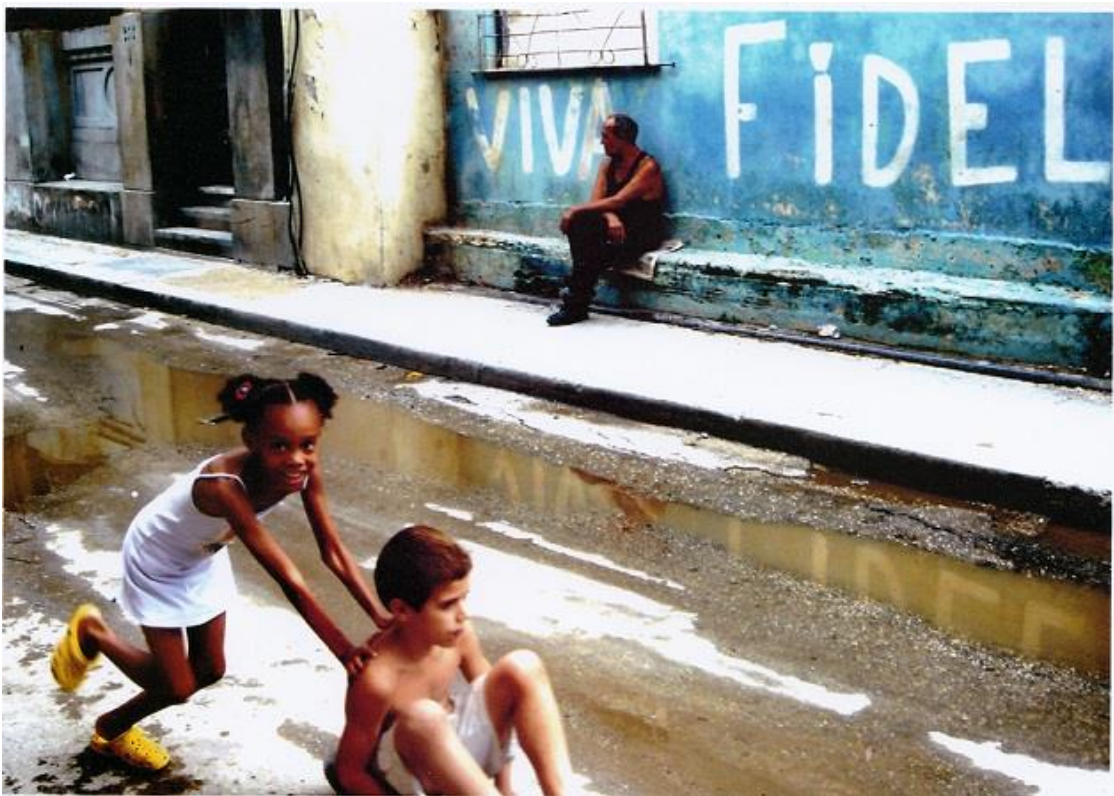


# The roots of change

A case study of how artists, as part of civil society, contribute to democratization in Havana



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# **The Roots of Change**

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contribute to democratization in Havana

Master's thesis

Sophie de Jonge

The photo on the cover page is made by a Cuban photographer who I met in Havana. For me this photo displays two of the images that struck me most while doing fieldwork in Havana. The first one is the one of the superficial cheerfulness. The playing children in the photo display the surface of Havana: the travel brochure image. For tourists things look bright, cheerful and happy in Havana: there is music in the streets, a blue sunny sky, and people dance and laugh. What tourists will not see is that the once so beautiful Havana has turned into a ruin, Cubans are penniless and struggling to survive, they have lost faith in their failed government and Castro's ideology. Still the government desperately forces Cubans to live according to the rules of their revolution. Repression is not shunned to protect the power and ideology of the government. The decayed wall with faded exclamation and the poor man illustrate this pensive situation.

However, I chose this picture as cover photo as it also stands for the hope that things can change in Cuba. In Havana this hope is personified by artists and other Cubans who aim to contribute to democratization in Cuba. The image of the playing children who make the best out of it with the means of their disposal in the photo is a metaphor for these artists and their optimism, cheerfulness, and assertiveness which I encountered in Havana. While their compatriots look for ways to leave Cuba or have reconciled themselves with the miserable situation they are in, artists are determined to stay in Cuba to transform Cuba into a better place in which human rights are respected by means of their protest art.

## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses the relation between artists as part of civil society and democratization in Havana. Artist in Havana contribute to democratisation by means of different forms of protest art, such as: documentaries, festivals, hip-hop, graffiti, paintings, photos and films. The way in which these forms of protest art contribute to democratization strongly relates to the totalitarian context in which Cubans have lived for almost 55 years. After years of repression, repression became ingrained in society and the hearts and minds of Cubans. They became paranoia frightened and apathetic. To contribute to democratization the focus of artists in Havana lies eliminating this self-repression.

Keywords: Cuba, Havana, democratization, civil society, artists, repression, self-repression, totalitarianism, protest art

## Maps

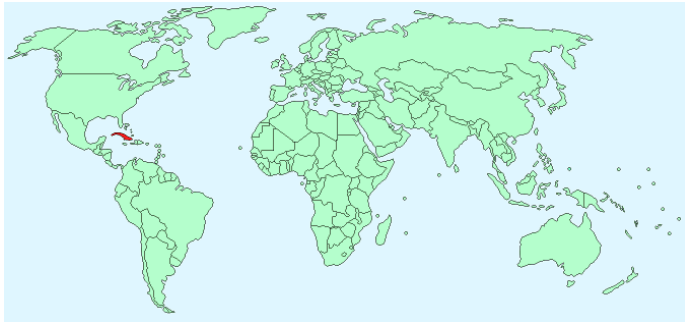


Image 1. Map of the world with Cuba highlighted in Red. Source: worldatlas.com



Image 2. Map of Cuba. Source: worldatlas.com



Image 3. Map of Havana. Source: casahavanaparticular.com



## Preface

I decided to write my thesis about civil society and democratization in Cuba after the newspapers in September 2013 declared that democratisation was taking place in Cuba. Some rules changed by Raúl Castro seemed to have triggered these enthusiastic broadcasts of the international media. The abolition of the white card - an almost unobtainable paper that Cubans need to leave the country- was the most essential cause for international hope for democracy in Cuba. Questions came to my mind: was democratization really taking place in Cuba by means of these rules that were instituted by the top? Did Cubans really perceive this new legislation as something that affected their lives? And what does democratization exactly mean?

At the same time Yoani Sanchez a Cuban blogger who expresses her criticism of the Cuban government in her blogs became famous worldwide. Her blogs and the repression with which her criticism was met, demonstrated that Cuba was far from being democratic. Yoani's blogs made me aware of a process of democratization that was generated at the grassroots: the Cubans themselves. This was extremely interesting to me. While the media predicted that democratization was going to take place after a democratic legislation was established, for me it seemed more valuable to look at the process of democratization from a grass roots angle by focusing on the "demos", or Cubans themselves. Once my fieldwork in Cuba commenced, I met a small group of artists who were so inspiring, and enthusiastic to talk with me, that I decided to focus my case study on them. The results of two months of fieldwork in Havana can be read in this thesis.

Although writing this thesis was a solitary process, I would never have accomplished without the help of a number of people to whom I am very grateful. First of all, I am specially grateful to my Cuban friends – whose names I will not mention out of fear for reprisal - who were so helpful during my fieldwork in Havana. I would like to express my admiration for the work of the artists and other Cubans who are determined to improve the quality of lives of their compatriots. I am thankful to my supervisor Mathijs van Leeuwen for his advice, support and patience. Thank you also Patty Claassens for thinking along during meetings.

I am thankful to my parents who have supported me during my studies and for thinking along enthusiastically during my fieldwork in Havana. I owe a great debt to my mother who has casted her discerning eye over the text.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Civil society and democratization in Havana*

*'Cuban graffiti artist and government critic, Nilo Maldonado<sup>1</sup>, "El Sexto" was taken this morning by security forces from his home, together with his laptop, art materials, and artwork. No one has heard of him since, no charges have been made public. Nilo is a good, peaceful and honest man who has never used violence, only art, to express his discontent with the government. This abuse has to stop.'*<sup>2</sup>

This is the message I read on a Cuban/Dutch network webpage when I am back in Holland ten days after my fieldwork in Havana has ended. The message demonstrates how dangerous the work of critical artists in Havana can be, as well as how necessary their actions are: with their art they aim to eliminate exactly this repression. In other words: with their art they aim to contribute to democratization. Democratization in this context means: 'The increase of the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to citizens' expressed demands' (Tilly, 2001). In this thesis I will explore how artists, as part of civil society, contribute to democratization in Havana.

An extensive amount of theories on how civil society contributes to democratization exists. I focus on the role of civil society as a platform through which criticism of the government is expressed. Civil society could also encourage others to adopt a critical attitude. By means of expressing criticism, and encouraging other to do the same, civil society is able to contribute to democratization. I will explore the roles of civil society by focusing on artists who aim to contribute to democratization through their art.

Although civil society is ought to be essential to democratization, civil society is a problematic concept within Cuba's totalitarian context. According to Heydebrand (1998) is 'the goal of a totalitarian state total political coordination and control. This refers not only to the abolition of democratic institutions such as competing political parties, a multi-party or pluralistic parliament, the protection of individual civil and human rights, the separation of powers and the judicial review of constitutionality of governmental and administrative decisions, and a free press. Totalitarian control also implies systematic propaganda, a secret police apparatus, political control of information and of processes of socialization and education, and, of course, the un-appealable repression of deviance, critique, and opposition.'

As expressing criticism is exactly the way in which civil society contributes to democratization, not only actions but even the existence of a civil society is problematic in Cuba. The repressive context leaves little space for an autonomous sphere in which actors are able to

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<sup>1</sup> Names are fictitious for privacy reasons

<sup>2</sup> Informatiecuba.wordpress.com, accessed on 27 august 2013



criticise the government. Immediately the question pops up: how does civil society in Havana contribute to democratization in this repressive context in which little space to express criticism exists? This leads me to the main question and the sub-questions of this thesis:

### **How do artists, as part of civil society, contribute to democratization in Havana?**

- What is the relation between civil society and democracy?
- How does the repressive totalitarian government curbs civil society in Havana?
- Which initiatives have been taken by artists in Havana to contribute to democratization?

This thesis is the result of fieldwork and a literature study. I have conducted fieldwork in Havana in April and May 2013. Here I undertook qualitative research - participant observation and interviews - to collect data. In this thesis I will zoom in on literature as well as my collected data to answer the questions.

My research objective is to convey the relation between artists, as part of civil society, and democratization in Havana. Many auteurs have discussed the role of civil society in democratization. The scientific objective is that with my thesis, I attempt to provide new insights on how artists, as part of civil society, are able to contribute to democratization. The repressive context is one particular aspect of my focus. As I mentioned, the totalitarian context in which civil society moves is problematic for civil society. Cuba is a socialist totalitarian state governed by a single communist party. Authoritarian control over the smallest details of the nation-state is one of its tenets. How does civil society in Havana contribute to democratization in this repressive context? This conclusion might contribute also to a more general debate on civil society in a repressive context.

The exploration of the role of artists within a process of democratization might also add to this debate. What exactly is their role as part of civil society within democratization? I hope to contribute to the debate on how civil society is able to contribute to democratization by focusing on the abilities of artists within this process.

Focusing on the context and on artists is also essential as by understanding how they are able to contribute to democratization, they – and their efforts - can be strengthened by international organizations and governments. This objective also embodies a societal relevant objective. The Cuban Commission for Human rights and National Reconciliation reported in August 2013; 547 detentions for political reasons of Cubans. Another 337 dissidents were harassed and threatened by the police.<sup>3</sup> This is an indication of how problematic the context for

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/cuba>, accessed on 23-9-2013

civil society is. International organizations and governments could look for a way to protect critical artists against Cuban authorities. Herewith, international organizations and governments could strengthen efforts of artists to democratize Cuba. Therefore, international help can improve the quality of lives of artists as well as the lives of the rest of Cuban society.

To describe the outline of this thesis: I will first elaborate on the theoretical framework in chapter two. Here I will focus on definitions of civil society and democratization and the relation between these concepts. In the second section of this chapter, theories on artists within repressive contexts are discussed. In chapter three I will shortly discuss the failure of a famous civil society action to demonstrate how civil society is curbed by totalitarianism. I also emphasise that this repressive context is not static but has changed over time. The methodology and the limitations of doing fieldwork in a repressive context are discussed in chapter four. In chapter five the repressive context in which civil society operates in Havana is outlined. In this chapter I will demonstrate how civil society is constrained by this repressive context. In chapter six I discuss the initiatives taken by artists in Havana who aim to contribute to democratization with their art. Chapter seven is the conclusion of this thesis in which I will answer the main question and discuss the research objective, and societal and scientific relevance.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical framework**

### *The relation between civil society, artists and democratization*

In this chapter, I will define civil society and democratization and their relation. In the second section I will zoom in on the role of artists within repressive contexts.

#### *2.1 Defining civil society and democratization*

Hirst (1997:103) mentions that civil society is ‘frequently thought of as a private sphere composed of individuals and their associations – as a spontaneous order that should be independent of the state in a democratic country.’ Larry Diamond (1994:5) states: ‘Civil society is the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-generating, largely self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.’ The notion I would like to derive from these definitions is that civil society is a: ‘private, independent, or autonomous sphere; a realm independent from the government.’ Although the term civil society is often associated with organisations and associations, instead I focus on individuals. Focussing on individuals as part of civil society is less complicated than a study of the controversial independent organisations in Cuba. Formation of organisations and associations independent from the Cuban State is prohibited by Cuban Law and Cuba’s ‘hostile context of restricted freedom makes it hard for associations to flourish’ (Corrales, 2005). The extensive variety of associations and organisations that do exist in Cuba are part of the government and therefore do not qualify as independent organisations that exist in the autonomous sphere. I will instead focus on individuals. Or more specifically: artists, who express criticism of the government with their art. In the second section of this chapter I will outline in which way artists can be vital for democratization.

What does democratization mean? I would like to stress that democratization for citizens in Havana means: the elimination of restrictions on their human rights and freedoms. For them democratization does not mean a change towards free elections, it rather includes a changes towards a state in which their human rights are respected. Democratization for citizens of Havana means thus above all a transformation of the political culture, not the political system.

To clarify the notion of democratization I adopt Tilly’s (2001) definition of democratization.<sup>4</sup> This notion begins with definitions of the state and its citizens: ‘The state is viewed as an organization that controls the major concentration of coercive means within a substantial territory. Everyone who lives under the state’s jurisdiction are: ‘citizens’. Democracy

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<sup>4</sup> This notion resembles the perception of my participants on democratization.

will then turn out to be a certain class of relations between states and citizens. Democratization will consist of changes in those sorts of relations.' Tilly assesses the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to the expressed demands of its citizens to judge the degree of democracy. Simply put: gauging democratization, the extent to which that conformity is increasing should be assessed. Democratization thus means the increase of the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to the expressed demands of its citizens

## *2.2 The relation between civil society and democratization*

In this section I will review some of the theories on the relation between civil society and democratization. How does civil society increase the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to the expressed demands of its citizens?

First of all, these demands must be known by the government. Many experts have argued that civil society contributes to democratization as it provides an alternative way to criticise the government. Eckstein (1994:10) argues: 'The practice of democratic centralism in Cuba decrees that the communist party is the only legitimate political party allowed in the state, giving that party an effective monopoly on power. As government restrictions prevent Cuban citizens from openly disagreeing with state policies, informal dissent (as he calls civil society) is often the only avenue available.' Habermas (1992:443) argues that civil society is able to promote democratization as it articulates public interests, or detects social problems and convey these interests and problems to the polity: civil society finds, takes up, condenses and amplifies the resonance of social problems in private life, and passes it on to the political realm or public sphere.'

Corrales (2005) argues that this alternative way to express dissatisfaction and criticism of the government, changes citizenship. He explains that civil society changes citizenship and therefore contributes to democratization. He applies the voice-and-exit-scheme throughout his analysis on civil society in Cuba. In this scheme two reactions to dissatisfaction are described. "Exit" means leaving the country and "voice" means protesting. As protesting in socialist Cuba generates great personal danger, many Cubans use the exit strategy and decide to leave Cuba. However, these strategies are costly and dangerous. Civil society therefore, forms an alternative way to express dissatisfaction of the government. Civil society is helping to 'change what it means to be a citizen.' Therefore, civil society according to Corrales creates a new model of citizenship - individuals become more willing to express themselves and to develop strategies to change the status quo.

To conclude, through civil society an alternative way of expressing criticism is found. By expressing criticism citizenship can be transformed. Zooming in on artists, as part of civil

society, and their abilities in repressive contexts might shed more light upon these notions.

### *2.3 The importance of art within a repressive context*

Now that I have discussed how civil society contributes to democratization in general, I will zoom in the question how artists are able to contribute to democratization by means of their art. Alice Guillermo (2001) defines these forms of art as *protest art*. 'Protest art sets itself against the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions. It is an art that is primarily one of exposure, showing striking images of the inequitable, unjust, and inhuman conditions in which people live. On the first level, protest art, which is often related to particular issues, may deal with current social issues in the form of sociopolitical commentary. Secondly, it may react against a particular government, which it perceives to be the main cause of the deplorable social conditions.'

There are different roles assumed by art as well as diverse artistic strategies artists employ in a dictatorial government (Preda, 2012). By elaborating on notions of authors who have investigated the possibilities of artists under authoritarian governments in Romania and Chile and Brazil, the possibilities to make a change towards democracy through art are discussed.

#### *2.3.1 Art as a safe-haven to express direct and indirect criticism*

Art can be critical of the dictatorship both in a direct way, through its message, and indirectly through its form or its disguised message. On one hand the artist confronts the political power and decries repression and oppression and states it directly, in an easy to grasp language and format. On the other hand, the artist tackles the political by a disguised critique using symbols and an encrypted idiom based on his/her dialogue with a limited public (Preda, 2012).

Moreover, art might be the first, safe, place to express criticism. 'The artistic practice is transformed, for thousands of persons in a basic form of expression, of saying what they cannot express in other languages' (Rivera, 1983:109). In Chile art served as a means of expression in a space where communication was forbidden by the authorities. 'Art was without a doubt the first expression that emerged from groups that opposed the authoritarian order. The artistic was in a first moment one of the few alternative discourses to the official one that could be emitted as the political discourse is excluded.' Dragomir adds: 'confronted with living in dictatorships, besides exile, Romanians as Chileans had a solution "in-xile" that is to take refuge inside the country but in a self-designed reality populated by fictional characters found in literature, theatre, films and music. Art functions as a refuge or even a new political space. Art is then a characteristic common to authoritarian governments: art assumes the function of political and acts as a "substitute for politics" or as a "substitutive public opinion"' (Dragomir, 2007:213). When

getting together for political purposes was forbidden, artistic expressions came to play partially a substitutive role.

The public played a paramount role in the assembly of the artwork as it participated to its interpretation and as only by this reception did this find its final form. 'A new literature that grants to the reader the role of accomplice of the author in the deciphering of the text through the reading through the lines'. This characterized all the literary spaces in Eastern Europe and that characterizes all literatures written under dictatorships. Art forms thus a replacing arena for the forbidden political one. Art established a sense of community with the public in an alternative space where the political power cannot intervene – imagination (Dragomir, 2007:187).

### *2.3.2 Art demonstrates the alternative*

'Art offers alternatives by the mere fact that it shows that other worlds and points of view are possible' (Whitebrook, 1992:7). Art as a critical reflection states that art, by its intrinsic autonomy, can also accomplish a critique of its environment. In Rumania art forms a way to escape – through the means of evocation of another space opposed to the officialised reality. Art in dictatorships is then a means to deconstruct the officially constructed reality. This is perhaps the perceived danger the dictatorships detect as, 'art visibly constructs realities and so demonstrates how easily that can be done' (Edelman, 1995:68). Art as a critical reflection evokes those approaches that seek to convey an alternative discourse by the detour, twist of the phrase, image or sound. This includes the direct opposition confrontation (resistance), as well as the subversion of the official channels through self-publishing, and underground culture. 'Without doubt artists and intellectuals have always been in an advantageous and privileged position to chronicle events, preserve the collective memory, perform the role of teacher and seer, and become social critics' (Negash, 2001:191).

### *2.3.3. Art changes citizenship*

Art is able to change citizenship as it makes spectators aware of their violated human rights and encourages them to become active, instead of remaining passive. Carlos Ochsenius (1991:197) argues that shows, popular theatre developing in shantytowns and throughout Chile during the entire period of the dictatorship, indicates 'the tendency to search for means of using any public place or event so that people there have the opportunity to become involved to express themselves; to participate, communicate, act, and reflect.' 'Everything is done with the intention that the audience participate actively' and thus, 'from the political point of view, it helps create active citizens (...)' (Ochsensius, 1991:180).

This has also been done by the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal. He utilized interactive theatre techniques as means of promoting social and political change:

*Theatre of the oppressed is a system of Games and special Techniques that aims at developing, in the oppressed citizens, the language of the theatre, which is the essential human language. This form of theatre is meant to be practiced by, about and for the oppressed, to help them fight against their oppressions and to transform the society that engenders those oppressions. The word Oppressed is used in the sense of s/he who has lost the right to express his/her wills and needs, and is reduced to the condition of obedient listener of a monologue. It must be used as a tool of fighting against all forms class oppression, racism, sexism, and all kinds of discrimination. THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED does not aim at being only like Hamlet's definition – a mirror that allows us to see our vices and virtues – but to be an instrument of concrete social transformation'* describes Augusto Boal in 2004.<sup>5</sup>

Boal believed that the human was a self-contained theatre, actor and spectator in one. Because we can observe ourselves in action, we can amend, adjust and alter our actions to have different impact and to change our world. The theatre of the oppressed is based on the idea of dialogue and interaction between audience and performer and aims to make the audience aware of their oppression. One of Boal's theatre techniques is forum theatre. In forum theatre, the audience becomes active, and transforms from spectator into "spect-actor". With the term "spect-actor" Boal aims to eliminate the notion of the ruling class and the theatre solely portraying their ideals while the audience is the passive victim. Spectactors feel free and act for themselves and do not simply obey and listen to those who are on stage. They free themselves; they think and act for themselves.

A short scene by Forum actors presents an issue of oppression and represents the world as it is—the anti-model. Audience members are then encouraged to stop the play and take the stage to address the oppression, attempting to change the outcome through action. The scenes explore issues of oppression, and most commonly the subjects and story lines originate from real experiences of the community members, developed during a series of workshops and rehearsals. The performance serves as rehearsal for real life, where participants can develop tactics to fight the oppression they face (Wardip-Fruin, 2003). The theatre of the oppressed creates awareness, empowers citizens and transforms them from silent victims into strong and critical citizens. The theater of the oppressed is thus an excellent example of how art can change citizenship.

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<sup>5</sup> Theatreoftheoppressed.org, accessed on 19 November 2013



To conclude, protest art in a totalitarian state can be essential to democratization as it may, first of all, be the only way for civil society to criticise the government: It can form a safe haven to criticize. Moreover, civil society actors are able to express criticism directly with their art and indirectly by trespassing the rules of the government. They also show an alternative to the public. They illustrate and encourage spectators to become critical and demand change. Therefore artists are able to transform silenced victims into critical citizens. These notions on how artists are able to contribute to democratization thus resemble the notions on how civil society in general is able to contribute to democratization. Discussing this, questions arise about how artists, as part of civil society, in Havana are able to contribute to democratization. In chapter five I will outline my case study in which I will place artists as part of civil society in Havana in this debate.

### **Chapter 3: Civil society within a totalitarian state**

#### *How civil society is hindered by Cuba's totalitarian government*

In this chapter I attempt to convey the difficulty for civil society to contribute to democratization in a totalitarian state. In the first section I exemplify this by elaborating on the failure of an initiative of civil society in Cuba. In the second section I discuss that the totalitarian context which hinders civil society is not static: some reforms have been made by the Cuban government, which – if they have not been rolled back - loosened the totalitarian grip of the government on (civil) society to some extent.

#### 3.1 Civil society and totalitarianism

Brecher (1978:118) sums up some of the characteristics of a totalitarian state: ‘The exclusive claim on truth and the right to govern, ideologies have a monolithic character, there is a promise of total solutions to all problems, the destruction of the individual as a person and the rise of the fiction of a “new man” who, fully coordinated, fuses with community and society, the chimera of total liberation brought about by the total identity of the governed and the government, citizen and party, people and leadership, and the fundamental denial of free criticism and opposition.

As I mentioned; ‘the central phenomenon of totalitarianism is the one-party state’s claim to total ideological and political dominance. The government attempts to penetrate all of the social institutions as well as of language, culture, and the structure of consciousness (Heydebrand, 1998). In a totalitarian state, democratic institutions such as competing political parties, a multi-party or pluralistic parliament, the protection of individual civil and human rights, the separation of powers and the judicial review of constitutionality of governmental and administrative decisions, and a free press, are abolished. Totalitarian control also implies systematic propaganda, a secret police apparatus, political control of information and of processes of socialization and education, and, of course, the violent and un-appealable repression of deviance, critique, and opposition (Heydebrand, 1998).

Civil society is thus extremely constrained by its totalitarian context. The repressive context leaves little space for an autonomous sphere in which actors criticize the Cuban government. In Cuba it is the question whether space for such private sphere that expresses criticism exists. According to Hirschman, who distinguishes between “vertical voice”(expressions of protest against superiors) and “horizontal voice” (communication among peers), “is horizontal voice a necessary precondition for the mobilization of vertical voice”(Hirschman 1986:82). A precondition for civil society activism to evolve is some degree

of public sphere in which it can “breathe.”

A famous example of how the repressive context obstructs civil society’s attempt to contribute to democratization is the Varela project in 1998. With this project, the Christian liberation movement, headed by Oswaldo Payá, appealed to article 88 of the Cuban Constitution Text, which allows citizens to propose laws if 10,000 persons support this proposal. A proposal of new law was handed in by Payá at the Cuban National Assembly advocating for democratic reforms in Cuba, such as the establishment of freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of press, free elections, etc. The organization collected 11,030 signatures but when the proposal was handed in, the Cuban National Assembly answered by amending the Cuban Constitution to make the socialist nature of the Cuban state permanent. The Cuban government claimed that it was met with 99% voter approval. The law proposal was rejected and the Varela project failed. Since then, civil society did not attempt such large-scale protests with which the government was directly addressed.

The failing of this project indicates that civil society at that point had no chance of to contribute to a democratic change in Cuba. Civil society was at that point too weak, and the government too strong for civil society to have any influence. The Varela project is an example of civil society’s inability to breathe – as Hirschman calls it –, as the attempt was immediately tackled by the government.

### *3.2 The historical opportunities for civil society to gain strength in Cuba*

Although I would like to emphasise that this repressive context in Cuba leaves little space for civil society I do also want to comment that this context is not static. In this paragraph I will outline that the context, in which civil society moves, changes. In the last decades some reforms have been initiated which caused some “opening up” in the economy and this contributed to some space for civil society.

The first opportunities arose when communism fell. Cuba entered into its economic crisis when the island lost the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe for trade, credits and aid. The Cuban government dealt with this economic crisis in 1990 by instituting an emergency economic program: “The special period”. This program obliged the government to transform its policy. It included some market oriented measures. These reforms were supposed to revitalize the economy and included restructuring of state enterprises, legalizing small businesses, and freeing prices and labour markets. Self-employment was authorized in 114 occupations, primarily in transportation, home repair and personal services sectors. New forms of agricultural cooperatives were allowed and the farmers and artisan market opened up. In 1995 the foreign investment law opened all sectors of the Cuban economy, except the education, health care and non-commercial military sectors, to foreign participation (Hellinger, 2012).

Otero and O'Bryan (2002) state that studies of Cuba, have proofed that civil sphere, spurred on by economic and political crises of the so-called special period, gained strength. Maybe therefore Fidel Castro decided to cancel the reforms when he believed that the economy was recovering.

The second time that reforms were initiated was when Raúl replaced his brother Fidel as Cuba's leader in 2008. These changes seemed to liberate Cubans to a certain extent from the totalitarian socialist grip. Cubans were allowed to own cell phones and personal computers. Farmers were told that they could produce and sell crops grown on up to 100 acres of land, an attempt to rectify a situation in which Cuba imports 80% of its food. In august 2010, Raul Castro announced that 1.3 million state employees would be discharged and expected to find work in the private sectors. The government intended to allow small private businesses to absorb these workers (Hellinger, 2012). Since January 2013 Cubans are not obliged to purchase a "white card" to leave Cuba. The ability to leave the country legally became a possibility. These reforms loosened the totalitarian grip on society to a certain extent, making it easier for an autonomous sphere to develop, which is essential to civil society.

The attempt of the Christian liberation movement to make a democratic transformation in Cuba that resulted in a catastrophe for civil society, exemplifies the hardship civil society encounters in its attempt to contribute to democratization. However, are the contextual circumstances in Havana different now? Has the contemporary situation improved for civil society? The repressive context did change to some extent: Raul became president and initiated new laws with which the totalitarian grip on society loosened to some extent. In chapter four I will focus on the contemporary repressive context in which civil society moves in Havana. Is civil society at this moment able to contribute to democratization?

Maybe there is a special role for artists within the process of democratization. Compared to other civil society actors, such as organisations, they might find ways to create more space to act and to increase the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to their, and their compatriots, expressed demands. Maybe the strength for civil society to contribute to democratization lies in the subtlety with which artists criticise the government? In chapter five I will elaborate on artists in Havana. However, before devoting attention to the findings I collected during my research it is important to elaborate on how I collected these findings.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### *How I collected data*

In this chapter I will elaborate on how I collected my data. I will also devote attention to the limitations of conducting fieldwork in a repressive context.

#### *4.1 Methods to collect data*

During my research I used a constructivist approach. I wanted to find out how people understand their environment. I attempted to describe the truth according to my participants and their world and situation according to their perception. However I am aware of the fact that I am not be able to apply a sec descriptive approach. I interpreted the information that I absorbed during my research according to my own cultural framework (Asworth, 1997).

To gain insight in the lives of Cubans I conducted qualitative research. People assign meaning to their surroundings and act on basis of this assigned meaning. Qualitative researchers want to understand the meanings and behaviour of people and understand and explain them. They describe the aim of behaviour, experiences and expressions of individuals, interpret and explain these in a way that does not disturb their natural habitat. The context people live in is often meaningful to the definition they assign to certain aspects, for their behaviour and their attitude. If we want to know how the social reality of people looks like, we have to understand the context of those people and we have to give depth to our descriptions (Boeije, Et. Al., 2009).

I believe that this method will gives me with a broad insight into life on Cuba and I will therefore gain more understanding of the impact of civil society on political transformation. In order to draw a conclusion on how Cuba's civil society promotes democracy it is important to focus on the pivot of civil society: Cubans. This cannot be done without anthropological fieldwork as this method brings me closest to their feelings, perceptions, desires, fears and despairs. Throughout my research I wanted to look at the perspective of people, on their social environment; their emic perspective. To understand this perspective I tried to enter into their situation. Therefore I conducted fieldwork in Havana in April and May 2013. Here I used two methods to collect data; participant observation and qualitative interviews.

Participant observation means interacting with participants, observing them and participating in their normal lives. During participant observation direct observations are made. I was able to make these observations as I was part of their social lives. I tried to enter into their situation by entering their world as much as possible. I collected most of my participant

observation data simply by living with Cuban families during my stay in Havana and by hanging out with them and other participants. Some of my participants and members of the families even became friends with whom I interacted in a casual and friendly way. Participant observation included normal conversations and observations, but also 'hanging out'. Hanging out with my participants implied, for example; having dinner and breakfast, attending parties, going to the cinema, going out for drinks, going to markets, and endless conversations and 'living room discussions', with them. Doing so, I collected data about the context in which Cubans live.

Through these casual interactions I found out a lot about the effects of the repressive totalitarian system in which Cubans live as everyday my participants were confronted with this repression. Throughout these casual interactions I found out for example that Eduardo – the son in law of my host family - had been arrested and was taken to the police station twice for placing an antenna and helping a friend with an illegal internet connection. I saw the CDR offices, camera's, and police, on the streets through which the excessive authoritarian control is exercised. I saw the banners, posters and statues on the streets and buildings produced to influence to attitude of Cubans towards Castro and his ideology. This propaganda dictates Cubans to support Castro and his ideology, and to dislike the government of the United States - the reason for everything that is going wrong in Cuba - with the faces of Fidel and Ché carved on buildings (appendix A: photo 1, 2) and texts like: '*defendiendo socialismo*' (defending socialism)(appendix A: photo 3), '*Por un Socialismo próspero y sostenible*' (for a prosperous and sustainable socialism) (appendix A:photo 4),and '*Unidos, vigilantes combativos*' ( together, combative inspectors (appendix A: photo 5) Or on a poster depicting former president of the United States, George Bush; '*Culpables, el gobierno de Estados Unidos ampara al terrorismo*' (Guilty, the government of the United States protects terrorism)(appendix A: photo 6).

I saw the false loyalty of Cubans who went to the streets on the first of May to "support the government", and I was being told by a construction worker that this was a perfect example of the double moral; Cubans seem to support the government but actually pretend to do so, to avoid problems with authorities. Also the "generational gap" came to light when I witnessed a heated living room discussion about the Cuban government between the members of my host family where I stayed during my fieldwork. By means of this discussion I was able to understand the different views people from different generations have on their government: while the older generation will not criticize the government, the younger generation has lost its faith in the ideology to such an extent that they make no effort to defend their government. These observations I made and the data I collected by means of informal conversations were contributing to my notion of daily life in Cuba. The data I collected through participant observation also supported the data I collected through qualitative interviews.

Qualitative interviewing is a form of conversation in which the interviewer asks

questions about the behaviour, opinions, attitudes and experiences according to a certain social phenomenon to one or more participant(s), and the participant answers the questions (Boeije, et. al., 2009). Before I conducted these methods my working method was not established. This depended on what happened in the field. Throughout my fieldwork I decided to standardise, or structure my interviews as little as possible. Before an interview took place I thought about the content of the questions but not about the way I asked the questions, neither did I decide on an order of asking questions, nor did I think about possible answers in advance. I wanted to find out what occupied their minds - what was important to them? - without directing them into certain opinions. I thought this was the best method to do so.

This implied that I wrote down three to five questions before an interview. During the interview I intended to react flexible to relevant changes and happenings during the research. During interviews with artists for example I wanted to find out how they defined democracy and, democratization, I wanted to find out what they thought about the situation in Cuba and how they were attempting to improve life in Cuba. When they started elaborating, I refrained from interrupting. According to Emans (2003) this means that my interviews were unstructured. I conducted these unstructured interviews to approach my research as “emic” as possible.

Later during my fieldwork I conducted more structured interviews as I was looking for opinions on certain issues that were not yet clear in my analysis: whether artists believed they were able to make a change in Cuba towards democracy, whether they thought their art had any effect on society, whether they were free enough to make such change, and whether the repression was not obstructing their ability to generate a democratic transformation. I thus conducted unstructured and semi structured interviews. I also organised group interviews in which two or more persons were interviewed. I interviewed Ana and her friend Hector for example. This appeared to be very interesting as a discussion flared up between them when Hector called Cubans “zombies, who were just obeying the authorities.” Ana was much milder about her compatriots explaining that they were not zombies but became submissive after years of repression.

Analysing is the systematic processing of findings (Boeije, et.al. 2009). Analysis was a cyclic process. I collected data, analysed the data and then reflected on my findings. Based on these reflections I decided where and about what to collect new data. I modelled them into results and conclusions. I coded my findings by assigning categories to them. Throughout my analyses I compared my data constantly. This is how I detected relations between categories.

When returned from Havana I continued my research by studying literature on civil society, democracy, democratization, totalitarianism, and the relation between civil society and democratization and civil society in totalitarian contexts. By reading scientific articles, books



and reports I gained insight in concepts like civil society and democracy which contributed to the data collected throughout my fieldwork.

#### *4.2 A safe strategy to do fieldwork in a repressive context*

Cuba is a totalitarian state. This means that the state holds absolute authority over society and controls all aspects of public and private life. Cubans are forced living according to the rules of the socialist revolution. Especially absence of freedom of expression is a problem when you want to do research. Cubans with a critical mind, who express their criticism, are branded as dissidents by the Cuban government and they will not have an easy life. Therefore a researcher who wants to talk about these prohibited topics, should be very careful. As Sluka (1995) mentions: 'field researchers in a totalitarian context have to deal with questions like; how to gain access to the intended research population, how to ensure the safety of both researcher and informants. In this section I would like to discuss some of the measures I took to ensure the safety of my participants and myself.

First of all, while I was still at home, I asked researchers who conducted fieldwork in Cuba in the recent past for advice: 'Do not act suspicious, instead look like a tourist', 'do not pack material in your back with which you might be envisaged as a journalist by the authorities, otherwise you will be send home on the first plane,' and 'do not talk about your research with random Cubans', were some of their advices. With these recommendations in mind I started my fieldwork. During my first weeks in the field I was extremely careful as I attempted to gain insight in my research possibilities. I did not tell anyone about my intentions. I kept in the back of my mind the possibility that authorities would compel me to terminate my research, and the possible danger I could create for my participants. As Sluka mentions (1995) most of the risks in fieldwork comes from authorities rather than from the research participants. "The dangers emanating from the authorities include the risks of intimidation, arrest, interrogation, prosecution and imprisonment (Sluka, 1995)." Not only I, but also my participants would have been in the danger zone. Therefore, after I had slowly and carefully started my research, I only focused on a small group of artists who knew each other, and each other's work. I never talked about them with other Cubans.

After I spent one week attempting to be as unsuspecting – touristy – as possible, I started my research using the snowball method: A safe way to find participants in a repressive context, and an easy way to build up rapport: the trust band between researcher and participant. Through my first participant I met another, and through the second participant I met the third and the fourth etc. This was a convenient method as my research concerned sensitive topics: 'civil society' and 'democracy' are both "dirty" words in Cuba. As I will describe later, after years

of repression a certain fear, paranoia and apathy has been instilled within society, therefore it is problematic to ask Cubans at random about these themes. Before serious conversations could start, first a certain trust must be built. Through the snowball method this trust was easier build up.

I applied the snowball method to find participants before I came to Cuba, in Holland. I met people who were connected with Cuba in a certain way: Cuban experts, members of Cuban/Dutch networks, people who were helping Cuban dissidents, former Cuban residents, students and professors who had done research in Cuba, members of organisations who had conducted development work in Cuba. Xantha, who had lived in Cuba for some years, introduced me to Katja de Groot, who works in the human rights department of the Dutch Embassy in Havana. She invited me to come to the embassy in the first week of my fieldwork in Havana. Before I came to Cuba, Katja introduced me – through email - to Pamela. Through Pamela - who had done research for her thesis in Cuba in 2012 - I obtained telephone numbers of her Cuban friend, Ana. Once in Cuba I visited the embassy and talked with Katja de Groot who introduced me to Alberto, a government critic who had organised a popular festival. After interviewing Alberto, he introduced me to several political activists like Leonel, a well-known dissident, to Maria the documentary producer, to Aldo the hip-hop artist, and to Nilo the graffiti artist. After being interviewed, Leonel, gave me Tony's number.

Ana became my Cuban friend with whom I explored Cuba in a Cuban way. I met her friends and family, we went to cinema's, parties, markets together. With the host families I stayed with, I was able to look inside Cuban (family) life. I did not only sleep in their house but they made me feel like I was a member of the family. These types of informal connections were very important as I was able to obtain data about delicate research topics.

#### *4.3 Limitations of doing fieldwork in a repressive context*

The first limitation of doing fieldwork in Cuba was the length of my stay. The maximum time on a tourist visa is two months. Research visa for a longer period are not obtainable. Although I stayed the maximum amount of days it still is a very short time to come to a complete understanding of Cuban life.

Another limitation was that I was not able to ask questions about civil society and democratization, randomly. The snowball method to collect participants was very convenient in the repressive context but has its limitations: my participant group was a small group of people who form the exception in Cuba. They are the ones who do not want to leave the island to build up a better future somewhere else. Instead they want to stay and contribute to a positive

transformation towards democracy. They are known by the government as subversive. Indeed, they did not hold back when I asked their opinions. Their opinions might be a bit extreme because of their status. “Normal” citizens are far more careful.

Another problem is the objectivity problem. Is what is being told really the truth? As I mentioned, after years of repression most people have become paranoia. Was this only paranoia or was repression as rigorous as some Cubans claimed it to be. Oscar, for example, stated that he was constantly followed by the government. Was this really the truth? Was he completely paranoid because of something that happened in the past and because of stories of his paranoid friends, or was he exaggerating? A completely different view on Cuba was laid out by Alejandro, the journalism student who grew up in a Castro adoring family. Both his parents had fought alongside the Castro’s when Batista was overthrown. Alejandro had a softer opinion of the Castro’s and stated for example that some of the dissidents are exaggerating the poor social political situation in Cuba. Did he really believe this? Was he brainwashed by his family? Was he protecting his parents who are Castro supporters? His life, as the son of two fervent Castro supporters is probably easier than Oscar’s life, who had seemed to have ruined his opportunities to success and an easy life by painting “Hip-Hop Forever” on a water tank ten years ago, an act that branded him as contra revolutionary (appendix B: photo 1). However, although I am not certain whether what they say really conveys “the truth”, their different perceptions on life on Cuba are valuable data.

Although I found out how civil society attempts to contribute to democratization in Havana, it is difficult to understand what influence artists have on society. This is difficult to measure as society, as I mentioned, still lives in fear. Habaneros are very careful in expressing what they actually know about civil society and whether they are influenced by them. Because of the caution with which Cubans discuss sensitive topics, it is difficult to comprehend how much “normal Cubans” know about activities of artists and whether they are influenced by them. Are they really unaware of the documentaries of Alberto, Ana and Maria. Do they really not know about *Rotilla* festival, or Tony’s art? Or is denying knowing about contra revolutionary activities, a way to survive? However not everyone claimed to be unaware of actions of civil society. Some of my participants with whom I had built up rapport did confess to know civil society and their actions.

Finding objectivity was also complicated as I, as a non-Cuban, have had a complete other “Cuban experience” than most Cubans have. The tourist industry is Cuba’s most lucrative business and therefore non-Cubans are treated friendly by authorities. While Cubans are reprimanded constantly, tourists are ignored. I became aware of this fact when Oscar resentfully noted that if he would ever photograph as much as I did he would be interrogated immediately at the police station. There are complete other rules for tourists. Therefore,

although I conducted fieldwork, with which I attempted to enter into the world of my participant, I never really experienced Cuban life and its repression as Cubans do.

Although a researcher can never be completely objective, my objectivity became even more impaired by all the warnings I received from Cuban experts before my research started. Already before I arrived I had demonised the Cuban government and its supporters. As my fieldwork progressed it was still difficult not to see the persons who are pro-government as “the evil ones” and the artists I interviewed as “heroes”. However, after a while I found out that the line cannot be drawn that sharp. As I mentioned, the government and repression had penetrated into the smallest detail of society. Some participants have informed me that one third of the Cubans works for the government. It is thus difficult to speak of a “bad” and a “good” side. I found out for example that the friendly and welcoming father of the family where I stayed was a spy who was hired by the government to keep an eye on his neighbours to pass information on to the Communist Party. His son in law who lived in his house was furiously against the Castro’s and spoke bitterly about the government.

Another example that fades the line between “good” and “bad”: on my last day in Havana I wanted to say goodbye to Alejandro, the journalism student who had helped me during my fieldwork. When I went to his house, his mother told me that he was out. However, she invited me in. When I sat down in her living room I was surrounded by portraits of Fidel and Raúl Castro. An absolute showpiece was a photo of her husband shaking hands with Raul Castro. “I know that you have been talking with Alejandro about the political situation in Cuba, but now I want to tell you my side of the story,” she explained. She elaborated on her time as a rebel, fighting against Batista with Fidel. She elaborated on the awful time, on the hardship she endured during this Batista era. She explained that she had decided to fight alongside those who wanted to overthrow the tyrant, Castro’s predecessor: Batista. An absolute highlight of the conversation came at the point when the 67 year old lady pulled up her dress and showed me her leg where she had kept her gun. I became aware of the fact that she was not indoctrinated but really believed in the ideology of the Castro’s, they had overthrown Batista who had made her life dreadful, and she would therefore always support the Castro’s.

I elaborated on these examples I stumbled upon in Cuba as I hope to convey that Cuba’s society does not consists of groups of “good-,” and “bad people”. A massive grey area exists. I also hope to have made clear that it is difficult to find out what “the truth” exactly is in Havana. “The truth” is never an uncomplicated concept, in Havana however this truth might be even harder to find. Cubans know the repercussions of being unfaithful to – criticising - the government, lying is an important way to survive in Cuba. Cubans all know stories of people who have crossed the rules of the revolutions and still pay the price for this “unfaithfulness.” Although conducting fieldwork in a repressive context has its limitations I did collect some

interesting findings during my fieldwork. Next to the “truth” are lies, stubborn denial and exaggerations also valuable data which add to a complete image of life in Cuba. In the next two chapter I will elaborate on my data.

## **Chapter 5: The Context**

### **The totalitarian power of the Cuban government**

Otero and O'Bryan (2002) state that, with continued pressure from below, the Cuban state is able to open up to a democratic transition. How is it possible that civil society has never had success in protesting against its oppressors? Some constraints affect civil society's ability to contest the power of the one-party state. To comprehend these constraints it is important to look at the historical, political and ideological context of the island. In this section I will discuss the context in which civil society moves in Havana. This excessive repression makes actions of civil society necessary – democratization is needed - but at the same time complicates them. Factors that complicate the existence and actions of civil society are the legitimacy of the government and its ideology - How has the government sustained its power for almost 55 years? And is this power still strong enough to suffocate civil society? The second factor is the ability of the government to strengthen this power: repression. The level and types of repression exerted by the party-state affect civil society's ability to challenge the government. If repression is thorough, it can prevent an effective opposition from coalescing.

#### *5.1 Castro's ideology*

Why is the communist party still in power? One of the obstructions faced by civil society has for a long time been the strong ideology of Cuba's government. Otero and O'Bryan have stated in 2002 that this forms an obstacle for civil society to challenge the established government. They stated that 'the Cuban state is still quite strong. Despite severe tests it faced during the 1990s, it still has solid roots in its own society. They argue that the Cuban revolution had indigenous, nationalist origins that became the basis for its later ideological foundation. The Cuban state-socialist government therefore holds greater popular legitimacy historically than did similar governments in other soviet bloc countries. To explain how the ideology became so strong and how the Cuban government could be popular among its citizens for such a long time, I will discuss the origins of this ideology, the history of Cuba's revolution, in this section.

Cuba was among the very last of Spain's colonies to achieve independence. A successful slave revolt for independence was led by José Martí. Martí mobilized Cuba's black population with the slogan "Cuba for All" promising to overcome inequality and racism. They almost casted off Spanish rule, but then the United States intervened, starting a war against Spain in 1898. Before Martí was killed in 1895 he had warned Cuban society about American intentions of domination. However, Creole elite feared social rebellion and emancipation of slaves who were imported into Cuba until 1870. They welcomed the United States, hoping that they would soon

bring an end to the independence struggle. Here the first signs of U.S involvement in Cuba are detected.

The United States occupied Cuba for three years. They left in 1903 after the Cuban government signed the Platt Amendment. This amendment prescribed that the United States where given the right to intervene in Cuba to maintain stability. Herewith Cuba's sovereignty became limited. Indeed, did the United States intervene several times after they were dissatisfied with outcomes of elections. Moreover North Americans bought up many plantations and sugar mills from Spain. Cuban planters became their employees and because the price of sugar was kept high, Cubans became economically distressed. After the United States established the naval base at Guantánamo Bay, US interference in Cubans domestic affairs had become a fact. Their presence caused anti-imperialist sentiment.

Cuba's post-independence politics - full of corruption and fraud – also became a massive frustration. The failure of electoral democracy to deliver honest government, true sovereignty and social reform agitated Cubans enormously. The Batista dictatorship was corrupt, brutal, mafia connected and U.S. supported. Opponents of Batista united behind Castro's program calling for political democracy and deep social change. In 'history will absolve me' Castro laid out stark injustices of Cuba's labouring masses, corruption and brutality of the government and other problems:

*'The problem of the land, the problem of industrialization, the problem of housing, the problem of unemployment, the problem of education and the problem of people's health: these are the six problems we would take immediate steps to solve, along with restoration of civil liberties and political democracy'* (Castro in Brenner et al. 1989:32, cited in Hellinger, 2011).

Later he stated: 'Above all we are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to the dictatorship' (Hellinger, 2011). The quest for freedom and desire for social change, were brought together in his revolutionary movement. Batista's response to this movements resulted in death and torture of thousands. 20,000 civilians died in the fight, leaving a legacy of deep popular anger against anyone associated with the Batista government. In January 1959 Batista was overthrown by an army of guerrillas under the command of Fidel Castro. Castro and his army were warmly welcomed by Cubans; after so many frustrated revolutions, here at last was a leader in the person of Fidel Castro, ready to make a real social revolution. Castro became the hero who had freed the people from a tyrant. However, one enemy remained present: the United States.

The United States feared the establishment of a communist government in the



hemisphere. Cuba feared interference of this state only 90 miles away. In 1960 Castro refused to ask for economic aid to the United States, a symbolic demonstration of his determination not to subordinate his revolutionary goals in deference of Washington. Castro implemented far-reaching land reforms, expropriating all parcels of land of more than 1000 acres. Cuba seized control of its oil refineries, transportation system and utilities. Castro moved left and United States made more effort to exploit divisions within revolutionary forces. Castro forced dissident members of the government to resign. Some were arrested, charged with collaboration with the enemy and were sent to prison. Repression and threats of intervention of the United States were building forth on each other. At this time U.S. interference in Cuba had become traumatic, this translated into an extreme nationalism which can be detected in the measures that were taken to scare of disloyalty to Cuba. The antagonistic attitudes of United states and Cuba entered into a vicious circle; strengthening and building forth on one another, leading to some absolute low points like the invasion of the Pig's Bay in 1961 and the missile crisis in 1962.

In 1962 an industrial facility in Cuba was blown up by protagonists of the Cuban government, killing 400 workers. In response, Castro suppressed civil liberties such as press freedoms. The new government met challenges of U.S. intervention not only by repressing dissidents but also by mobilizing the population to defend the revolution. The militia and Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) were formed. CDRs form a nationwide network that informs on and disciplines dissidents at the grassroots level. According to Fidel Castro, is the maintenance of a one-party state committed to Communism crucial to the unity against the threat of Cuba becoming once again a virtual colony of the United States (Hellinger, 2011).

To conclude, Cuba's semi-colonial history provided Castro with legitimacy for his rigid government. But also Cuba's violent past, the Batista era, made Castro's government legitimate. No-one would like to return to the Cuba before 1959. Still some (older) Cubans see the Castro's as heroes who freed the Cuban people from their oppressor. Therefore, the communist party is still supported by some Cubans, especially by the generation that was born before 1959.

## *5.2 The fading ideology*

I would like to shed light upon three remarks on the legitimacy for Castro's ideology. My first notion is that while the younger generation has lost faith in the government, it seems like the older generation (50+) still supports the government. The second striking fact is that this support might often simply be a way to survive in Cuba.

I noticed this generational gap and opportunistic support of Cuba when a discussion

flared up in the living room of my host family after I posed the question: what will happen on the first of May, labour day<sup>6</sup>?

*'There will be a march, many people will go to Plaza de la Revolución, maybe Raúl Castro will be there to speak to the people,' explains Eduardo, the 27 year old son in law and IT specialist. 'Will you be there?' I ask. 'No', Eduardo starts to laugh mockingly and waves his hands, 'I will not go there. I am not... a big supporter of the government.'* *'The last time we went, we were little, we went with our school,' says Alina the 26 year old daughter of the family and Eduardo's girlfriend. 'But why do people go there?' Eduardo explains: 'The government keeps lists. At Plaza de la Revolución during Labour Day there will be a lot of checking. If people working for the state do not show up at the plaza they will receive a mark. When you receive this mark you will be chastised. You are punished for being contra revolutionary. They will withhold you wages for some months, for example.'* *Throughout this conversation Frank and Beatrice, Alina's parents, became very quiet, but their expression was clear. Beatrice finally protests: 'No, you're not right Eduardo. I worked for the ministry but I am certain that there is no list! And I have always received my wages.'*

This heated discussion characterises the different ways of thinking between children and their parents. Parents/grandparents claim to support the government (or by all means do not apostatize the government), while their (grand-)children are more critical. The way Eduardo shook his head and looked indignant when I asked him whether he was going to *Plaza de la Revolución* to support the government was telling: his generation has lost faith in Castro's ideology, their government. It also illustrates how clandestinely the government is supported, waving with Cuban flags and shouting '*Para la Revolución*', wearing a Che Guevara shirt, is a way of surviving in Cuba. When you do not visibly support the government, life could become complicated. Like Eduardo told me, Cubans go to Plaza de la Revolución because this makes life in Cuba easier.

Eduardo and Alina's statements denote the attitude of their generation. This generation does not blindly support the government like their parents and grandparents did. The government has lost its popularity and is losing its legitimacy. This could be an opportunity for civil society. When Cubans lose faith in the ideology they are able to stand up against the government. They are able to be critical of the government and its ideology and therefore they could support, or even become part of, civil society.

The constraint of the fading popularity of the government is that almost every young Cuban would leave Cuba if there would be an opportunity to do so. Therefore they come up with

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<sup>6</sup> 24 April 2013, group-conversation with Beatrice, Alina, Eduardo and Frank

inventive ways to leave the island.<sup>7</sup> Leaving, instead of protesting, is their way to cope with this dissatisfaction. Almost everyone I talked to in Havana has a brother, sister, daughter, son or friend who left Cuba. Also Eduardo and Alina are looking for a possibility to move to California. A popular (underground) song in Cuba is named: *'Cada uno se va'* (everyone leaves). This is the downfall of the fading popularity, people are dealing with their dissatisfaction not by protesting or making their problems with the government known and negotiate to better their situations, rather they deal with this situation by leaving Cuba.

### 5.3 Repression

Although the government is losing its popularity, they do not lose power. They use repression as a way to stay in power. Otero and O'Bryan (2002) have stated that development of civil sphere is hampered by continued government repression. To prevent people from moving outside the lines of the revolution, to suffocate dissidence or criticism of the government, repression is used as a tool to keep Cubans within the lines of the revolution. If they have lost faith in the revolution they are obliged to pretend to be faithful and stay within the rules of the ideology. Not willingly, but unwillingly, by means of repression. And this repression is thorough. Human rights watch states in a report on Cuba in 2012 that:

*'Cuba remains the only country in Latin America that represses virtually all forms of political dissent. In 2012, the government of Raúl Castro continued to enforce political conformity using short-term detentions, beatings, public acts of repudiation, travel restrictions, and forced exile. While reforms passed in October 2012 eliminate the need for Cubans to obtain an exit visa to leave the island, they contain vague, broad provisions which could be used by authorities to continue to deny the right to travel to people who are critical of the government.'*<sup>8</sup>

In this paragraph I will discuss some forms of repression like censorship and controls and arrests detentions and interrogations for those who seem to cross the lines of the revolution. I will also elaborate on the consequences of repression.

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<sup>7</sup> One of those ways is wooing tourists. Some of my Cuban friends had made it their business to pay court to as many tourists as possible. An exotic romance was staged, followed by a dramatic goodbye at Havana airport, all this to receive a ticket and invitation to leave Cuba to visit their "loved ones".

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/cuba>, accessed on 21 November 2013

### 5.3.1 Censorship and the lack of Internet

Human rights watch states that: 'The government controls all media outlets in Cuba and tightly restricts access to outside information, which severely limits the right to freedom of expression. Only a tiny fraction of Cubans have the chance to read independently published articles and blogs because of the high cost of and limited access to the internet<sup>9</sup>.' Hoffman (2013) states that the state's monopoly on mass media has been a thorough form of authoritarian control over the national public sphere.

Cuban media are state-owned. The state's monopoly on media prevents that contra-revolutionary activities or any criticism of the government or the state are published. This is legislated in Cuba's law. The constitution of 1967 defined the Communist Party as the 'highest leading force of society and of the state, which organizes and guides the common effort'(República de Cuba 1992) and declared as the mission of 'the social and mass organizations... the edification, consolidation and defence of socialist society'(República de Cuba 1992). Freedom of speech and of press is limited by constitutional prescription, 'in keeping with the objectives of socialist society'. Article 52 of the Cuban constitution effectively establishes a monopoly on mass media: 'Material conditions for the exercise of that right are provided by the fact that the press, radio, television, cinema, and other mass media are state or social property and can never be private property.'

A small number of independent journalists and bloggers manage to write articles for foreign websites or independent blogs, yet those who use these outlets to criticize the government are subjected to public smear campaigns, arbitrary arrests, and abuse by security agents. The authorities often confiscate their cameras, recorders, and other equipment. According to the independent journalists' group Hablemos Press, authorities arbitrarily detained 19 journalists in September 2012.<sup>10</sup>

Statements of Ana<sup>11</sup>, a 36 year old documentary producer, and Alejandro<sup>12</sup>, a 22 year old journalism student, indicate how the violation of free press, censorship and lack of internet is perceived by Cubans. Alejandro:

*'Because I study journalism I have to watch a lot of television and I have to read the newspapers. But I am fed up with it. Every day the same news, and it is not even news. The same stories about the beginning of the revolution and Fidel's speeches are being broadcasted every day. But I want to be able to inform myself, to collect information from different sources. Therefore it would be great to be able to connect to internet. It would be*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/cuba>, accessed on 21 November 2013

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/cuba>, accessed on 21 November 2013

<sup>11</sup> 22 april 2013, conversation with Ana

<sup>12</sup> 18 april 2013, informal interview with Alejandro

*wonderful to hear news from around the world from different sources.'*

Ana argues accordingly:

*'Everyone should be able to inform him- or herself, have access to different sources of information. Here the state's monopoly on media prevents Cubans from being informed in an objective way. Moreover everyone should be able to write articles in magazines and newspapers or talk on the radio and television about whatever they want. Internet forms an alternative media. Especially as news bringing in newspapers and on radio and television is extremely subjective, it is important for Cubans to have access to alternative sources of information. How is it possible that one man (Fidel, and later Raul Castro) decides that no-one can use internet?'*

With these statements I would like to point out that the lack of free press and internet has been perceived by Cubans as a severe human right violation and that this form of repression limits their possibilities on spreading and absorbing information. Therefore this form of repression obstructs civil society's ability to challenge the government, as messages of dissidents and political activists for example are not so easily distributed.

Otero and O'Bryan (2002) state that free-press is very important in building and maintaining civil society, especially in state-socialist governments – as they call Cuba. 'Even if they remain underground through most of the transition, they can provide some freedom of expression, dissemination of new ideas and information, a voice independent from the state, and a unifying symbol of opposition.' The Cuban state's portrayal of dissidents as a marginal batch of malcontents can be challenged only if people can obtain and debate countervailing information. Cubans cannot effectively assess their political and economic systems, or possible alternatives, without access to information.

However, In a country where internet is restricted and media is owned by the state, finding an alternative way to transmit information is vital for civil society. Fortunately Cubans have found a way to challenge the restrictions on access to information and spreading of information. There are some ways to get around this digital blockade. Often there is a friend, family member or neighbour who has found a way to connect (illegally) to internet. Although often very expensive and extremely slow, this is a way to send and receive messages via email or *facebook*.

Memory stick are also essential to the distribution of projects and messages of political activists in Cuba. 'Through memory sticks', is the standard answer to the question how other

Cubans should become acquainted with artist's work. Tony statements denote that memory sticks are a suitable alternative to spread information of civil society<sup>13</sup>.

*'Do Cubans know what you are doing, Tony?,' I ask. 'Of course! Sometimes people recognize me on the street, and they say 'good work man!' They recognize me! They have seen one of my projects or one of my interviews in a documentary. A neighbour, friend or relative probably passed this on to his memory stick More and more people know me. I think that is a sign that my work is spreading.'*

To conclude, media are censored and internet is almost non-accessible in Cuba. Without internet, and state's monopoly on media, the means of distributing messages of civil society are limited and therefore civil society is hindered. Luckily memory sticks are suitable alternatives to transmit and receive information about the activities of political activists. Paintings of Nilo, documentaries of Ana and Maria, critical rap songs, and films of Tony, are all passed on from one to one another through memory sticks.

### *5.3.3 Cuba's control-system: CDR's, vigilantes and spies*

Another form of repression to protect the revolution, that obstructs civil society, is the well-functioning, meticulous control-system. Authorities will do anything to detect a threat that might endanger the revolution and the power of officials who are in charge. Through spies, vigilantes and CDRs - Offices of Committee in Defence of the Revolution - information about a person or activity that could potentially harm the revolution is passed on to Cuba's political party, the Communist Party.

CDR's are offices that are found on every block in Cuba(appendix B: photo 2). They are described as "the eyes and ears of the revolution", and form the tenet of Cuba's society. The slogan of the CDR is; "in every block revolution". They were founded by Fidel Castro in 1960, as a collective system of revolutionary vigilance. 'So that everybody knows who lives on every block, what they do on every block, what relations they have had with the tyranny, in what activities they are involved and with whom they meet', explained Castro when he founded CDR's.<sup>14</sup>

They are the extension of the Communist Party that wants to be informed on who does what. They exist to promote social welfare and report contra revolutionary activity. Members of the Committee are ordinary people who collect information about their neighbours. They involve their neighbours in politics, encourage them to vote and to attend revolutionary

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<sup>13</sup> 12 april 2013, informal interview with Tony

<sup>14</sup><http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>, accessed on 23 august 2013

activities CDR's also track lists of people who attend and who do not attend these activities. They collect details on private lives of the people in their neighbourhood: Are they members of a secret society? Who visits them? Did they buy a new television? Do they drink a lot? The CDR network is extensive: in 2010 8.4 million Cubans of the total population of 11.2 million were registered as CDR members.

A more hidden way of controlling society has been exercised by vigilantes – watchers - and spies who are hired by the Cuban government to detect contra revolutionary activity. Alina's statement indicates how thorough and thorough this type of checking is<sup>15</sup>:

*'Everywhere people are being watched to prevent people from plotting contra revolutionary plans. Even Cubans, who appear to be "normal" neighbours, are involved in this control network. Neighbours control at what time you come home, who visits your home, where you shop, what you buy. There are certain people who are assigned as vigilantes. Vigilantes appear to be normal citizens but they have to keep an eye on their neighbours and have to reveal this information to CDR. No one knows who a vigilante is in their neighbourhood.'*

Spies are often present in projects of political activists. It has occurred to Ana – the documentary maker - that when she works on a documentary there is always one "colleague" who has been hired by the Cuban government to keep an eye on the people he is working with.<sup>16</sup>

The control system in Cuba is a well-functioning, effective institute. Many Cubans know they are being watched by CDR, spies, and vigilantes, therefore they are carefully staying within the lines of the revolution. As citizens are carefully preventing to become suspected as subversives these controls hinder civil society in its attempt to challenge the government. repression has penetrates society. Many "normal" citizens are part of the information system. They are hired by the state to spy on people. Therefore the government is not something that works at the top, it can also be detected at the bottom and in every single detail of society,

### 5.3.4 Arrests, detention and interrogations

*'In addition to criminal prosecutions, the Cuban government has increasingly relied on arbitrary detention to harass and intimidate individuals who exercise their fundamental rights. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation—an independent human rights group that the government views as illegal—received reports of*

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<sup>15</sup> 5 April 2013, conversation with Alina

<sup>16</sup> 22 April 2013, conversation with Ana

*2,074 arbitrary detentions by state agents in 2010, 4,123 in 2011, and 5,105 from January to September 2012. The detentions are often used preemptively to prevent individuals from participating in events viewed as critical of the government, such as peaceful marches or meetings to discuss politics. Many dissidents are subjected to beatings and threats as they are detained, even though they do not try to resist.*<sup>17</sup>

When contra-revolutionary activity is detected by Cuba's control system - through spies, vigilantes, or CDRs - measures will be taken to protect the revolution and the power of the government. Many political activists have been arrested and some of them have been in detention. The complaint is usually; "activities against the revolution". Alberto, the 34 year old documentary producer and the founder of *Rotilla festival*, has been on the black list since he organised the independent festival for the first time. He is watched and followed by the government and has been in detention many times. He illustrates government's paranoia and fear for anything that might endanger their ideology and power, by elaborating on what happened to him when pope Benedict XVI visited Cuba for the second time in March 2012:<sup>18</sup>

*'When the pope visited Cuba for the first time, a government critic was running in the streets of Havana screaming: 'Abajo communism!' (away with communism). Because of the pope's visit, the international media was focused on Cuba those days. They recorded and spread dramatic images of policemen vigorously beating the activist to the rest of the world. The international community was furious. Credits built up by the pope's visit were destroyed with the violent action of the police. To prevent thus unfortunate event to happen for a second time, Castro came up with an idea; all Cubans who formed a threat, who were perceived to be able to damage Cuba's image, were locked up. Three days, from the beginning, until the end of the pope's stay in Cuba, I, among other political activists, was locked up in prison.'*

This example illustrates how easily the police incarcerates people - like Alberto - who they perceive to be a threat to their power. Not only Alberto has been incarcerated, also other political activists have been jailed. Leonel, a 38 year old well-known "dissident" who organises panel discussions during which criticism towards the government is expressed, has been arrested, interrogated, and beaten up by authorities many times. After he was incarcerated last year, Amnesty international issued an 'Urgent Action Call' for his release. On 15 November 2012 they called out:

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/cuba>, accessed on 21 November 2013

<sup>18</sup> 4 April 2013, informal interview with Alberto



*'Government critic Leonel Rodiles has been charged with "resisting authority". It is believed the charges may be used to punish and prevent his peaceful criticism of Cuban government policies.'*<sup>19</sup>

Nilo, the 30 year old graffiti artist was arrested ten days after I left Havana. At the police station they interrogated him for almost a week. A message of the Cuban/Dutch website stated at that time:

*'Cuban graffiti artist and government critic, Nilo Maldonado, "El Sexto" was taken this morning by security forces from his home, together with his laptop, art materials, and artwork. No one has heard of him since, no charges have been made public. Nilo is a good, peaceful and honest man who has never used violence, only art, to express his discontent with the government. This abuse has to stop.'*<sup>20</sup>

Not only government critics are arrested. Also Cubans who are not directly criticizing the government, are being harassed by the police. This is illustrated by Eduardo - the son in law of my host family and IT specialist - who helped a friend with an illegal internet connection<sup>21</sup>. Some days after his assistance a police officer knocked on his door and Eduardo was taken to the police station. Here he was interrogated about his contra-revolutionary-activities; helping a dissident to access internet: A serious crime. Later Eduardo found out that his "friend" was a spy working for the Cuban government. Eduardo was already in a danger zone as he installed an antenna, with which he was able to receive more television channels than the socialist approved ones, years before. Now Eduardo is carefully staying within the rules of the revolution as he fears reprisals of the authorities if he trespasses these rules again.

With these examples I attempted to illustrate that activities of civil society - or potential civil society - are met with repression. Arrests, detentions and interrogations are measures of Cuban authorities to extinguish any contra revolutionary threat. Not only political activists are punished, also "normal" Cubans who – accidentally - move outside the lines of the revolution encounter problems with Cuban authorities. Often harassment of the police seems random. However, these restrictions are effective. Cubans fear reprisals of authorities and therefore shun activities that might be considered contra-revolutionary as can be seen in Eduardo's case. Therefore this form of repression hinders the - uprising of - civil society in its attempt to challenge the established government.

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<sup>19</sup> [www.amnestyinternational.org](http://www.amnestyinternational.org), accessed on 30 august 2013

<sup>20</sup> [Informatiecuba.wordpress.com](http://Informatiecuba.wordpress.com), accessed on 27 august 2013

<sup>21</sup> 27 March 2013, conversation with Eduardo

### 5.3.5 Exclusion and Isolation

Not only arrests, detentions and interrogations are measures that challenge the possibilities of civil society to open up the Cuban state for a democratic transition. Other tactics applied by authorities, to protect the revolution, and prevent and punish – potential - contra revolutionaries, are isolation and exclusion strategies.

Since Alberto has been known as the initiator of *Rotilla* festival he is barred from some public places.<sup>22</sup> Theatres and cinemas for example are off limit for political activists. Alberto also became isolated. His friends and family have all been threatened by the police; they were warned that interacting with Alberto will also endanger them. For this reason his girlfriend just left him.

Alberto's colleague, Maria, - a 34 year old political activist and documentary maker - explains to me how frustrating it is when people ignore her.<sup>23</sup> Her neighbours do not greet her when she walks by. They do not want to appear befriended to a dissident. Society fears reprisals of authorities when they act contra revolutionary, or interact with contra-revolutionaries. Therefore they also adopt this strategy. Eduardo for example, proclaimed that he avoids dissidents.<sup>24</sup> When he walks on the street and a former friend, who is now known as a dissident, approaches him, he walks into another direction without saying "hello". This illustrates that it is not just the government against society. The government has penetrated every detail of society.

To conclude, preventive and retributive measures of Cuban authorities to shun off any contra-revolutionary activity are not only tangible measures like incarcerations, interrogations and arrest. Also strategies like exclusion and isolation are used to close off and thus limit freedom of those who are trespassing the rules of the revolution. As I illustrated above, exclusion and isolation are strategies to punish and deter criticising the government. Therefore this form of repression also obstructs the ability of civil society to challenge its government. Especially as not only authorities are excluding and isolating government critics. Again I have attempted to illustrate how repression penetrates in society. Many Cubans adopt tactics of authorities to avoid getting in trouble, as a simple interaction with a dissident could also be seen as dissidence.

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<sup>22</sup> 4 April 2013, informal interview with Alberto

<sup>23</sup> 24 April 2013, informal interview with Maria

<sup>24</sup> 24 April 2013, informal group interview with Eduardo and Alina

### 5.2.6 Self-repression: fear, paranoia and apathy

The above discussed forms of repression instil fear and paranoia in Cuban society. These emotions also indicate that repression has been adopted by society. People became self-controlled after 55 years of actual authoritarian control. They instilled government's repression in their hearts and minds. As has been described by Dutch journalist Edwin Koopman (2008): In Cuba you live in constant suspicion, with paranoia and fear, the repression is not obvious. It is a form of repression you cannot see. It is invisible, silent and omnipresent. This causes fear but you do not know where it is or where it comes from. Personal fear, fear for family or friendships. This fear reaches your sub-consciousness. Suddenly you see spies everywhere. 'The government of schizophrenia governs; everyone can be twofaced. They do not send spies to your house. No much easier, they hire your neighbours or your own family to become informants. 'When your dearest confidant can be your biggest enemy you must be discrete. Men asked for a divorce as they thought their wives were hired by the secret services' (Koopman, 2008).

I notice that the political activists I talk to in Havana, who are already known by the government as contra-revolutionary, and therefore have nothing to lose, are not afraid to express themselves. Even in public places they seem very reckless. On the other hand, "Normal Cubans" fear their life will become a lot more difficult if authorities mark them as *Contra Revolucionario*. However, as repression is not only exercised by authorities but deeply ingrained in society, it is difficult to see who to fear. This uncertainty, complexity, inclusivity, and non-transparency of repression has led to deeply ingrained fear and paranoia among Cubans. The following statement of Juan, the car mechanic at the second house where I lived in Havana, elaborates on this paranoia:<sup>25</sup>

*'You know, control is everywhere and most of the time it's hidden. You do not know who is who. Someone does not have to be who he argues to be. A taxi chauffeur could be a spy. You know, the men who are extinguishing insects in your house, often those men are spies.'*

Oscar, a construction worker who painted "hip-hop forever" on a water tank, is an example of paranoia instilled by hidden control. His behaviour illustrates how repression became self-repression. After painting the water tank he was obliged to come to the police station. Here he was interrogated for hours. It happened ten years ago but after this incident Oscar received a CR stamp and has been watched by authorities since then. Before the interview starts Oscar looks to his right and left and then whispers: 'I'd rather talk about these things in my house.'<sup>26</sup> Throughout the interview he explains that his neighbour is always unduly interested in his daily

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<sup>25</sup> 6 May 2013, Informal conversation with Juan

<sup>26</sup> 3 May 2013, informal interview with Oscar

activities. Hanging around her open window to observe her subversive neighbour might be a task that has been given to her by the CDR. His behaviour reflects effects of years of repression:

*We sit on a bench in a public park. Some, boys are hanging around, near us. Oscar is visibly irritated by the attention they pay to us. He keeps looking in the direction of the boys. Suddenly he jumps up: 'come on! We have to go!' When we sit down a few meter away from our first spot I ask him what was wrong. 'You saw those guys? They are spies!' But how can you tell they are spies?' I ask. Pfff after ten years of being followed I know who are spies and who aren't.*

His behaviour is a reflection of how the government treats its citizens and how Cuba's repression was instilled within Cubans. Therefore, people avoid interacting with dissidents and do not express criticism of the government (in public places). Almost everyone is dissatisfied with the social-political-economic situation. They are fed up with the government. Still, not many people undertake action or express themselves to protest against the unfairness of how the government treats its people as they are very afraid their lives will become more complicated. It is difficult to know if this fear is still founded or whether fear has become paranoia. Either way, legitimate fear and paranoia, prevent people from undertaking contra-revolutionary actions. Therefore also fear and paranoia challenges civil society's ability to contest the power of the government.

Foucault calls this ingrained repression 'governing the self' or 'conduct of conduct' in his famous 'governmentality' (1978) speeches. Foucault argues that while the word government today possesses only a political meaning, he emphasizes that the problem of government was placed in a more general context until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Government was a term discussed not only in political sphere, but also in philosophical, religious, medical and pedagogic texts. In addition to control and management by the state, "government" also signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, etc. For this reason, Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as "the conduct of conduct" and thus as a term which ranges from "governing the self" to "governing others".

Not only fear and paranoia are instilled after 55 years of repression, also apathy is an obstacle that stand in the way of civil society to change something in Cuba. If I ask political activists what should be changed before a democratic transformation can be expected, many of

them argue that the mind-set of Cubans needs to be transformed. 'Before the leaders have died, the minds of the people have to be changed', says Ana<sup>27</sup>. Or as Maria puts it<sup>28</sup>:

*'The pensamiento (mentality) of the people has to transform. People have lived in fear and within the controlling government for so long that they are afraid to act. They are scared but also apathetic. For example, if suddenly Cubans are refused to enter a hotel, they don't protest! They stay away from the hotel. Normally, Cubans just listen and obey to what they have been told to do. The problem is a psychological problem.'*

Alejandro also confirms this.<sup>29</sup> 'Many things should change in Cuba. But if the mind-set doesn't change, nothing happens.' Ana and her friend respond affirmative <sup>30</sup>:

*'The people have to change before a substantial transformation can take place.'* Ana's friend, points at some pedestrians, 'look at those people. They are zombies. They try to survive. Try to find food, clothes. They are not thinking about changes, they keep distant from any political thinking.' Ana: 'But the people are not naturally zombies. This is what the revolution did to them. They became blunt after years of repression. Fidel says: 'we are wonderful. The greatest country in the world.' But people are unaware of what happens outside Cuba. They believe him. That is why it is dangerous to have only one source of information. A dialogue should take place. Everyone should be able to express her-, himself. Sociedad liberal! People have to listen to others. That is important.

Not only fear and paranoia have been instilled in Cuban society also apathy is an outcome of almost 55 years of repression. Just like, fear and paranoia also the instilled apathy can be perceived as Foucault's "conduct of conduct".

To conclude, although I discussed that the ideology might be fading away in the hearts and minds of Cubans, the government protects its power by obliging people to support the ideology. If not willingly the state makes sure that society will unwillingly support the government, by means of repression. With this repression they aim to stay in power. They do not grant any space to (potential) civil society to challenge their power. I also attempted to illuminate that repression is not solely a top-down process. Repression tactics of the government like, spying, checking, isolating and excluding have been taken over by society. Next to actual repression, self-repression has obstructed civil society. Years of repression instilled fear, paranoia and apathy in the hearts and minds of people. This prevented people from criticizing the government in public. This instilled fear, paranoia and apathy can be seen as

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<sup>27</sup> 6 April 2013, Informal groupinterview with Ana and her friend

<sup>28</sup> 24 April 2013, Informal interview with Maria

<sup>29</sup> 15 April 2013, informal interview with Alejandro

<sup>30</sup> 6 April 2013, informal groupinterview with Ana and her friend

Foucault's "conduct of conduct". Governmental repression is now exercised by Cubans themselves and became self-repression. A positive sign is that civil society has found ways to get round these constraints, like the use of memory sticks to spread the work of artists.

## Chapter 6: Case study

### *How Artists in Havana contribute to Democratization*

In chapter two I discussed the importance of protest art within a repressive context. I discussed how protest art is able to contribute to democratization. In this chapter I would like to zoom in on my case study, on artists in Havana and their different forms of protest art like festivals, hip-hop, documentaries, paintings, poetry, and films. By means of these initiatives they attempt to contribute to democratization.

#### *6.1 Festivals*

As I discussed, the right to freedom of expression in Cuba is severely violated. However, at some places at some times Cubans are able to express themselves freely. At independently organized festivals for example. These festivals have been initiated without governmental meddling and therefore form safe havens where people feel free and liberated from the oppressing government. Here they are able to express themselves, behave how they would like to behave and interact with whomever they would like to interact without being punished.

Omni Zona Franca, a multi-disciplinary Cuban art collective, organises an annual festival named: *Poesia Sin fin* (poetry without an end). Tony, the organiser of the festival, explains:<sup>31</sup>

*'This artistic conference was built as a space for free and open dialogue, for people who want to express themselves. The festival reached 4000 participants, but then... the government intervened. Since then the festival became prohibited. Now the festival has to be organised inside houses of participants. This cut down the amount of participants to only 100.'*

Tony's statement illustrates that through his festivals a free space is created in which people are able to express themselves freely. However, organising festivals is met with authoritarian repression.

Another initiator of a festival aimed at creating a free space is Alberto. Alberto's most important and influencing project has been *Rotilla festival*:<sup>32</sup>

*'Rotilla festival definitely contributed to democracy as within and during the festival people are free to speak their mind. Unlike the situation outside the fences of the festival*

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<sup>31</sup> 12 april 2013, informal interview with Tony

<sup>32</sup> 4 april 2013, informal interview with Alberto

*where freedom of expression does not seem to exist, Rotilla forms an independent state within Cuba where Cubans are able to express themselves critically on Cuba's social-political and economic situation.'*

Like Tony, also Alberto emphasises the essence of a space independent from the government in which people are able to exercise their right to freedom of expression. This has been made explicit in a documentary made by Maria.<sup>33</sup> In *Aire Libre* she interviews visitors and artists who are participating in *Rotilla festival 2009*. Some people who were interviewed described the poor social-political situation in Cuba. They describe especially how they suffer under the restrictions on freedom of expression:

*'No other place exists where you can speak your mind about political and social issues. My mother is a delegate, I can't express myself, even less in my house. My grandmother is communist, my family loves Cuba, I do to but we don't have freedom of speech.'*

*'What do we do? Simply nothing, because we can't do anything. We love this place. I would give my life for Cuba. I would kill for Cuba. But expression, our personal freedom? We want to fly but we can't. we want to talk, we can't. we want to eat, we can't, we can't do anything.'*

*'We feel miserable. In the first place because they violate our rights, our right to freedom of expression, which is an universal right.'*

*'But the government always hides the truth about something. They never give away everything and sometimes Cubans feel... closed off, because they don't know everything they should know. That is freedom, a great part of the freedom we are looking for. To know the truth to know what there is. Why do they cover the truth?'*

These statements illustrate the dissatisfaction of visitors of these festivals with Cuba's social, political and economic situation. What they also demonstrate is that the visitors of the festival are not afraid to speak their minds on this situation. Even if they are not able to alleviate any of these frustration within their own homes, because their family members are Castro supporters, at the festival they are able to live in a sphere where they are free to speak their minds. Some statements on *Rotilla festival* which illustrate this:

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<sup>33</sup> 24 april 2013, informal interview with Maria



*'For me, Rotilla is a place where we have freedom to express anything. Within... one can feel free.'*

*'I feel free at this moment, really.'*

*'Rotilla is an encounter of another Cuba. It is a possibility, an alternative. It's a new way of thinking. A way and a style of being. Rotilla gives us the possibility to be able to look for another way of being Cuban.'*

Thus, these festivals form an independent state, an island within the island Cuba where people have the right to freedom of expression. This fenced area forms a safe haven to express criticism. Within these festivals people are also able to discuss sensitive topics openly. Censorship does not exist.

These festivals contribute to democratization by directly criticising the government through statements of visitors and artist but also in a disguised way, by organizing the festival and herewith trespassing the rules of the revolution. The aim of a totalitarian government is that nothing can be organised without the government's consent. Organising an independent festival crosses this line. People are able to speak up. An open dialogue is initiated and criticism remains unpunished. Therefore, festivals also demonstrate another way of being Cuban. They illustrate that another life, without repression is possible. It conveys the message: You are able to express criticism. And visitors are able to exercise this right. Therefore this festival changes citizenship as it transforms silenced victims of Cuba's government into critical citizens.

## *6.2 Hip-Hop*

Hip-hop is extremely popular in Havana among the younger generation. Many hip-hop artists are known for their contra-revolutionary lyrics as they rap about injustices in Cuba. Aldo is one of these hip-hop-artist. He performed during *Rotilla festival* and during *Poesia Sin Fin*. In this paragraph I will zoom in on some parts of Aldo's (translated) song to illustrate that he aims to contribute to democratization with his songs. By informing his compatriots that they are mistreated by the government and by encouraging them to counteract.

*'We are the Roots of Change'*

*'Pay attention, we're no danger to anyone*

*We don't want violence or confrontation*

*They insist our message is counter revolution  
No, this is reality and commitment to the nation'*

Aldo is branded as a counterrevolutionary: a threat to the socialist revolution as he attempts to reveal the truth about the social political situation in Cuba through his lyrics. He aims to convey that the government portrays him as a collaborator while he is actually attempting to transform Cuba positively. It is important that he speaks about this problem as indoctrination of the government is still penetrating society and the government does not shun a chance to demonize political activists, which challenges the legitimacy of hip-hop artists.

*I know it's hard to wake up  
If information is partial, the isolation is lethal.'*

Another problem is depicted: media are state owned and restricted to broadcast pro-socialist, pro-revolutionary messages. Therefore information is partial. Also leaving the country has been prohibited for a long time and internet is severely restricted. Castro has been very successful in isolating Cubans from the rest of the world. This is dangerous as it is difficult to obtain information from other sources than socialist impregnated ones. Because of partial information and isolation, people are indoctrinated by propaganda in the media. Puncturing this culture is difficult. "Waking up" means developing a critical attitude towards Castro's information which is extremely difficult for an isolated and indoctrinated society.

*'It's what most people think, I know  
It's what most people feel, I know  
It's what most people want, I know, but  
They're too scared to tell you.'*

People are fed up with the government but are too afraid to express their dissatisfaction. They are frightened that they will be punished for their openness. These lines convey the self-repression that has been instilled in Cubans after years of authoritarian repression. Aldo attempts to overcome this self-repression by encouraging society to stand up against their oppressor.

*'They can't handle us.  
The truth lies with*

*The people and they know it.  
We are the roots of change  
So long thinking without acting. What are we waiting for?*

The truth about Cuba can be seen when you look at the people; poor and too afraid to express themselves. But when all those people unite, the government will not be strong enough to oppress them. Aldo appeals to the nation of Cuba to act out and stand up against their oppressors.

With his lyrics Aldo points out sensitive issues like poverty, censorship, and people's fear to undertake action against these injustices. By pointing out these sensitive issues Aldo criticises the government, the state, in public. Hip-hop as form of art is thus a way to express criticism. Indirectly he utters criticism and demonstrates an alternative by producing and performing: trespassing the rules of the revolution. Moreover, he states that these injustices are not normalities and argues that an alternative way of being Cuban is possible. By criticising the government in public he demonstrates another way of being Cuban: a Cuban who is aware of his poor situation and is not afraid to speak up. With his lyrics: "*We are the roots of change. So long thinking without acting. What are we waiting for?*" he also directly summons people to protest against their oppressors, to mobilise Cubans. Thus, he also attempts to change citizenship with his art. He aims to change Cubans from a silenced and fearful society into a society that fights for its rights, is more critical, and stands up against its oppressors.

### 6.3 Documentaries

Not only do festivals and hip-hop open a way to utter criticism, demonstrate an alternative and attempt to change Cuban citizenship, also through documentaries injustices are demonstrated and people are encouraged to counteract. Alberto and Ana produce documentaries in which they criticize the lack of freedom of expression and censorship in Cuba. Their documentaries protest against limitations on censorship in Cuba. Aldo's lyric "*If information is partial, isolation is lethal*" fits perfectly within the mentality of their documentaries. Alberto is working on a documentary on nonobjective journalism in Cuba.<sup>34</sup> In Cuba, media is owned by the state. Like I mentioned, Cubans do not have access to objective broadcasts and have been informed on the same socialist revolutionary reports for almost 55 year now. Moreover, Cubans have limited access to internet. Ana, describes in her documentary 'Offline' how internet would open up the *pensamiento* of Cubans:<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 4 april 2013, informal interview with Alberto

<sup>35</sup> 22 Apeil 2013, conversation with Ana

*'The lack of internet affects democracy in Cuba. My documentary explains how internet could contribute to democracy in Cuba. Through internet people are able to communicate by means of email, facebook, skype, and chat programs. Internet is able to open eyes. It shows that other worlds exist. At this moment, through Fidel and Raul's policy, only one, their, truth is displayed. And this truth has been told for more than 50 years. People who are not higher educated believe this truth and live by this truth. But internet could change also their vision! Because you hear about other ideas, you are able to form your own opinion. This also explains why internet is prohibited. In Cuba the government aims to prevent people from being influenced by ideas other than the revolutionary socialist ideas. So that they will not broaden their vision. The government keeps talking about socialism about the revolution that started 50 years ago. But I do not want to live in the past. I do not want to keep looking back at what happened back then.'*

This statement conveys the message of Ana's documentary: internet is able to break through paranoia, fear and apathy of Cubans. It could change people's *pensamiento* because they are able to become informed by other sources than state owned media. Documentaries of Ana and Alberto form direct protests against censorship and the lack of internet in Cuba. Therefore, documentaries as form of art directly criticise the government. Indirectly, these documentaries demonstrate that you are able to trespass the rules of the revolution, to express yourself and discuss sensitive issues. Therefore making these documentaries also indirectly criticises the government. With their documentaries they explain how lifting censorship would liberate people. Cubans would become able to inform themselves and form their own opinions. People are encouraged to transform into a critical citizen, someone who is able to inform him/herself.

#### *5.4 Graffiti, films, and photos*

In his minimalistic furnished apartment in a more prosperous neighbourhood of Havana: *Vedado*, Nilo proudly presents me one of his paintings.<sup>36</sup> A two by two canvas painting of his own face, painted in the same style in which Fidel's face is often painted on postcards, posters, folders, flags, mugs, t-shirts. The painting is a protest against the glorification of this "hero". Next to the faces of El Ché, and Fidel now Cubans are also able to encounter Nilo's face as he sprays "his face" also on walls, traffic signs, benches etc. in Havana. Nilo, or El Sexto, explains: 'Why should we look at one person's face for more than 50 years? From the first moment we go to school we hear 'Fidel is the greatest,' but I am fed up with this indoctrination. I have painted my face as reaction to this glorification (appendix C: photo 1)'

Nilo's artist name, "El Sexto", is on its own counterrevolutionary as it is a protest against

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<sup>36</sup> 8 April 2013, informal interview with Nilo

the glorification of the 'five heroes'. On almost every corner of the street, Cubans are exposed to big billboards. On the billboard; the friendly faces of the five heroes are depicted. These five heroes are Cuban spies who were hired to infiltrate in Cuban exile groups in Miami in the United States. In Cuba they are known as the five heroes who are wrongly imprisoned. They are glorified by the government as they are known as the five men who sacrificed their freedom for Cuba's safety. Out of protest against this theatrical attention, paid to the five, Nilo sprays "el sexto" on traffic signs, walls and buildings. 'If they are five heroes, everyone could be the sixth.')(appendix C: photo 2&3). Another favourite image Nilo likes to paint is an robot with a Cuban flag in his hand. Nilo explains that this robot is Cuba's society. Everyone is programmed to act in a certain way according to the rules of Castro's ideology. He protests against the "robotness" with which Cubans obey their oppressors instead of thinking for themselves (appendix C: photo 4).

By painting, Nilo challenges the power of the established government. He asks attention for abuses and injustices by painting them. He directly criticises the government through his paintings, indirectly by the act of painting injustices, and thus trespassing the rules of the revolution. Nilo also criticises Cubans directly. He encourages Cubans to stop obeying their oppressors and start thinking for themselves. Herewith he aims to transform Cuban citizenship.

Tony is another artist who strives for transformation in Cuba. During exhibitions in his apartment, in which he displays his art, he hopes to shake up people. When I visit him in his flat in one of the poorer districts of Havana, he shows me a film with which he wants to show that in Cuba on the surface everything seems nice and fine, 'music in the street people laugh and dance, sun, fresh air.' But nothing is what it seems like. Inside, people are miserable. This film shows Tony in meditative position on top of a collapsing building in de neighbourhood *Havana Vieja*: a part of Havana that could be described as "a ruin". Tony states: "The city reflects the people that live in de city".<sup>37</sup> Just like the beautiful but neglected ruin like buildings in the city, also the citizens are neglected and mistreated by the government (appendix D). Unfortunately Tony is not able to expose his art in public places. Therefore he organises expositions in his own house. Here he shows his films, photos and poems. He invites friends and they invite other people who are interested in his art and in this way he is able to demonstrate some of his work. To convey his objectives:

*'Cubans do not have access to the truth: the television only displays the pro socialist revolutionary chitchats. Only communistic approved programs are allowed on television. Internet is prohibited. Cubans are not able to travel. Cubans are not free. They are closed*

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<sup>37</sup> 12 April 2013, informal interview with Tony

*off from the world. Control is everywhere. Media are censored. There is only the propaganda that indoctrinates Cubans. Therefore people have no idea of what openness and freedom means. Your thoughts are manipulated by the government. People who are sleeping now have to wake up. I want to shock, awake people and ask attention for problems.'*

This statement demonstrates that Tony is determined to transform Cubans. Tony criticizes the government directly by demonstrating injustices and indirectly by expressing these injustices: He contests the restrictions on freedom by demonstrating what is wrong in Cuba. He wants to break through fear, paranoia and apathy that has been ingrained in people. He encourages people to become critical.

To conclude, first of all, festivals, documentaries, graffiti, paintings, films and photo's might at this moment be a suitable way of protesting against the government and stand up against injustices. Through art, a subtle way<sup>38</sup> is found to express what is wrong in Cuba. Protest art directly criticises the government. Artists shed light upon the government's repression, like censorship, and the lack of freedom of expression. Artists also indirectly express criticism of the government by producing these art forms and thus trespassing the rules of the revolution. They stand up against injustices and oppressors. However, rather than criticizing the government, art in Cuba seems to do another important thing. Artists convey with their art that, just like them, Cubans could also be critical, express their criticism, and change from a silenced fearful, apathetic citizen into a proactive individual who criticises injustices exercised by the government. Some artists, like Tony and Nilo for example also directly criticise Cubans themselves and encourage them directly to stop obeying their oppressors and start thinking for themselves. As has been stressed by my participants, this change is the most essential transformation that precedes democratization. Therefore, a vital way in which protest art of artists in Havana contributes to democratization is by changing Cuban citizenship.

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<sup>38</sup> Not art itself is subtle but the form of protest is more careful. Art is multi interpretable something artists who are harassed by the police can always fall back on. Artists themselves are convinced that organizing protests on the streets will only make the situation in Cuba worse. Therefore protest art is a suitable way of protesting.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### *How artists, as part of civil society, contribute to democratization in Havana*

Artists criticize the government with their protest art and encourage their compatriots to do the same. Herewith they attempt to transform Cubans from powerless, silenced victims into empowered, critical citizens. Transforming citizenship is the most essential way in which artists in Havana contribute to democratization - 'the increase of the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to citizens' expressed demands (Tilly, 2001)'. But, how does transforming citizenship increase the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to citizens' expressed demands? How is the state able to behave in a certain way when it seems like criticism is addressed to Cubans and not the government? Transforming citizenship contributes to democratization in two ways: First, civil society encourages Cubans to express their criticism. So other Cubans, who were too fearful or apathetic to be critical before, are now able to express their criticism. They are able to strengthen civil society to protest against their oppressors, and therefore civil society is strengthened in its attempt to contribute to democratization. Moreover, as the government is ingrained in society also the government is transformed when civil society transforms citizenship.

To elaborate on these conclusions I will discuss the answers to the sub questions of this thesis: What is the relation between civil society and democracy? How does the repressive totalitarian government curb civil society in Havana? Which initiatives have been taken by artists in Havana to contribute to democratization? In paragraph four I elaborate on the above stated answers to my main question: How do artists, as part of civil society, contribute to democratization in Havana? Finally the research objective and societal and scientific relevance are discussed.

#### *7.1 The relation between civil society and democratization*

Although many theories on how civil society contributes to democratization exist I have focused on theories in which civil society functions as a platform to express criticism, and changes citizenship to contribute to democratization. Eckstein (1994) argues that civil society forms an alternative to disagreeing with state policies. Habermas (1992) mentions that civil society articulates criticism to politics, and Corales (2005) argues that expressing this criticism changes citizenship. Civil society is helping to 'change what it means to be a citizen.' I adopted these theories in my thesis but my conclusion focuses on the effects of expressing criticism and transforming citizenship in Havana in which the government became ingrained in society. I will discuss my conclusions in section four of this chapter.

### *7.2 How does the repressive totalitarian government curb civil society in Havana?*

To guard Cuba's autonomy, the government violates human rights. Freedom of press and freedom of expression do not exist for example. Almost 55 years the Castro's have governed Cuba according to this repressive totalitarian ideology. Although the legitimacy of their government has faded and more and more young people have lost faith in their government, the government keeps a tight grip on society to stay in power. The government forces its citizens to support them and their ideology by means of repression. Contra revolutionary activity is met with authoritarian repression; something that deters and prevents (potential) initiatives of civil society. The iron fist of the government thus weakens civil society and deters citizens to be critical and stand up against their oppressors.

Moreover, repression is not something to be found only at the top. Also "normal citizens" became involved in repression tactics. The government's repression and control system has penetrated society. Many Cubans are hired by the government to spy on their friends, neighbours and relatives. Above all, after years of governmental repression, Cubans have become self-repressed. They are fearful, paranoia and apathetic. This is an example of Foucault's "conduct of conduct": repression is deeply ingrained in people's hearts and minds, which prevents them from protesting against their oppressors.

### *7.3 Which initiatives have been taken by artists in Havana to contribute to democratization?*

Artists, as part of civil society, in Havana contribute to democratization through different forms of protest art like: festivals, hip-hop, documentaries, paintings, graffiti, films, and photos. With these different forms of protest art, actors criticise injustices impaired by the Cuban government to which Cuban citizens fall victim. Art is an essential tool to contribute to democratization as it may, first of all, be the only way for civil society to express criticism, it can be a safe haven to criticise. At this moment this subtle form of critiquing the government is the only possible way to stand up against injustices in Havana as repression of critical citizens is not shunned by Cuban authorities.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, civil society actors are able to directly criticize the government with their art. Paintings, documentaries, and other art forms shed light upon injustices. For example: the lack of freedom of expression or censorship are discussed in documentaries and hip-hop lyrics. Artists also indirectly express criticism as by producing their art they trespass the rules of the revolution. They demonstrate an alternative to the public: they stand up against injustices and oppressors. They illustrate that you are able to express criticism, they demand change and they

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<sup>39</sup> The Cuban Commission for Human rights and National Reconciliation reported in August 2013; 547 detentions for political reasons of in Cuba. Another 337 dissidents were harassed and threatened by the police in the month august. This is the highest amount of detentions regarding political repression of this year.



encourage Cubans to do the same. This is the most vital way in which artists in Havana contribute to democratization: By expressing criticism and encouraging their compatriots to do the same they transform citizenship. Protest art enables a personal transformation. Cubans are encouraged to change from silenced fearful, apathetic inhabitants into proactive critical citizens who protest against injustices.

#### *7.4 How do artists, as part of civil society, contribute to democratization in Havana?*

According to Tilly is democratization the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to societies expressed demands. So how does transforming citizenship increase the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to societies expressed demands?

To understand how transforming citizenship contributes to democratization it is important to understand the context in which civil society moves in Havana. After 55 years of governmental repression, Cubans have become self-repressed: the state – or government – became ingrained in the minds of citizens. Self-governing or Foucault's theory of 'conduct of conduct' describe this process in which the government is instilled in the minds of individuals. Many Cubans have become apathetic, frightened and paranoid: they refrain from standing up against the repressive government. Governmental repression is also incorporated in society as repression is not only exercised at the top: in Havana, your neighbours, family, and best friends could be hired by the government to spy on you.

Now that I made clear that repression is deeply ingrained in society I am able to elaborate on how transforming citizenship in Havana contributes to democratization. Transforming citizenship contributes to democratization in two ways.

First of all, experts have argued that civil society is able to contribute to democratization by expressing criticism of the government to the government. I would not like to contradict this statement: Civil society does perform this role but I believe that in Cuba this would be a second step of civil society's strive to contribute to democratization. At this moment civil society is too weak. Before civil society is able to express criticism to the top it has to strengthen the bottom. Before democratization can take place, first society has to learn how to express demands. To quote Hirschman: 'horizontal voice (communication among peers) is a necessary precondition for the mobilization of vertical voice (expressions of protest against superiors)' (Hirschman 1986:82). Before vertical voice can take place the horizontal voice has to be strengthened.

Also many of my informants have stressed that before a democratic transformation takes place in Havana, citizens should first learn how to make claims: how to demand protection of their human right to the government, and how to express criticism of the government to the

government if their human rights are violated. Tony and Nilo stated: 'Artists want to initiate an awakening of Cuban society with their art. A personal transformation precedes a democratic transformation of Cuba.' Maria, Alejandro, and Ana have emphasised that: 'Before a structural transformation in Cuba can take place, first the mind-set of Cubans needs to be transformed'. Civil society's protest art is produced to enhance this transformation. Paranoid, frightened, apathetic or self-repressed individuals can become critical, empowered Cubans who are not afraid to stand up against repression and join civil society. More critical citizens could join civil society so that civil society is strengthened. Right now civil society is fragmented and too weak to directly express criticism to the government. However when other Cubans are encouraged to stand up against their oppressors, they can support civil society and together they can form a strong fist against the oppressive government. A strong civil society is able to command the state to behave in conformity to their expressed demands.

Secondly, there is also a direct way in which artists in Havana contribute to democratization in Havana. Again it is important to think about the context in which civil society moves in Havana. As I mentioned, ordinary citizens can be spies: the government is incorporated in society. The government is not something to be found (only) at the top anymore. The government is also your neighbour, friend or family member who is hired by the government to spy on friends, family and neighbours. So, in Havana civil society should not direct its criticism (only) to the government at the top but should also direct criticism to the citizens, as not only the government at the top exercises repression, also citizens - who appear to be "normal" - repress their compatriots by spying on them and by working together with the government at the top. They support human rights violations of the government and cooperate with the government to enforce their repression. To contribute to democratization civil society should command citizens to stop this repression.

Civil society in Havana attempts to do this. With their protest art, artists attempt to create awareness that citizens do not have to obey, and work together with, the government. They encourage citizens to become independent and think and act autonomously. They are encouraged not to be indoctrinated by the government. So, as the government is ingrained in society, civil society changes the government (at the bottom) while it transforms citizenship. Although I mentioned that civil society does not direct criticism of the government to the government at the top, they actually do direct criticism to the government at the bottom, by directing criticism to the citizens. When citizenship is transformed also the government (at the bottom) is changed and thus civil society is able to command the state to behave in conformity to their expressed demands. Or in other words, by changing the government at the bottom, civil society contributes to democratization. This is the second way in which civil society contributes to democratization in Havana.

#### *7.4 The objective, and societal and scientific relevance of this thesis*

My research objective is to convey the relation between artists, as part of civil society, and democratization in Havana. As I have stated in the introduction: the repressive context in which civil society moves is one particular aspect of my focus. One of my findings was that the repression has become ingrained in society. This asks for a certain approach of civil society in its effort to contribute to democratization. Although the term democratization - the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to societies expressed demands – seems to be focused on the state. It is in the case of Havana - in which government and governmental repression has become ingrained in society - vital to “open up” society to contribute to democratization. After years of repression, civil society creates a new model of citizenship: from an apathetic, fearful and paranoid victim into a critical citizen who can form and express his opinion. Based on what my participants have stated and the context in which civil society moves I would like to state that the struggle is not one in which civil society is positioned on one side while the government stands on the other. I would like to emphasise that democratization is a process that has to take place in the hearts and minds of citizens (as well). With these conclusions I hope to have conveyed the relation between artists, as part of civil society, and democratization in Havana.

In the introduction I have also expressed the wish to explore the role of artists within a process of democratization. What exactly is their role as part of civil society within democratization? Artists may fulfil a special role within the contemporary attempt to democratize Cuba as their art is a subtle way to criticise injustices committed by the government. The repressive contexts ask for a subtle way to express criticism, through which repression can be sidestepped. Many of my informants have stated that it is unthinkable to enter the streets to collectively protest and demand changes from the government. The repression of those who are not careful or unsubtle in their attempt to express criticism to the government is a sign that Cuba is not ready for such a direct approach of civil society. Artists are able to convey messages in a subtle way. Instead of protests on the streets art is multi-interpretable: something artists can always hide behind. Art thus forms a safe haven to express criticism and might be the only possible way to express criticism at this moment in Havana.

I have also expressed the wish to fulfil a scientific objective, and contribute to new insights on the relation between the topics ‘civil society’ and ‘democratization.’ The special attention to the context in which civil society moves is essential, as by understanding this repressive context you are able to understand why initiatives of artists focus on society not on the government. In the theories often civil society is applauded for its positive contribution to democratization. As I mentioned civil society is able to express criticism to the government and demand changes. In Havana civil society is in a pre-phase of this phase in which criticism can be expressed to the government (at the top). As at this moment civil society is too weak and the

government is too strong to express criticism directly to the government(at the top). Civil society at this moment encourages society to join them and to become critical and demanding.

This conclusion might also contribute to the debate on the question how civil society could be strengthened by international organisations or governments. Although it may seem like democratization is a phenomenon that “happens” at the top- Cuba’s government - we could find (part of the) solution for the problem at the bottom – Cuba’s society. It is thus not (only) the government that needs to be addressed when a process of democratization is to be enhanced by other governments or international organisations to support civil society. Society needs to be addressed as well.

An organisation that aims to help civil society to contribute to democratization could first start up a dialogue with citizens. There, at the grass-roots, the organisation could strengthen the message of civil society and emphasise that change has to start up on a personal level. Within the organisation citizens should feel safe enough to express their criticism. When these organisations take care of the protection of Cubans who express their criticism, Cubans learn to overcome their self-repression and citizenship can be transformed. A platform needs to be provided within which (potential) civil society feels safe to express criticism. This approach could enhance their quality of life. Therefore this conclusion might also be a societal relevant one.

Empowering Cubans can be achieved by strengthening the attempts of artists in Havana to contribute to democracy. Artists could be empowered by simply shedding light upon their work. At this moment, artists who express criticism are severely harassed by Cuban authorities. By giving them international attention, they could be strengthened. As can be seen in the case of Yoani Sanchez for example.<sup>40</sup> Her world fame makes her untouchable. Her status made her immune: If she is harassed by authorities the world will know. As the Castro brothers aim to avoid antagonizing the rest of the world, they are more hesitant to harass activists who have achieved international fame. Giving attention to these artists strengthens them as they reach a certain status of immunity. Their work will be made more fruitful as space for them is created to find a way to contribute to democratization. This could simply be done by posting information about them and their activities on websites and blogs which are accessible worldwide. Organizations and governments are thus able to support civil society in Cuba simply by making their activities known as their world-fame functions as their protective shield.

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<sup>40</sup> Yoani Sanchez is a Cuban blogger who has achieved international fame and multiple international awards for her critical portrayal of life in Cuba under its current government.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A:** Propaganda in the streets of Cuba to convince Cubans that Fidel and Ché are heroes and their ideology should be supported and to demonise the government of the U.S. Source: My photo collection

Photo 1: Fidel's face on a building in Havana



"You are doing fine Fidel"

Photo 2: Ché's face on a building in Havana



"Until victory, always"

Photo 2: War cry on a wall in Havana



"Defending Socialism"

Photo 3: Poster behind a window



"The first of May for a prosperous sustainable socialism"

Photo 4: War cry on a wall in Havana



"Together, combative inspectors"

Photo 5: Banner behind a window



"Criminals, the government of the United states protect terrorism"



## Appendix B: Watertank and CDR

Photo 1: Oscar's water tank: his art project for which he became branded as contra revolutionary by the Cuban authorities.



Source: Oscar's photo collection

Photo 2: A sign of the CDR. I encountered at least one of these in every block in Havana.



Source: My photo collection



## Appendix C: Nilo's art

Photo 1: Danilo's face painted on a wall in Havana



Source: Danilo's photo collection

Photo 2: "El sexto" painted on a traffic sign in Havana



Source: My photo collection

Photo 3: Robot painted on a wall in Havana.



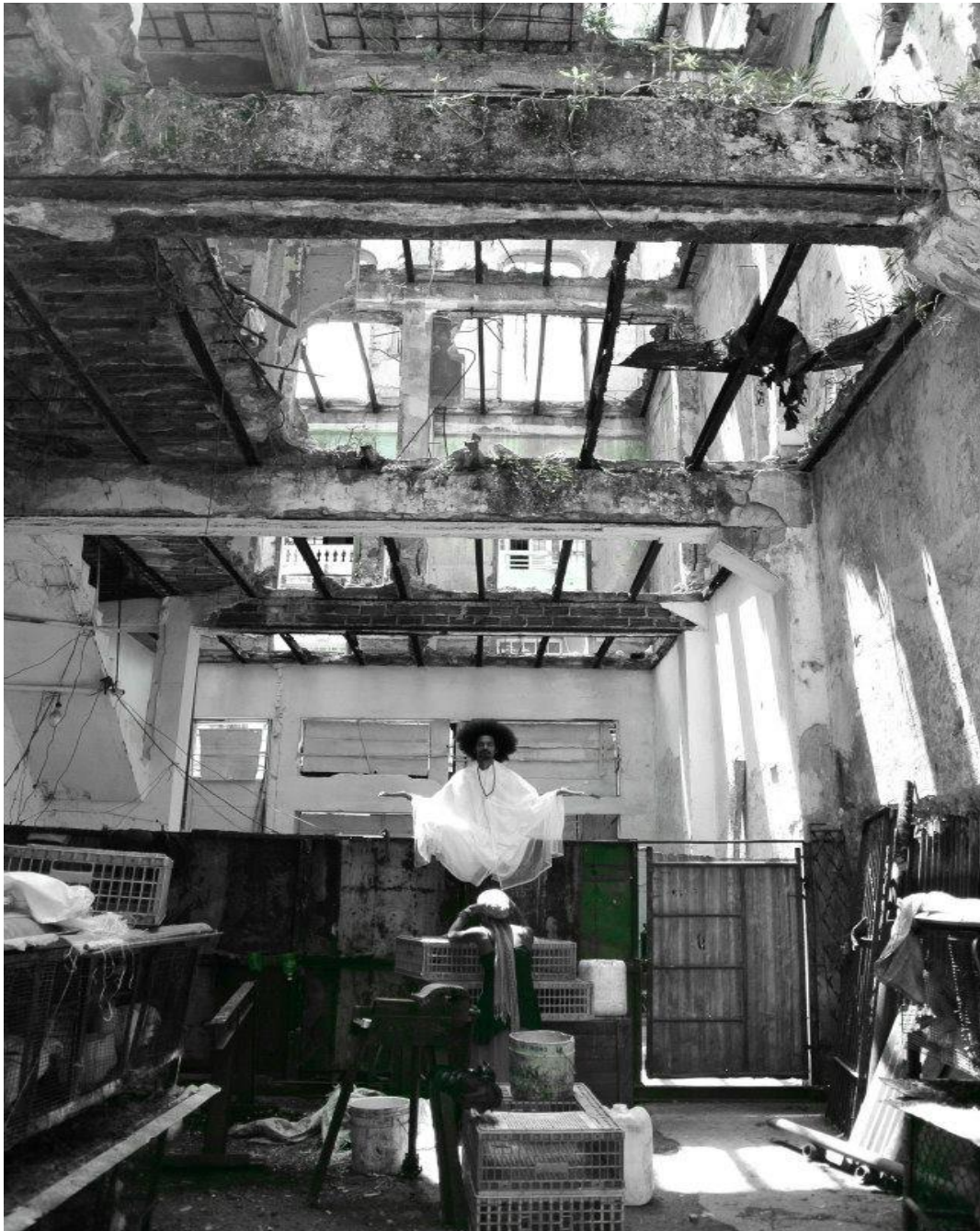
Source: Danilo's photo collection

Photo 2: "El Sexto" painted on a flat



Source: Danilo's photo collection

**Appendix D:** Photo of Tony's film in which he is positioned in meditative position on a collapsing building in Havana



Source: Tony's photo collection