas de esta forma tenían que ocupar un espacio en la preservación de aquellas conquistas que habíamos logrado...

significant (e.g. Cole 1998), due to the extent of public discussions held throughout the country. The debates expressed themselves formally in the third and fourth Cuban Communist Party Congress in 1986 and 1991. The discussions held around the document known as the Call to the Fourth Party Congress in particular were large-scale, public and covered somewhat new ground (Hernández 2003). The document included the call for more room for nongovernmental activity from churches and associations, amidst suggestions for more decentralization and political participation at local level etc.... It was in the mists of this debate that the Berlin wall fell. Prior to the actual collapse of the Soviet Union, the political as well as social climate had changed in Cuba, making more pronounced changes and transformation possible.

In this epoch, definitions were less clearly circumscribed and a certain level of confusion certainly supported the opening of various spaces to be filled with ideas that were present in debates around the globe. Having lost a strong and protective ally, Cuba also had to seek new allegiances and international support. Cuba saw NGO cooperation as one way to consolidate international ties to a small communist island in an increasingly hostile World Order. Foreign solidarity campaigns had begun to re-shape into NGO-style development cooperation.

### 7.3 The opening of spaces for civil society

Significant in the increased development of new NGO spaces were the constitutional changes made in 1992. In those changes the nongovernmental functions of mass organizations were emphasized (Hernández 2003). But while the 90s certainly saw a growth in mainstream development cooperation in Cuba, it is important to stress that international links had always existed. While the link between Cuba and the Soviet Union had dominated international relations, others had formed relations through various solidarity groups. Within cooperation via solidarity groups, the discussion of the relative proximity of the institutions to the state was irrelevant. The more classical development cooperation between European NGOs and Cuban NGOs as well as state institutions is dated to 1982 (Mora 2001). The general discourse permeating in Cuban NGOs and foreign donors (that includes Northern NGOs) tends to ignore these earlier ties and claims that development cooperation had started in the 90s. This is partly because they perceive the current 'type' of development cooperation to be a mere technical

support, while prior linkages were tied to political ideologies and thus classified as solidarity links.

The development cooperation of the 1990s was based on active recruiting and lobbying for cooperation supported by the Cuban government. Cuba lobbied for bilateral and multilateral funds and understood NGO cooperation not exclusively as relations between Northern and Cuban NGOs. Rather, Cuba identified a whole spectrum of civil society permissible for development cooperation. Mora (2001:89) refers to: "An important group of the organizations of the Cuban civil society (NGOs, associations, foundations, mass organizations, trade unions etc)<sup>6</sup>". As a first step, a meeting in Havana in January 1992 invited these to "*Encuentro de ONGs europeas, latinoamericanas, caribeñas e instituciones cubanas que promovido por la ANAP, en Habana 15-22 January 1992*<sup>7</sup>". Fundamental to the organization and execution of this meeting was ANAP, which had for decades been maintaining links with *campesino* groups and movements in Latin America. ANAP (see section 6.8) had played a fundamental role in establishing links for stepping up foreign development cooperation with Cuba together with the state. In the early years of the 1990s, establishment of development cooperation was still channeled in many cases through government institutions. It was an initial channel for meeting and starting collaboration: "In this period, the channel for cooperation had been fundamentally the organizations of the Cuban state<sup>8</sup>" (Valdés 1996:9).

While there had been a certain level of government support, the establishment of the NGO sector and discussions of civil society were also accompanied by writings from intellectuals and lobby groups. The development of project cooperation and NGOs has thus not been a single-track development with homogenized ideas and agendas, but rather a contested space (see section 4.4 and 8.4). Foreign claims to civil society space in Cuba are in particular perceived as referring to dissident groups: "Another widespread stereotype holds that the only Cuban formations that deserve the name "civil society" are the so-called Human Rights Groups or dissident organizations and the Catholic Church" (Hernández 2003:95). This stereotyping was heavily fuelled by the US adoption of The Cuban Democracy Act in 1992, also known as the Torricelli Act, in which they propose to promote civil society and democracy in Cuba, understood as organizations that are

<sup>6</sup> In original: "un grupo importante de organizaciones de la sociedad civil cubana (ONGs, asociaciones, fundaciones, organizaciones de masas, sindicatos etc)."

<sup>7</sup> Meeting of European, Latin-American and Caribbean NGOs and Cuban institutions, which was promoted by ANAP en La Habana 15-22 January 1992.

<sup>8</sup> In original: en este tiempo de canal de la cooperación eran fundamentalmente las organizaciones del estado cubano.



opposed to the Cuban state and are dissident. What became known as track one, was the direct confrontation through economic sanctions, and track two was to topple the Revolution from within, through fostering contacts and seeking to help Cuban NGOs. Between 1992 and 1995 a total of 65 million dollars has been made available in private humanitarian donations channeled through NGOs<sup>9</sup>.

It is exactly this outside usage and signification of the concept of civil society and NGOs (see section 5.1 and 5.2) that have contradictory effects on the development of an acceptance of NGOs in Cuba. "The horizons of Cuban society have been considerably widened by the relative increase in available information, the progressive broadening of access to the Internet, the greater presence in Cuba of international NGOs and of cooperative intergovernmental projects in the areas of health, education, sports and culture abroad. In contrast the politicization of 'people to people' contacts, typified by the US strategy of Track Two, has charged the atmosphere of bilateral and international exchange considerably and has also interfered, within Cuba, with critical and careful debate about some subjects" (Hernández 2003:132-133)

#### 7.4 External dependence: funding issues?

The ways NGOs receive resources and, in particular, the resources received from external environments are crucial in the determination of NGO capacity to act independently and voice ideas and needs. The impact of these external environments, executed through the funding channels, implies a certain outside control (Hudock 1999, Townsend et al. 2004). In the mainstream NGO debate, these external dependencies have received less attention than concerns about the internal factors such as leadership and organizational structure (Hudock 1999). Foreign NGOs in Cuba are silent on the issue of external funding and the potential dependencies and power imbalances they might cause. However, they as well as international donors lead a vivid debate regarding the Cuban NGOs' proximity to the state and whether 'real' NGOs do actually exist in Cuba. "There are no NGOs here, maybe only the freemasons" (International donor 24.07.03) and in the same vein: "There are no Cuban NGOs here, they don't exist" (International donor 01.09.03). Northern NGOs tend to hesitate to completely negate the existence of Cuban

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<sup>9</sup> Source: [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/1995\\_hr/h950324w.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/1995_hr/h950324w.htm) [accessed 25 May 2005]

NGOs, since they need justification to work with them, but they certainly identify as scale of Cuban NGOs as being 'more' or 'less' real NGOs.

ANAP in particular is often attacked for its closeness to the state and for the lack of independence and NGO identity. "ANAP depends on the state. The president is a member of the *Consejo del Estado*, there are many internal links. ANAP does not really have the character of a NGO" (Representative of Northern NGO 23.07.03). Donors have a similar opinion about ANAP. "ANAP claims to be independent of the Communist party, but the Marxist notion of conveyor belt persists. But they [ANAP] represent the concerns of the farmers, I guess" (Northern donor 29.12.03). This donor highlights the representation ANAP offers for small farmers on political level and others equally recognise the power position and influence ANAP holds. "ANAP is the biggest and politically the strongest. They are at the institutional level of the government...ANAP has capacity to change agrarian policy, because Orlando [president of ANAP] is member of the *Comité* [Consejo del Estado]. The movement *de campesino a campesino* of agro-ecology in ANAP has big influence, more than ACTAF [Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales] or ACPA . They [ANAP] had influence over Fidel for the agrarian law"<sup>10</sup>(Representative of Northern NGO 28.07.03). This ambivalence over ANAP is negotiated in the everyday through, on one hand, working with them sometimes for particular purposes and on the other hand through by-passing them and doing things on the sly. The Northern NGOs' actions negotiate the legal space provided and resist the state where it seems essential for the project goals through actions or lack of actions in the everyday. In their everyday, they consciously use space in a contradictory manner to the prevailing dominant representations (see section 5.8). "We work with CPA [Cooperativa de Producción Agropecuaria] but ANAP doesn't know that"<sup>11</sup>; because they are the first to use money for other purposes and it would never get to the cooperative. We have 600\$US for *lombricultura*<sup>12</sup> and we work directly with them [CPA]. ANAP is there to make traps. If they are being difficult we just work without them. The president [of CPA] puts himself in a bit of a difficult

<sup>10</sup> in original: "ANAP es mas grande y políticamente mas fuerte...están al nivel institucional del gobierno...ANAP es mas cerca del Estado. ANAP tiene capacidad de cambiar política agrícola, porque Orlando es miembro del Comité. El movimiento de campesino a campesino de agro-ecología de ANAP tiene importancia grande, mas como ACTAF o ACPA. Tenían influencia por el ley con Fidel."

<sup>11</sup> Since the CPA is politically represented by ANAP, links to CPA and CCS (Cooperativa de Créditos y Servicios) need to be approved by ANAP.

<sup>12</sup> Worm culture is an integral part of the Cuban agro-ecology methods. Worms convert excrement to humus, which is used to provide well fertilized soil.

position, but in the end things always resolve themselves" (Representative of Northern NGO 01.12.03).

The monthly meetings with the EU commission delegate in La Habana often turn into fierce battles between the EU stance and European NGOs over the justification for working with certain ones and not others (see section 8.2.2 and 8.4). Here the focus on 'real' NGOs and the identification of such NGOs for future work is often central to the meetings. The status of 'real' is determined by action and voiced independently from the Cuban state. However, from the perspective of the Cuban state, real NGOs are those that are registered in the Registry of Associations with the Ministry of Justice according to the 1985 established law 54 on 'associations and their regulations' as well as article 39, 396 and 397 of the civil code from 1985. By 1994 NGO's officially registered amounted to 2200 (Gunn 1995). That resources often originate from Western governments is seen as legitimate and perceived as removed from the state as they are channelled through foreign NGOs. Resources are thus perceived to be washed clean from any dependence on foreign states. This was made most clear when Fidel Castro renounced all aid emanating from the EU and its members states in July 2003<sup>13</sup>, but the funds of NGOs even if originating from a European government were allowed to continue. NGO funding will however determine in part the autonomy an NGO can have in developing its own program (see section 5.1 and 5.2).

Cuba enacted strict policies regarding NGO funding with the aim of controlling and coordinating the relative power and implications foreign NGOs would have. In Cuba, NGO core funds cannot be paid from project money. Salaries for employed staff have to be raised through other means, whether membership fees or sales of magazines and brochures. Foreign NGOs are not allowed to assist in covering staff salaries. Neither are foreign NGOs allowed directly to employ staff for their support. If staff are needed to act as representatives, these are employees of the Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica (MINVEC), dollars being paid to MINVEC by the foreign NGO and then paid to staff in local

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<sup>13</sup> The diplomatic break resulted after the EU banned high-level governmental visits and participations in cultural events in Cuba and started inviting dissidents to embassy parties. The EU imposed these sanctions after a crackdown that led to 75 dissidents being handed long prison sentences, and the execution of three Cubans found guilty of hijacking a ferry. The Cuban authorities reacted with a rejection of relationships with the EU and its member states, including multilateral and bilateral aid. The diplomatic freeze began melting in November 2004 as the EU reviewed the sanctions. At the end of January 2005, the EU decided to drop the sanctions and restore normal relations with Cuba.

pesos by MINVEC<sup>14</sup>. They legally thus do not have status as NGO employees, rather they are Ministry employees. The Cuban NGOs must raise in Cuba the money for whatever resources can be purchased in the national currency of local pesos. Resources obtained from foreign NGOs are to meet the costs in dollars of items that are only available in dollars<sup>15</sup>. "When the car breaks down, it needs to be repaired through official means in a designated workshop in \$US. We are not allowed for example to exchange \$US for pesos. That means, all spending in pesos would have to be covered by ACPA" (Representative of Northern NGO 22.11.03).

While this policy exists, it is often undermined. Being employed in the NGO sector has certain benefits that closely resemble the emergence of a middle class: increased access to travel for international conferences and training courses and dollar access through illegal payments from foreign NGOs to Cuban staff. The latter can range from \$US10 to \$US200 per month<sup>16</sup>. The Cuban Council of Churches pays employees every 3<sup>rd</sup> salary in dollars. This is based on the argument that Council of Churches employees will not receive pensions and old age benefits later on and hence need to make provision early on during their employment. However, to receive every 3 months 26 times the standard salary is a very good provision indeed. When the basic salary of a NGO worker is comparable to a civil servant at medium rank, the actual income is thus far higher for NGO employees.

While government policies are in place to limit the differentiated access to dollars and remain true to principles of equality and equity, NGOs have started to become a lucrative and sought after employment sector. International travel is usually associated with receiving funds in dollars (e.g. a per diem), a welcome source of income. Non-monetary values and benefits from travelling such as experiencing a foreign environment etc. are also highly valued, as travel is otherwise difficult to organize privately and usually only possible with elaborate bureaucratic hurdles on the Cuban and, even more, on the foreign embassies' side. Travel documents for NGO purposes are obtained through the respective *órgano de relación*<sup>17</sup>. Access to project cars, internet etc are other perks of NGO work that are

<sup>14</sup> For example, if a Foreign NGO pays 300\$US, the employee would receive 300 pesos (*moneda nacional*), i.e. only 1/26 of the actual monetary value.

<sup>15</sup> There is an anomaly in the Cuban economy that certain goods, particularly imported goods are only available in \$US unless subsidized by the state, in which case they are available in local pesos.

<sup>16</sup> This implies an additional salary of 0.65 to 13 times the average professional salary of 400 pesos/month.

<sup>17</sup> All Cuban NGOs have a bureaucratic link to a state institution closest to their work. For example, a NGO dedicated primarily to agriculture would have MINAG (Ministerio de Agricultura) as *órgano de relación*.

highly valued. While there are stark differences between members of different NGOs in terms of dollar accessibility, travel etc. and relative wealth, undoubtedly the sector as a whole has many attractions. Working in the NGO sector can provide a more secure route to obtaining perks than through government employment. While certain perks had also been available for government employees, they were severely reduced due to the economic crisis in the early 90s and are less frequent and of less value now. Hence, the access obtained through the NGO sector is a welcomed source for meeting shortages. Hernández (2003:104) is slightly more critical of this development and he states: "Clearly, civil society is not just a realm of economic relations and of pluralism but also a realm of inequality. Neither economic power nor power that derives from the activity of nongovernmental organizations and institutions is equitably divided. The limited opening to market relations, together with distortions brought by the crisis, have given rise to actors who concentrate economic power and to new social relations. They have given rise to hierarchies, attributes, and values that express these social relations, including symbols of success and social preeminence that were previously unknown or unaccepted."

### 7.5 Promoting democracy and getting outside dependency?

These emerging dependencies bear the risk of actively undermining the increased spheres of activity and influence Cuban NGOs can exert. They might even run the risk of undermining their current lobbying status with the government, if they are perceived to be mercenaries of a neo-liberal policy dictated by the outside world. They can easily fall into discredit as manipulators or puppets of outside interests, particularly US-steered interests. NGOs in Cuba have to tread a fine line and find a balance between satisfying outside conditions through their NGO involvement, while not losing their lobbying position and relation with the state. There is evidence from research in African states that well connected NGOs have been politically sidelined by the state. Edwards and Hulme's (1996:7) "concern is that the willingness of NGOs to speak out on issues that are unpopular with governments will be diluted by their growing dependence on official aid. There has been evidence from Africa that NGOs that depend on external funding (not just official funding) are more likely to be ignored as 'illegitimate' by their own governments in policy debates (Bratton 1989)." It is curious that NGOs in general are often seen as vehicles for democratization, while they themselves do not have

democratic structures as non-representative organizations. They have failed to develop effective strategies to promote democratization (Bratton 1990, Fowler 1991, Lehmann 1990). This makes them less effective in this process and poses a particular problem for 'downward' accountability to members and beneficiaries (Bebbington and Thiele 1993, Carroll 1992,). Why then are Cuban mass organizations criticized for their relative coziness with the state, when there are – at least theoretically - democratic practices in place such as elections for representatives and heads?

Also in other contexts it has been observed that mass organizations involved in development work can find themselves squeezed between their members' ideas on development and those of outside funding agendas (Shivji 2004). Cuban mass organizations are experiencing a similar squeeze. While they rely on a large base, the project department seems often to function without strong linkages to the organizational structure. Separate project cooperation departments have recently been introduced at the level of administration, with personnel in charge of development projects appointed, not elected by the masses. Hence, following international NGO practice makes them less accountable to their members and beneficiaries and moves them away from existing (if not always active) democratic structures.

## 7.6 Techniques and perception of how NGOs should work and function

A general perception of how NGOs are meant to be organized and to function has already swept into mainstream discourse on NGO activities in Cuba. The Centro de Estudios Europeos (CEE), which self-identifies as a Cuban NGO with the objective of organizing and coordinating international development cooperation, (CEE 1996a:21) states that Cuban NGOs in general are starting to know how to play the game, use the specific knowledge and displays characteristics sought after by the international community. While applauding the advances Cuban NGOs have made, the scholars of CEE point to a series of deficiencies they have identified. They are aware that these NGOs will have to meet certain requirements to please the international NGO sector. They focus on capacity building of personnel in techniques and methodology for the design, execution, administration and evaluation of projects, and securing "the presence of communication technology, office supplies and other resources that are necessary to guarantee the adequate

functioning of the new and emerging tasks that they are developing<sup>18</sup>." (CEE 1996a:19) It is acknowledged that Cuban NGOs do not quite yet function in ways that are necessary or required by foreign NGOs; that they still have to learn to speak the NGO language correctly.

Cuban NGO staff are trained by professionals, mainly international, in a series of workshops on techniques such as participatory methods, logframes, and project management and evaluation. They get exposed to buzz themes such as sustainable development, community development, participation, microcredit and also gender. International consultants flown in from abroad conduct the workshops. Some Cuban NGOs have recognised the importance of speaking the necessary NGO / development cooperation language as well as using the tools to effectively tap into the channels of development money, which flows as long as certain impulses are triggered by the appropriate themes and techniques. For example, in terms of participation: "We have unmasked deficiencies and weaknesses, amongst which is the almost entire lack of knowledge by the Cuban NGOs concerning modern participatory techniques for the collective construction of knowledge<sup>19</sup>" (CEE 1996b:27). That these norms and regulations, - one might even call them rituals - are important is shown by the following quote: "It also allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the knowledge of various norms and criteria that are used internationally for the elaboration, administration and management of projects. A process in which we had to push ourselves considerably in order to be able to continue the amplification and deepening of the cooperation relations with the international NGOs<sup>20</sup>" (CEE 1996b:27). It is important to note that the focus lies within project work; the small scale, local and patchwork nature of which are not questioned. This approach however lies in contrast to government policies, which tended to be all encompassing, sweeping into the furthest corners of the Cuban island. This is most recently exemplified by the electrification of schools project, where even a one-pupil mountain school was equipped with solar panels to power the TV and video station considered a necessary tool in teaching.

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<sup>18</sup>.In original: "la presencia de medios de comunicación, materiales de oficina y otros recursos necesarias para garantizar un funcionamiento adecuado a las tareas nuevas y crecientes que están desarrollando."

<sup>19</sup> In original: "hemos descubierto insuficiencias y debilidades, entre estas la casi total ausencia de conocimiento por parte de las ONGs cubanas acerca de las técnicas participativas modernas para la construcción colectiva de conocimiento."

<sup>20</sup> In original: "nos ha ido permitiendo también iniciarnos en el conocimiento de la variadas normas y criterios utilizados internacionalmente para la elaboración, administración y gestión de proyectos, proceso en el que tenemos que esforzarnos considerablemente a fin de poder continuar la ampliación y profundización de las relaciones de cooperación con las ONGs internacionales."

The following quote describes well the process that Cuban NGOs have adopted to satisfy the scope of international cooperation (see section 8.4 and 8.5):

“Organisations like ANAP have an international office at headquarters and are very professional. They know the ropes and act as quality controls for projects that come in from the provinces and municipal level. Which makes the work for us easy. We want it, they are professional, good in accounting everything, but paradoxically it doesn't help decentralising, capacity-building outside Havana, decision-making over own processes even though this is something we would like....Cubans have good capacities, very well educated, clever, have ability to adopt fast and did so. We did a lot of capacity-building through work-shops on project management etc. We trained the Cuban counterparts and all other donors and NGO sector did so as well. A lot of capacity building and Cubans are bright and have capacity to adopt quickly. They adapted quickly to those types of norms, especially organisations in Havana. ANAP, ACTAF, but outside Havana, still need to strengthen skills.” (Representative of Northern donor 05.09.2003).

ACPA (2003) has even published a 45-page long booklet on 'Strategy for International Cooperation', which was elaborated through a workshop held in January 2003 constituted by representatives from the National directive of ACPA, the provincial offices, project directors, specialists and invited guests from MINVEC, MINAG and CEE. The aim was to evaluate the organisation in terms of opportunities, strengths, weaknesses and challenges for future cooperation. Furthermore, the national and international context and priorities for cooperation were discussed. The agendas and programmes that ACPA wants, and should follow in future work, were established. The cross-cutting themes which are important in all the activities were also identified. A follow-up workshop was conducted in 2003, which included international NGOs with representation in Cuba, such as AAA (Agro Acción Alemán), Oxfam Solidarité, Care international and Paz y Tercer Mundo (see section 8.2.4). Cuban NGOs working in the agricultural sector were invited, including ANAP, ATAC (Asociación de Técnicos Azucareros de Cuba), ACTAF. Actors such as MINAG and CEE were also represented.

There nevertheless circulate strongly the framework and agenda as set by the donors that must be fulfilled by the Cuban NGOs. One donor puts it very clearly: “They [Cuban NGOs] are experiencing a learning curve, but are appreciating what is



required for working with an international organisation. They are learning what they need to do....those understanding the ropes for international funding will get it" (Bilateral donor staff member 12.08.03)

## 7.7 NGO development work and the church

An important actor in recent development cooperation is the Christian church<sup>21</sup>, which interestingly enough opened the space of debate for civil society (Acanda 2002). The Christian churches and the Cuban state used not to have good relations. The historical and political circumstances of this are discussed elsewhere (e.g. Kirk 1989, Malone 1996) and are not further discussed here. However, what is important to note are the recent developments of church-state relations as they have a direct bearing on NGO development and activity in Cuba. During the 80s the relationship between church and the state improved and by 1985, the Cuban state elevated the status of its office of religious affairs to make it an independent department (Malone 1996). In 1991 a further concession to religion was made, as it was voted that Christians and other religious believers were now allowed to obtain party membership. And in 1992, the constitution was changed from an atheist to lay state. The policy was adopted as part of the changes made to the Constitution in 1992 and affirms the lay character of the state and of eliminating discrimination against religious believers. The acceptance of the church has increased ever since and culminated in 1998 with the visit of Pope John Paul II, which offered the Catholic church, in particular, a major platform from which to speak on social, ideological, and political subjects with nearly unrestricted access to the population (Hernández 2003).

Cuban churches are allowed to receive funds directly from overseas counterparts without any interference from the Cuban state. The money does not need to be registered or approved by any Cuban institution, as it does for development cooperation. Hence, the churches have relative freedom in terms of their financial status and are less controlled than other binary links of Cuban institutions to the outside. The exact reasons for this relative openness towards the church have been speculated upon. Malone (1996) suggests that EU conditionalities

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<sup>21</sup> Both catholic and protestant, even so the protestant church is more pronounced in development work. The catholic church works through Caritas, while the Protestant Church works through DECAP (Consejo de Iglesias- Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos) in executing development projects.

regarding religious freedoms to benefit from economic cooperation have encouraged a greater tolerance. Cynics argue that this relative autonomy and the possibility of churches to acquire external funds are due to the greater need for foreign donations triggered by the economic crisis (Gunn 1995). The activities of the church are, however, not viewed without a certain scepticism by the Cuban state, as churches have been included as target institutions by the US Track Two policy from 1992<sup>22</sup>. According to Gunn (1995) it was the churches that first displayed bottom-up NGO behaviour. Now in Cuba, there exists CARITAS for the Catholic Church and the Consejo de Iglesia (CIC) with the 'Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos' (DECAP) which functions like a NGO for the Council of protestant churches<sup>23</sup>. This project work with the latter institution has its origin in about 1986-1987, instigated through the visit by a representative from 'Pan para el Mundo' (PPM) the organization assigned to international development work from the German protestant church. Development work and projects were suggested and the Consejo de Iglesias was to take an intermediary role between the projects and the Cuban society. During the 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CIC, the participants approved and voted for the establishment of DECAP to use the modest possibilities to support the population through social and community projects. DECAP was officially approved and legalized by the Executive Committee of CIC on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1992. DECAP itself points to external and internal factors for its establishment. As external factors they list: the opening towards international cooperation by the Cuban state, the macro-political changes in East-West relations, and the effect of the '*periodo especial*'. Internal factors were the dialogue between German and Cuban churches and in particular the role PPM took, the changing relationship between the Cuban state and the church, and Christian motives based in the theological principle of social responsibility (DECAP 2002). DECAP now aims to work with three main programmes:

- Ecclesiastical outreach
- Sustainable development
- Communications.

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<sup>22</sup> This so called Track two policy emanating from the US seeks to undermine the state by supporting civil society organizations to prepare for a regime change.

<sup>23</sup> More than 50 protestant denominations in Cuba participate in the Consejo de Iglesias. The organisation dates back to the early years of the Revolution, but received increased attention through the re-organization in 1964, when it was still called Concilio de Iglesias Cubanas. In 1966, the name was changed to Consejo de Iglesias (CIC).

<http://168.96.200.17/ar/libros/Cuba/marin/religion.doc> [accessed 26 May 2005].

Within sustainable development, they focus on three sub-areas: ecology, expressed through the conservation of natural resources, food security expressed through agricultural production and the conservation of food and the energy sector, focusing on renewable energy. They further identify gender as a transverse-theme cutting across the programmes. This will be discussed in detail in section 7.10 and 8.7.

It is striking that church-related international donors constitute the largest donors within the NGO sector. In 1994, the four major NGO-donors were listed as PPM, Catholic Relief Service, Caritas, Misereor, Oxfam (UNDP 1995). The list of church related donors now extends to at least 20 Northern NGOs that emanate from church institutions. The appendix III lists the major Northern NGOs active in Cuba. In 2001 from all the 22 NGOs listed in the UNDP report, 14 were of clerical origin, ranging from Caritas to the Arquidiócesis de Boston (UNDP 2001). Some Cuban organizations thus function in the international world like NGOs, while internally they are under the auspices of the church, as for example BIOVIDA. "BIOVIDA functions like a pastoral service of the church and has its own structure that is independent with its own bank account, like a NGO. But it is not inscribed in Cuba as a NGO, but it to the outside it appears to function like NGO. Anyone who has reading material from BIOVIDA outside Cuba says: listen, but this is a NGO, due to the characteristics, but however it is a pastoral arm of a church, that is situated within the organization of the Christian Pentecostal Church...and within that it has a part that is BIOVIDA<sup>24</sup>" (Senior staff member of Cuban NGO 29.02.04).

## 7.8 A ministry for control or coordination?

The Cuban state chooses carefully which foreign NGOs are being let into the country, as it certainly does not perceive all NGOs to be genuine supporters or even tolerant of the Cuban Revolution. The state is in general wary of 'civil society'. An independent special Ministry, Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica (MINVEC), was established in 1994 through the Cuban State Council from the previous Comité Estatal de Colaboración Económica

<sup>24</sup> In original: "BIOVIDA funciona como la pastoral de servicio de la Iglesia tiene la estructura orgánica independiente con una cuenta bancaria como una ONG pero no esta inscrita en Cuba como una ONG, o sea funciona para el exterior como una ONG, cualquiera que tenga una lectura de BIOVIDA desde el exterior dice: oiga pero es una ONG, por las características, pero sin embargo es una pastoral de una Iglesias, esta dentro de una organización de la Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal y dentro de eso tiene un acápite que es BIOVIDA.."

(CECE), which indicates the importance given to international cooperation. MINVEC is responsible for coordinating all foreign investment whether private, state or through NGO relations. "NGO cooperation passes through MINVEC because we have priorities provided by the government and [they] are best able to direct assistance to Cuba's development needs". (MINVEC representative 27.03.04). Hence in practical terms when a contract of collaboration is developed and signed between the Northern and Cuban counterpart, MINVEC is a third signatory on the contract and will hold both NGOs accountable to the terms of references as set out in the project proposal. While this can easily be seen as a direct control exerted by the Cuban government on NGO relations, not all donors perceive this institution as negative:

"MINVEC is very demanding of financial capability, want to have a good image. They maximise the \$US we give them. For example if money is available for a new car, they come back and say they want to buy 2-3 used cars with the same money and I have not experienced that in another country. And the rewards they are willing to accept for work is modest, not like in other countries. They want to prove that they are not corrupt and account for everything. They are very professional. Cuba is the most effective country to do cooperation. They are on top of the list in the way they manage the funds. They allocate resources and make the dollar go far. The other side of the coin is that innovation and decentralized decision-making is weak. But you can't have everything" (international donor 05.09.03).

This positive role of MINVEC is recognised by some Northern NGOs working in Cuba too. "The MINVEC, in his role could be good, in the sense that I think that it is positive that the state takes account, no? To see what is happening with the cooperation in one's country<sup>25</sup>" (Representative of Northern NGO 03.11.03). However, an additional institution meddling in the intricacies of individual projects also implies more bureaucracy, often leading to delays and simply hassle that could rather be avoided. One representative of a small Northern NGO who is not living in Cuba, but comes on visits regularly states this bureaucracy:

"Say we are in Guatemala and we had a pot of money that wasn't used. I would say, I suggest to find out what the needs are of

<sup>25</sup> In original: "El MINVEC, en el papel sería bueno, en el sentido que a mi me parece que las cosas positivas, que el estado se preocupe, no? de ver que se hace con la cooperación de su país."

the constituency are and let's use that money to respond to it...and then we are flexible how it is utilized....in this case [Cuba], no! Any change on a budget line, or an account or anything that is written in the terms of references, I have to authorize with a signed letter; they [Cuban counterpart NGO] have to take it to MINVEC to stamp it and send it to their processor to authorize the withdrawal of that particular money for that particular purpose; which means they [Cuba NGO] are limited in their responses...you write a long-term project, a three year project and of course there is change, there are different needs....and that it is strange to me" (Northern NGO 19.03.04)

The Ministry is perceived to be making sure that money is used as stated and not corrupted into private channels. It further seems to make sure that money is spent on the actual people and not primarily for capacity building of institutions, such as NGOs. This might be due to political motivation, i.e. the government wants to minimize strong parallel structures that have better institutional capacity and better infrastructure than the government itself (as it is common in developing countries). "MINVEC are concerned about capacity development for [Cuban] NGOs, because they think that it means buying computers and cars and want to see that the money gets to the people. They do not want to have too much capacity outside the government. Not too much civil society" (Representative of Northern NGO 03.09.03).

## 7.9 Implications for agricultural development

Agriculture features prominently in NGO cooperation, whether packaged in community, rural or sustainable development projects (see also section 8.6). When Cuba experienced severe food shortages in the early 90s, the agricultural sector was quickly assigned priority in government policy and support. Furthermore, the agricultural associations have been fundamental in the establishment of development links to the international community (see section 6.8). During the various meetings and conferences held between Cuban institutions and international NGOs, agriculture whether in terms of food security, or agro-alimentation, or sustainable agriculture, has featured prominently in every single meeting and been identified as a priority area. The cooperation in this sector is particularly pushed by the state as Isabel Allende, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, made

clear during her speech at the NGO conference in Brussels in 1996: "...new projects that can support some aspects of our reality in a significant way, as well as in the agricultural as well as energy sector ...<sup>26</sup>" (Allende 1996:4). Despite the full state support for agriculture, as discussed in the previous chapters, NGOs were increasingly identified as useful actors to support the transformations in the agricultural sector. Cuban NGOs were perceived to have conceived of and implemented practical, realistic, and less expensive solutions to recover traditional practices of local farmers, promote community participation, and strengthen the capacity of producers to develop innovative ideas and solve problems (Nieto 2002). NGOs are working mainly with sustainable agriculture principles, originating from own initiatives and agendas as well as outside discourses. There are various Cuban NGOs that have been identified as working in the agricultural sector: ACPA, ANAP, DECAP, FMC, ACTAF, CIERI (Centro de Intercambio y Referencia sobre Iniciativas Comunitarias), ATAC and FNH (Fundación de la Naturaleza y el Hombre). Only one of them, DECAP, is a church linked NGO, but conducts substantial projects and is firmly placed in the consciousness of Cuban actors, as one that works intensely in the agricultural sector<sup>27</sup> (see section 6.8 for ACAO and ACTAF and 7.7).

## 7.10 The gender component in NGO work<sup>28</sup>

There exists only one large Cuban NGO currently that has gender inscribed as its objective and has the stature to work on gender. This is the often cited and well-known mass organisation Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) (see section 4.6.3). The incorporation of a gender component in development projects is faced with this specific institutional context of Cuba. Given that the FMC is the largest and only organisation dedicated exclusively to the necessities of women, it acts like a reference in the discourse and methodology of issues that are considered gender related. The FMC generates theories and practices and these are propagated through the organizational structures to the grassroots level.

The FMC in some aspects acts like a government arm that is assigned with the responsibility for gender issues. At the same time the FMC takes on the role of,

<sup>26</sup> In original: "...nuevos proyectos que puedan ayudar de una manera significativa algunos aspectos puntuales en nuestra realidad, tanto en el campo de la agricultura como de la energía..."

<sup>27</sup> It is curious to note that far more international NGOs have a clerical identity, than there are church linked NGOs in Cuba. This is discussed in the section on church and NGOs.

<sup>28</sup> I do not explore gender relations in NGOs, but they are diverse. There is a considerable presence of women working in Cuban NGOs including senior positions.

and self-identifies as, an NGO. At the Beijing conference in 1995 it acted both as government representative and an NGO (Pearson 1995). However, they clearly state that the execution of development projects is not a priority for the organization. The FMC is basically a political organization that has accumulated considerable power and self-identifies as an autonomous organization dedicated to the establishment and translation of gender discourses. Since 'gender' is thought to be covered extensively by the FMC politically as well as practically, there is no possibility of an emerging NGO identifying or registering as a 'gender NGO', since this is seen as the sole monopoly of the FMC and thus their discourses remain unchallenged.

Other (Cuban) organizations that wish to develop and conduct projects with a strong gender component inevitably have to establish collaborative links with the FMC, since they are understood as the sole reference point for gender matters. The creation of close networks of cooperation with other organizations is however not a priority for the FMC. Hence these collaborations on the theme of gender are riddled with obstacles. This is particularly valid when the organizations are situated in other organisational or institutional levels, such as agricultural, or cultural NGOs. Furthermore, the limitations to the development of an advanced gender discourse in terms of gender within FMC, do not encourage personnel from other organisations to work with the FMC. Many Cuban NGOs, such as ANAP, ACTAF, ACPA and DECAP have recently adopted the objective to work with a gender component as a cross-cutting strategy in their projects and in practical terms link loosely with the FMC. This serves as an alibi only. The incorporation of gender aspects in project proposals is, in most cases, a donor instigated move under the auspice of gender mainstreaming. The specific Cuban institutional context, as well as a certain lack of training of NGO staff on gender outside the FMC, results in a shallow application – if they are applied at all – of gender components, in development projects. Many Cuban NGOs are aware of the donor fashion of gender and are now trying to train up on gender through workshops held by foreign consultants. These workshops are usually organized and paid for by the Northern NGO for their Cuban counterparts and representatives from the FMC are often not included. This implies a lost opportunity to try and work on a thorough understanding of gender on different levels, including the organization that is most powerful with respect to women, gender and political leverage.

Many Cuban NGOs claim that the perspective of gender is now one of the fundamental objectives of the organization as a cross-cutting strategy. DECAP for

example puts gender firmly on the promotional CD as a cross-cutting strategy together with energy and communication, cutting across the programmes directed at church work, sustainable development and communication. In the past years, DECAP has developed various community projects with the aim to also integrate a gender component, and a large part of the beneficiaries of such projects are women. The team in DECAP has – to the present date – not received any official or formal training in issues relating to gender. They participated for the first time in September 2003 in a gender workshop, organised and held by their international counterpart PPM. They are, however, willing and trying to gain further understanding in gender work and to increase the capacity of their personnel. In local projects they always try and integrate with the local FMC through the respective representative, as one of the many social actors that need to be integrated in a successful community project. Despite an official and real interest in incorporating a gender focus and working with gender in projects, the reality shows that a lack of capacity in this field inhibits a thorough development of a sound gender strategy. DECAP states as its general objective concerning gender: to achieve an integration of gender into the different themes, programmes and projects DECAP is conducting. As specific objectives, the following are listed (DECAP 2002):

1. to promote equal opportunities in all stages of the project management
2. to foment the active and balanced participation of the women in the different levels of management
3. to stimulate the access of women to the productive resources of the projects in a balanced manner according to her possibilities and capacities
4. to advocate the participation of women in capacity-building and educational opportunities.

Despite the stated willingness to integrate gender into projects, the conceptualisation of gender remains marginalized and it is a little surprising that the staff to be trained for gender issues are both women.

ACTAF also attempts to integrate gender and claim that they are organising activities all over the country. At times they hold workshops for capacity-building together with the FMC as for example on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2002 in the Centre for the Promotion and Development of Urban Agriculture of the ACTAF La Habana branch. Their objectives for such a workshops are identified as: to achieve better knowledge about gender and its development in ACTAF, to know the perspective of the woman



in agriculture and to increment the activities for capacity-building. Apart from these workshops, ACTAF promotes the 'Creativity prize for women in the rural areas', whose winner gets put forward to the 'Foundation of the World Summit of the Woman'.

ACPA has also identified gender as one of the cross-cutting themes they wish to incorporate in their project work, as stated in their 'Strategy for International Cooperation' (ACPA 2003). Their main objective is to incorporate the gender dimension in the project process starting from the proposal, planning, execution and evaluation according to gender democracy. The actions that are to be considered are to eliminate the word man/men as a generic term to mean person and to disaggregate according to gender.

## 7.11 Summary

Cuba's emerging NGO sector is on the one hand aiming to resist the international homogenisation of development discourse and the political project attached to it. On the other hand, the emerging NGO sector is also willingly adopting foreign ideas and projects. The political project might be unconscious or subtle, such as neo-liberalism and managerialism, and the respective weight given to civil society NGO practice, but it acts strongly on the dominant representations of space that permeate society. On the other hand Cuban NGOs get drawn in through practices and methods, such as the audit culture, report writing, log-frames and project management practices, delivered through Northern NGO contact in national and international work-shops. They also get re-focused to follow fashionable themes, such as capacity building, participation (less so on empowerment). Resistance lies in their relative financial autonomy, local government support, and the strong un-negotiable political and context. Nonetheless, the path one sees unfolding is one where Cuban NGOs are driven from the arms of the Cuban government into the arms of the international neo-liberal managerial NGO world. Current opportunities for forming independent alternatives which could blossom through the existing protection of the Cuban state are not always being taken up. One donor describes it as follows: "They [Cuban NGOs] are squeezed both by the politics of the state and by donors. It makes it worse. They [Cuban NGOs] still cannot use their own ideas" (bilateral donor staff member 24.07.03).

The following chapter will explore the role that the Northern actors, state and NGO donors as well as NGOs, play in the network of Cuban agriculture.

## 8 ■ Claiming (neo-liberal?) spaces: international development actors in Cuba

There is always a wrong way to do the right thing  
(Rick Hinds, Greenpeace USA)

Having focused on the national NGO environment in Cuba, I will now draw on my research in the Northern NGO community in La Habana and examine more closely some of the international networks and channels that are actively evoking an opening to the perceived closed space in Cuba through the channels of 'development cooperation'. These 'outside' agents are invoking new representations of space, and negotiating existing representations in terms of civil society, social actors and their understandings of specific issues, including gender. This outsider engagement and intricate involvement with Cuba, the Cuban people and the polity will be explored through depicting actors and channels in the agricultural sector and considering gender as a cross-cutting theme. I will argue that agriculture is particularly exposed to the establishment of outside representations.

### 8.1 Remnants of Geopolitics or the 'New Policy Agenda': international donors in Cuba

While geopolitical considerations had shaped Western and Eastern aid flows during the Cold War Period, with the fall of the Berlin wall the primary drive for aid flows was changed. No longer does capitalism fight communism and vice-versa and thus determine aid flows; the 'New Policy Agenda' is being enacted globally as described in detail in sections 5.1 and 5.2. The main points already made, and that I want to repeat here, are: elements of economic liberalism and Western political thought are now shaping and defining the roles and relationships that markets, states and 'civil society' should play (e.g Keane 2003, Moore 1993). An explicit link between political and economic liberalization and mainstream donor discourse that has become prevalent worldwide is that economic growth, respect for human rights, the market economy, reduced military expenditure, decentralization and democracy

are mutually sustaining (Archer 1994). Particularly for post-socialist countries, the cure for the ills of the Soviet regime was believed to be a vibrant civil society to fill the spaces left behind by a retreating state and manage an emerging market. Donors developed a particular understanding of civil society and prescribed doses of it as a direct measure towards the creation of a vibrant free market (van Rooy and Robinson 1998). It was widely believed and advocated that a transition from 'statist' to market-based economies could be more effectively consolidated with the growth of advocacy groups that champion such reforms (Hansen 1996).

Cuba, being one of the more prominent locales in the Cold War - host of the Missile Crisis and geographically located on the doorstep of the United States - was deeply involved in the power struggle which was played out through development support. As a former ally of the Soviet Union, from 1989 Cuba could no longer draw on the resources<sup>1</sup> received prior to *glasnost* and *perestroika* and had to renegotiate new positions in a changed global geopolitics (see section 3.2). While there are still elements of a geopolitical game, detectable particularly in US foreign policy, Cuba has become increasingly subject to the New Policy Agenda. US foreign policy concerning Cuba includes an aid budget<sup>2</sup> that is packaged and worded in the New Policy Language of human rights, democracy and market liberalization, while pursuing geopolitical interests<sup>3</sup>. Other donors, particularly the European Union and its member states, wrap their assistance and bilateral relations in an understanding of good governance, democracy and human rights. Political conditionality is also increasingly incorporated into the assistance destined for Cuba. It is these macro-considerations of the 'Post-Washington Consensus' - civil society in particular - that shape mainstream development cooperation with Cuba.

However, Cuba is not a willing recipient of foreign ideologies and perceives international cooperation with a certain degree of scepticism. On grounds of national sovereignty, Cuba has, for example, withdrawn its application to the Cotonou treaty

<sup>1</sup> In 1989 Cuba received about US\$6000million in Soviet economic aid, half in price subsidies and the other half in loans but under generous terms (Mesa-Lago 1998).

<sup>2</sup> This aid does not flow directly to Cuba., but is funding various think tanks and associations in the US that are working for a transition in Cuba. More detail is given below in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> The USAID Programme: "In support of a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba, the USAID programme will focus on developing civil society through information dissemination. In FY 1996, USAID awarded its first grant aimed at promoting a democratic transition in Cuba. The Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 authorizes the U.S. Government to provide assistance "...through appropriate nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), for the support of individuals and organizations to promote non-violent democratic change in Cuba."... Over the past nine years, USAID has provided approximately \$34 million to about 28 U.S. universities and NGOs for this purpose.

<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/lac/cu.html> [accessed 20.06.05].

with the EU twice. The result is that Cuba cannot make use of the larger budgets otherwise available through Cotonou and thus receives relatively little aid. Figure 8.1 displays the aid scenarios for a few selected countries in comparison with Cuba, which is clearly positioned at the bottom end.

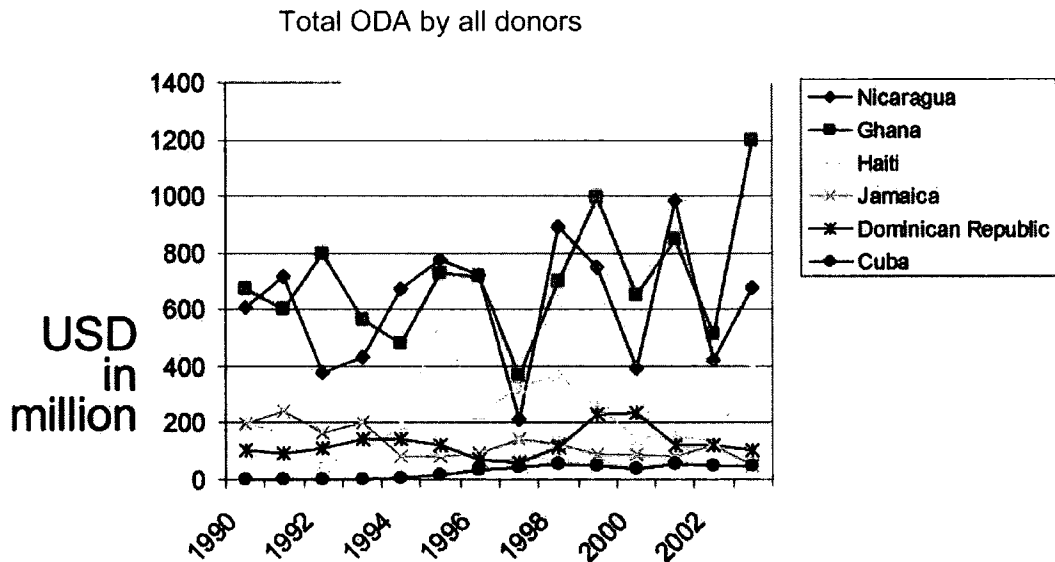


Figure 8.1

Source: OECD database<sup>4</sup>

The political as well as socio-cultural implications of this aid are not to be underestimated. The impacts of development aid and donor agency in recipient countries have been documented widely (e.g. Cassen *et al.* 1994<sup>5</sup>). In particular in the post-socialist countries, where the engagement of Western aid is relatively recent, the effects and impacts of donor presence have received increasing attention (Hemment 2004, Waller 1998). Mislivetz and Ertsey (1998), for example, document how deeply donors have affected the social and political context in Hungary.

## 8.2 Mapping the international actors and aid flows

Aid flows to Cuba move through various channels: multilateral, bilateral and through Northern NGO assistance. Cuba maintains links to neither the World Bank nor the IMF and multilateral aid is restricted to United Nations programmes and the

<sup>4</sup>Source:[[http://www1.oecd.org/scripts/cde/viewbase.asp?dbname=cde\\_crs](http://www1.oecd.org/scripts/cde/viewbase.asp?dbname=cde_crs) accessed 23.04.2005]

<sup>5</sup> The literature on this is vast ranging from economic approaches to more anthropologically inclined assessments. No full account can be given here.

European Union. Figure 8.2 displays a general comparison of the relative weight of different aid channels in Cuba between 1995 and 2001.<sup>6</sup>

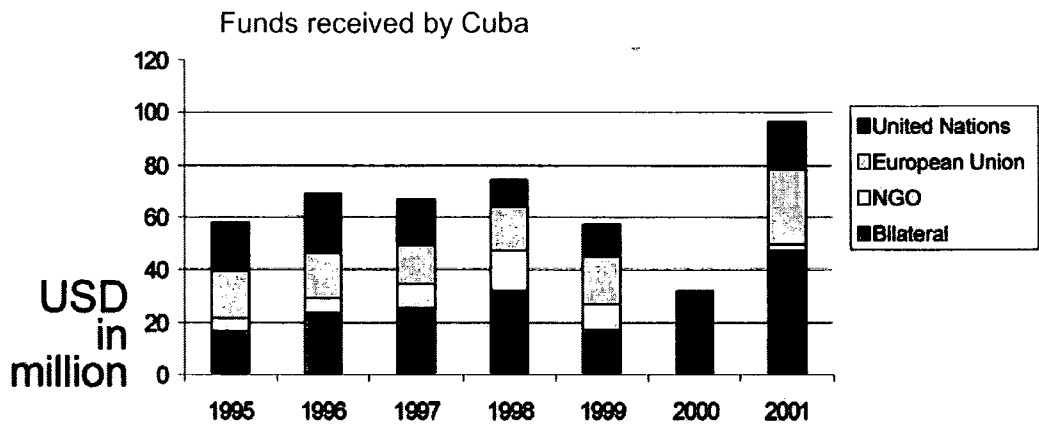


Figure 8.2

Source: UNDP 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001

International donors have different recipients and the politics of these linkages become highly important in the aid assistance playground. Figure 8.3 displays some of the links and destinations of aid flows and channels between the international donor and the Cuban recipient institutions.

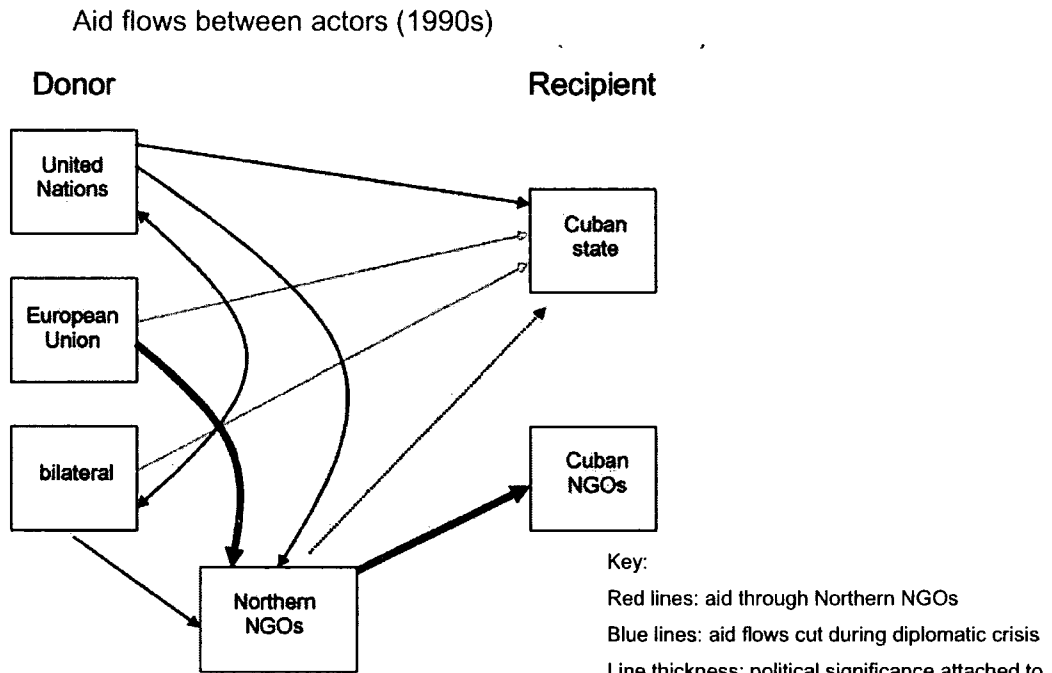


Figure 8.3

Source: author (from fieldwork)

<sup>6</sup> The data is compiled by the UN office in Havana and is hence not necessarily comprehensive. The figures relating to NGO assistance are grossly underestimated.

Figure 8.3 illustrates the importance Northern NGOs have in linking outside donors with Cuban NGOs and 'civil society'. These Northern NGOs find themselves caught in a net of negotiations as they try to comply with different actors. They are accountable to their donors, such as the United Nations, the European Union and bilateral agents and they need to comply with their mission statement and/or constituency. Furthermore they will need to fulfil and comply with expectations raised by their local counterpart, the Cuban NGOs. The Cuban NGOs in turn have to act within Cuban state regulations, while still serving and working with their local constituency, members and/or beneficiaries. The international NGOs are being used by all actors as potential 'transmission belts' (Tvedt 1998) for a variety of political messages. The Northern NGOs thus reflect the struggle for society and state to mediate the multitude of external and internal pressures within the current geopolitical climate. This leads to the creation of contradictory spaces through which Northern NGOs need to carefully navigate their role (see section 5.7, 5.8, 8.2.2, 8.3 and 8.4).

The European Union and the West would like to see these actors taking on the role of promoting a vibrant civil society and democracy. The Cuban state and the Cuban NGOs have different expectations and see these international actors as potential outward transmitters of Cuba's plight. The Cuban goals are to end the US embargo, achieve the acceptance of the Cuban Revolution and build solidarity bridges that would bargain for Cuba in the geopolitical game. In a meeting between Cuban and Northern NGOs in Brussels in 1996, the Cuban NGOs clearly formulated their expectation of European NGOs. They were asking for solidarity with Cuba's independence and sovereignty of the country and acceptance that the socialist Revolution is irrevocable. They wanted support for Cuban NGOs working with the most vulnerable, as in health, community development and work with the disabled. They asked for lobbying work to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Cuba and the EU at the state level<sup>7</sup>. They further wished for a respectful relationship, symmetrical and without conditionalities (CEE 1996b).

In their position of doing 'development work', the Northern NGOs have become instruments in a political struggle and are being drawn away from their main objective of technical development assistance. Their significance is hence raised to political levels, which the Northern NGOs themselves do not necessarily intend (see section 8.2.2).

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<sup>7</sup> This request is quite unusual in an international context. Generally NGOs would ask for more budget for independent project work rather than the strengthening of bilateral ties.

### 8.2.1 United Nations

The presence of UN organizations in Cuba dates back to the earliest established in 1945, but the majority did not start to have a permanent representation in Cuba until the mid 70s. During the 90s the UN, and in particular the UNDP and World Food Programme (WFP), took a more important role in providing assistance to Cuba due to the adverse economic circumstances the country faced. It is hence not surprising that the WFP is currently channelling the lion's share of UN funds to Cuba. In 1998 they provided 3.6 million USD directed at emergency relief and food nutrition (UNDP 1999).

The UNDP's development cooperation with Cuba has a long history that had started tentatively in the 1960s, but full cooperation did not commence until the early 1970s when it was formally established in the form of a national coordination programme. The UNDP's efforts were largely within the spheres of science, technology and industry during the decades of the 70s and 80s (UN 2002). Due to the crisis in the 90s, the UNDP refocused its activities in Cuba and decided to support the Cuban government more broadly in various sectors in order to "improve the quality of life of all Cubans in the face of adverse circumstances" (UN 2002:2). Since there were few development cooperation partners in Cuba at the time, the UNDP wanted to tap into its comparative advantage to seek integrated approaches to complex environmental, social and economic problems in the areas of macroeconomic management, environment, energy, decentralization and social sectors (UN 2002). The first country cooperation framework was signed in 1997, to run from 1997-2001. A second framework was approved in 2002. The UN recognized the relatively high levels of human development as well as equity attained in Cuba. Development assistance was hence to focus on poverty prevention instead of poverty eradication and preserving equity instead of promoting equity under the distinctive economic circumstances (UN 1997). The majority of the UN funds are directed to Cuban state institutions; a part however is outsourced to Northern NGOs working on behalf of the UN delivering projects.



### 8.2.2 European Union

An increasingly important actor in Cuba's international relations is the European Union<sup>8</sup>. European aid activities in Cuba commenced in 1993 and were initially based on humanitarian and emergency relief. An office was opened in 1994, but its diplomatic significance was stepped up in March 2003 with the installation of a permanent representative of the European Commission. This symbolizes the relative importance the EU attributes to relations with Cuba and it consolidates this through the presence of permanent personnel in country<sup>9</sup>. This decision is however not without a certain political calculus. EU development cooperation operates on the political premise of the adopted Common Position,<sup>10</sup> which aims to facilitate peaceful change in Cuba and thus calls the Commission and the Member States to provide assistance more specifically to<sup>11</sup>:

- encourage the reform of internal legislation concerning political and civil rights;
- carry out ad-hoc humanitarian aid to be distributed through NGOs, churches and international organizations;
- support the economic opening through focused economic co-operation actions.

The early years of cooperation were conducted through the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) and were directed to emergency relief and humanitarian assistance. In 2001, humanitarian aid was stopped as the country was thought no longer to be suffering a crisis. Conventional development projects started, which were subject to the ordinary procedures and conditionalities as set out by the EU. "The honeymoon, in terms of 'we are giving you a blank cheque' is over....we cannot continue funding forever, the system has to change. It

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<sup>8</sup> EU relations with Cuba are governed by the Common Position, as approved by the Council of Ministers in 1996, which is updated every six months following regular evaluations. According to the Common Position "the objective of the European Union in its relations with Cuba is to encourage a process of transition to a pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people".

<sup>9</sup> The current diplomatic representative is Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff.

<sup>10</sup> Cuba rejects the Common Position as interference in its internal affairs.

<sup>11</sup> Source: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/country/country\\_home\\_en.cfm?cid=cu&status=new](http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/country/country_home_en.cfm?cid=cu&status=new) [accessed 15.11.05]

has to be financed sustainably"<sup>12</sup> (Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff, EU representative 11.11.03). The budget for humanitarian aid was reduced and the decline was to be offset through other channels. "This was however only partially successful since local capacities are somewhat limited in the sense of the multiplication and modernisation of the economic system. It wasn't easy to find good projects quickly. And also our internal procedures, financing, development and evaluation, you know this, all the entire canon of calls for projects are hindering us a little in our imagination"<sup>13</sup> (Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff 11.11.03).

The overall budget assigned to Cuba decreased as only every 4<sup>th</sup> project got financed, a similar scenario to other recipient countries. One of the criteria applied to receiving funds is their financial and economic sustainability. The EU understands this as a vital ingredient for a worthy project. The EU however applies a narrow understanding of economic sustainability. Any project that is financially sustainable needs to have in-built mechanisms that the project will generate the possibility of income earnings in US dollars. In the current economic system of Cuba, this is only possible if the goods produced are destined for the export or tourist sector and hence out of reach for the local population. This is particularly poignant for the numerous agricultural projects financed by the EU so far. The EU delegate laments the fact that so many projects are rejected due to the lack of a clear vision on financial sustainability. This narrow understanding of economic sustainability does not rest well with the macro-structures present in Cuba and does not generate benefits outside the direct beneficiary group. The criteria of financial sustainability are particularly applied to projects executed by the NGO sector and financed through EU money. It was in the late 90s that the co-financing of NGOs through EU money commenced and took a more active step. Just recently the role of Northern NGOs in Cuba has been heightened due to the political tension between the EU and Cuba as a result of the jailing of dissidents and the reactions from Brussels<sup>14</sup>.

As soon as the direct link with the Cuban government and institutions was curtailed, due to a Cuban state decision to reject all bilateral and multilateral ties with the EU and its member states, the EU started to intensify and re-shape the role

<sup>12</sup> In original: „Also der honeymoon im Sinne wir geben Euch etwas auf dem Blanko-scheck, ist vorbei. Wir koennen nicht einfach ewig so weiter finanzieren, das System muss geaendert werden. Es muss nachhaltig finanziert werden.“

<sup>13</sup> In original: „Das klappte nur bedingt, weil die lokale Kapazitaet etwas begrenzt ist, jetzt im Sinne von Projekten der Vermehrung und Modernisierung des wirtschaftlichen Sytsmes. Es war nicht einfach da gute Projekte schnell zu finden und unsere eigenen internen Prozeduren, Projektfinanzierung, Entwicklung und Abnahme, sie kennen das ja, die ganzen Ausschreibungsmodalitaeten die uns ein bisschen aufhalten von unseren Vorstellungen.“

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 13 in chapter 6 for details.

Northern NGOs could play in Cuba<sup>15</sup>. "We will have a meeting every 4-6 weeks, because we are interested to be in permanent contact to improve capacity and problems in projects especially in this epoch of tension with Cuba" (Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff 12.11.03).

The European Union is actively pursuing the construction of a strong and coherent network of Northern NGOs present in Cuba through monthly meetings. With baits such as explanatory notes on funding cycles and possibilities, NGOs sit together at the round table and are encouraged to speak with one voice. The EU delegate's plea to have the NGOs write the European Commission country strategy paper<sup>16</sup> for Cuba, is yet another means to strengthen ties between the participant NGOs as well as to foster the homogenisation of discourses, goals and language. The country strategy papers are usually written in collaboration with the host country but due to the break between the two entities, the EU wants to use the Northern NGOs as intermediaries in the process. They are to split in three working groups, covering the productive sector, the social sector and the civil society sector, and to present their results to the EU delegation. The emphasis on the civil society as a sector, and an important area for work, is evident.

This homogeneous view of Northern NGOs shows a high disrespect for the varying institutional histories imprinted on each NGO. Diagram 8.2 below is a schematic representation of these interfaces. Some NGOs are critical of the EU's proposals and attempts. "You cannot assume that we are all here with the same ideas, ideals and positions."<sup>17</sup> (Representative of Northern NGO 12.11.03) Some NGOs actively decided not to participate, are cynical of the EU's position, and are

<sup>15</sup> The EU had adopted a resolution against Cuba on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2003 which was to limit high level governmental visits; reduce the profile of member states' participation in cultural events; invite Cuban dissidents to National Day celebrations; proceed to a re-evaluation of the EU common position ahead of schedule. This however was seen and interpreted by Cuba as a breach of sovereignty and is not quite legal under diplomatic law that requires respect for the country's home laws and regulations. During a speech for the 50 year celebration of the Moncada attack, Fidel Castro renounced publicly all aid emanating from the EU and its member states. "El gobierno de Cuba, por elemental sentido de dignidad, renuncia a cualquier ayuda o resto de ayuda humanitaria que pueda ofrecer la Comisión y los gobiernos de la Unión Europea. Nuestro país solo aceptaría este tipo de ayuda, por modesta que fuese, de las autonomías regionales o locales, de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales y movimientos de solidaridad, que no imponen a Cuba condicionamientos políticos" (Fidel Castro, Juventud Rebelde 27.7.2003:9).

<sup>16</sup> The European Commission had adopted a Common Framework for Country Strategy and considers these to be very useful programming tool that have made a significant contribution to achieving the objective of giving multiannual programming greater substance and increasing the effectiveness and quality of EU external assistance [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/sp/gac.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/sp/gac.htm) [accessed 15.11.05].

<sup>17</sup> In original: "No puedes asumir que todos nosotros estamos aquí con las mismas ideas, los mismos ideales y las mismas posiciones."

trying to use spaces for protest against this political power game. As they lack power and bargaining position, their only means at present is to refuse to accept EU money. "We should discuss here, how we as NGOs get used as red arms in a political and ideological game"<sup>18</sup> (Representative of Northern NGO 12.11.03). The NGOs are being viewed as political forces in the game of democratisation, where a high value has been ascribed to these 'civil society' actors. The creation of a homogeneous voice, the building of a specific power block, the scaling up of political significance, and a push to increase the dependence on the EU, are all mechanisms employed by the EU. These small changes in the everyday, such as monthly meetings or creating tasks that require collaboration, are a dominant force in the everyday life world of these representatives of the European NGOs as they work in La Habana. According to Lefebvre, it is the everyday that carries the greatest weight and is the very soil on which the great architectures of politics and society rise up (Lefebvre 1991)(see section 5.7 and 5.8).

The EU is particularly interested in developing good relations with the Northern NGO sector, as it represents the primary means to influence Cuban NGOs. EU projects were until July 2003 either directed to the Cuban state institutions or, through project contracts, with Northern NGOs working with a Cuban counterpart. Hence the Northern NGOs become fundamental in transmitting the ideological stance the EU would like to push. They equally are fundamental for the European Union to feed-back the general 'vibe from the field'. The European Union requires from EU funded projects executed by a Northern NGO, that the NGO has a representative in country (Representative of Northern NGO 28.07.03). This speaks either of a lack of confidence in the Cuban NGO to execute projects well, without the 'watchdog' of the European specialist, or it is yet another means to augment the position of civil society actors, in this case the European NGO, on the Cuban polity.

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<sup>18</sup> In original: "Hay que discutir como se nos utiliza como armas rojas en los juegos de la política e ideología."

Interfaces between the dominant actors (July 2003-January 2005)

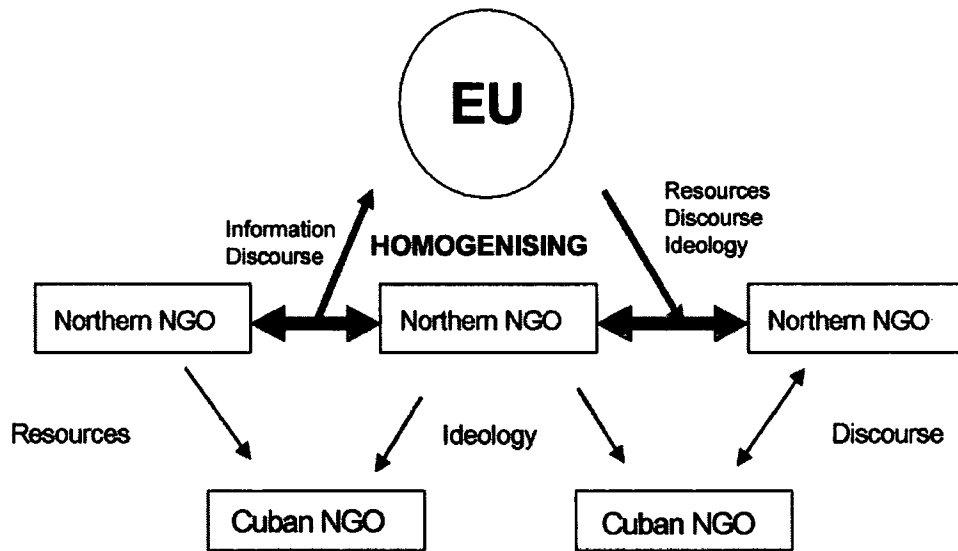


Figure 8.4

Source: author (from fieldwork)

8.2.3 Bilateral actors

Some bilateral cooperation from Western countries with Cuba occurred during the 70s as well as during 1987-88. Countries involved were, for example, Canada, France, Netherlands and Sweden, which provided large one-off funds in the form of loans and tied money. This early cooperation was mostly directed at education and cultural exchange rather than the technical cooperation prevalent at present. Bilateral links re-emerged to significant levels in the early 90s. Figure 8.5 shows the bilateral funds received by Cuba since 1973 and how the funds increased steadily from the early 90s (all grant money for project funding).

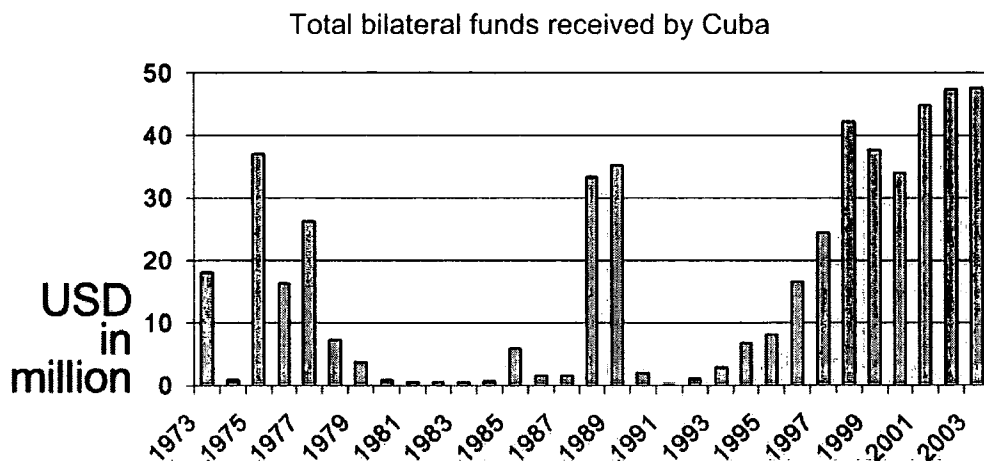


Figure 8.5

Source: OECD database

During the late 90s, many donor countries reformed their aid strategies in terms of identifying priority countries, on which they focus their development attention. These countries are selected often according to need as well as criteria such as good governance. Not all donors have selected Cuba as a strategic funding country. This is either due to the relative high human and social development level and hence the perception that it is not in dire need, or for the lack of what is considered 'good governance'. "Cuba is not a focus country for us, because they don't fulfil the requirement of 'good governance', Cuba is not corrupt, but the manner of leading their country [disqualifies them]" (Bilateral donor staff member 24.07.03). Graph 7.4 depicts the country specific ODA Cuba received in the period of 1990-2003. The countries most significantly contributing to the ODA are Spain, Canada and Italy. In 4th place ranks the USA, which has made large sums of aid money available for funding democratic and civil society activities. These funds are however mostly spent within the US itself, in supporting think tanks, research posts and advocacy NGOs, some of dubious character, working towards a transition in Cuba. So, while they rank high, in terms of absolute sums designated for Cuba under the OECD classification scheme, the majority of the funds do not actually enter Cuban soil. Due to the illegitimate activity of USA funds sponsoring illegal associations in Cuba, the proportion of funds that do actually reach Cuban soil can only be speculated on. The political implications of this are vast and will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter.

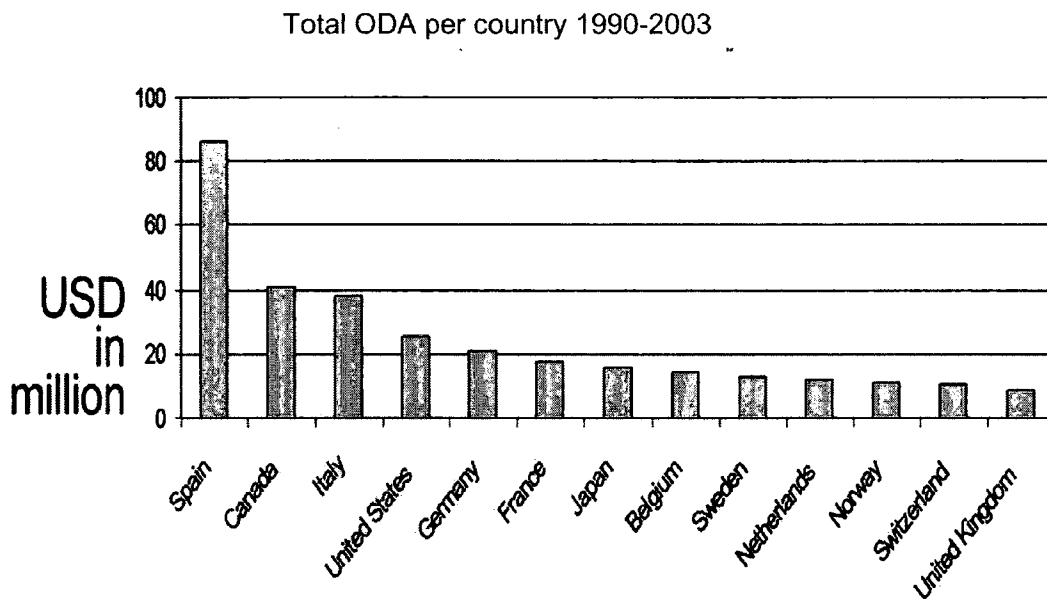


Figure 8.6

Source: OECD database

#### 8.2.4 Northern NGOs

Another important international actor that is gaining importance in the North-South relation with Cuba is the Northern NGO sector active in Cuba. This sector is highly heterogeneous with a multitude of NGOs rooted in their specific histories and ideological as well as ethical convictions<sup>19</sup>. NGOs are often classified differently and disagreements in the academic literature exist. John Clark (1991) uses the label all inclusively while Korten (1990) distinguishes 4 types of organizations: voluntary organizations, public service contractors, people's organizations and governmental non-government organizations. Farrington and Bebbington (1993) claim that NGOs should be distinguished by their origins and their staff composition (whether advocacy or development actions, whether serving a clientele or a membership). This classification suits the Cuban context and I divided NGOs according to their 'institutional' origin. Northern NGOs active in Cuba can be classified according to whether they are linked to the Christian church, to solidarity groups (former and present) or have their origin in mainstream development cooperation. Both church and solidarity based NGOs, have often had long standing histories with Cuba. 'Bread for the World' (PPM), an NGO linked to the Lutheran protestant church in Germany, has been active in Cuba – mostly with church groups - for more than 20 years. 'Oxfam Solidarité' from Belgium had links to Cuban groups well before the NGO boom during the 1990s. Foreign NGOs working in Cuba currently range from rather conservative, church-based NGOs such as 'Caritas' (Catholic) to former solidarity groups - remnants from social movements - such as 'entrepueblos' and 'Gruppo di Volontariato Civile' (GVC) and to the classical development NGOs such as the 'Oxfam' family and 'Save the Children'.

External NGOs are working with differing objectives. Some are taking positions in a geopolitical game, working for the US state agenda for Cuba. Others, with or without US support, work towards the undermining of the state heralding the principles of democracy and human rights in their mission. Other external NGOs are positioning themselves well outside the neo-liberal project, and consider solidarity, social justice and human development as their driving mechanisms. Northern NGO motivations to start work in Cuba were as diverse as is the sector. The most recent arrivals of Northern NGOs in Cuba have been mainly for purposes specific to Cuba. For example, a number of Northern NGOs have come because of the relative success of Cuba's organic and urban agriculture models. For many, however, the

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<sup>19</sup> See appendix III for a list of Northern NGOs active in Cuba.

reason was the humanitarian crisis of the early 1990s<sup>20</sup>. Their agenda in Cuba started with emergency relief and developed into project-based development work, indistinguishable from activities they support in neighbouring countries as part of mainstream development cooperation. Other Northern NGOs currently present in Cuba have a longer – and more political - history and presence in Cuba, having had links through solidarity campaigns dating back to the 70s and 80s. In synergy with a general shift away from solidarity movements to development project work, these Northern NGOs are now also involved heavily in classical development project delivery. The Cuban Christian churches, albeit in a difficult relationship with the Cuban state, have continued to foster relationships with sister denominations internationally and thus have close ties to church-linked NGOs. The recent political opening towards the Christian churches and religion in Cuba has implied an intensification and amplification of these links.

By 1996 Cuba maintained state-sanctioned relations with more than 170 foreign NGOs in 42 countries and an estimated 50 Cuban NGOs were benefiting from international cooperation in sustainable development projects (CEE 1996b) (see section 7.1). The large majority of Northern NGOs do not have representatives in Cuba, but provide support from afar by making project financing available. It is important to note here, that no Northern NGO can have legal representation in Cuba under the current legal framework. While the 'representatives' are in practice seen as such they are legally only specialist workers/consultants in specific development projects. Northern NGOs always have to work with local counterparts and cannot themselves execute projects. This way, the Cuban government retains a certain steering of development cooperation and seeks to ensure that local institutions benefit.

Actual data for the amount of funds channelled to Cuba through Northern NGOs are contradictory and indicate very different scenarios<sup>21</sup>. Between 1990 and 1995 funds increased 9-fold as Graph 7.1 in chapter 7 displayed. One source claims that in 2002 alone, US\$ 77 million were channelled to Cuba via foreign solidarity groups and NGOs, making this group the largest donor<sup>22</sup>. Some of the most important NGOs in terms of funds channelled are AAA mostly working in agriculture, 'Oikos' focusing on health and agriculture and PPM, which also has a large

<sup>20</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union had resulted in a sharp decline of Cuba's economy and during the early 1990s, food and other shortages had been severe (see section 3.2).

<sup>21</sup> This might be telling for this sector, which is highly heterogeneous, diverse and disenfranchised.

<sup>22</sup> Source: [http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu/FACTS\\_Web/Cuba%20Facts%20Issue%206%20August%202004.htm](http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu/FACTS_Web/Cuba%20Facts%20Issue%206%20August%202004.htm) [accessed 15.11.05].



component focusing on sustainable agriculture. The report of cooperation published annually by the UNDP offices in Cuba provides a list with NGOs working in Cuba with their relative funds available. What is striking in this list is the dominance of church-based NGOs. While this list is certainly not comprehensive and many other NGOs working in Cuba are not listed (the reasons for this are unknown) it emphasises yet again the importance the church NGOs are playing in the emerging cooperation sector.

### 8.3 The politics of these aid channels

Humanitarian aid does not fall under such strict donor conditionality as development cooperation does. Hence accessing Cuba through emergency relief did work for Cuba since it was receiving needed resources. The international community in return gained a foothold in Cuba. Emergency relief acted as a testing ground, for Cuba as well as for the international community, to see whether development cooperation was possible in and with Cuba and how this might be shaped. Figure 8.7 displays the change in development aid focus between 1995 and 2003. While the emergency sector in 1995 received 65% of total ODA, by 2003, this sector received only 5%. The general trend away from emergency relief and humanitarian aid is striking, though there are some individual peaks in humanitarian assistance, which relate directly to disaster relief (devastating hurricanes such as Mitch in 1998, Michelle in 2001 and Ivan in 2004<sup>23</sup>).

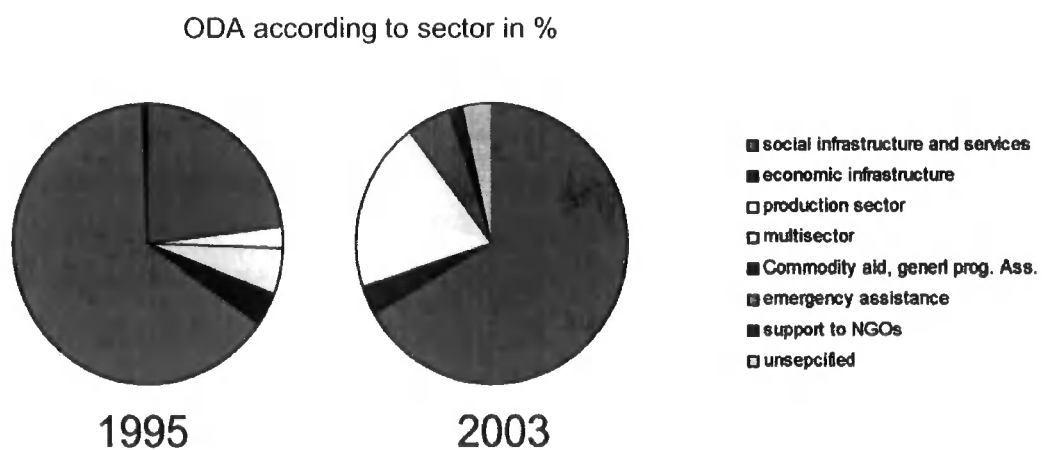


Figure 8.7

Source: OECD database

<sup>23</sup> Ivan in 2004 will not feature yet in any ODA statistics as it is too recent. This hurricane caused havoc in Western Cuba in particular and will have received various funds for the mitigation of the effects.

The focus on humanitarian aid during the 90s mimics the international development discourse in as far as there was then a tendency to rely on humanitarian aid in countries that fail to meet 'good governance' guidelines (Maxwell 2005). Countries that are identified as complying with good governance performance receive budget support through the various aid channels. While the Cuban government has not achieved what the West would consider good governance, support in the form of humanitarian aid has nevertheless declined in favour of technical cooperation, particularly in the social infrastructure and service sectors. The European Union, in particular, adopted a new strategy in 2001, where the EU decided to stop humanitarian aid and continue the linkages with Cuba via technical cooperation mechanisms. This is due to the stance of instigating political change in Cuba through inclusion rather than isolation (Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff EU 11.11.03). These mechanisms however imply the strict adoption of certain funding criteria and conditions, a managerial language and the embedding in neo-liberal market understandings. Hence, while world-wide the trend is towards humanitarian aid for failing states, in Cuba technical aid is being increased and used directly as a political bulwark.

I will argue that the EU is aware of the neo-liberal underpinnings that these aid flows exhibit and which have been documented widely in the academic literature. It continues its support so as to force open the closed Cuban system and prepare for a transition towards a free market mechanism. The messages are wrapped in the *lingua* of democratisation and human rights. The EU argues that by 2001 there was no longer a general crisis in Cuba and the humanitarian assistance must decrease. "We had to try and change our instruments of cooperation or to adapt them insofar as to provide the Cubans with other possibilities...to replace the decreasing humanitarian aid, but that succeeded only partly, as the local capacity is limited"<sup>24</sup> (Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff 11.11.03).

By the late 1990s, the EU was keen to co-finance NGOs. This is in line with the general promotion of New Policy Agendas in the development scene, where NGOs are taking a leading role for economic as well as political messages. Economic growth and service provision are seen as best achieved by free markets and private initiatives, with NGOs as more capable of efficient service delivery than the state, particularly in reaching the poor. NGOs became, in the New Policy

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<sup>24</sup> In original: "Wir mussten versuchen unsere Kooperationsinstrumente zu ändern oder sie insofern anzupassen, um den Kubanern andere Möglichkeiten zu geben...um die zurueckgehende humanitäre Hilfe zu kompensieren, aber das ist uns nur teilweise geglückt, weil die lokale Kapazität limitiert ist."

Agenda, the preferred channel for social welfare. Another attribute that NGOs were sought after to fulfil, was to encourage, ensure and safeguard good governance. Under the general auspices of promoting civil society, NGOs are understood to deliver good governance, to provide an opposition to the state and perceived as more connected to the voices of the grassroots. But emphasizing the role of NGOs in that manner and with those underpinnings rests more on ideological conviction than on empirical verification (Edwards and Hulme 1996). Numerous accounts point to the possibility that a greater dependence on foreign funding can distort accountability away from bottom-up towards upwards accountability to the donor hierarchies, shift performance in key areas and agendas and weaken legitimacy with the beneficiaries as well as the local state (Edwards and Hulme 1996). The EU actively tries to use NGOs as political vehicles, as arms and executioners of EU policy of democratisation, transition and political change in Cuba<sup>25</sup>. This is evident in the recent round-table of monthly Northern NGO meetings held in the EU office in Havana (see above).

8.3.1 Focusing on civil society support

Since the mid-1990s there has been a sharp rise of funds available for the sector termed by the OECD 'government and civil society'. This rise is mainly due to US policy shifts and the track two policy (see section 7.3 for details on US track two policy). Figure 8.8 displays the development of funds made available under the OECD classification 'government and civil society'.

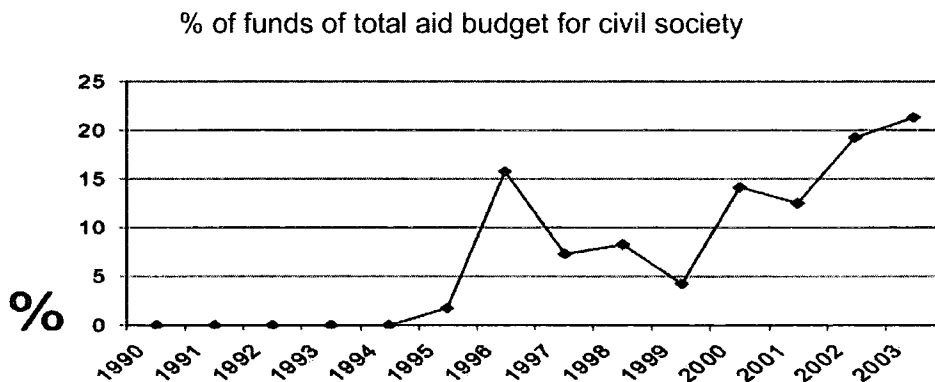


Figure 8.8

Source: OECD database

<sup>25</sup> There exists a lengthy discussion of whether Cuba is already democratic or not. There is no scope here to discuss this at length, but it is important to point out that this assumption, held widely, of an undemocratic Cuba is contested, and not only by Cuban authors but also western scholars (e.g. Cole 1998).

% Contribution of countries to the funding of civil society regarding Cuba

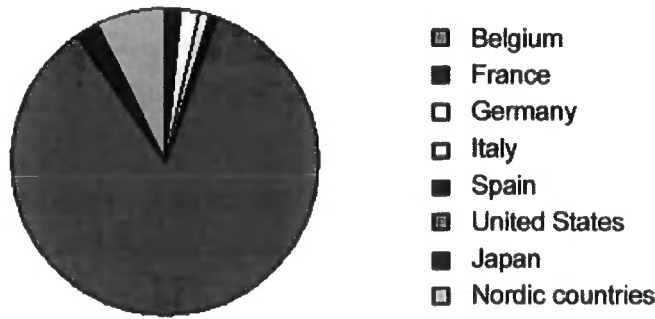


Figure 8.9

Source: OECD database

The United States constitutes the bulk of funds of the overall budget spent on civil society, and 97.5% of the US aid budget designated for Cuba is channelled to civil society projects. The United States is followed by the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland) who designated 39.6% of their ODA to this project sector. Italy and France designated a mere 22.2% and 7.7 % respectively to the OECD category government and civil society.

Funds spent for civil society regarding Cuba per country

country	2003
United States	97.5%
Nordic countries	39.6%
Italy	22.0%
France	7.8%
Germany	5.1%
Japan	4.9%

Table 8.1

Source: OECD

Funding of civil society projects started in 1995 with Canada taking the lead. Only in 1998 did the US start to fund civil society projects and rapidly increased their budget spending in this sector. However, most of the funds made available by the US are not spent in Cuba, but on US territory. Some of the US-based organizations have means to channel resources to Cuba, such as e.g. the Grupo de Apoyo a la Democracia, Cubanet and Acción Democrática Cubana (Valls and Schmeling 2004).

These figures only relate to OECD classified funds for government and civil society, they do not specify or include funds obtained from other sources and channelled directly through NGOs. The classification of a sector called government

and civil society, as well as the underlying ideologies of various donor agencies, rests on the belief that civil society has a normative identity. "Western aid agencies imagine that there is a 'thing' called civil society that can be manufactured in a couple of years using outside ideas and resources. There is no basis for this in the historical record" (Edwards 1999). Within the aid industry, the manufacturing of outside ideas, translated into social engineering, is very common.

#### 8.4 The politics of working with whom

Development cooperation in Cuba has placed existing and emerging Cuban NGOs<sup>26</sup> in the limelight. The newly favoured Cuban NGOs are perceived by most of the international donors as the future cornerstone of a thriving civil society equipped to contribute to democratisation efforts. The possibility of NGOs having a significant impact on formal political processes and change is, however, contested in Latin America (Lehmann 1990) as well as in Africa (Fowler 1993, Hearn 2000). It is couched in terms of strengthening civil society, but the normative and generic existence of a civil society is contested (Armony 2004). As Bebbington and Thiele (1993) point out, during the 1980s, NGOs in Central America were instrumentalised in a political power struggle. While right-wing groups received funding from USAID, a range of left-wing groups had been supported by various Northern NGOs. Edwards and Hulme (1996:66) hence ask correctly: "Is it strengthening of civil society or is it merely an attempt to shape civil society in ways that external actors believe is desirable?" The increasing focus globally on funding for social infrastructure and service provision, i.e. welfare provision (Farrington and Bebbington 1993:188) raises concern over the 'rewriting of the social contract' between government and its citizens as a result of contracting out key aspects of the development process, particularly in the provision of services. The accountability of non-elected NGO when providing services to 'clients' is very different from the formal relationship established between governments and citizens, giving rise to what Wood (1997) has called 'a franchise state' in countries such as Bangladesh.

There exists a preference at the EU to fund only certain types of Cuban NGOs. The EU delegate states this clearly: "my strategy is to work with strong

<sup>26</sup> The term Cuban NGO here is not used in the narrow sense of World Bank conceptualisations of development NGOs, but included the spectrum of Cuban associations, mass organizations, trade unions, professional unions etc., many of them within the 'state' but all with some autonomy in practice.

NGOs and not weak ones" (Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff EU commission delegate 12.11.03). In particular those that have achieved certain institutional capacity as well as having perfected the technical development language are funded. This bears the danger of 'crowding out' other Cuban NGOs that might do interesting work. Edwards and Hulme (1996) caution that large NGOs can dominate the resources as well as ideas to such an extent that they act as barrier to the very pluralism and diversity of opinions and approaches that are the hallmark of a healthy civil society. Trade unions, social movements and other less compliant components of civil society (Mawdsley and Rigg 2003) receive little or no consideration.

This singular trajectory in funding implies that certain ideas and agendas are getting support by millions of USD, while other NGOs have to make do with smaller budgets retrieved from other sources. The 4 projects approved in 2004 by the EU are all targeted at the same Cuban NGO. This selection has a direct bearing on the structural change that some of the most active Cuban NGOs are undergoing. Northern NGOs also follow certain strategies in choosing with whom they wish to engage and work. "For political reasons we wish to only work with organisations that have an NGO character<sup>27</sup>" (Senior representatives of Northern NGO 23.07.03). Other Northern NGOs stress the actual work done by the NGO and less their institutional character or development. "Yes, there are no NGOs how we understand them, but there are institutions that work innovatively. Institutions that might have less capacity and that are more fragile, but they are more interesting to work with, because they do different things." (Representative of Northern NGO 14.11.03). Some donors are less concerned about 'Western NGO characteristics' and emphasise the agenda and ideas of the individual NGOs. "Cuba is different. Since the principles of the NGOs are in line with the government policies. This is often not so in other countries. We are not worried about NGO characteristics. We sure look at that, but because the state promotes health, education and organic agriculture, we are not as preoccupied....We work with all groups as if they were NGOs. It is not all black and white" (Bilateral donor staff member 05.09.03).

A large portion of the international community perceives Cuban NGOs as agents of the state, harbouring too close a relationship with the state and they are hence often not considered genuine NGOs. The problematization of Cuban NGOs is pushing them away from the state and they risk the accusation that NGOs are starting to dance to the tune of the foreign piper. Closer links with donors (and the

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<sup>27</sup> In original: "Aus politischen Gründen wollen wir nur mit Organisationen arbeiten, die NGO Charakter tragen."

suspicion of foreign influence this creates in government) may result in a move away from self-regulation to regulation from above by the state (Edwards and Hulme 1996:969), which is already happening in Cuba. With the relative opening of the NGO sector in Cuba, the state was adamant about not inviting subversive right wing organizations with their origin in an anti-revolutionary ideology, based in Miami to act on Cuban soil and Cuban society. Endless incidents have proven the fickle temper Cuba displays when perceived to be under threat of foreign – particularly US – influence and mingling in internal affairs. This push among NGOs to free themselves from state links hence is causing a polarity that is neither fruitful for supporting a thriving civil society nor a constructive challenge to state practices.

The lack of political leverage for NGOs in the South has often been assigned to a lack of a domestic funding base and popular support as well as financial dependence on outside sources (Bratton 1990). By contrast, many organisations in Cuba have a long standing history and a large-scale membership base. Since many of these organisations grew from popular support during the early revolutionary years, they are deeply anchored within Cuban society and have gained a strong presence in the everyday. Having a domestic funding base as well as popular support, Cuban ANAP (National Associations of Small Farmers) for example, has high and direct political leverage in official policy-making (see section 7.3). The president of ANAP has political representation in the highest Ministry of Councils. While in other countries the lack of political representation and leverage is lamented, in Cuba this is considered by many international observers and donors as problematic. This is due to the fact that the state is perceived as overarching, totalitarian and so tightly knitted that there is no scope for debate and contributions. It is, however, debatable whether this view is consistent with actual political processes. There exists an issue of to what extent the head of ANAP is truly representative of the local base, in ANAP's case the small scale rural farmer, but this is equally true for any such person within a representative democracy, whether this is our local MP or associational head.

#### 8.4.1 Restructuring NGOs: adopting Western standards

Due to the growth of international development cooperation, specific departments for cooperation to deal with projects were created within the institutional matrix of Cuban NGOs. The technical staff in these departments are appointed and not elected. They possess, however, enormous authority and

decision-making powers through receiving and applying for international funds, but are removed from the local base. Popular support and self-financing have been identified as a basis for the legitimacy of NGOs to act in the development space. External funding and dependency however undermine this legitimacy and the link and relationships with the 'constituency', i.e. the members, or the poor to whom they claim to give a voice. Those NGOs with shallow roots in society and who depend for their survival on outside funds have a much weaker claim to legitimacy (Edwards and Hulme 1996).

With the 'New Policy Agenda' there is an obvious fear that donor funding reorientates accountability upwards away from the grassroots and the poor. The voiced need for professionalization within Cuban NGOs in order to tap into the international aid sources, meant that a de-linking of the project department from the general services provided by the membership organization has occurred. The cooperation department functions independently, like an enclave within organisations such as ANAP. Another strategy was to slim the organisation in terms of staff members and to re-orientate the organization entirely towards project coordination in a managerial style. "Without meaningful accountability to their beneficiaries, this scaling up could seriously distance (NGOs) from the poor" (Pearce 1993:226) In many cases there have been documented issues and problems with the scaling up of informal grassroot organizations into NGOs, receiving Western funds (Igoe 2003). Western donors actively encouraged NGO leaders to modify their organizations according to Western standards (Igoe 2003).

#### 8.4.2 Changing NGO identity: good-bye to mass organizations?

Amongst the donor community, there are different conceptualisations of which Cuban institutions are worthy of receiving funds. Various definitions regarding what are considered to be NGOs are used differently. The US interest section positions NGOs in political terms. They claim that if an organization includes people who take a position independent from that of the government, then the organization should be considered a legitimate NGO. Caritas also uses a political definition introducing the amorphous term civil society, despite granting some concession concerning state linkages: "even if an organization is led by an individual selected by the state and receives much of its funding from the state, if it has its own independent projects which help build civil society, it is legitimate. If, however, the organization simply acts as a bridge to send resources to the state, it is illegitimate"



(Gunn 1995:16). As for the catholic bishop in Santiago, he defines legitimacy on a more chronological and contextual basis. In the epoch of a relative opening in the 90s concerning the NGO establishment, he claims that NGOs formed after 1989 are more likely to be genuine than those formed before 1989. One Cuban dissident rests the legitimacy of a true NGO in the hands of the origin and context and states that a group led by a religious person is more likely to be a genuine organization. He hence uses a moral stance with religion as a safeguard for genuine behaviour (Gunn 1995). Others are more rigorous in their judgement. "There are no Cuban NGOs, they don't exist<sup>28</sup>" (Bilateral donor staff member 01.09.03).

All these different views on the ontology of the NGO are in the context of independence from the state. This can be seen most prominently in a recent proposal from some European NGOs, which suggests funding a range of Cuban NGOs and evaluating whether these organizations have used the funds to become more independent after one year (Gunn 1995). They would like to use this approach as an empirical testing ground to determine the impact of donations upon independence. What is never questioned is this normative understanding and intrinsic attribute of 'autonomy'. This use of independence only relates to relationships with the Cuban state, it does not relate to issues of dependency on outside agents such as donors. Furthermore, the discussion on the nature of Cuban NGOs is held within the semiotics of 'true' and 'false', of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' NGOs, consolidating dichotomies that have been rare in Cuba. Only due to outside influence and linguistics of NGOs, was the term NGO introduced in Cuba. For the international audience, organizations have stopped being associations, mass organisations or foundations: these are now all framed as NGOs. "We were 'actors of the community' and now everyone speaks of civil society and NGOs<sup>29</sup>" (Cuban NGO staff member 27.11.03). Pamphlets are printed with the institution's logo, their history in development cooperation including international project partners, and a clear statement of their identity as an authentic NGO.

Cuban NGOs thus are trying to fit the normative understanding of what it is to be an NGO, i.e. the internal structure, its positioning in society, in terms of state-NGO relations. With this new term, they are also required to re-position their standing in the socio-political context of Cuba. At present this signification still matters more to the outside presentation of one's organisations and is of less

<sup>28</sup> In original: "No hay ONG cubanas. No existen."

<sup>29</sup> In original: "Eramos factores de la comunidad, y ahora todo el mundo habla de la sociedad civil y de las ONG."

internal importance. When presented with a journal called *'Mensaje de Cuba'*, which is published for the international cooperation sector by the Centre for European Studies (CEE)<sup>30</sup>, the following dialogue occurred between staff within the office walls of the Cuban NGO (07.10.03):

"R: look, the XXXXX [Cuban NGO] is on the list of Cuban NGOs

L: so, we are classified as NGO?

R: it seems so!<sup>31</sup>"

#### 8.4.3 Technical tools: speaking the language and knowing the themes

For Tvedt (1998:75), the development sector is a "transmission belt of powerful language and of Western concepts of development." He argues that NGOs take the 'latest fashion in terms of techniques and themes as buzz-words across the globe. In a perceived need for managerial professionalism and to be able to tap into the international resources, Cuban organizations realized the need to speak *'the language'*. Their efforts during the early 1990s with the international donor community were rejected as donors were amused by the 'shopping list of necessities', Cuban organisations presented them with (Representative of Northern NGO 07.01.04). The necessities had not been framed in terms of a project cycle filled with concepts such as participation and empowerment, giving evidence of cross-cutting themes such as sustainability and gender, and employing outcomes in tick boxes that can be evaluated through the audit culture. The international donor community and Cuban NGOs identified this apparent lack in capacity and consequently various donor-funded workshops were provided to teach the technical tools, such as the writing of project proposals, logframes, accountancy and management. These are all techniques that are perceived by donors as necessary for fully functioning NGOs. New manuals were published entitled: 'Project planning', 'Project accountability', 'Participatory methods' etc. "It also allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the knowledge of various norms and criteria that are used internationally for the elaboration, administration and management of projects. A process in which we had to push ourselves considerably in order to be able to

<sup>30</sup> A Cuban think tank that has the status of NGO and takes on a coordinating role between Northern and Cuban NGOs.

<sup>31</sup> In original: "Mira, el XXXX esta en la lista de las ONG Cubanas. Así! ¿qué nos clasifican como ONGs? Parece que si!"

continue the amplification and deepening of the cooperation relations with the Northern NGOs"<sup>32</sup> (CEE 1996b:27).

Not least through the presence of Northern NGO workers in-country, these ideas are proliferated in the everyday. Today, many professionals in development NGOs belong to what Kees van der Pijl calls a 'transnational class' (1998), synchronising behaviour, outlook and language along common lines all around the world until they become interchangeable (Townsend and Townsend 2004). Learning the ropes and working in collaboration with this 'transnational class of NGO workers' was not necessarily perceived as easy by Cuban NGOs. "It was a difficult process to change to be a NGO, the writing of proposals and the entrance of foreign professionals"<sup>33</sup> (Cuban NGO staff member 17.07.03). According to the international donor community, there are thresholds of compliance with the jargon, the ideas and agenda. "Some realize how it is done to conform, to comply with the donors....and it shows, who is learning and who is not" (Bilateral donor staff member 12.08.03).

#### 8.4.4 Claiming economic space

The claiming of economic space is seen as important in encouraging the economic participation of civil society members in the market. Cameron (2000:627) writes that "Developmental NGOs are increasingly engaging with the language of economics. Economic thinking has a direct impact on NGOs through their involvement in micro-level income generation and micro-finance, to macro-level advocacy and in their critique of structural adjustment strategies." One way to influence economic behaviour is through conditions on funding. Project proposals to be funded by the EU must prove the financial and economic sustainability of the project. The EU however applies a narrow understanding of what constitutes economic sustainability. To be considered financially sustainable, any project needs to incorporate mechanisms to generate earnings in \$US rather than in the local currency, the Cuban peso<sup>34</sup>. Many welfare-orientated projects that cannot generate income are left without the possibility of EU funding. Secondly, in the current

<sup>32</sup>In original: "Nos ha ido permitiendo también iniciarnos en el conocimiento de las variadas normas y criterios utilizados internacionalmente para la elaboración, administración y gestión de proyectos, procesos en el que tenemos que esforzarnos considerablemente a fin de poder continuar la ampliación y profundización de las relaciones de cooperación con las ONGs internacionales."

<sup>33</sup> In original: "Ha sido un proceso difícil cambiar hacia ser una ONG, el escribir de los proyectos y la entrada de profesionales extranjeros."

<sup>34</sup> In 2004, 1 \$US was equivalent to 26 MN (Moneda nacional) Cuban pesos.

economic system of Cuba, obtaining \$US is only possible if the goods produced are destined to the export or tourist sector and are hence out of reach for the local population. This is particularly poignant for the numerous agricultural projects financed by the EU. When producing for an export or tourist sector, the national policy of increasing food security is ignored. The individual cooperatives benefiting from EU projects are thus slowly integrated into the dollar<sup>35</sup> economy.

The use of micro-credit is increasingly advocated as an innovative idea for the benefit of small farmers by some of the Northern NGOs and the EU. Microfinance is seen by some as a central part of neo-liberalism (Townsend *et al.* 2004). "Microfinance uses existing group-based social networks (family, caste, friends) to lower transaction costs (Anderson *et al.* 2002) and creates new patron-client structures (van Bastelaer 1999)" (Townsend *et al.* 2004:875). The microcredit projects in Cuba are sold as innovative ideas that will benefit individual farmers, who otherwise would have difficulty in obtaining credits. This focus on the individual contradicts the institutional structure and workings of cooperative structures in Cuba, where the cooperative – as an institution – applies and receives credits for the benefit of the necessities identified within the cooperative. The focus on individual farmers, who are part of a given cooperative structure, aims to educate the individual in market economic transfers.

#### 8.4.5 Claiming physical space: or signifying the private

In a context where billboards embody political messages ranging from 'saving the Revolution' to 'saving energy', and commercial advertising is absent from the public eye, the claiming of spaces with stickers (see photo below) may be a small yet significant symbol signifying the private nature of the object and indeed development *per se*.

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<sup>35</sup> I use dollar economy for simplification here. Since November 2004 the \$US is no longer legal tender in Cuba, and transactions need to be made in pesos, or pesos convertibles (dollar equivalent value). \$US can be exchanged to pesos convertibles at a tax surcharge of 10%.



Figure 8.10: Water tank that had been provided by a foreign NGO and donor money in an urban garden in Havana

Small symbols that relate to development activity are starting to permeate the everyday. Apart from stickers, further divisions are visible, for example through the use of different number plates on vehicles. While there has always been a distinction between state cars (blue number plates) and private cars (yellow number plates)<sup>36</sup> a recent addition are the orange number plates that are designated for foreign technical staff, which includes both business representatives and NGO representatives. Vehicles bought from project money are equipped with orange number plates, even if the vehicle is in use by Cuban NGO staff. The nexus of private/public and foreign/national are blurred across these symbolisms, but situates development activities increasingly in the private sector.

### 8.5 State relations: too close for comfort?<sup>37</sup>

Many observers, Cuban as well as international, have commented on the relative synergy that exists between Cuban state policy, which is rooted in a social welfare understanding of society, and the goals of Cuban NGOs. While it is reported that in many low income countries, NGOs are taking on state responsibilities in terms of health and education while lobbying for increased social welfare benefits, the Cuban government already employs these principles. Pearson and Lewis (1995:18) state that “they [Cuban academics] argue that the Cuban state’s

<sup>36</sup> Some more colours were in use, such as black for diplomatic and dark red for tourist cars, they were however only few.

<sup>37</sup> Expression borrowed from Edwards and Hulme 1996.

objectives resembled those of NGOs in other countries, and that most people have been content to work with the State, rather than form autonomous organizations”.

An important factor in the politics of ‘working with whom’ are the perceived links and relations the NGOs maintain with the state beyond the official legal requirements. The Cuban state is seen as problematic by the international community, as pointed out on various occasions in this thesis. Therefore, embedded within the recent neo-liberal reading of civil society, the political, economic, personal and physical links the Cuban NGOs have with the state become an important point of contestation. “We want to work with civil society and not linked with the state<sup>38</sup>” (Representative of Northern NGO 3.11.03) The donor’s problematization of the links that Cuban NGOs maintain with the state is pushing the NGOs away from the state, which often ruptures beneficent links and support structures, such as drawing on expert knowledge from Ministry staff, some access to resources and infrastructure. This move away from the state is causing a polarity that is neither fruitful for supporting a thriving civil society nor constructive in challenging state practices. The de-linking of NGO activity from the state and creating their own independent sphere of action harbours the danger of weakening the state, and fostering agents of a new imperialism, as already observed in different countries (e.g. Tembo 2003). Community development projects in Cuba focus on self-help initiatives. These projects promote the mobilization of people’s own resources to provide for necessities, rather than waiting for state provisions. Many of these services were once the responsibility of the state, but are currently not provided for lack of funds. While self-help provides for the short term, this referral to own resources can imply that demands for guaranteed rights provided by the state are no longer made and the responsibility of the state to recognize such rights is undermined (Tvedt 1998).

#### 8.5.1 The politics of office location

The perceived necessity by donors and also Cuban NGOs to rupture state-NGO relations is expressed through physical location. Although many Cuban NGOs had their origin in professional membership organizations, their offices had historically been located within state buildings. This physical closeness to the state became problematic and Cuban NGOs came to move out of these buildings, often with the help of foreign money in the form of institutional capacity building. While dependencies on the state were scrutinized, the new dependencies of sharing office

<sup>38</sup> In original: Queremos trabajar con la sociedad civil y no vincularnos al estado.

space with their respective donors – as increasingly prevails – are not perceived as problematic by the donors. Dependencies have thus shifted – physically and otherwise – away from Cuban contexts and now rest within the global actors of Northern NGOs. The picture below demonstrates these new dependencies nicely. “We are moving office from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor in MINAG<sup>39</sup> for the moment. We are a NGO and looking for a place to rent. At the moment we are renting space in MINAG, but need to move because we as a NGO cannot be in MINAG<sup>40</sup>” (Cuban NGO staff member 01.09.03). The pamphlets that this organisation produces now omit the name of the building, i.e. Ministry of Agriculture, when stating their physical address. They now give only the name of the street, while in earlier versions the address included the line ‘Ministerio de la Agricultura’.

Figure 8.11:  
Signboards at the regional headquarters of a Cuban NGO in Santiago de Cuba. The bottom signboard is for a foreign NGO sharing the office space with Cuban NGO



## 8.6 Using agriculture: a neo-liberal potential?

These newly forming linkages between the Northern NGO sector and Cuban NGOs have direct implications for the reframing of dominant representations. The impacts on the agenda and discourse by these various actors are important. Foreign NGOs are increasingly tapping into the romanticist environmental imagery of Cuba's green agriculture or the “Greening of the Revolution”. The increasing project work in

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Agriculture.

<sup>40</sup>In original: “De momento, nos mudamos del 13 piso al 6 piso en el edificio de MINAG. Somos una ONG y estamos buscando un lugar para alquilar. De momento rentamos espacio en el MINAG, pero tenemos que mudarnos de allí, porque como somos una ONG, no podemos estar en el MINAG.”

Cuba through conventional development cooperation via NGOs is setting the environmental ideas agenda through typical NGO speak and through tools such as the DFID log-frame. "Sustainable agriculture and development" are becoming increasingly prominent discourses. The discursive setting of sustainability within the institutionalised global civil society has obvious outcomes in the form of NGO interfaces with donors, state relations and Cuban institutions and community.

While agriculture features as an important sector in development cooperation, in general, the recent trend in Cuba towards organic production has also attracted additional donors and resources. The Cuban agricultural landscape has achieved international prominence with its shift to organic<sup>41</sup> and development of urban<sup>42</sup> agriculture. It was particularly through the work and subsequent publications of the American NGO FoodFirst (see section 6.7) that the Cuban innovations had reached the ears of the international community. The organic movement has since been celebrated and *re-presented* in numerous reports and newspaper articles (e.g. Altieri 1993, Carney 1993, Gersper 1993, Kaufmann 1993, Kilcher 2001, Levins 1992 1993, Murphy 1997, Vandermeer *et al.* 1993, Warwick 1999, Wright 2005). Various international donors considered this transformation as worthy of support and some even started their work and presence in Cuba exclusively due to this reported success story.

"we [Northern NGO] have always worked in urban agriculture and were interested in urban agriculture and wanted to strengthen our work in urban agriculture and trying to match our work with what is going on in other parts of the world and that what we have in Canada. And Cuba is, and we also had our eye on Cuba, that would be a good match, because Cuba is the place for urban agriculture. It sprang out of the mid 1990s, as a crisis response, urban agriculture started and gained a lot of international recognition for its work on urban agriculture. So that's why we struck up a relationship with ACTAF [Cuban NGO]" (Northern NGO staff member 20.03.04).

What had started as a Cuban-born movement under a very Cuban discourse of organic or agro-ecology was soon taken up and re-shaped by international voices claiming the '*Greening of the Revolution*' (Rosset and Medea 1994). This

<sup>41</sup> Organic here is understood as more ecologically friendly production methods. It does NOT bear the Northern connotations of 'organic', such as market-orientated, value-added and certification.

<sup>42</sup> The urban agriculture is particularly perceived as organic, as city planning laws prohibit the use of any chemical substances, such as fertilizers or pesticides.



understanding of 'organic agriculture' referred to specific agricultural techniques unlike the Northern usage. With the development of closer international links this concept was, superseded and watered down by and broadened to the all-encompassing Northern concept of 'sustainable agriculture' (see section 6.7 and 6.8).

Also agriculture has been given the status of a sector that is easily reformed to a market orientated economy. Hence, the relative high focus that agriculture has been given by donors, has to be seen as politically motivated. It is not surprising that in the OECD statistics, funds for direct agriculture projects are relatively few, while funds set aside under social and economic infrastructure are high. What these statistics hide, is the fact that agriculture is often an integral part to these social infrastructure projects. Traditionally, the agricultural sector had been the biggest private sector with independent and private farmers coexisting with large state farms. While the state farms had been more significant in terms of scale and size, the private sector cannot be neglected. Hence, the possibility to tap into this sector for pushing neo-liberal reform. Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff (EU 11.11.03) states: "agriculture has more liberties [than other sectors]. It is an interesting sector, also in particular for a soft transition to more sustainable economic models...In our projects now, we want autonomy in management of the cooperatives...not due to ideology, but because of the necessity for more liberty and autonomy in the cooperatives...in order to have more liberty through internal structures"<sup>43</sup> All projects approved for 2004 with the EU were in the field of agriculture and with the same Cuban NGO.

The far right have also identified the private farmer as an important factor during the 'transition period' in Cuba and have devised clear strategies for the necessary support of this sector. These scholars (Ricardo 2003:234) have assigned roles to "small farmers and family farms in the restructuring of the agricultural sector in Cuba after the demise of the communist regime" Not only are these small farmers perceived to be effective producers, but they are also assigned a vital political role through "their participation in modelling civil society in the countryside and in rural communities" (Ricardo 2003:234). These outside scholars even designed a "proposed 'ideal' family farm for Cuba" (Ricardo 2003:240), with precise attributes they should have and a visualization of how this ideal family farm should look. It is a

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<sup>43</sup> In original: "Die Landwirtschaft hat mehr Freiraum. Es ist ein interessanter Sektor, auch besonders für einen sanften Übergang zu mehr nachhaltigen Wirtschaftsformen...Jetzt in unseren Projekten wollen wir eine Managementautonomie für die Kooperativen..nicht wegen der Ideologie, aber der Notwendigkeit mehr Freiheit und Autonomie in Kooperativen zu haben...durch interne Strukturen Freiheit haben."

blueprint for extreme social engineering, top-down, idealized perceptions, which are usually assigned to socialist regimes.

Various development projects are conceptualised within the understanding of sustainable agriculture projects, often in conjunction with a wider community development approach. That some of these projects are ill-conceived and alien to Cuban structures is evident. One large project to promote agro-ecology through farmer-to-farmer education, funded by the German PPM with ANAP as counterpart has been criticized for its lack of local specificities. "PPM doesn't realize that conditions are different in Cuba. The method comes from a different country and it is not the same whether you work in Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Ecuador and just to apply the theory as set out in the strategy doesn't work. And Cuba has very different characteristics for which the strategy doesn't work"<sup>44</sup> (Cuban NGO staff member 28.11.03). The NGO's involvement with the agricultural sector dates back to the early 90s and in particular to an active group of researchers wanting to promote agro-ecology (see section 6.8). Hence the early years of the conceptualisation were overarched and rooted in a discourse of organic agriculture.

## 8.7 Travelling ideas: gender

The gender theme in project work in Cuba has only been picked up recently, as international donors and Northern NGOs start to stress gender as a cross-cutting theme throughout all projects. The recent adoption of gender into the project work is a result of the consolidation of the presence of Northern NGOs in Cuba. In the early years of their presence, they were in the process of adapting to the new context and were not yet institutionalised enough to apply their entire agenda. Only with increasing years of presence in Cuba and established working relationships with selected Cuban NGOs is this possible. This includes gender mainstreaming. Northern NGOs that do not claim a mission to promote gender might do so because of donor requirements. A project put forward by DECAP in collaboration with the Spanish NGO *entrepueblos* was criticised by the funding agencies, in this case municipal governments in Spain, for its lack of a gender focus. Future projects that are being developed between those two NGOs are now considering the

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<sup>44</sup> In original: "PPM no esta conciente que las condiciones en Cuba son diferentes. El método llega de otro país y no da igual si estas trabajando en México, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Ecuador y solamente aplicando la teoría como lo dice en la estrategia no funcionara. Y Cuba tiene muchas características distintas por cuales la estrategia no funciona."

incorporation of a strong and explicit gender focus. It was this circumstance that had gained me access to work closely with those two NGOs and the agricultural cooperative in the first place (see section 2.1).

'Gender' as discourse and practice is transmitted as already pointed out in section 7.6 through numerous workshops mostly conducted by international consultants. These workshops are held for training Cuban NGO personnel, usually a few selected (mostly female) staff members of NGOs.

## 8.8 Summary

This chapter has explored the claims made to spaces of cooperation by international actors in Cuba. The Cuban NGO-Northern NGO links are crucial for an understanding of the spaces claimed by this new sector. The increase in project work by Northern NGOs in Cuba is strongly setting the Cuban agenda on environmental practices through the conventional NGO speak and tools, while sidelining the state. Many international development NGOs frame the Cuban state as problematic and engage with it as little as possible. Hence, sustainable-development-speak remains largely outside the state sector, generating new binaries and creating specific institutional powers, which rest within the NGO spaces that are emerging and growing as Cuba opens to international cooperation. The discursive setting of sustainability within institutionalised global civil society has important impacts through NGO interfaces with donors, the state, other Cuban institutions and the grass roots.

## 9. Exploring the everyday: understanding life-worlds in the cooperative '26 de Julio'



Source: Rius (1971)

Having explored in previous chapters some dominant representations, agencies and power struggles, where exactly do these take place and how do they get played out? I will use this chapter to explore debates on the new agricultural spaces, NGO activities and gender through the everyday life-worlds of cooperative members, and in particular farmers<sup>1</sup>, in one recently established cooperative, the UBPC<sup>2</sup> '26 de Julio'. I explore the extent to which farmers are creating spaces of resistance through the negotiation and appropriation of dominant hegemonial spaces along various interfaces (see section 5.7 and 5.8). This ethnographic work aims to provide linkages and enhanced understandings, both regarding the development of dominant discourses, and regarding their significance at the micro, everyday, level. To achieve this it is important to view and interpret the local through various interfaces, as the "arena of the prosaic and the habitual is to imagine the politics of propinquity as the politics of the everyday" (Amin 2004:38). The interfaces are multiple and can either be internal among cooperative members only, or, as in most cases, interfaces with external actors.

<sup>1</sup> Farmers in this chapter are to be understood as cooperative members who are working the land.

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I will use UBPC, cooperative and '26 de Julio' interchangeably. For details on UBPC formation, please refer to sections 4.2 and 6.4. The 26<sup>th</sup> of July is a historic date associated with the attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba in 1953, which is often quoted as the start of the Revolution. This date is widely celebrated in Cuba.

## Interfaces (internal and external) resulting from the organizational structure

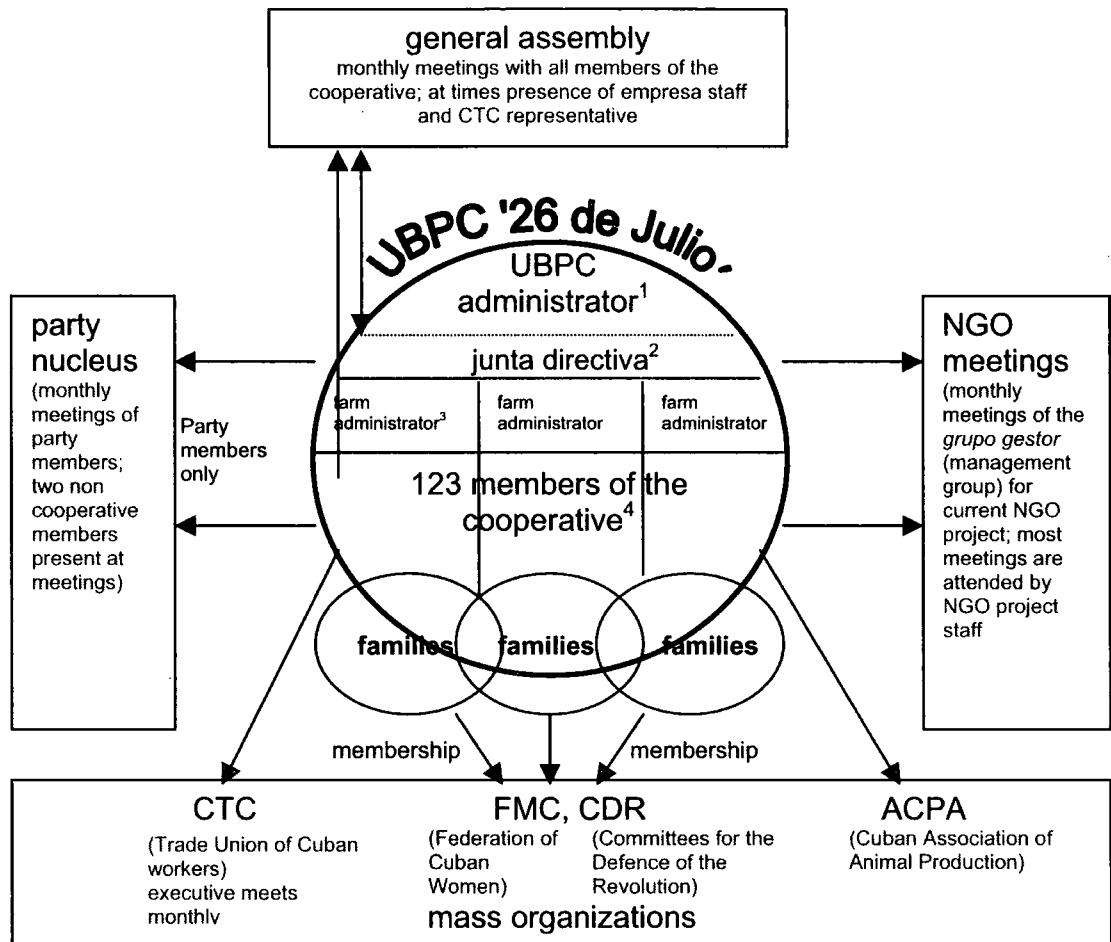


Figure 9.1

Source: author (from fieldwork)

- 1: UBPC administrator: legal and formal head of the cooperative.
- 2: junta directiva: executive committee of the cooperative composed of administrator of the UBPC, controller, head of machinery, head of production, head of mixed crops, sales representative and two farmer representatives elected by the farmers in the general assembly.
- 3: farm administrator: head of an individual farming unit in the cooperative; responsible for the farm in terms of economy, human resources and general management of his/her unit.
- 4: members of the cooperative: all official employees of the UBPC holding a work contract with the cooperative.

The interfaces shown in figure 9.1 establish that the cooperative cannot be perceived, and does not function, as an enclosed island. Apart from the boards and committees presented in figure 9.1, an exploration of external or outsiders' interfaces is crucial for an understanding of life-worlds in the cooperative. See figure 9.2 for details.

## External interfaces: discourse and income generating agency

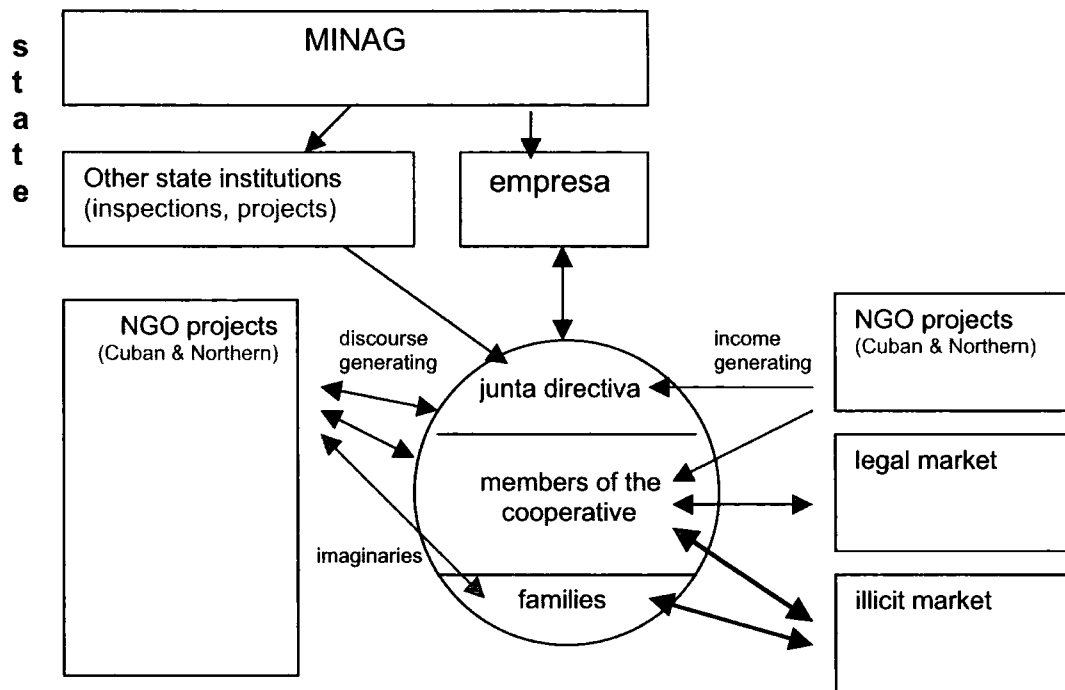


Figure 9.2

Source: author (from fieldwork)

The structure of this chapter will reflect the interfaces presented in the diagrams. I will first explore the outsiders imaginaries through the various actors related with international cooperation and NGO activity. These imaginaries will be complemented by the *empresa's*<sup>3</sup> authorities and imaginaries over cooperative activities. I will then refer to some of the issues pertinent to agro-ecology and NGO agency in detail, such as participation and the creation of expert knowledge. I will point to the resulting tensions and negotiations that result from the cooperative members' agency and everyday life-worlds. In order to fully understand the performed life-worlds of the cooperative members, I include a substantial discussion on issues of gender and immigration, before returning to the project's interface with the cooperative regarding gender in the project. There is less focus on performance at the other interfaces.

The outsider's imaginaries and representations, such as state policy and NGO activity, are strongly interlinking and interacting with the UBPC, the members of the cooperative and family members. I was one of the many outsiders who

<sup>3</sup> *Empresa* (Spanish for company) here is the state owned company that maintains authority over the UBPC's production and fulfilment of government policy. The *empresa* is under the direct auspice of the Ministry of Agriculture. The *empresa* is responsible for the provision of production plans and inputs to the UBPC and acts as reference to the UBPC activities.

roamed the entire cooperative, witnessed (and sometimes participated in) legal and not so legal activities, detected contradictions in state policy and NGO ideologies in the everyday, while observing and partaking in the negotiations of the farmers and family members at those interfaces. The decision to conduct the ethnographic study in the particular cooperative '26 de Julio' was not mine, but rather a result of the web of field relations that had emerged through living in Cuba. As discussed in detail in section 2 and 2.1, the link with the Cuban Council of Churches (DECAP) and a string of coincidences provided me with the possibility to work in this – and no other – UBPC. My presence in the cooperative started through participation in intermittent NGO meetings and workshops. I thus at first perceived the cooperative through those interfaces. Following my daily visits from January 2004 onwards, I realized, however, how underlying issues shape the efforts of NGO projects and other external actors. Various cross-cutting structural as well as lived experiences build a complex web that is negotiated by all actors, often in order to achieve their own personal objectives: whether the *empresa* demanding compliance with production plans, the NGO hoping to present a good progress report to the donors, or the farmers working to make ends meet and secure their livelihood. For the purpose of the structure of this chapter, I present various interfaces consecutively. However, I want to emphasize the interlocking nature of interfaces and life-worlds presented and urge the reader to envision a form of understanding that resembles a ball of wool for its criss-crossing and intertwining nature.

I aim to take the local, the farmer and the everyday seriously and seek to counterbalance the "standard academic perspective [in which] the Cuban people have appeared as either agents or objects of politics, confined to categories "masses" or "classes", but not as feeling beings with affective social networks that thrive in the non-state-regulated sphere" (Fernández 2000:vi). Speaking of *the* cooperative members, *the* UBPC and *the* conversations bear the danger of aggregating individuals into *the* 'cooperativistas', ironing out all the creases, the differences and nuances that amount to our personalities. Everyone that appears in this chapter has, however, a connection to the 'institution' UBPC '26 de Julio', either directly through cooperative membership or indirectly through family ties, business links, political activities or as a visitor. Every *thing* that appears in this chapter has certain bearings on the cooperative or emerges from the cooperative and the people in terms of conditioning and forming dominant spaces of representation (see section 5.7).

I use quotations throughout to illustrate general and minority views in the cooperative, which are selected to represent all significant issues, views and interests.

## 9.1 Introducing the locale of the cooperative '26 de Julio'

Guanabacoa is the second largest municipality in the Province of 'Ciudad de la Habana' and has a territorial extension of about 127 km<sup>2</sup>, which represents 17% of the entire Province. Some 66% of the land area in the municipality is dedicated to agricultural use, mainly dairy and mixed crop production. It has an irregular topography with extensive plains, which favour agricultural production, in the rural area and some hills mostly in the urban zone. The population of Guanabacoa is 106,374 (51,485 men and 54,889 women) in 2001 (ONE 2001).

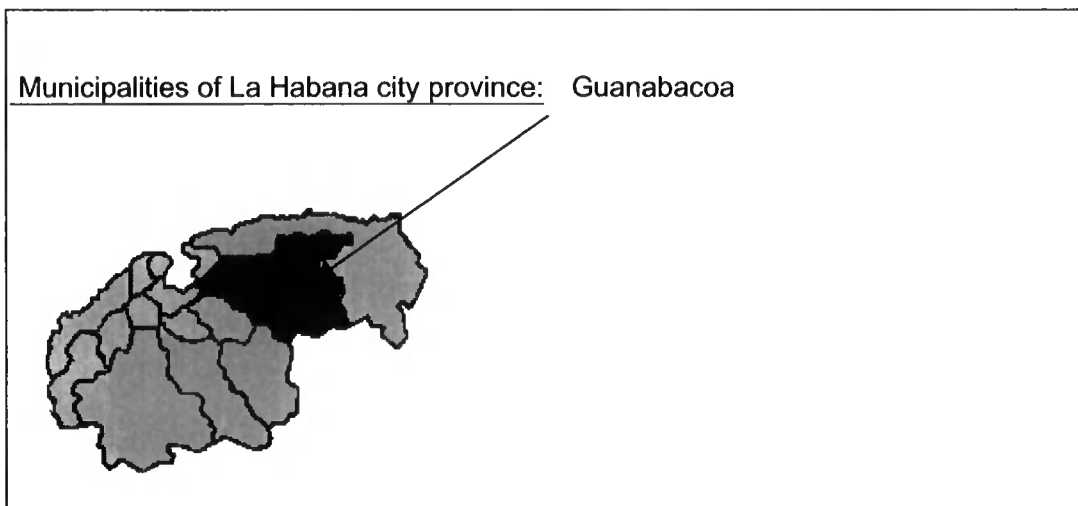


Figure 9.3

Source: <http://www.mihabana.islagrande.cu/guanabacoa.html> [accessed 28.08.04]

With the new political-administrative division into *Consejo Populares* (Popular Councils) resulting from the institutionalization of *Poder Popular* (People's power) in 1976<sup>4</sup>, Guanabacoa was divided into 8 *Consejo Populares*. The UBPC '26

<sup>4</sup> In the New Constitution adopted in February 1976, a new political-administrative division of the country was established based on ideas of decentralization and called *Poder Popular* (People's power). This was a new political body with representation from the grassroots to national level. At the grassroots: the nomination of candidates for delegates at the grassroots level by the people living in each voting district, the election of delegates, and the subsequent creation of the municipal assemblies and their administrative bodies, the *Consejo Populares*, was part of this process. Provincial level: the election of delegates to the provincial assemblies. The national assembly with highest ranking governing body, endowed with constitutional and legislative powers (Garcia 2001).



de Julio' extends over two different *Consejo Populares*, the Peñalver-Bacuranao and Minas-Barreras.

Political administration levels

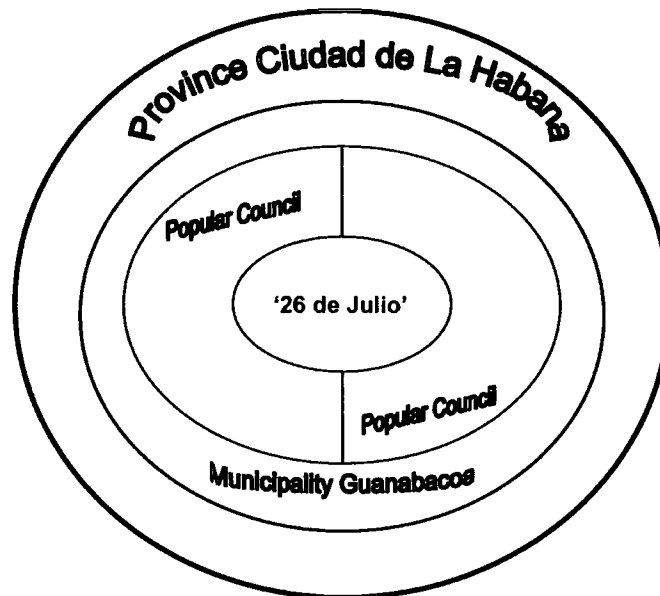


Figure 9.4

Source: author (from fieldwork)

In the south-east of Guanabacoa lies the community of Peñalver which belongs to the *Consejo Popular* Peñalver-Bacuranao. Walking or driving through Peñalver, it presents itself as a small quaint village with rows of brick houses, painted in various colours and full of life on the streets. Historically this Popular Council was characterised by isolated communities that have grown into villages with well defined identities like Peñalver. In the year 1861, 25 houses with 88 inhabitants were recorded here, but the main development and urbanization occurred in the 1940s with the increase of construction in Guanabacoa. Between the years 1946 and 1956 the company "Residencial Guanabacoa S.A." bought up some farms in order to urbanize the area. With the Revolution the land passed to the state farm administered by the *Empresa Pecuaria* Bacuranao. In 1994 the UBPC '26 de Julio' was formed and continues to report to the *empresa* (see section 4.2 and 6.5).

Raul, in his early 60s, is a member of the UBPC and works at the administrative block as a night-watchman, but also helps with the milking of cows if needed on other farms belonging to the UBPC. Raul is often to be found at the administrative block, where his wife Belinda is the cook for the worker's canteen. Raul usually helps her to light the wood-fire and to handle the large pots in the

mornings. He has lived his entire life in Peñalver and has shared his memories of those days with me. Sitting in the canteen, he recounts (04.02.04):

“That [Note: he waves his arm to indicate the administrative building and surrounding land] was a farm that had 9 *caballerías*<sup>5</sup>; the owner was called Antonio Hernández and he was dedicated to dairy; he had 45 to 50 cows, he didn’t have more. He produced 1000 litres of milk, 1000 and a bit. He was always trying to produce more milk during the dry period, because then he was paid more for the milk. He had 4-5 workers not more...He had all well prepared. There [the administrative building] is where he had his bottling station; it was there where he bottled the milk, labelled the bottles and everything. They called the milk Granoba....and he also sold the milk in thermos flasks, with the vehicles he had; although when he used the vehicles that was in 1958 and very little in 1959, because in that year the Revolution triumphed and they had already confiscated the vehicles”.

The village of Peñalver was further expanded under the first agrarian reforms of the Revolution in 1959 (see section 4.1), when many private farmers traded their land for plots of land closer to the settlement and moved to the existing villages. This migration was further supported by the general focus on urbanization, and access to the infrastructure being developed (such as electricity, water, *bodega*<sup>6</sup>, the medical centre and schools).

Mauricio (farm administrator 27.02.04): "let's see whether you understand me, they [the state] gave apartments to the people from the *campo*, to everyone, to the whole world. The majority moved to the village, but now many people have returned [to the *campo*] because life now is a bit tough...the people who were living in the village had been *campesinos*, they had left the farm and were given an apartment. There had been a whole pile of *campesinos* that had left, they had left the farm and all were given apartments...the objective was so that the population was close to the doctor, the school and all.”

<sup>5</sup> *Caballería* is the land measurement in common use in Cuba. 1 *caballería* refers to 43.7 hectares.

<sup>6</sup> The food ration shop.

The land surrounding Peñalver belonged to the very extensive state *Empresa Pecuaria-Bacuranao*<sup>7</sup>, which specialised in extensive dairy farming on a large-scale. The cows were housed and milked in large buildings. The rest of the land was used as pasture and for the growth of forage, especially king grass and sugar cane, to supplement the animals' diet of artificial imported feed. The workers on the state farm lived in communities such as Peñalver, Arango or Guanabacoa and other nearby settlements since the agricultural area was devoid of housing. Raul remembers that workers were driven daily to their respective workplaces, mostly organised in brigades. And "after the formation of the UBPC, they started to build houses inside the farms that were being created...before that workers had been coming here to work from the villages, this [the farms] was left alone during the nights. There had not been any problems with theft...some [workers] lived in Arango, others in Gubanabacoa, and other lived here in Peñalver" (Raul 24.02.04). On a personal note, Raul remembers his own life and early days working in the agricultural sector:

Raul (cooperative member 24.02.04): "in 1965, I passed the capacitating school. When I finished the school, they asked me if I wanted to stay in their *empresa* or in this one here. I had the option to come and live here and hence I settled here. But do you know what people said to those who went to work in agriculture? They called them communist dogs. They called me a communist dog, because I went to work in agriculture. They called me that. Communist dogs to those that went to work in the dairy, where none wanted to come and work...the work clothes were free, lunch was free, 2 litres of milk were given to us every day without charge, we had lunch, food and they didn't charge for it. They had coffee, chocolate, cocoa, all for free...so you were left practically clean with your salary to buy yourself something you liked."

At the place where the former owner Antonio Hernández, had his stables, the UBPC '26 de Julio' today has its administrative building. The administrative block lies slightly elevated on top of a hill on the outskirts of Peñalver and a badly eroded gravel road leads up to it. It was in July 1994 that the UBPC '26 de Julio' (see section 4.2 and 6.5 for UBPC formation) was legally founded. The *Empresa Pecuaria Bacuranao* converted almost all of its land into various UBPCs, one was

<sup>7</sup> This *empresa* was previously called Valle de la Victoria.

the '26 de Julio' and the workers had the option to become founders of the cooperative. Thirty-two workers decided to join the '26 de Julio'. By now only three of the founding members are still working in the cooperative (Raul 04.02.04)<sup>8</sup>. Raul and his wife Belinda, who looks after the canteen and Adriana, who is the technical control staff at the administration block, have remained. All three were born in that same area and have worked their entire life on this land, whether state farm or cooperative. They have changed their tasks within the farm, but not their employer. The other founders have left for work elsewhere on private farms, or have retired.

In the year 2000, the UBPC '26 de Julio' was asked by the *empresa* to buy the adjoining UBPC 'Vitalia Acuña', as this UBPC was having serious economic difficulties. This unification increased the UBPC's land size to 1201 ha, a total of 23 farms and 123 members. Members in 'Vitalia Acuña' were more stable and many more of the original UBPC founders remained working in the cooperative. The current composition of the work force in terms of place of birth is as follows (see also section 9.8):

Origin of current work-force

Provinces (grouped)	Women	Men
Habana	66.7%	24.0%
Oriente	33.3%	49.0%
Pinar del Rio	0%	11.5%
Central	0%	3.0%
No data	0%	12.5%

Table 9.1

Source: author (from fieldwork)

'26 de Julio' now has 1,230 cattle, of which 378 are cows. The 'social objective' of the cooperative remains milk and meat production; however, in recent years, the cooperative has diversified and has some 5-8<sup>9</sup> farms dedicated entirely to mixed crop production. These farms tend to be administered and farmed by immigrants from eastern Cuba who have joined the cooperative within the last 10 years. There is still land available within the area of the cooperative and new farms

<sup>8</sup> This does not include 'Vitalia Acuña'. A higher proportion had stayed at 'Vitalia Acuña'.

<sup>9</sup> Two of the farms are currently developing and one farm is dormant at present.

are in the process of being created or are in the planning stage, like Cumplidora II, La Ceiba, or Revolución II<sup>10</sup>.

At this point I will briefly introduce the various farms that exist presently in the UBPC. While there is an overall social objective to the cooperative (see section 9.3.), every farm also has an individually assigned production objective. At present, the UBPC has 8 dairy farms and 8 farms dedicated primarily to the rearing of calves. During the past 10 years, the UBPC has diversified and developed mixed crop farms in order to increase economic profitability. The following social objectives are assigned to each farm by the UBPC administration. Farmers cannot choose the social objective themselves. Farms in red have existed since the foundation of the UBPCs '26 de Julio' and 'Vitalia Acuña'. Those marked in green are selected project farms (see section 9.2).

Social objective of farms, and place of origin of farm administrator

Farm	Objective	Aministrator (Origin)	Members of the cooperative
Revolución	Dairy	woman (Oriente)	5 men 2 women
Los Mangos	Rearing/calves	man (Oriente)	5 men 1 woman
Tamayucatan	Dairy	man (La Habana)	4 men 1 woman
Combinado	Dairy/Rearing	man (Oriente)	3 men 2 women
Organopónico	Dormant	woman (La Habana)	1 woman
Peñalver	Dairy	man (La Habana)	2 men
Autoconsumo	Mixed crop	man (Pinar del Rio)	2 men
Pulido	Rearing	man (Oriente)	3 men
La Guayaba	Rearing	man (Oriente)	1 man
Victoria (cv)	Mixed crop	man (Pinar del Rio)	2 men
Monte de Oca	Forest farm	man (Oriente)	1 man
Colmena I	Mixed crop	man (Pinar del Rio)	2 men
Colmena II	Mixed crop	man (Pinar del Rio)	1 man
La Bonita	Integrated development	man (Oriente)	3 men
La Trampa	Integrated development	man (Oriente)	3 men 2 women
Rosa	Mixed crop	man (Pinar del Rio)	4 men
Unidad Militar	Mixed crop	woman (Oriente)	1 woman

<sup>10</sup> Part of the land owned by the cooperative is a declared military zone and I have thus decided against providing a map of the cooperative, as this might trespass on confidentiality and trust.

Anacahona	Rearing	man (La Habana)	7 men 2 women
El Mango	Dairy	man (La Habana)	5 men
Guanabito	Mixed crop	man (La Habana)	1 man
Carolina	Rearing	man (La Habana)	1 man
Victoria	Dairy	man (La Habana)	5 men 1 woman
Cumplidora	Dairy	man (La Habana)	8 men
Santa Rita	Dairy	man (La Habana)	8 men 2 women

Table 9.2

Source: author (from fieldwork)

The administrative building was converted from the previous stables as part of an NGO project (see section 9.2). It is now a small white washed building with about 4-5 small rooms that hold offices for the administrator<sup>11</sup>, accountant, controller<sup>12</sup> and human resources staff. It also has a large hall equipped with a television set and video, providing a physical space for meetings and capacity-building activities. One small office is also made available for the *control técnico* – the technical support staff<sup>13</sup>. The administrative building, with the obligatory bust of José Martí in front and the revolutionary banners and flags inside, serves as locale for many – but not all – of the interfaces that shape the everyday of the cooperative. For example, most meetings of the various groups that exist in the UBPC are held in the administration building: whether the meeting between dairy farm administrators<sup>14</sup> and the head of production<sup>15</sup> or the *junta directiva*<sup>16</sup>, or the party nucleus holding their closed-door monthly meetings. Cooperative members are frequent visitors to the administrative building, either for regularly scheduled meetings, to discuss issues that have arisen and need to be debated with the administration, to look for various practical things or materials or simply to collect their monthly salary. From all 123 cooperative members, usually only the farm administrators are regular visitors; members of the cooperative or family members are rarely seen to walk up the road to the administration building. The building sees outsiders (e.g. *empresa* employees, state officials, NGO staff and even myself) come and go in order to accomplish certain tasks, to hold inspections, to meet and to discuss.

State lands, void of housing, farmers and suffering from lack of inputs, needed to be put under production in order to comply with the state's objective to

<sup>11</sup> See figure 9.1 for a description of the administrator

<sup>12</sup> Controller: responsible for the economic dealings within the UBPC

<sup>13</sup> Control técnico: staff responsible for record keeping of milk production

<sup>14</sup> See figure 9.1 for a description of farm administrators.

<sup>15</sup> Head of production: responsible to oversee the fulfilment of milk production plans decided upon with the *empresa*.

<sup>16</sup> Junta directiva: executive committee (see figure 9.1).

increase national food production (see section 6.3). This was only achievable by attracting labour and creating new small-sized farms that are tenanted by members of the cooperative with their families. The relative labour shortage in La Habana implied that most members of the cooperative who have recently joined are in-migrants from other provinces.

## 9.2 International cooperation in the cooperative: the interfaces of NGO projects and the UBPC

In the last 10 years the inputs, benefits and discourses received from international development projects have had significant influence on the development and shaping of the cooperative and its farmers. Since the foundation of the UBPC, four development projects have been implemented. The first project started in 1996 and was carried out by the Spanish NGO Vetermon, in collaboration with the Cuban counterpart ACPA (Cuban Association for Animal Production). This project focused mainly on the construction of houses, mostly in the outlying areas of the UBPC with the aim of allowing the repopulation of these vacated lands.

The other three development projects were implemented through the Department of Coordination and Consultancy of Projects of the Cuban Council of Churches (CIC-DECAP)<sup>17</sup> with mostly German and Spanish funding. DECAP has been working in the '26 de Julio' since the year 1996. They had initially focused on local micro-projects. These were aimed at resolving specific small-scale problems such as reconstruction of fences, reforestation, water drainage, production of animal protein, etc... These micro-projects had not been implemented with a strict sustainability focus. The initiation of the pilot-project "Diversification of the agricultural production" in 1999 had tried to ameliorate this. Various sub-programmes of DECAP were thus integrated and fostered through the development of alternative energy, agricultural production and conservation of natural resources with a strong component on capacity-building. The current project 'Regreso al Futuro' started in October 2003 and is scheduled to run for 36 months.

DECAP secured funding through the Spanish NGO entrepueblos, who had managed to tap into donor funds from Spanish local government sources<sup>18</sup> and is co-financing the project with about 50,000 Euros. My first visit to the cooperative

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<sup>17</sup> Refer to section 7.7 for detail on the DECAP's origins and work.

<sup>18</sup> Ayuntamiento de Barcelona and Ayuntamiento de Vilafranca and for the second phase also Ayuntamiento Rivas Vaciamadrid.

coincided with the first visit by the Spanish NGO staff member Antonio, who had only recently taken up the position as representative in Cuba. The official objective of the current project 'Regreso al Futuro' states: "to promote a better quality of life for the population, while promoting a sustainable use of natural resources, specifically soil, water and forest. The project wants to facilitate a constant process of transformation that involves consciously and particularly all inhabitants of the zone. Specifically, the project aims to recuperate and conserve the soil of a good part of the UBPC and to increase biodiversity" (entrepueblos 2004).

The different people and actors involved, however, have their own personal objectives and hopes attached to the project. The international NGO representative, Antonio, perceives the project as a tool for solidarity. He presented his role and the agency of his NGO to the cooperative members as such:

Antonio (representative of NGO *entrepueblos* 25.11.03): "What is *entrepueblos*? Well, we provide an outside support through DECAP, that identifies priorities. DECAP contacted *entrepueblos* and our mission or tactics is the financing of projects. That is the superficial view. For me, the project is not only to improve the farms or to achieve sustainability. I would like to share and reflect through the project. The projects are only an excuse or one more tool to do so. It is not only to increase production. The projects do not have a sense in themselves, but it is something more global. We are working to make this world a better place: the formation of ideas and reflections of how we can improve this world. The objective in Cuba is to feed its people. And we are interested in creating an interchange of ideas and visions. In the 1960s and 70s Spain showed a lot of solidarity with Central America, in the 80s principally with El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. It is the search for a legal framework within which to obtain money for projects that interests us. You are the specialists. We only find the financing. I am not a doctor; the doctor is a specialist. I am not an agronomist. I am a mere bureaucrat that wants to share this process."

DECAP staff member, himself a strong supporter of renewable energies and a former agronomist with MINAG, has high hopes for the UBPC.

Julio (staff member of NGO Cuban Council of Churches 28.11.03): "This UBPC can be a platform to become a UBPC '*de referencia*' [a reference farm]. We have a multidisciplinary team here with lots of expertise. We can make use of this for the transfer of technology."



For the cooperative administration, the project is a useful means to access resources they otherwise would not be able to obtain. Many necessary resources are only available for purchases in dollars. International development projects have become an important source of access to hard currency in order to obtain needed resources for the cooperative, in particular for the development and maintenance of infrastructure. Miguel (UBPC administrator 12.02.04): "We can no longer count on the *empresa*, we have to find other means. Through the project, there will be money entering that we can use to do things with." Jorge (head of machinery<sup>19</sup> 14.01.04): "We can buy one computer and if we take money away from the capacity-building of other items then we can buy a second computer because the one we have cannot be repaired anymore." Pedro (head of mixed crops<sup>20</sup> 17.01.04): "When we have a project, we can buy machines or repair the olds ones, as we have money coming in."

According to the discussion group I held with members of the cooperative, the experience of international cooperation has had positive impacts so far. "It has improved the living conditions, especially housing; productivity and income has increased, a better quality of life and other things. The work conditions have improved" (28.03.04).

Fabian (cooperative member/CTC president<sup>21</sup>24.02.04): "well, that [the project with *entrepueblos*] is a big progress, because, look, boots, lime, machete, barbed wire, all these we weren't able to obtain, because they are expensive, do you understand me? And hence we got electricity cables for some stables and lamps for where they had been missing, wheelbarrows...these are things that had not been entering the cooperative, because there was no money to buy them. And therefore, you understand, the project has been magnificent, magnificent! And for the tractors we bought parts, the tyres, so that the tractors don't have to lie idle...and well now, with this project, we have improved a lot. And let's be clear, already now at least we have work clothes and shoes. The shoes are very important. And also the machete in order to be able to work, because it is not the same to work with nothing or to work with something. You are going to work to

<sup>19</sup> Head of machinery: he is responsible for managing the machinery unit of the cooperative, overseeing the use and maintenance of the machinery. The head of machinery is a member of the *junta directiva*.

<sup>20</sup> Head of mixed crops: responsibilities lie in overseeing the fulfilment of production plans decided and agreed upon with the mixed crop farm administrators and the *empresa*.

<sup>21</sup> CTC: Trade union representative.

cut down weeds and if you don't have gloves, oh that is a story! There is no one who goes without gloves....And if you go with gloves, they have to be good gloves. I have seen people, who have lost an arm or a finger. We are conscious of this and none can go to cut without gloves, that is a big mistake."

The relative proximity to La Habana city, as well as personal links to individuals active in the sustainable and organic agriculture movement within Cuba, makes the 'UBPC 26 de Julio' a welcome target for potential projects. The visit of a research group from the Research Institute of Pastures and Forages (Instituto de Investigación de Pastos y Forrajes IIPF) illustrates the difficulty in drawing binaries between state and NGO activity (see sections 4.3, 4.4, 5.2, 7.3). While they are employed as researchers with IIPF, a state research institution, they have been founders of ACAO (see section 6.8). Fernando is the director of IIPF and is also the former ACAO director, who travelled to Geneva in order to collect the Right Livelihood Award (see section 6.8). The research group from IIPF is currently aiming to turn one of the meat development farms in the UBPC over to organic production. Marta (scientist IIPF 14.01.04): "With the mad cow disease now in our country, with those reported cases in the USA, there is a renewed interest in organic meat. They [officials] might approve the project of organic meat with FAO quickly." This project proposal was entirely outsider led, with little or no participation of the actual farmers on that farm (see section 9.4). The UBPC administrator suggested, ad hoc and single-handed, the potential farm most suitable for the project. Carlos (former UBPC director 14.01.04): "That [an organic meat project] for us in the cooperative with the farmers is difficult....but I suggest 'Combinado'. I like 'Combinado'. The farmers are disciplined there. They take good care of the farm."

The organic meat project will be aimed at making links to the tourist sector to obtain dollars and hence would not primarily contribute to the national policy on food security (see section 6.3). Fernando (specialist IIPF 12.02.04): "Here the farm needs to produce organic meat for the tourist sector. Then they will have some income." The proposed FAO project includes the training of specialists abroad, which is a welcomed perk for local NGO and state officials equally. Lucia (head of production 13.01.05): "It is likely that someone from IIPF will take that place, but there is also training for two more *técnicos* and they should be from the cooperative, as it is us who will be working with them more closely and on the ground."

The researchers from IIPF/ACAO are well connected to global organic interest groups and their connections have an impact on their conceptualisations locally. Fernando (IIPF director 14.01.04): "We need a market study for organic meat, e.g. for hotels that have profits, how much they would be willing to pay etc. There is interest. In Camagüey<sup>22</sup> there are Canadians that are doing the organic certification for meat. The guy is a friend of ours and of Peter Rosset<sup>23</sup>." Fernandito (the son of Fernando) is also a researcher at the IIPF and has equally been active in the agro-ecology movements since its origin. His view of the project in the UBPC '26 de Julio' is that (12.03.04): "It is a field for experimentation; we are fighting for an integral development. There have been various steps forward in Cuba, but it was mostly individual and local. In this project we can unite to teach the people to form a higher knowledge, like an example that other people can use as a pilot-study." Hence, there exist different imaginaries, expectations and conceptualisations of what the UBPC and the cooperative members are to fulfil, to negotiate and to live.

### 9.2.1 The role of friendship relations in project-UBPC interfaces

The origin of development projects in the cooperative promoted via DECAP was not a result of choosing a project cooperative according to specific criteria. It was rather due to personal relations/friendship between the former UBPC administrator and NGO staff.

Carlos (former UBPC director 05.11.03): "due to friendship relations DECAP started work with a local project on the farm la Bonita. There already existed the relationship with Julio, and to us, we were very interested in the sustainable programme. To augment sustainability, like organic matter and these things. We talked a lot and started to form capacity with Luis S. I want to understand the participatory methods, because without these you cannot work in the cooperative. We started the process of change through the relations and the interest in sustainable development. The first step was to have capacity-building with Luis S. through the personal relationships that we had. "

<sup>22</sup> Capital of the Province Camagüey.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Rosset is the former head of FoodFirst and the principal promoter of Cuba's agricultural turn internationally (see section 6.7).

This fact is important in understanding the interface between DECAP and the UBPC administration, as it is built on trust, mutual understanding and respect. This can, however, result in decisions being taken between friends rather than consulting with a wider stakeholder group. The development of the current project 'Regreso al Futuro' in the cooperative was a direct result of decision taken between friends.

Carlos (05.11.03): "With DECAP, with Julio and Kolmans the idea [for a project] emerged. We explained the social and economic difficulties to them; we thought of working for that process of transformation of the cooperative, all the work for the project like the diagnostics was for a process in order to develop."

Kolmans, who was mentioned by Carlos, is a German consultant in sustainable agriculture, working for Pan para el Mundo (PPM) and having close links to DECAP and its staff members. Carlos (5.11.03): "I then wrote the project in 1998."

### 9.3 Looking for independence: the empresa framework and UBPC agency

Despite the friendship relations and the fact that all project activities were to take place in the UBPC, the project nevertheless needed to follow protocol. The UBPC has to follow their legal and organizational obligations with the *empresa* (see section 6.5). The *empresa* administers 7 UBPC and 5 *granjas* in the area and is responsible for executing MINAG policy through the implementation of policy measures. Despite the decentralisation effort by the government through the formation of UBPCs, strong links to the *empresa* continue to exist that also impinge on the NGO project. The terms of reference of the project, for example, had to be signed by the head of the *empresa* rather than by the UBPC administrator. The official signing of the contract took several months to accomplish, long after the project activities had started to be implemented. This was due to some land in the UBPC being classified as a military zone. The Armed Forces (FAR) had to clear the project and were thus responsible for the delay in the process. A staff member of DECAP is proud of having obtained the signature by following the *empresa* official to the toilets during a political event. The delays in signing official papers are by no means unusual in Cuba, and NGOs active in Cuba have their means and ways to fulfil their project cycles and timetables regardless.

Antonio (NGO representative 09.02.04): "The project with '26 de Julio' started in October 2003, but the official contract is still not signed, but

we can work through another bank account that already exists. Without the authorized terms of reference you cannot open a bank account. It is probably difficult for new Cuban NGOs to form themselves and start working if they do not have that kind of structure yet [accounts from previous projects that remain open to do transactions for other projects]. It makes it also difficult for new foreign NGOs, if you don't have any knowledge of the Cuban ways and tools."

Milk and meat production are assigned by the state *empresa* as '*objetivo social*' and needs to be treated as a priority within the cooperative. Milk production is a national priority of the government, which has a programme to provide one litre of milk per child under 7 years per day. In order to achieve this ambitious programme, milk imports are still necessary, since national production does not yet provide the required amounts. The *empresa* determines the required production levels for milk, meat and the mixed crop production. These production limits need to be met and limit the autonomy of decision-making at the UBPC level. Production costs of milk are high and payments are low, causing the UBPC a severe economic struggle. There is a fixed commercialisation agreement with the *empresa* for the milk and meat sales. Cattle can only be slaughtered in designated abattoirs and gaining permission to slaughter cattle is a lengthy bureaucratic process with a long trail of paper-work under the exclusive handling of the *empresa*. There is no official private market for milk or beef and all sales have to be done legally through the *empresa*. Depending on the water content of the milk, the *empresa* pays between 0.80-1.20 pesos/litre. The mixed crop produce however is sold through the UBPC's own commercialisation system.

These binding contracts provide a strong backcloth of compliance that NGO activities cannot undermine. The administrative staff doesn't perceive the *empresa* as problematic and speaks of mutual agreements. Lucia (head of production 05.11.03): "We tell them how we would like to work and we come to an agreement." Carlos (former UBPC director 05.11.03): "The *empresa* helps us a lot. There have not been any problems." Members of the cooperative, on the contrary, do not perceive the strong kinks to the *empresa* in favourable terms. They often complain about the restrictions they are presented with in their everyday activities.

Jaime (cooperative member 20.01.04): "Firstly, the land here belongs to the state. I was given the land by the state...that is the first thing you need to understand...that all the land here belongs to the state and that they have to authorize you and only then can you work on

it...I tell you, the link with ANAP is different. ANAP is a different thing altogether. They come with different plans and give you more freedom in working the way you want to, in order to obtain more from your land. They don't control you, that is what I always said. For example, what I have now, the land I have, well in quotations marks, if it was mine, I would do what I think convenient. And even though I would have a plan to comply with ANAP, like all *campesinos* have, but well that would be fine. I know that I would have to give a lot to ANAP, a lot and a lot, but then they would not put themselves in my business after that. It is not like here, where they keep controlling you constantly. What you have cultivated, what you are going to sell, this and that. They [UBPC administration and *empresa*] have a very strict control, too much."

The farmers often draw little distinction between the UBPC administration and the *empresa*.

Xavier (farm administrator 24.02.04): "You can never feel like the owner [of the farm], because you cannot realize the work how you understand it...because the *técnico* comes, the head of production comes, the person from the *empresa* comes, from the building, from there, from the headquarters of the *empresa* comes the other and dictate to you and hence you never can develop yourself. Whether you are the worst or the best. Always someone comes and cuts you off, halts you and tells you 'you can't do it like this, it has to be like that' ...in my opinion, I know what you can get from the soil here, and what the terrain can produce. For me, there is no need that they order me to plant *boniato* – sweet potato – where [the soil] gives yucca, because I am not going to produce *boniato* and lose my entire work I have put in. I will plant *boniato* in his place and the yucca in his place where it grows best; and the malanga where suitable, so it will be. Since I have been more than 50 years in the terrain, I know where to plant *boniato* and why then does Pedro have to tell me where to plant the *boniato* if we are then going to lose it...?"

### 9.3.1 Empresa inputs versus farmers' preferred inputs

The *empresa* is responsible for inputs to the UBPC '26 de Julio'. The collapse of the subsidies from the Soviet Union described in detail in section 3.2, severely affected the UBPC '26 de Julio'. Their entire dairy and meat production relied on the importation of animal feed, on the upkeep of high mechanization levels and the use of artificial fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides. Decentralisation into the organizational form of the UBPC has brought about a change in technology where cattle predominantly rely on pasture and forage, such as sugar cane and king grass, grown on site, and only small rations of additional feed are made available through the *empresa*. In terms of herbicides and pesticides, the *empresa* has worked for the substitution of chemical inputs, forbidden in urban agriculture, with biological products. The *empresa* developed facilities to produce bioinsecticides and bioherbicides in their recently created Centres for the Reproduction of Entomophagous (CREE). The CREE are part of a newly adopted government strategy to make inputs available to, and maintain production in, the agricultural sector (see section 6.3). However these biological products are being sold to the cooperatives without adequate training for farmers in their application. A strong mistrust of these biological products is hence not being challenged or overcome and chemical options are still preferred by the farmers.

Xavier (farm administrator 23.12.03): "The field needs spraying, but I don't have the chemicals. I don't have the sprayer to fumigate with biological products. Here all the cabbage went rotten, because I didn't fumigate in time. The salad has grown, because I put a lot of organic matter on it. I work with oxen, but imagine...with a tractor<sup>24</sup>, it would be so much quicker and faster." (16.02.04): "the biological products do not work, because they only control, but do not kill. In an organopónico [raised bed technique common in urban agriculture], where there is only a small area, they work. But here they don't work, because the area is too big....every year I do not produce enough due to the missing fumigation. I work *por gusto* - for nothing. I need something for the pests, I lost huge quantities."

<sup>24</sup> The cooperative has 8 tractors, 5 are property of the UBPC and three under contract from a private farmer with various appliances, such as a weed cutter and carts. These tractors can be rented for working on the individual farms. The charges are low and based on the services rendered. The available tractors cannot fulfil the demands of the farmers. They are few and break down often, despite a group of 9 men working continuously on the maintenance of machinery.

Joaquin (cooperative member 23.03.04): "Not a lot, no [use of biological products]. That what you have seen today in the morning, the chemicals, they still exist a lot. But we will do it little by little with the biological products. At least we are starting to use organic matter, and to plant trees on the fields....but still you have to continue using chemicals, they are not eliminated yet. The biological products are not as good."

Agricultural chemicals are easily obtained from the black market, but they are expensive. One bottle, the size of a 1 ½ l, can cost up to 500 pesos. Oriol (farm administrator 03.02.04): "I need to find the chemicals outside, the cooperative doesn't pay that, but I need to fumigate, if you don't, you loose all." Rarely do the chemicals come in the original packaging and, at times, are even diluted with other substances, which can put the farmer or consumer potentially at risk. Farmers can never be sure what chemicals they have obtained through the vendors.

Pedro (head of mixed crops 18.02.04): "Xavier had very toxic chemicals that he wanted to apply to the crops, but they do a lot of damage. It takes more than 3 months to get rid of that particular toxin and hence I told him that he can't use it on leaf vegetables, as they have a turn-over rate of less than 3 months. Residue would still be on the plant and could intoxicate people eating them. That's why I like people to tell me what they buy, so that I can advise them, even so it is illegal."

Pedro (head of mixed crops 20.01.04): " The empresa and DECAP are asking me for a lot of information and data, including the sprayers and what inputs we use; but that has no sense, because we don't use any chemicals and the biological products are few. Some use chemicals illegally, but I can't put that on the papers at all." The *empresa* has recently adopted production quotas for natural fertilisers obtained from worm culture composting animal excrement. This quota is however not synchronized with DECAP's project proposal of implementing worm culture on all farms. The *empresa's* approach towards agricultural production mimics the government's approach on input substitution without any further understanding or consideration of more fundamental, holistic and long-term technological changes and systems approaches (see section 6.1 – 6.3). Here, hegemonic discourses on fertilizer use and conceptualizations of local practices by *empresa* employees are essentially refracted and reformulated by farmers, paying lip service to the outside,



while going about their everyday practices using space in a contradictory manner to the prevailing dominant representations. They acquire, apply and keep quiet about the inputs used to go about their farming activities (see section 5.8).

#### 9.4 Project interfaces: claims of participation versus vertical organizational structures

According to Carlos, the collaboration with NGO projects has had significant impacts on the cooperative's development of new farms.

Carlos: "In the beginning [at the foundation of the UBPC] there only existed the farms Revolución and Tamayucatan and then we developed other farms. Smaller farms, but on the same land. The cooperation with DECAP was necessary in order to push development."

He further believes that the *grupo gestor* - the management group of the project - can act sufficiently outside the imposed *empresa* constraints. Carlos (05.11.03): "We still have a strong influence from the state and *empresa*. But the *grupo gestor* helps to get rid of that head." The interfaces between the various groups in the cooperative are determining important frameworks for the everyday.

There exist various boards and committees in the cooperative that are deeply embedded in the daily routines of the cooperative (see figure 9.1). Some of those allow a widespread participation from cooperative members while others are taking place within specific circles of particular boards, some elected by cooperative members, some there by default. The agency and activity of the NGO takes place within various groups.

Various members of the *junta directiva* (managing board) – sometimes all – meet with staff from DECAP and occasionally with the Spanish representative Antonio. This is either for purposes such as the finalization of the project outline or for discussing the project progress and implementation. The *junta directiva* is composed of the administrator of the UBPC, the controller, head of machinery, head of production, head of mixed crops, sales representative and two farmer representatives elected by the farmers in the general assembly. There are standing invitations for the trade union representative and the secretary of the party nucleus to attend if they so wish. The *junta* has weekly meetings where any problems that have arisen from within the cooperative or the *empresa* are discussed. Decisions are made according to what measures need to be taken. New guidelines and

directives are communicated and any complaints brought forward by the farmers are discussed and later disseminated through the farmer representatives or put on the agenda for the monthly meetings with farm administrators. Two separate meetings are held, one for dairy farms and one for mixed crop farms, where production guidelines and completion of goals and objectives are discussed, new directives disseminated and general problems discussed with farm administrators. The structure of the *junta directiva*, which is composed at large by technical staff, is symptomatic of the vertical and hierarchical nature of the cooperative's organization. The junta "doesn't know what it means to work the land, the hard labour the farmers do" (Pedro 03.02.04). While the general assembly of all cooperative members is. Theoretically, the highest governing body, in practice the *junta directiva* or at times the *empresa* take decisions.

Raul (cooperative member 28.01.04): "I tell you, these people think all day long, how they can tell you tomorrow that there will be, I don't know, maybe a landing strip for planes and that you have to collect the packages again, and they will make a landing strip. '*Donde manda capitán no manda soldado*<sup>25</sup>', you have to tape that."

Belinda (cooperative member 05.02.04): "I used to work as *maternista*, but then was transferred to the canteen and I prefer it. I like the kitchen. There came a point when the president [of the *empresa*] told me 'you don't work here any longer'. He said that because he had an affair with the *economista* (controller); the *junta directiva* had to do what he said. It needed to go through the General Assembly, but he had warned people that if they raised their hand against the decision that he would kick them out of the cooperative. Some of the people from *Oriente* came to me and said 'I am sorry I can't do anything, but if I vote against you then he will kick me out and I have nowhere to go'. The whole story went up all the way to the *Comité Central* of the Party, and the president was kicked out. With the new president, he asked me to bring a letter from the CDR and the party in order to revise my case, whether I could work again. He looked at the letters and said 'so what is that, of course you can work here again'. I am not a party member, but I am more revolutionary than some of the members."

<sup>25</sup> Literally: Where the captain gives orders, the soldier doesn't give orders.

The General Assembly is scheduled to be held monthly and all members of the cooperative are expected to attend. During my three months in the cooperative, I however experienced only one assembly. They are not held as regularly as they are supposed to be. During the assembly, the economic development and accounts are presented by the controller, new cooperative members are voted on, housing and movements between farms approved and general problems raised. It is the highest decision-making committee in the UBPC, theoretically; practically the *empresa* or *junta directiva* often take decisions that are not voted upon or approved by the General Assembly. For example, the UBPC administrator had changed in January 2004 and it was the *empresa* who decided on the successor. When the sales representative was substituted, this was equally a decision taking at highest UBPC administrative level, rather than voted upon from the grass-roots. Here conceptualisations and theories on the functioning of the UBPC run counter-current to the realities as lived in the everyday. In many instances, waiting for the next General Assembly, that only theoretically meets every month, can immobilize the running of the UBPC and decision are taken at hoc by administrative staff, bypassing a vote by the members of the cooperative.

The UBPC is structured into different units: the 23 farms all act as separate units, plus the machinery, the services and the administration or directors' unit. Each unit has an administrator who takes responsibility in terms of work plans, production, human resources and the farm's economy. He/she is the main intermediary between the administration and the members of the cooperative on his/her farm. The administrator thus needs to report and account to the administration of the cooperative and manage the members of the cooperative working on his/her farm (see figure 9.3). Laura (controller 15.01.04): "There is the custom to be boss of the farm and to take decisions. In almost all farms the papa is the representative, especially in those where there are family farms."

This vertical structure has a direct bearing on the composition of the *grupo gestor* - project management group - of the project 'Regreso al Futuro' in the cooperative. Even though the *grupo gestor* was formally decided upon during the General Assembly, which is attended by all cooperative members, it remains to be composed of people in decision-making positions and doesn't reach down to the very grass-roots.

Carlos (former UBPC director 05.11.03): "The *grupo gestor* was formed through the General Assembly. The comrades in the group are

those that can best incorporate themselves in order to achieve a development.”

Lucia (head of production 05.11.03): “There is the habit that farm administrators act and take decisions.”

The group does not have any voices either from the members of the cooperative working on the farms, or their family members. The *grupo gestor* is composed of all members from the *junta directiva* and those farm administrators whose farms had been identified as project farms. Those are 15 farms from the 23 that exist within the UBPC.

Carlos (former UBPC director 05.11.03): “It was ugly to say that this farm is in the project and this one won’t be in the project, because we are all together in the assembly. So even we only have 15 project farms, we speak as if all participate in the project.”

The project aim however is to “consciously and particularly involve all inhabitants of the zone” and cannot be sufficiently met considering this underlying structure. While the NGO language speaks of full participation, including the grassroots, the lived realities in the cooperative cannot meet these dominant representations. In the project proposal, all cooperativist and the family members are listed as contributing their labour “without which the execution of the project would not be possible” (entrepueblos 2004:14). Anna (cooperative member 28.03.04): “I didn’t even know there was a project in the cooperative until Kati came and told me.” This is equally true for the capacity-building component of the project, for which various workshops on specialised topics are held in the cooperative. All cooperative members are invited, but usually only farm administrators attend, since only they are expected to attend meetings and liaise with higher hierarchical levels. The techniques and knowledge transmitted during those workshops is thus held within the decision-making level and does not get transmitted downwards either to the cooperative or the family member (usually the wife), who in many cases looks after the privately owned crops and animals around the house (see section 9.12).

There remains a stark division between the farmer and project staff, since the latter meet only at *grupo gestor* meetings, the workshops and at rare field visits, such as the one I witnessed during my presence in the cooperative. The everyday practice and performance thus does not foster links to the grassroots. Antonio Ruiz would ask me – in private – about the intricacies of the workings and developments in the cooperative, since he cannot develop a sufficient understanding during his short visits. I became Antonio’s ‘informer’ about issues on the mind of farmers and

permeating the cooperative (see section 2.6). Julio, for example, is pushing for a new biogas plant in the second worker's canteen, despite discussions during the workshop, as to whether the money could not be better spent on different activities. As part of a previous project, the workers' canteen at the administration building was equipped with a biogas plant, which has never been in use and whose construction was faulty and needs repairs before it can be used. Julio is, however, a strong supporter of biogas and renewable energies. This is another example where an outside perspective introduced a specific technique, with no participation and hence no acceptance by the canteen staff. Hence, initiatives for agro-ecological and environmentally sound practices are often ill-conceived from the farmer's perspective and often do not get fully accepted. The lack of grassroots involvement, became apparent in most of my interviews with specialists and officials in La Habana. Thus, dominant imaginaries, which are conceived by planners, scientist and NGO staff, are cast upon the cooperative. This does not only include the issue of international cooperation, but also the representations of agro-ecological spaces (see section 6.3, 6.7 and 6.8).

## 9.5 Project interfaces: expert knowledge and farmers

DECAP is pushing for capacity-building and the promotion of agro-ecological methods and techniques, which are conceived by them as specialised and expert knowledge. The discourse on sustainable and organic agriculture in the cooperative has been fostered at large through the intervention of outsiders such as DECAP in particular. It is mainly their projects, their use of language, and the specialists that they bring to the cooperative for workshops, that is generating a discourse and representations of sustainable agriculture spaces in the cooperative. To them the solution to the lack of faith in biological pesticides is that "we will do a workshop on integrated pest management" (Julio NGO staff member 16.02.04). Beatriz (cooperative member 15.01.04) from the farm Revolución was assigned to take responsibility over the worm culture, as part of the diversification of the farm. When asked to point to the areas and activities on farm that are understood as sustainable agriculture practices she states: "I think these are the worms, no?" Nadia (15.01.04), the farm administrator points to all the mixed crops activities: "I think these crops are sustainable agriculture."

DECAP has trained two members of the technical staff at the UBPC level to become sustainable agriculture promoters. They were sent on three one week long courses together with representatives from other projects that DECAP is running. One of the promoters has since left the cooperative while Pedro continues to promote sustainable technologies.

Pedro (head of mixed crops 17.01.04) "I didn't know anything. I had been working in urban agriculture. One day they told me that tomorrow, a workshop starts. I came early and they started to greet me. They were saying a prayer and I thought, but where have they sent me? There was a reflection about the bible, and they were reading the bible. But then they started with the agro-ecological and sustainable agriculture and I thought, oh yes. I already knew the language, and I was expecting some professional classes, but it was the plantation of an idea. They were explaining how to avoid the use of chemicals, and were talking about biological products and organic products that are healthier and protect the environment and human life. In the beginning I didn't understand the biological products, because they are not strong. I asked Tanya [the other cooperative member that was being trained] 'they are crazy, no?'. We then made two teams, one that had to defend the conventional and the other that was defending the agro-ecological agriculture. Then we made a judgement. We were equal. The chemicals for the damage to crops by pests; well that is the agriculture in the rest of the world; the agro-ecology takes care of the environment. I was educated in the conventional agriculture. So during the first day of the work-shop: that with the church and the agro-ecology. I felt that they were crazy, but later I became convinced about the use of bio-products, they are healthier. And I learned how they can be produced here with our resources."

The professionalization of 'indigenous' farmer knowledge by creating 'promoters' resonates with the planner's conceptualisation of the scientific nature of the agro-ecological turn (see section 6.3). These discourses are outsider-led and find little resonance within the farmer community, who are using sustainable techniques, such as soil conservation, by instinct and traditional knowledge, even if they do not know the theory. "We didn't know very well what this [organic] means. We didn't know these practices before coming here" (cooperative member

02.02.04). During a workshop that Pedro was asked by DECAP staff to repeat in the cooperative, only 5 men attended and were eager to return to their farms. Due to the personal trust relationship many members of the cooperative have with Pedro, they did not hesitate to speak their minds (17.01.04):

Oriol (farm administrator): "We know all that, but ok continue. I am doing this already for years. I have a kid 6 years old and he knows already where to put the crops and barriers, so that the soil doesn't go" Nico (farm administrator): "When you come and visit my farm, you can see all that. Even so we might not know the theory, in practice we have been doing this."

It is interesting to note that when the same workshop was held by outside consultants, members of the cooperative sat obligingly through the day-long workshop, without implying that they knew the techniques that were being taught. During a visit of IIPF staff to the farm Anacaona (14.01.04), Marta from IIPF was explaining to the farm administrator Mauricio had to make compost from cattle manure and other residues.

Mauricio: "we can do it, but I need to see it to understand. You know I am stupid in these things. I need to see it. Maybe you can come one day and explain all well and we do it together. The women bring about 7-10 wheelbarrows full of dung every day from the cleaning of the stables. They do that work here."

Even though the women, Dominga and Nora, are responsible for cleaning the stables and are handling the cow manure, Marta was talking to Mauricio, the farm administrator. She explained to him the techniques of creating a successful compost, rather than to the two female members of the cooperative, who would essentially be doing the composting. Once again, expert knowledge is transmitted to the administrators, rather than reaching the grass-roots.

## 9.6 Project interfaces: outsider agro-ecology versus insider necessities

DECAP had implemented a pilot-project on the farm 'Santa Rita' (1999) aimed at diversifying production and applying agro-ecological techniques. This was fundamentally a development of seeds for forage, protein rich trees and organic technologies such as compost, worm culture and live barriers. The experiences made during that project have formed the basis for the current project 'Regreso al

futuro' and the farm Santa Rita is to act as 'reference farm'. The current project encompasses activities in 15 farms. In the pilot-project in Santa Rita, "Diversification of the agricultural production", various sub-programmes of DECAP had been integrated for the first time. These are the development of alternative energy, agricultural production and conservation of natural resources, with a strong component of capacity-building. Dominant representations, as propagated by the NGO, suggest the dairy farms diversify production in order to include mixed crops. This is meant to guarantee economic viability for the dairy farms and the UBPC, which is currently the worst performing UBPC the *empresa* administers. The project aims to achieve this through the incorporation of agro-ecological techniques. The diversification of dairy farms is meant to allow intra-farm efficiency of resource use, such as using the manure for fertilization and mixed crop residues for animal feed. Amongst the 15 selected project farms are included some of the recently established mixed crop farms, in order to strengthen their development, to introduce agro-ecological techniques to crop production and to ensure an integration with the UBPC and other farms.

The dairy farmers are less eager to diversify for agro-ecological reasons, but for increasing the economic benefit through the incorporation of mixed crops that can be sold profitably on markets. While DECAP aims to diversify for agro-ecological reasons, the farmers' priority is economic viability. It is thought that this agricultural diversification will allow the participating dairy farms to increase the quality of life of the beneficiaries. Through additional income obtained from the secondary products sold on the market, farmers would be able to augment their income. The production of milk and meat however needs to remain the primary objective of production. This results in a contradictory space (see section 5.7 and 5.8) between the ideology to diversify dairy farms and the overall social objective of milk production propagated by the UBPC administration and *empresa*.

Raul (cooperative member 24.02.04): they [mixed crop farms] have an income, but those with dairy don't. They [the administration] told us [dairy farmers] that we will get 6 *cordeles* – 'ropes' – to cultivate, but in the end they didn't give them to us, because they said that if there is cultivation, we no longer work with the cows and that we will be all the time attending the fields. So, they didn't give us that land...well, those that are paid the least nowadays work in a dairy and it is the toughest of all. And this question I always asked myself and I have asked many people why they pay so little to the dairies...as difficult as things are



now, and you pay little, no-one wants to work there, because dairy farming is day and night.”

Also the availability of time and labour can easily result in an increased burden on members of the cooperative, if farm resources do not allow more labour to be brought in. The farm Revolución, for example, was assigned by the *grupo gestor* to incorporate not only worm culture, but also to create a plant nursery. Pedro (head of mixed crops 16.01.04) queried that: “Revolución doesn’t have the labour force for the plant nursery. They have all the materials, but they don’t do it.” The daily routines of individuals who do not build a plant nursery create specific representational or lived spaces (to use Lefebvre’s language), which are in contradiction to the aims of diversification. Contradictory spaces, as discussed in section 5.8, are created. Mavis (family member 17.01.04): “The problem in Revolución is that there is no money to pay extra workers, even though the workers are needed.”

The project objectives of diversification and agro-ecology resonate only slightly with the farmers. The project is not well networked, either with the workings of the *empresa* or with the daily lived spaces of the cooperative. This results in activities being undertaken as demanded by the project, but since the full integration into the networks is missing, the work is futile. Danae for example had been filling plastic bags with soil and humus for a plant nursery as part of the reforestation plans inscribed in the ‘*terminos de referencia*’ (see section 7.8), but was never provided with the necessary seeds.

Danae (family member 20.01.04): “I don’t know, well, I had small bags here, in a line, they told us that we will use them for fruit trees and poles of those forest trees, and those things, but they never came with seeds or anything and from there it was left idle and weren’t used...I had filled them for nothing and they were not used for anything and it was then that I said never again.”

Seeds form part of the inputs that the *empresa* is supposed to provide, but they are not made available in time and are not the seeds that the farmers require. Xavier (farm administrator 23.12.03): “Seeds come always late, because the *empresa* asks for them too late. Last year there was a woman working here and she found me whatever I needed, but this year it is difficult.” Pedro in a conversation with a farm administrator from a mixed crop farm (18.02.04): “Do you want parsley to plant? I have seeds [from *empresa*].” Abel: “I don’t even know how to plant it. Is there a market for it? I will try it a little.” Hence, some of the project’s efforts are rebuffed

through the realities of members of the cooperative, as well as UBPC, have to adjust to.

The method of worm culture, which is to be introduced on all farms, according to the project, is also new and can potentially be very profitable. One kg of worm humus can sell at 17 pesos at the CTA (agricultural consultation shop). Pedro (head of mixed crops 12.01.04) "It is difficult to persuade the farmers [to do worm culture], there is money in worm culture, but they [farmers] just don't take enough interest. They are stupid, they don't want to advance." Lucia (head of production 13.01.04): "They [campesinos] think how they live and not how you want them to. That shows for example in how they are against capacity-building and new technologies." The incorporation of worm culture on farms is not always favoured by the members of the cooperative living on the farms, as they are often in conflict with other livelihood needs. Beatriz, who lives with her husband in the converted stable on Revolución, for example, was responsible for looking after the worms on the farm. She was never fond of the idea and considered it additional work to her work as night watchwoman. Beatriz (cooperative member 23.12.03): "I am the one that will attend to the worm culture, but until now I don't know anything about this method. I work as a night watchwoman. I am a cooperative member like my husband." The worms died and Beatriz is meant to be sanctioned for it – most probably through the withholding of part of her monthly salary. The chickens that Beatriz owns privately and roam around her house had eaten the worms. For Beatriz, those chickens are a vital life-line: Beatriz (04.02.04): "I need those chickens for food, especially since I am not registered with the *bodega* yet." This is an important contradictory space, where NGO ideology clashes with the livelihood requirements of the members of the cooperative and their family members.

## 9.7 Inside interfaces: the UBPC role in livelihood requirements: housing and land

Hardly any cooperative members joined the UBPC primarily for the remuneration in the form of a monthly salary. The primary motive for becoming a cooperative member is access to other perks that can be obtained legally or illegally through cooperative membership.

Marcel (farm administrator 19.01.04): "The advantage of living inside a UBPC is that you have your meals. If you live in the city, you have a

problem with getting at food. Here, you have your food guaranteed.

The chicken, the protein, everything.”

Dayme for example had joined the cooperative in order to gain access to milk<sup>26</sup>.

Dayme (cooperative member 22.01.04): “10 or 11 years ago, my husband died and after his death I joined the cooperative. He used to have money to buy the milk for the children, since they were over 7 years already and no longer received the milk through the *libreta*. I was a teacher before and one day I was sitting in school thinking that I would like to work in *ganadería* and at the same time the administrator of the dairy farm walked past. I asked him and he said let’s try it. He told me that he usually doesn’t work with women, that there is no place for them, but I worked well and he kept me on...When I started I was afraid of the animals, but out of necessity I told myself that if others can do it, so I can do it as well...In the beginning I only received the salary and some milk, but now since we are also planting mixed crops, we have additional food for our home-use and there are many things that I no longer need to buy.”

While Dayme needed milk, many of the recently joined cooperative members had been looking for access to housing and land for private farming. Pedro started to administer a farm, so that he could gain access to a plot of land for his private use. As long as one family member is a cooperative member and has secured access to the necessary resources, e.g. a house, there is little incentive for other family members to join. Miguel (UBPC administrator 15.01.04): “If the husband works and earns so little, then there is little incentive that the wife joins in, for what? To earn 250 pesos more. It doesn’t seem worth it.”

Within the cooperative the official salary of members of the cooperative is firmly established. The farmer’s wage is 196 pesos<sup>27</sup>, which is above the national minimum wage of 110 pesos. Farm administrators earn a little more for their additional responsibility. Their monthly wage amounts to 211 pesos. The technical staff, employees in the administration block and directors earn in the range of 300-400 pesos, which is equivalent to a researcher’s salary in a research institution or

<sup>26</sup> Due to the national programme to provide 1l of milk to every child under 7 years, milk is not for sale either through the rationing system or the legal market to a person without a child under 7 years. Milk has to be purchased on the black market.

<sup>27</sup> 26 pesos are 1 \$. With this conversion, the salary in \$ terms is extremely low. However one needs to take in account the local economy, in which the peso does have value. It becomes more complex if items on the dollar market have to be purchased (see section 3.2.on dual economy).

University. The regulations and principles governing the UBPC however state that farmers should be directly linked to their income generated through the farm activities and need to be remunerated accordingly at the end of every month. The salary received is only an anticipatory salary that is subsequently balanced against the earnings of the farm. Each of the 23 farms is seen as an economic sub-unit with its own book-keeping, where costs and incomes are calculated at farm level. Up to the present, the economy of the UBPC as well as the system of accounting and economy has not provided any farmer with additional revenue from gains achieved, even if the farm has made a profit<sup>28</sup>.

The majority of the farmers cannot make a living from the cooperative salary alone<sup>29</sup>. They engage in other activities, either directly related to farming or entirely unrelated activities. These outside activities are often a greater source of financial income to the family and have become an integral part of the livelihood and everyday. The ability to negotiate the interfaces with legal, semi-legal and illicit markets determines the actual disposable income farmers and their families can manage to mobilize. Montse, a divorced mother of a grown son, has access to little more than her salary from her work on a dairy farm. Montse (cooperative member 13.03.04): "I invent, I sell a little from my milk and some chicken, but it is not easy." Her pride is her colour TV that she recently obtained, but for which she has to pay monthly instalments. Her salary is her main income source and she finds it difficult to make ends meet. On the other hand, Xavier, a farmer of a mixed crop farm is earning in the range of 2000-3000 pesos monthly, as he sells crops to buyers that come directly to his farm. He has a large patio, where he rears pigs and chickens for home consumption and sale. He additionally farms on a piece of private land he managed to obtain outside the UBPC. He was able to buy a large brick house, owns a 1950s Chevrolet, and claims not to suffer from financial worries. Jorge (head of machinery 29.01.04): "I am also a *campesino*, I have two private farms and my son is currently looking after them. They are right behind my house."

Access to outside sources of income largely determines the financial possibilities of the members of the cooperative. Some of these private activities are

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<sup>28</sup> If a month has closed with a surplus, the controller readily decides to save the money for future months that will be in the red. In effect the money is used to pay off the debts of the cooperative, the salary of the technical and administration staff and to keep the UBPC afloat, as their dairy and milk sector is not running profitably. This has caused tension with farmers in the past. It does not foster a sense of ownership over production and it strongly maintains a worker mentality. It inhibits a sense of responsibility and efficiency.

<sup>29</sup> This is a common phenomenon in Cuba, where the official salary does not necessarily make ends meet and families resolve to look for other incomes.

linked to access to resources at the workplace, for example animal feed used to feed privately grown animals such as poultry and pigs, or the illegal sale of crops from the farm. A private cow looked after together with cooperative cows, and the sales from the private milk, are also common activities. The rearing of small animals around the house, particularly poultry, is the most common steady income for farmers. They supplement their diet and/or are sold if cash is needed. Katarina (cooperative member 17.02.04): "Here I have some chicken, ducks and turkey hidden to make some money. None lives from the salary, everyone *inventa* – invents. That is particular difficult for the dairy farmers, because UBPC regulation only permits one pig; so how are these people meant to live. When we were at Los Mangos, we had many more animals since we had more space. It was easier there. Now I still have a cow there and they bring me my milk everyday. Today they only got 1 ½ litres, but for breakfast it is enough. The chickens are for eating in the house, because they don't sell well. I kill the chickens myself, only the slaughter of bigger animals like goats and pigs is men's work." Rafael raises pigs and makes a good living from them (17.02.04): "When I sell a pig, the big one, I can ask for about 20,000 pesos. I sell to an intermediary at 17 pesos per pound, who then sells it on for 22-25 pesos. The day before I want to sell it, I look for a person and agree the sale. I also work in the slaughter house for the MININT just over there. They give me the grease from the pigs and animal feed for the work I do. "

Often, the ownership of pigs is shared between more than one farmer. While one, for example, may have the space or feed to raise the pig, the other might be the owner. In this case profits from the sale are shared. Some raise a pig from another person in order to gain rights over the off-spring. Complex patterns of economic networks result, and these are deeply gendered (see section 9.9 and 9.10). Location and space are also crucial factors in determining the possibility of having income sources 'on the side'. "Mario can have more business, because he is further away from inspections and whereabouts of the administrative staff, he made 6,000 pesos in one month....Xavier's daughter has a lorry and her husband too. With that he can do a lot of commercialisation and they have a small warehouse in their house" (Antonio cooperative member 17.02.04). Xavier (17.02.04): "I am too close [to the administration building] from here they can tell and see any lorry coming to me and hence I just simply can't sell. But those there at the back have better locations. Trucks can come in but no-one sees them."

Anna is a cooperative member and has obtained a house through the membership, but only managed to meet her financial needs by being supported by her lover.

Anna (cooperative member 25.02.04): "if this wasn't a *medio básico*, I would not work in the cooperative, because I wouldn't work for the salary. But the house, yes, that is important...but my ration is still on Marcel's booklet, because I used to live in his house before and his house is legalized. For changing the name on the *libreta* I first have to get my own house legalized....I spend a lot, about 2000-3000 pesos monthly; but I manage everything. I always had my ways. I have a lover who gives me everything. He has a wife, but every day he comes to see me. He gives me everything. Before I used to work for a private *campesino*, who was alone with his children and I washed and cooked, ironed and everything in the house. He paid me 30 pesos daily, which was about 700 pesos monthly. I got up at about 7 am and went to his house, after I had gone to bed at 5.30 am. when I had the night duty guarding the animals. I left this work and now my lover gives me everything."

In-migrants from other Provinces outside La Habana, are particularly dependent on accessing land<sup>30</sup>, obtaining housing and often the legal papers, required to be allowed to stay in La Habana. It is stated in the constitution of the UBPC that the workers have the right to obtain a rent-free house from the cooperative, provided that a property is available. They can remain in the house as long as they are a member of the cooperative, including after retirement.

Marcel (19.01.04): "I have never worked in agriculture before, but here I had the possibility to have a house and I stayed....there is plenty of work here for years to come. I feel fulfilled through my work. Of course there are many things that need changing. I feel good, as a *campesino*. When I meet my former colleagues in 'state inspection', where I used to work, when I tell them I am *campesino*, they say: *muchacho!*. But I feel good and I have it all sorted. To have a house in good shape and complete is not easy to obtain."

<sup>30</sup> Every farmer apart from the cooperative land he farms, gets assigned a plot of land for self-sufficiency. This is particularly vital for those who work on the dairy farms.

The issue of migration and the agricultural imperative to increase production has resulted in a contradictory space, that leaves in-migrants to negotiate their legal, economic and social position on a day to day basis. There exists a state policy regarding migration that attempts to inhibit the influx of people from other provinces to La Habana. This government policy wants to discourage mass migration to the capital from people in search of better economic possibilities, as housing and pressure on social and basic services are already stretched in La Habana. The policy aims to avoid the establishment of slum-like areas as the state is obliged to guarantee that basic services are being met through the social infrastructure and welfare system established. The successful move is translated in the everyday through a change of address on the national identification card. Pablo (family member 13.01.04): "My wife is cooperative member. I am not because of the difficulty of changing the address. She came first and got the address changed. It is the *ley de migración*, because if you build illegally, the state becomes responsible for schools, doctors, *bodega* and basic infrastructure."

### 9.8 Insider interfaces: "I don't want any more '*Palestinos*'<sup>31</sup> in my Council" - the issue of migration

In total 46% of cooperative members are in-migrants from other Provinces. Almost half - 49% - of the male labour force are men from *Oriente*, in particular Guantánamo, Granma and Santiago de Cuba (see table 9.1). They have joined the cooperative during the past 10 years and all of the recently established farms - the mixed crop farms are administered by in-migrant farmers. In most cases, newly joined members are part of a larger family network, members of which have already settled on farms in the cooperative. Once one member of the family is incorporated into the cooperative, mostly through pre-existing private ties with another cooperative member, other extended family members come to join shortly after. The cooperative currently has about 4 extended family networks. Mario from la Bonita, for example came to the cooperative first and now his brother is running the farm La Guayaba, his sister the recently established farm Unidad Militar, his nephew is administrator of La Trampa and various other family members are working on the farms as members of the cooperative. Another brother is currently clearing land behind La Trampa with the intention of making a farm. Rosa (farm administrator 12.03.04): "I came here on vacation to visit my brothers, who are here, and my

<sup>31</sup> Derogatory name for people from *Oriente*.

brothers told me to take this farm, which had been empty and I took it." Another extended family are the *Pinareños* – people from the Province Pinar del Rio. They are tucked away in the outlying areas of the UBPC and stretch over three farms, Victoria cv, Colmena I and Colmena II.

Elena (family member 23.01.04): "The nephew of my husband had moved here some years ago. He said to my husband 'uncle let's go there [La Habana]; uncle, why don't you go there. Since you are family, you come and stay with us...when we go there we collect a farm....there [in Pinar del Rio] are many hills, many mountains...it was worse than here; here it is plainer, another life. There was electricity here, in Pinar we didn't have electricity. Hence, one day we came here, my husband and I came to have a look. We liked it and shortly after he moved here and made the house. We started afresh, for the better.... the only thing is that here, everything is far from everything. Look, this friend of mine, who came to visit, was crazy about moving here, because her husband likes to work. He likes to rear animals, but there is one problem. They have three small children. She wants to work, but if she comes here, she cannot work, because who will look after the children?"

The issue of migration is contentious. The cooperative administration under Carlos was actively looking to increase the labour force. He allowed people to settle who were willing to clear land and to carve new farms out of the weed infested lands. The aroma and marabú needs to be eliminated and production levels have to rise, which can only be achieved through increasing the labour force. Carlos supported the in-migrants by trying to legalize houses, allowing additional family members to settle and construct houses and assigned them land. He provided a certain framework of security, took members of the cooperative under contract, even without the proper change of address in the papers and cleared obstacles out of the way for the establishment of new farms and therefore new homes. For example three farms are currently in the making, Cumplidora II, La Ceiba and Revolucion II. The interface between the UBPC administration and in-migrants was marked through Carlos's emphasis on state policies of national production over migration policies. The support extended to in-migrants was not viewed positively by all cooperative members, some of whom share the resentments that widely exist against in-migrants in La Habana. Lucia (13.01.04) "The *Palestinos* only have to meet with him [Carlos] and done!" The administrator to the UBPC had changed in



January 2004. Carlos: "people are a bit upset that I am leaving....but well." Bettina from *Oriente* (28.01.04): "With Carlos we did not have any problems. He knew us and you could talk with him. But the new administrator, he doesn't know us yet." Sofia (family member 03.02.04): "Carlos was sorting the papers for us for the legalization of the house, but now with the new *jefe*, I am not sure what is going to happen." and (Miguel new administrator 16.01.04): "I have a different style to Carlos. I think the problem here is the discipline of those that work here."

The issue of trust and personalized relationships are important at the interface between members of the cooperative and between the members of the cooperative and the administration of the UBPC. The position of in-migrants is hence negotiated daily, and spaces, legal and illegal, are being appropriated as far as that is possible. Beatriz (25.03.04): "I do feel a bit insecure, because I don't have the change of address. With the change of address, I would feel secure. I do however have a contract with the cooperative, Carlos made it....when living in Santa Fe<sup>32</sup>, the police once gave me a fine, because I was not legal. I never had been preoccupied that the police would ask me for my identity card, but here I hope that the cooperative will protect me."

Many in-migrants are primarily attracted by the economic possibilities that La Habana can offer. Julio (machinery, 05.02.04): "There is a better economy in La Habana, it is easier to get 100 pesos here than 10 pesos there [*Oriente*]." While many in-migrants are attracted by the possibility of incorporating themselves into cooperatives and working the land, they are facing severe difficulties in settling.

Kathrin : and how do you manage to obtain the change of address?

Elena: oh that, it is not easy.

K: why is it not easy?

E: no, no it is not easy. Look, this daughter of mine, who recently moved here, she is now in Pinar, because her small son cannot even go to school; not until she has the change of address. He has started anyway, but it has been some semesters already that he is illegal. He doesn't appear either there or here...Hence, look, my son has made the invitation letter for her, but they [state officials at popular council] have not given it to her yet. They haven't given her the card yet, because you have to legalize the house first....This house is still not finished, but that what they have done was with what he had brought [from Pinar]....they won't recognize it, not until the house is finished,

<sup>32</sup> Another village within the Guāñabacoa municipality.

they won't legalize the house and without that they can't get the change of address...The one that you have to renew every year, that one is not a change of address. We made a small change like this and every year you need to go and renew it, but well...but we will see how long it will take to finish the house with bathroom and everything. Let's see whether something [building materials] will enter the cooperative, so whether we can finish it..."

In-migrants, in particular those from *Oriente*, often have to face severe discrimination, lack of respect and prejudice. They tend not to be welcomed. Bartolo (La Trampa 20.01.04): "In the beginning when I came here, people always tried to find a scapegoat for everything and they will try and put the guilt on you, but now not anymore. The word *Palestino* doesn't offend me anymore. It is because we are migrants and *Palestinos* are migrants as well. That's where the name comes from." Beatriz (25.02.04): "I am not very problematic, so they accepted me. I am not really offended by *Palestino*, but I always say 'thanks to the *Palestinos* that *Habaneros* can live, because the people who work here are *Palestinos*. The *Palestino* works hard wherever you put him." In-migrants are seen by *Habaneros* as opportunists who come to La Habana in search of an easier and better life without necessarily wanting to work hard. The local delegate to the municipal government announced: "I don't want any more *Palestinos*<sup>33</sup> in my Council." Tension between local *Habaneros* and in-migrants from *Oriente* is further exacerbated through mixed crop farms being far more profitable in economic terms than dairy farms. Most mixed crop farms are under the management of in-migrants.

The first international development project that was implemented in the UBPC had focused on the construction of houses, mostly in the outlying areas of the UBPC in order to allow the repopulation of these previously vacated lands. The project was started in 1996 and was carried out by the Spanish NGO Vetermon, in collaboration with a Cuban counterpart ACPA (Cuban Association for Animal Production). In total 25 houses and office buildings were constructed. The houses are designed to have 2 bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen, large lounge and a patio. They are brick houses with concrete roofs and are generally in good condition. They have become a home to many members of the cooperative through a *medio básico*.

The administration building on top of the hill at the edge of Peñalver village introduced in section 9.1 was built under the same project. The project had aimed to

<sup>33</sup> Derogatory name for people from *Oriente*.

facilitate the *vinculación* (linking) of farmers back to the land. Land was being split into smaller, manageable farms and allowed the farmer to live close to the land he farms and the animals he cares for. Hence, in the dominant representation of valuing the 'rural', the peasant life-style was being propagated through the development initiative (see section 4.1, 6.5 and 6.6). This project was most important in the reshaping of the landscape of the newly founded cooperative and its vast extensions of land. Twenty-five houses have been built in particular in the more remote and inaccessible parts of the cooperative land, which allowed the reclamation of farming land. Some additional houses were built with the sole support of the company and others have been built with the very own resources of the farmer. Some farmers are still awaiting proper housing and in the meantime have to make do with makeshift housing in the form of containers or half refurbished stables. These lack comfort and adequate living conditions. All houses have electricity including the makeshift houses, apart from one container house that relies on kerosene lamps.

The required authorisations and paper work for new houses to be built and authorized in La Habana province<sup>34</sup> is a lengthy process. There are 12 houses on the cooperative land built within the last 10 years that have not been fully authorised or legalised yet. Miguel (cooperative member 02.03.04): "For my house to be legalized, I need to put the terrace, the bathroom and bits and pieces here and there." Even some houses built under the Vetermon project dating back to 1996 are still lacking the appropriate papers.

## 9.9 Gendered interfaces

Despite the efforts, or maybe even because of these efforts, of trying to repopulate the outlying areas, as part of state policy and NGO efforts, women in particular are disadvantaged. Due to the repopulation of the land belonging to the UBPC, farms are being created away from the infrastructure provided in villages such as Peñalver and Arango. The recent development in the cooperative has marked out three quite distinct areas: farms near and around Peñalver, farms linking to the community of Arango and the farms recently reclaimed from the heavily weed infested and overgrown land in the southern edge of the cooperative. This latter part has a distinct rural feel and farmers that have settled here report that, despite

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<sup>34</sup> There are particularly strict planning permission regulations acting in La Habana City province, in order to contain a large scale migration to La Habana from the other provinces.

coming from a rural area, they live more rural and cut-off lives here than they did at their place of origin. This refers to access to schools, healthcare and shopping facilities. Women in particular are affected by the long distances to community services, which fall within their culturally assigned reproductive tasks.

Elena (family member 23.01.04): "That is the only bad thing here, the schools are so far away. Or if there was a crèche or kindergarten or least, even if it does not have much...something. The other day I said, well, why don't you [husband] plant the idea at the meetings that at least a primary school, that they give the order to construct one, it doesn't have to be of bricks, we ourselves would help to build it, from wood and cement, not much. We ourselves would clean it, and if the teacher would need help every day, that is not a problem. Today I give you food, tomorrow the other one does it. That is how it functions in Pinar del Rio. There are classrooms, small schools that only have one child and the teacher has to stay because they are far away and the teacher stays the whole week in the house of some people. And he gives classes to that one child. And well, he has his television, his solar energy plant and all in the classroom, and all that for one pupil. And here, how many children are here, a whole lot. They could do a big school...for all those children up to secondary school...the only problem here is the bodega and the school, they are so far away."

Other women have reported the same problem:

Cecilia (13.01.04): "The bodega is far away. I have to walk 1 ½ km and with the small child [2 years] it is not easy. I sometimes go once a week. My son goes to school there and he brings the bread daily from there as the school is near there. He walks."

Bettina (28.01.04): "I go to Peñalver about three times a week to collect food and to visit my sisters, sometimes other people fetch the food if they happen to go to Peñalver, or my sisters come to visit me."

Rachel (02.02.04): "My husband works with Mario on La Bonita. I used to live here in La Trampa and initially I was working in the plant nursery, but because of my two children I stopped working and went to live in Arango in another *medio básico*. I needed to be closer to the school for my daughter and there I don't work. Once the little one goes to school I can go and find work. I don't like agriculture at all and I didn't enjoy the plant nursery work."

Women continue to feel responsible for these tasks and are eager to perform them as part of their identity. Some men however do attend to reproductive tasks, at least for some tasks, and mostly those that require to leave the house and be *en la calle*. The performing of these tasks is also often a trade-off for other 'female' tasks needing to be accomplished but are not feasible both at the same time. Antonio (farm administrator 17.02.04): "If I don't go to the *bodega*, who is making lunch for me." (when I saw him walk passed with cooking oil and other items from the bodega. Female and male spaces – the gendered identities- thus continue to be performed, but also re-negotiated in small ways in the everyday (see section 5.9).

Fabian (cooperative member 24.02.04): I don't know how to clean the kitchen. Sometimes I help her to clean the house. When I come home before her, I clean and put the beans on, so that they are soft; that yes; but if she comes home before me, I like my meal on the table. That is another case. Women know of these things, I don't. If there was the necessity, sure that I would learn, but until now that is the thing of the wife.

Raul (cooperative member 24.02.04): "I knew how to cook, when I was still single, but since I married I didn't cook anymore."

The latter statement, emphasizes the performed nature of 'cooking' in the bargaining of gendered spaces.

The difficulty of accessing resources needed to fulfil the reproductive tasks, also extends to the social and political networks, such as links to the mass organisations like the Comité por la Defensa Revolucionaria (CDR) and Federación de las Mujeres Cubanas (FMC).

Elena (family member 23.01.04): "But in Pinar del Rio, look there had been reunions with the FMC every month, the reunions of the federation, that were in the evenings; here it is very far, they shouldn't be at night; they should be during the day, because I myself won't walk to Peñalver alone...but well. And the CDR. In that you have reunions and you talk and all that, but here, well here, I don't know...well I know that the president is Katarina. But of the federation I don't know who is the representative, because here none has come and I was told absolutely nothing, nor was I charged anything [for the membership] since I am living here."

The cooperative suffers from a marked geographical division not least due to addition of the UBPC 'Vitalia Acuña' in 2000, which has its centre in the community

of Arango. Internal transport links are not well established, even so various transport options exist, ranging from bullock carts, horse-drawn carts, bicycles, and tricycles, to horses, not forgetting the cooperative lorry. All these transport options have different forms of ownership. While bullock and horse-drawn carts are usually owned by the cooperative, bicycles and a boat are privately owned. One farmer family living in La Bonita uses a boat to cross the reservoir and therefore has easier and quicker access to the community services. The farm administrator's sister in particular uses the boat on a regular basis. She is a nurse and rows the boat across the reservoir on her own when going to work in the hospital in Guanabacoa. She claims it was a bit difficult in the beginning to learn, but feels very comfortable now and recognises her independence in her comings and goings due to her ability to row the boat. It eases her travel and is time-saving.

A few farmers own private cars, but do not generally use them for farm or work related activities. One farmer owns a tractor. The use of transport appears to be highly gendered. While women accept lifts on tractors, bullock and horse-drawn carts, they are seldom seen operating them. Many women claim that they can ride bicycles, but they are seen less often using the bicycle than their husbands or sons. Women make use of bicycles occasionally, especially for carrying the shopping. Many women know how to ride a horse and women from the *Oriente* say that they often and readily used to ride horses, but do not feel comfortable doing so in La Habana province. Bettina (cooperative member 28.01.04): "The farms have horses from the cooperative. Here we have horses, but the men take them to go to reunions. I know how to ride, but here I don't like to. I walk and everything is far, but I enjoy the tranquillity." They feel embarrassed and fear becoming subjects of gossip if seen. Katarina, who was already introduced above, used to live on the farm Los Mangos and had a 3 km walk to Peñalver community. She recounts that she used to take a horse to the entrance of the village where she kept it at a friend's place to walk the remaining metres by foot. She did not want to be seen riding the horse and felt that there would be little acceptance of a woman doing so amongst *Habaneros*.

Wives of in-migrants are particularly affected, as in-migrants were making farms on the land available in the remoter areas.

Mavis (family member 29.01.04): "the adaptation is difficult. I am from *Oriente*. I came two months ago, but I have my family here, my sister, my children. The house is comfortable, they are fixing it, but I miss my house in *Oriente*... I have 17 years experience in a high quality canteen. I want to integrate myself here and work. Let's see whether

there is work for me. The nightwatch doesn't please me much, because it is cold at night. ... but at least my husband is installed here, he likes it..., but you need to understand me, it was not easy to leave my house, it is not easy... but it happens that here, you can raise a pig, you can help in the cooperative, they won't pay me a salary, but I am ready to help, if help is needed, do you understand?

In the majority of cases, the initiative to migrate was taken by the man as household head and often resulted in the loss of the women's income generating activity as well as the loss of the social network to realize her reproductive tasks.

Katarina (cooperative member 17.01.04): "I had my own farm with a plantain grove and vegetables, but when the men say come here, what can you do, so I came here.

Nadia (farm administrator 30.01.04): "We came here, because he came here. I like to roam through the mountains and all that<sup>35</sup>, in that I can loose myself, but nothing, can you imagine. Where one goes, all have to go, no? He took the decision to come here and since I am in love with him, I went after him...well since I am in love...but I liked it there...I liked it there because it was better than here. Manzanillo<sup>36</sup> is a lively village, where you can have a lot of fun and you know many people. When we came to La Habana we had to start afresh."

For many in-migrant farmers, the housing offered through the contract with the UBPC is in the form of a *medio básico*. In many cases, since the wife is not under contract from the cooperative nor considered a cooperative member, she does not receive any rights over the house, which can leave her in a vulnerable situation in case of a separation from her husband. On many occasions however, the cooperative has not made use of its regulations on social grounds and is keen to take responsibility for finding solutions. Carolina, a young mother of two small children, was left by her husband. Her husband had been a cooperative member and had secured the contract for the house. Far from asking Carolina to leave the house needed for other cooperative members, she was allowed to stay in the house for several months before the cooperative offered her a workplace in the cooperative and to become a full cooperative member. In March 2004, Carolina started to work

<sup>35</sup> The Oriente has high mountain ranges such as the Sierra Maestra and La Habana province is mostly plain.

<sup>36</sup> Manzanilla is the capital of the province Granma.

on a nursery that was being developed in her backyard. The location of the nursery close to her house, allows her to care for her youngest child while attending to the seedlings. Her first born daughter attends the local primary school and the flexible hours involved in her work allow her to bring and collect her child from the nearby school.

Many of the in-migrant workers are still in a process of legalizing their papers and residency for La Habana city (see section 9.11). The legalization and obtaining of the residency is crucial for accessing the basic services the Cuban government provides, such as food rations, cooking gas supplies, medical services and the participation in local mass organizations. The majority of these resources are to household and family welfare and are traditionally and culturally taken care by the woman. She therefore is proportionally more affected by the lack of residency and papers. Beatriz (15.01.04): "We need to get the house legalized so as to be able to get gas access and be put on the distribution list in Peñalver. Without legalization we can't put in a request. The cooking with wood is the worst. Look at my hands. "

The large majority of women working in the cooperative are from La Habana and not from *Oriente*. In in-migrant families, the wife is generally not incorporated into the cooperative as a member. This is partly due to the fact that the majority of newly established farms are mixed crop production, which are associated closely with 'men's work' and types of work not suitable to women. Work places considered suitable for women are few, the majority of them in dairy farms and administration and these have been held by local women already for many years. The majority of local women in the cooperative had worked in the cooperative even before its transformation to UBPC.

## 9.10 Insider interfaces: "Women are good in caring" - gendered work spaces

There are 27 female employees in the cooperative. The ratio between male and female employees is 3.6:1. The cooperative has a relatively high percentage of women working compared to nearby UBPCs<sup>37</sup>. The current division of labour is a product of historical trajectories. While accounts exist to show that women used to

<sup>37</sup> In the nearby UBPC 'Desembarco de Granma', only 9 women are employed in a total workforce of 88. Only two women, however, work on a forest farm and one as night watchwoman; the other women are employed in the administrative sector. Unusual though is that the administrator of this UBPC is a woman. Her husband is a farm administrator in the same cooperative.



work in agriculture doing all kinds of tasks, including weeding, the introduction of mechanization in the 70s meant that women were then no longer needed and at first were left at home by their husbands. Women were most numerous in the dairy sector and the rearing of calves.

Raul (24.02.04): "In early days there had been few women working in dairies. But after the maternity of the cows was introduced, some women started to enter. They started to work as *maternistas*, they were called *maternista*...to give milk to the calves, to look after the calves. They attended the pregnant cows, the beds for the calves, because they made small cradles for them. The calf slept barred in his cradle...and from there women started to work in caring for the offspring and started to work with the calves. They took the calves to drink milk from the cows, when they wanted to drink milk, because before that they were raised artificially with milk in bags, they were taken away from the mother, we milked the cow."

The dairy consultant to the cooperative<sup>38</sup> remembers "We didn't want men, because the calves were in better conditions and health with the care of women<sup>39</sup>" (Salina 28.03.04). Anita (control técnica 22.01.04): "Many years ago I used to work with calves and we were 14 women attending the cradles of the small calves and all that. Later I learned to be *control técnica* and I like the work with papers. A few women have remained working on the farms, but most have been passed on to work in the canteen or as *control técnica*." Dominga (cooperative member 22.01.04): "I started work when this was still the *empresa*, about 20 years ago. The work was close and I already had small children. Then we were looking after calves; we were altogether about 21 people working and many more women than men. But later we had less animals to take care of and they were already older when they came to the farm. So there was less need for us women to attend to the small calves."

Those women that are active in the work-force were and are considered capable of only specific tasks, such as nurturing of small animals, the plant nurseries and administration. There exists a dominant representation of gendered spaces in the work-force that has an effect on the availability of workplaces for

<sup>38</sup> He is a research staff at the IIPF and advises the cooperative on the best techniques for milk production. He has close links to the project staff members of 'regreso al futuro' with DECAP and entrepueblos. Salinas also participated with his wife in my workshop held on my last day in the cooperative. He brought his wife along especially for the 'gender' workshop, since I was considered the 'gender' specialist (see section 2.2).

<sup>39</sup> We didn't want men, because the calves were in better condition and of better quality under the care of women.

women (see also section 4.6 and 6.6) and strongly assigns them to certain tasks. Dayme (05.02.04): "Well, the other woman working here is on sick leave, so I have to do her work as well. The men here don't help me in that, since they say this is women's work." Women are mainly employed in the administration and services such as canteens. The women who are employed at farm level are either caring for the young and small animals, particularly calves, or work as night watchwomen on dairy farms. Only one farm employs women to work on an irrigation system for mixed crops. This is due to the farm's different labour rotation system whereby all workers are responsible for guarding the animals at night time rather than assigning specific tasks to each employee.

### 9.11 The Project and gendered spaces

There is a formal commitment in the cooperative to include more women in the work-force, particularly the wives of members of the cooperative. This is in line with government and FMC policy of incorporating women into the work-force (see section 4.6). The project 'Regreso al Futuro' claims:

"With this project, we aim to invite all women that live in this community to all work-shops, meetings and seminars, and above all to incorporate them directly at the sales points, the food conservation, the making of compost, plant nurseries, worm culture and other tasks such as the raising of small animals (chicken, rabbits, pigs etc). We hope that, at the height of the project, improvements can be achieved regarding the social impacts and fundamentally in the gender aspect. Those should culminate in the fact that women can fulfil responsibilities according to their possibilities and aspirations, so that when the project is finished, we have achieved an increment in the % of women incorporated in agricultural tasks" (entrepueblos 2004:18).

The project thus identifies spaces for the potential benefit of women with the aim of addressing gender. These activities however have neither been proposed nor decided by women. The diversification aimed at farm level, is understood as opening new spaces for the incorporation of women in the workforce. In particular the agro-ecological techniques such as composting, creating nurseries and worm culture have been singled out as possible employment opportunities for women. This is as usual conceived by outsiders and proposed to the farmers. Palco

(scientist IIPF 12.02.04): "The worm culture is good for women, they don't need to carry much for this activity. It is not heavy work. Maybe also flowers..." A female representative from the *empresa*, who was present during the workshop where activities were assigned to specific farms, pointed out: "The wife [of a former cooperative member, Carolina] is occupying that house from the cooperative. She has small children. She could do that work perfectly well". This conversation occurred in early January, and by early March, Carolina was fully incorporated in the cooperative as member and was working on the plant nursery that was being developed behind her house. Dayme (cooperative member 13.02.04): "I attend to the worm culture. I was told by Julio how to do it. I give them food every 7 days and water them daily. They have already reproduced a lot." Carlos (former UBPC director 16.01.04): "A source of female labour are the plant nurseries... here we have the vision to work with gender and this is work suitable for a woman".

This perception at administrative level of female labour spaces resonates at the grassroots and among women, e.g. Danae (family member 20.01.04): "A work for a woman could be a plant nursery. That is work for a woman, they fill the bags and sow seeds." Women seem to have internalised – embodied – that they are the 'weaker sex', that they are not as strong as men, and are thus unable to perform similar tasks. As discussed in section 5.9, their 'gender identities' are produced through the performative (re)-iteration of culturally specific understandings of masculinity and femininity (Butler 1990, 1993). Hence, the cultural imaginary of 'female work' is being performed and thus re-iterated and encoded into cultural meanings of femininity.

Reforestation, seed banks and the garden agriculture are also seen as possible employment opportunities for women. The focus on the incorporation of women into the work-force does not address the triple burden women are facing. The incorporation into the workforce only, does not augment the living conditions or the empowerment of women. This is particular pertinent as the major income for a family does usually not originate from the cooperative salary, as stated above. Benefits from incorporation only result in trade union membership, legal protection and insurance in case of work accidents, paid holiday leave, retirement benefits and the rights to all cooperative supports, such as housing etc. In cases where the husband is already a member, the need to obtain housing is already met by him.

In some families, the husband, however, does not want his wife to work outside the house, for reasons including *machismo*, jealousy or the potential loss of her feminine looks.

Julio (cooperative member/machinery 05.02.04): "I have animals in my patio...at times my wife helps me with them. But you know how it is, she is a woman and they cannot do much, they are not strong.

Kathrin: "But there are women cutting sugarcane?"

Julio: yes, but those are '*bestias*' – beasts – I want my wife to be feminine."

During my workshop where we discussed the issue of working wives, the following statement resulted: "Husbands don't like that his wife works, because there are many men who are *divertidos* and the work is tough. You have to care for the image of the woman, we don't agree that this work should be for women." (workshop discussion 28.04.2004). Other men do not mind working wives in principle, but not in agriculture.

Xavier (farm administrator 17.02.04): "My wife used to work in the campo with her father, when we married I told her to leave it. I didn't want her to work in the campo. The campo is not good for women, to be standing in the field with a rake, no, no, no that is not good for women. I just don't like it. She then worked in an office for some years. I don't mind her working, just not in the campo."

In many cases, the household work such as the caring for children and the house, does not allow sufficient free time for the wife to work for an income.

It is notable that a much lower proportion of in-migrant women are employed on the farm. This is due to these farms mainly being mixed crop production: few spaces are identified as women's work on mixed crop farms. They do not require night watch(wo)men and other – considered appropriate – jobs in nearby dairy farms, such as the rearing of small animals, are already taken by *Habaneras*.

## 9.12 Women in the house: Invisible incomes

In many cases the need to look after the house is a real hindrance for women who want to take up paid work.

Danae (family member 20.01.04): "me no, but they [men] have always worked in the campo, but well, I was always house-wife, but I like, I tell you, I like to work, but the possibilities are not right, because I was always far from the village, and the house has to be taken care of,

because, think about it, the burglars are not easy, because if you leave the house alone, they finish with you, *muchacha!*"

Tamara (farm administrator 01.03.04): "I do everything that comes...the reunions, well yes that is a problem, because I can't leave all this alone, hence when there is a reunion...well, I told them that. Because look, at various occasions I left this alone and the chickens were stolen, because the people here observe you, if you go out and leave it alone...We are three people, not more, my husband, son and I. I don't have any more family, do you understand. I don't have anyone who could look after this."

Even though some wives of cooperative members are neither active in the work-force nor have the opportunity to seek formal work, they are nonetheless generating a large part of the house-hold income. They are often in charge of rearing private animals on the patio or in close proximity to the house.

Elena (family member 17.02.04): "I do quite a lot here, because look, I have three cats, two small calves, and now the piglets and the chicken there. In all that the morning just goes by fast, the moving of the animals to different spots, giving them food and after that, all the work in the house, the lunch preparation, I have to wash clothes, all that I have to do."

The activities around the house are a crucial means to generating income, and are in most cases more profitable than the cooperative salary. This productive work undertaken by women is mostly invisible, even so they are contributing considerably to the household income. Their productive work is thus not readily acknowledged.

Apart from tending to the privately owned animals, there are other income generating activities that are undertaken by women. The processing of food such as making tomato puree generates considerable amounts of income. Crates of tomatoes are obtained cheaply from the nearby farms and the tomato puree is then sold on for about 5 pesos per beer bottle of 330 ml. I once stumbled across a big production line of tomato puree in the worker's canteen in Arango. After their lunch duty was finished, the canteen staff used the facilities such as the big cauldrons and fireplace to cook the tomatoes. Some other activities readily taken up by women are not related to the agricultural sector such as making of cakes, nail care and the production of clothes.

While the wives do not regularly participate in the farm activities, their labour at times of labour shortage is important for the efficient running of the farm. When visiting Mario on his farm La Bonita one day, he had two women harvesting guava. One was his own wife and the other the wife of a cooperative member that works in La Trampa. Mario (farm administrator 02.02.04): "I made the farm productive again, but I have to work '*por la izquierda*' – literally to the left – for that." Since the farms are family-based, the women feel a responsibility to help if needed, as it is contributing towards the household's income. In the case where income is pooled in the household, separate contracts for wives don't appear to be necessary.

Oriol (farm administrator 02.02.04): "I had been thinking in giving a contract to Elena [his wife], but I have to give her money anyway. If she was under contract I would have to pay an extra salary, even when the month on the farm was not good. Extra contracts are '*por gusto*'; the more contracts you have the more problems the farm has."

Elena (family member 23.01.04): "Yes, all my life I have worked, all my life, now is the only time when I am not working, because well, there are more men here. The son of Magali, who is already a man, the son-in-law, yes. But here there are tomatoes that need to be collected and I collect them, when peppers need to be collected I do that, when help is needed with the water hose to water the plants, I do it, because I know how to. When you need to plant something, I know how to do it, because there I used to do it. But now, well I am in the house, and the animals. I am with the cows and I move them to the corral at night and the pigs the same, the chicken and all in the house here."

### 9.13 Summary

This chapter has seen the creation of a topography of a politicised environment. The roles that diverse actors, such as the state, *empresa*, UBPC and NGOs play in the 'moulding' of that environment was explored through the interfaces at the locality/place where representations of spaces are being negotiated and re-shaped by the everyday. The farmers' personal or "everyday" perspectives on those dominant representations are vital for understanding the actual spaces created by enacted discourses. Also, the unconscious everyday actions by farmers and family

members are adopting, re-shaping or even resisting the expected and appropriate norms and codes, as inscribed, for example, in new policy directives and NGO project frameworks. It is also important to note, how underlying issues, such as migration and gender are intimately linked to the power relations that will determine whose meaning will become prominent and lasting. It is this aspect of Lefebvre's work that has influenced my understanding of my fieldwork results: "It would be mistaken in this connection to picture a hierarchical scale stretching between two poles, with the unified will of political power at one extreme and the actual dispersion of differentiated elements at the other. For everything (the 'whole') weighs down on the lower or 'micro' level, on the local and localizable - in short, on the sphere of everyday life. Everything (the 'whole') also *depends* on this level: exploitation and domination, protection and - inseparably - repression" (Lefebvre 1991:366 emphasis in original) (see section 5.7).

# 10. Conclusion

"A lesson must be lived, in order to be learned.  
and the clarity to see ... this now  
that is what I've earned"  
(ani difranco)

## 10.1 Has Cuba gone green? Emerging discourses

I have argued in this thesis that the acclaimed 'new environmentalism' in Cuba has to be understood in terms of its discursive construction of concepts such as organic/agro-ecological/low-input/sustainable agriculture. It is important to note here that the transformation was primarily one of economic necessity rather than an ideological shift at national and ministerial level (see section 6.1 and 6.3). One can observe how in the 1990s a discursive shift occurred in the concepts used. The "organic" for example is increasingly pushed into and identified with the export market sphere, with foreign certification boards working in Cuba and linking to the globalized food system and network of organic growers and consumers. Here, the discursive nature of certification standards, origins and control is directly linked to the international signification of organic production, expressed through standardised and coded norms. The use of "organic" in the early 90s by Cuban groups such as ACAO, however, was not yet linked to certification for international organic markets or norms and standards, but was primarily seen as an alternative to industrialised agriculture, and as a route to continued production during this period of input scarcity (see section 6.7 and 6.8).

The discourse of the 'organic' rests mostly within the academic elite and is validated through declarations that green techniques are based on scientific results and expert knowledges. Agro-ecology is considered expert knowledge and farmers need to be trained by specialists and trained promoters, while local knowledge is not fully valued (see section 9.5). While the state aims to revalidate the 'rural' and the '*campesino*', local producers and farmers are rarely given the platform from which they can actively engage with these discourses, even though they are affected by them in their everyday lives.



Re-visiting the 'Greening of the Revolution', I argue that the prevailing imaginary of a state-led nationwide transformation needs to be deconstructed. While certain changes in dominant agricultural representations by the state have been made, the actual development of what is generally known as organic or agro-ecology lies within what can be termed the NGO sector (see section 6.8). The role of NGOs and, in particular, the Northern NGOs, in the organic development of Cuba, is rarely fully acknowledged – let alone reflected – amongst international organic interest groups. To the outside, Cuba is being presented as a show-case for a state-induced and state-led national conversion. It is hence vital to deconstruct the various actors engaged in the agricultural sector and to explore their use and employment of 'green' concepts that are charged with their differing discursive powers.

## 10.2 Contested spaces for NGOs

The tapping in of Northern NGOs to the romanticist environmental imagery of Cuba's green agriculture has resulted in a framing of agro-ecology according to the needs of 'logframes', budget codes and project cycles. Development aid in the form of projects has been increasing in Cuba since the early 1990s and a vital role is attributed, both by the Cuban state and Northern donors, to NGOs (see section 7.1-7.3). The involvement of Northern NGOs in Cuban agriculture, however, implies the shaping of environmental ideas through the typical NGO speak and tools. Amorphous terms like 'sustainable agriculture and development' are becoming increasingly dominant discourses and often replace the Cuban concepts of organic, agro-ecology and low-input agriculture (see section 6.7). This implies a discursive setting of sustainability within global institutionalised civil society in the form of NGOs. The sustainable development speak largely remains outside the state sector, drawing up new binaries and creating specific institutional powers resting within the NGO spaces that are emerging and growing as Cuba opens to international cooperation.

It has thus been particularly important to explore the interface between Northern and Cuban NGOs. The particular conceptualisations of civil society in the West and in Cuba play a vital role in the understanding and execution of NGO identity and agency. The growing linkages between Northern and Cuban NGOs has resulted in a re-shaping and positioning of Cuban institutions to follow the Western perceptions of NGO characteristics (see section 7.6, 8.4). The focus herein lies in

the relation – or lack of relation – to the Cuban state (see section 8.5). Many Northern NGOs consider the Cuban state as problematic and wish to engage as little as possible with it. These NGOs prefer to work with institutions disassociating themselves from the state as far as that is possible. Other Northern NGOs are less concerned about the actual identity of the organization, but work with what they consider to be institutions that do 'interesting work'. In both cases the issues of expert knowledge, power relations and agenda setting are important and new dependencies are created that are at large not admitted either by the Cuban or the Northern NGO sector (see section 7.4 and 8.4). The exploration of interfaces has allowed me to unpack an array of important issues that are being negotiated and performed in the everyday.

### 10.3 The everyday of agricultural spaces

Having drawn on Lefebvre's conceptualization of representational spaces or lived spaces I introduced the routines and practices of the farmers in a selected cooperative. These farmers are performing, negotiating or at times resisting the dominant 'representations of space' – i.e. the state, regulations and policies, as well as NGO discourses and frameworks (see section 9.3, 9.5 and 9.6). Whether representations of space originate in an 'insider's' lived experience or are conceived through an 'outsider's' reading (e.g. NGOs and state employees), such representations are intimately linked to representational space – the lived spaces - in a socio-spatial dialectic (see section 5.7). Whose meanings will become prominent and lasting will depend on the power relations and the political, economic and social processes in which such representations are ultimately embedded. Lefebvre's trialectic of space was thus a useful tool to explore the contested meanings, ideas and representations in the struggle for creating 'organic' spaces.

The recent formation of UBPCs triggered diverse negotiations aimed at controlling access to resources at individual, household and cooperative level. Contradictory spaces have resulted from these policy shifts that both favour and hinder the farmers' development and ability to make a living. There are dominant representations by the state, new laws and NGO projects cast upon the UBPC, all claiming territory for their imaginaries (see section 9.2 and 9.3). The resulting interfaces are thus multiple and range from the family to other cooperative members, to the *empresa*, state and NGOs. The farmer needs to negotiate his/her

space at the various interfaces that exist. He/she adopts and co-opts where necessary and useful – and negotiates and resists where essential and possible through actions and non-actions in the everyday. The spatial practices of those that go about the everyday consciously use space in a contradictory manner to the prevailing dominant representations. Black-market fertilizer use is a good example (see section 9.3). Many also unconsciously subvert the prescribed uses of space merely through being there or acting in ways 'inappropriate' to the prescribed codes.

### 10.5 Where was gender?

National agricultural policies in Cuba are remarkable for their silences on gender. In the latest cooperativisation move, considerations of gender issues are not part of either the rural imaginary or of the agricultural policies suggested and implemented (see section 6.6). Policies such as the promotion of settlement in rural areas do not take into account the less densely provided infrastructure to meet reproductive tasks, which continue to remain the responsibility of women. Women moving away from urbanized centres to farm the land with their husbands rarely make the decision to move and often lose the reproductive infrastructure previously available in urban centres (see section 9.9). No understanding of these implications and their consequent buffering through appropriate policies has developed. This is due to the persistent notion that addressing gender is sufficiently accomplished through the incorporation of women into the workforce alone. This specific conceptualization resonates in reports where the relatively high proportion of women working in urban agriculture is celebrated. Specific spaces of employment for women are identified amongst the agro-ecological methods being promoted, but these are equally based on the discourse of labour incorporation. These spaces closely reflect the gendered norms of what is considered women's work and are being performed in the everyday (see section 5.9 and 9.11).

Gender mainstreaming is now increasingly being discussed amongst NGO staff and many Cuban NGOs are willing to present gender as a cross-cutting theme throughout their project activities. This is essentially an outsider-driven development, as donors and Northern NGOs have requested the integration of gender mainstreaming into projects (see section 7.10). Through workshops that are mainly held by foreign consultants, gender issues are introduced and passed on to Cuban NGO staff. Since the FMC is considered by many Northern NGOs too close to the

state for comfort, they are usually not part of these workshops, despite the FMC's claim to have an authority on gender matters. For courtesy reasons, the FMC is involved marginally during the implementation phase of projects on the ground. The FMC is, however, not considered important by community members – as for example in the cooperative life of '26 de Julio'. The interfaces that are negotiated in the everyday are strongly gendered, whereby some spaces are only available to men or women (see section 9.10). Due to issues of access as well as the broad scope of this thesis, I have not been able to explore many aspects of women agency, especially within the household. I have rendered them visible only within the work-sphere, rather than being able to also include the private and political space of women (see section 2.9 and 4.6.4). Nonetheless, my findings offer pointers to likely broader patterns.

## 10.6 Signposts and weathervanes

I see my work as a small contribution to a number of literatures (e.g. political ecology, Cuban studies, development and NGOs as well as gender), as a result of the way the research process developed, rather than making a major contribution to any of these. This thesis, rather, draws its strength from the use and the application of Lefebvre's trialectics of space. I have used his concepts as a lens through which to explore the field. In particular, his understanding of the production of space allowed a close analysis of linkages between hegemonic discourses on 'organic' agriculture (see section 6.1, 6.3 and 6.7) and the actual conceptualisations of local practices by the farmers themselves in the everyday (see section 9.5 and 9.6). My research suggests that Lefebvre's understanding of space can be a valuable tool for political ecology because it helps unpick the imaginaries, discourses and environmental practices grounded in the social relations of production and their attendant struggles in the everyday. In the Cuban polity, it was important to unravel the spaces of NGO involvement in the emerging discourses as well as the imaginaries. This thesis thus also positions itself within the recent NGO/civil society debates that are held within the development scene and has added yet another small mosaic to the understanding of those interfaces for the case of Cuba. In the light of an increasing neo-liberal understanding of NGOs as prime agents of civil society (as propagated by the World Bank and followers - see section 5.1 and 5.2), this thesis provides evidence that urges a thorough reflection on the ways and

means of international cooperation. Cuba seems on the verge of buying into Northern NGO agendas and is in danger of being relegated to the status of any developing nation in need of Northern aid money and project logframes. This thesis thus unpicks the political and ideological baggage that often is attached to aid money, resulting in shifting power balances and new dependencies. The thesis has offered a detailed analysis of these new 'marriages' opening up the 'emerging civil society' debate' that is being held with respect to Cuba (see section 5.2 and 7.3).

While numerous accounts exist regarding Cuba's acclaimed sustainable agriculture, this thesis has hopefully contributed to a fuller understanding of the actors involved and a more nuanced perspective of the achievements and deficiencies in that process. Re-visiting the scene and drawing attention to the actors (including their respective power positions e.g. the case of ACAO, see section 6.8) allows a new perspective on Cuba's 'organic' development that has not been explored before. It is also one that will sit uneasily with the international organic interests groups that had been responsible for the international fame Cuba's agricultural turn had achieved (see section 6.7).

My work offers a detailed analysis, locating the emerging discourse and pointing to the creation of contradictory spaces. The opportunity to draw on thick descriptions provided by the case-study enables me to localize processes, to involve the farmer's perspective and to gain insights on negotiations and processes on the ground amidst the dominant representations of space. This aspect may be particularly valuable to the research community working on Cuba, as I had been exceptionally lucky (for reasons none of my own; see section 2.2) in having had access to institutions such as the cooperative, that most international students or researchers are unable to obtain.

## 10.7 Reflections

*It was going to be my last day in Cuba, the flight back to Europe was leaving the same night and I made my final trip to the cooperative. This time I was not only equipped with my note-book, pens, camera and flip charts as on my numerous previous visits, but I was carrying my workshop outline and the paper slips with questions for discussion for each group. After having participated in various workshops, this was going to be my workshop, where I had the opportunity to present my preliminary results from the work in the cooperative, to discuss with the*

*participants and to raise issues that I thought were important to the people in the cooperative, judging from all the conversations we had had. In my mind I was racing over the issues I had learned in the cooperative as well as the interviews held in La Habana, and over the uncertainties that remained. How would I deal with the invisibility of women outside the work-sphere? Would the information I gathered be suitable and sufficient to answer the research questions that I had developed in the field (see section 1.1 and 1.2, also 2.2)? That is, how have dominant representations of agricultural space been created through government institutions, public policy and their respective discursive powers and what role do Cuban and Northern NGOs play in the conceptualisation of those new and 'green' environmental spaces? What implications do the politics and actions of Northern NGOs and donors have for Northern NGO-Cuban NGO relations and NGO-state relations in terms of dependencies and power (im)balances? Where and how does gender feature in the production of these new NGO-generated discourses? What does this emerging NGO activity imply for human agency and livelihoods in the everyday? How do farmers engage, re-shape and resist the dominant spaces of 'organic' agriculture?*

*Not only was I racing over the fieldwork in my mind, I was also anxious about the turn-out and process of the work-shop. Would people come? Would they agree to my preliminary results and discuss them critically? The faces of individuals passed my inner eye as I saw the view from the administrative building over the reservoir and I knew that I would be sad to leave. This day was not going to be like any of the previous days - albeit without wanting to suggest that they had all been the same, far from it! But this time, I left Vedado<sup>1</sup> with my supervisor and her husband in my car, a big colourful cake for the short leaving do resting on her lap. Prior to our arrival at the administration building, Ramona had already greeted us at her house with a 'cafesito', a small ritual of hospitality and friendship. Shortly after our arrival, the UBPC owned lorry arrived. It had been recently repaired and was now in working condition. While the lorry is mainly used for carrying produce it also often serves as passenger transport within the cooperative for bringing people to meetings and workshops. And indeed today various cooperative members - friends - climbed down, to my amazement and joy. A big 'hello' started, voices chatting from all sides and kisses on the cheeks were floating about. I was curious to see how many of the cooperative members and non-members that I had spent time with during my stay in the cooperative would come to the workshop. How many women,*

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<sup>1</sup> A municipality of the Ciudad de la Habana, close to the historic centre

*who usually do not participate in workshops (since normally only farm administrators are invited see section 9.4) would have the time amongst all their regular duties in work and household to come and participate? In the end I was positively surprised and emotionally touched at how many (12 in total) made the effort to come, maybe even against their husband's wishes? I also wondered how many 'outsiders', such as the FMC delegate, empresa staff and NGO employees would come, presenting their respective discourses.*

*The workshop went well, with active discussions and women talking and even presenting results for the first time in their cooperative life. If I had claimed wanting to work transformatively (see section 2.4), the workshop might have meant a small achievement in that direction, nothing more than a small, but important step. Later that day I left the cooperative, stopped in Vedado and made for the airport with the workshop flip charts rolled up and tucked under my arm. They are the visible and material outcomes of my last day in the cooperative and Cuba. The numerous impressions and emotions generated by leaving were not as visible, but very powerful. I was leaving and heading for having to produce my contribution to the academic world.*

Some acknowledge the fact that one never really leaves the field, certainly not psychologically. However, in almost all research cases, one actually does at least physically leave the field, step on a plane and find oneself sitting at one's desk in an academic institution again. While you should ideally leave when you feel that you can no longer gain more information (for the time being), for most cases, external factors determine the end of fieldwork (Letkemann 1980 in Kindon and Cupples 2003, Esterberg 2002 see section 2.6). I had to leave Cuba on the 28<sup>th</sup> March, as my student visa was expiring. A renewal would have been very difficult to negotiate, as I had already spent an unusually long period in Cuba for a student not fully enrolled in a Cuban degree programme. I was leaving a particular geographical space with which I had become familiar and also leaving distinct social spaces and relationships in which I had performed particular identities over the course of 10 months (see section 2.6). Maines et al. (1980 in Kindon and Cupples 2003) acknowledge that leaving the field plays a dramatic part in shaping our experiences and understandings and we often remain psychologically and emotionally connected to the field. I was aware of dates for the next EU-NGO meetings in La Habana, and lamented the fact I could not be present, as surely these were going to be the most interesting yet. There was also another general assembly of the cooperative around

the corner and it was taken for granted that I would be present if I was still 'around'. I no longer was. I had prepared my departure but it had not been an internalized process.

Leaving felt like a de-linking, a stepping out of the network and the field that had been constructed with me and around me in order to (re)-enter the academic networks in my home institution in Durham. I would (re)-engage with my materials brought back from fieldwork to start the process of conceptual knowledge production through distancing, analysis and presenting.

*I couldn't help thinking in the plane, whether I would have done things differently if I could turn back time. Would I have made the same steps, mistakes, progress and I realized that I had little choice of having done things differently. Things turned out as they did, but I nevertheless indulged in thinking, but what if...*

Since I have argued in section 2.2 that fieldwork was composed of chance encounters and serendipity and myself not more than a puppet on stage, there are numerous issues I wish had gone differently. In retrospect I would revise my drawing board research plan, despite knowing of the likelihood of serendipity. Having arrived in Cuba with one set of questions and having left with a revised, different set of questions (see section 1.1) implies that arrangements made, interviews scheduled and focus institutions had shifted. Hence, for exploring the issues I ended up doing, I would have chosen a different institutional affiliation, one that works more closely in my research field, as access might then have been facilitated much better. I would have aimed to work as an intern in a Northern NGO in Cuba prior to fieldwork, in order to experience more closely the practices, language and agency employed. This would have provided contacts, but also time to choose and select the appropriate Cuban institution and tutor to work with, as well as allowing me to fine-tune the research questions. I would have tried - or is this part of what needs to be done next? - to schedule time to interview those Northern NGOs working in Cuba, which do not have any representation in the country. This would provide evidence for a comparative study on imaginaries created from 'afar' and those that get re-negotiated by acting and being in-country. I would have sampled NGOs from different 'backgrounds' and ideological underpinnings and zoomed in on the Cuban NGO-Northern NGO relations looking for aspects of proliferation and resistance. Were it possible, I would suggest a comparative case-study in three cooperatives



<sup>2</sup>that operate NGO projects with different Cuban counterparts and one that does not receive any aid through project mechanisms (see section 2.9). I would hope to spend more time in the co-operatives, and I would try, even if that is currently not possible in the Cuban polity, to live with a farming family and explore issues pertinent within the household in order to be able to do justice to feminist research (see section 2.9).

Nonetheless, I have presented many aspects of Cuba's multi-faceted realities and outlined my understandings that have emerged from my research journey. During the fieldwork I understood myself as being part of a network (see section 2.2). The return to the academic desk to translate the 'lived' and 'performed' into systems of knowledge, is encumbered with specific power positions. The necessity to deduct and construct the 'one – academically accepted – narrative' reduces the ability to present multiple truths, which had been performed during the extensive conversation in the field. While I exercise the power in constructing the narrative, the text once again becomes subject to other power structures, that result from the (geo)political and ideological battles that surround Cuba. The readership will impose their 'situated' readings onto this thesis, which lie beyond my control. In this spirit, I would like to place this thesis into your hands, as the reader, and subject it to the comprehension and interpretation of others.

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<sup>2</sup> I had planned to work in three cooperatives, but the obstacles proved too great (see section 2.2)

# Appendix I

## List of interviews

For reasons of confidentiality, I do not wish to supply a more detailed list of names and institutional affiliation of interviewees. The following table gives a distribution of the institutional contexts in which interviews were conducted. (It includes some follow-up interviews with the same key-informant.) The categories below are not mutually exclusive and an interviewee could have fitted into more than one of the institutional categories. They were however classified according to the primary involvement of the interviewee. This implies that a religious NGO for example such as DECAP was classified under NGO rather than church. I also want to stress yet again the fact that the categorical distinction between narrative interview, what I would polemically call conversation, and interview is a porous one, so that the following table can only be an estimate based on a somewhat arbitrary cut-off point as to what constitutes an interview and what was just a mere conversation.

Number of interviews	Institutional affiliation
14	State (ministry, state research institution)
5	University
16	International NGOs
26	Cuban NGO
8	Donors
2	Church
65	Producers
4	Empresa/markets

# Appendix II

## Ministry of Agriculture chart

circulated to planning staff (reprinted in Rosset and Benjamin 1994a:31)

Classical Model	Alternative model
<p>external dependence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ of the country on other countries</li> <li>➤ of the provinces on the country</li> <li>➤ of localities on the province and the country</li> </ul> <p>cutting edge technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ imported raw materials for animal feed</li> <li>➤ widespread utilisation of chemical pesticides and fertilisers</li> <li>➤ utilisation of modern irrigation systems</li> <li>➤ consumption of fuel and lubricants</li> </ul> <p>Tight relationship between bank credit and production; high interest rates</p> <p>Priority given to mechanisation as a production technology</p> <p>Introduction of new crops at the expense of autochthonous crops and production systems</p> <p>Search for efficiency through intensification and mechanisation</p>	<p>Maximum advantage taken of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ the land</li> <li>➤ human resources of the zone or locality</li> <li>➤ broad community participation</li> <li>➤ cutting edge technology, but appropriate to zone where used</li> <li>➤ organic fertilisers and crop rotation</li> <li>➤ biological control of pests</li> <li>➤ biological cycles and seasonality of crops and animals</li> <li>➤ natural energy sources</li> <li>➤ animal traction</li> <li>➤ rational use of pastures and forage for both grazing and feedlots, search for locally supplied animal nutrition</li> </ul> <p>Diversification of crops and autochthonous production systems based on accumulated knowledge</p> <p>Introduction of scientific practices that correspond to the particulars of each zone, new varieties of crops and animals, planting densities, seed treatments, post-harvest storage etc.</p>

<p>Real possibility of investing in production and commercialisation</p> <p>Accelerated rural exodus</p> <p>Satisfying ever-increasing needs has ever more ecological or environmental consequences, such as soil erosion, salinization, waterlogging etc.</p>	<p>Preservation of the environment and the ecosystem</p> <p>Need for systematic training</p> <p>Systematic technical assistance</p> <p>Promote co-operation among producers, within and between communities</p> <p>Obstacles to overcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ difficulties in the commercialisation of</li> <li>➤ agricultural products because of the number of intermediaries</li> <li>➤ control over the market</li> <li>➤ poverty among the peasantry</li> <li>➤ distances to markets and urban centres (lack of sufficient roads and means of transport)</li> <li>➤ illiteracy</li> </ul>
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# Appendix III

## Northern NGOs supporting projects in Cuba

AAA Agro Acción Alemán	Dreikonigsaktion	OXFAM América
ACDI-Canada	Erikshjälpen	Oxfam Canada
AIL Bia	Ecopolis Italia	Oxfam Solidarite Belgica
APN	Entrepueblos-España	Pan para el Mundo
APS italia	FFEM Francia	Pact Arim Italia
ARCI/ARCS Italia	Fundação Gulbenkian	Progetto Continenti Italia
Arquidiócesis de Boston	Fundación Panamericana para el desarrollo	Progetto Sviluppo italia
Asamblea de la Paz	GRET Francia	Save the Children-UK
Asociación Evangélica de Cooperación al desarrollo	GVC Italia	Soberana Orden Militar de Malta
Austria-Cuban Society	Handicap International	Tearfund
Book Aid International	Iglesia Unida y Anglicana de Canada	Solidarity Cuba-Si
CAFOD	Institute of Latin America	UNICEF UK
Care Canada	Inter Church Action (Canada)	UK Sports and the British International Sports Development Aid Trust (BISDAT)
Care France	International Planned Parenthood Federation	Villes en transition France
Care International	KATE	VIS Italia
Caritas Alemania	Kirkens Nødhjelp (Ayuda de las Iglesias de Noruega)	WWF Canada
Caritas Espana	Latinamerika Helsefond	World Vision UK
Caritas Internacional	Lifecycles	
Caritas Italia	Landsorganisasjonen i	

	Norge (Sindicato Nacional de Noruega)	
Caritas Mallorca	MAIS	
Caritas varios	MDL Italia	
Catholic charities-Miami	Médicos sin Fronteras-Países Bajos	
Catholic Relief Service	Médicos sin Fronteras-España	
CIC Bota	Medicuba Finlandia	
CIES Italia	MISEREOR-Campaign Against Hunger And disease	
CISS Italia	MLAL Italia	
CISP-Italia	MONIMBO	
Coalición de Agencias de Canadá	Nexus Italia	
Conferencia Episcopal Italiana	Novarra Nuovo Futuro	
Consejo de Iglesias de Canadá	Oikos	
CRIC Italia	ORBIS UK	
Cruz Roja-Austria (ORK)		
Cruz Roja France		

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