

Characteristics and Challenges of Cuban Freemasons in the XX Century:

A demographic approach

International Conference on American and Latin American Freemasons:
A New Past and a New Future

Freemasonry and Civil Society Program at UCLA

UCLA's History Department in collaboration with the
Grand Lodge of the State of California and its Masonic Foundation.

Jorge Luis Romeu, Ph.D.

Research Professor, Syracuse University, NY/USA.
Director, Juárez Lincoln Martí International Education Project

Email: romeu@cortland.edu;

Web: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/jorge-luis-romeu/26/566/104>

REHMLAC.

Final: May 20, 2013.

Resumen

Presentamos un análisis estadístico e histórico del desarrollo de la Gran Logia de Cuba, en la segunda mitad del Siglo XX, basado en nuestro estudio demográfico de esta institución. La investigación identifica y evalúa factores que han contribuido al crecimiento, y declive de su membresía, entre 1945 y 2010. Se identifican y discuten características sobresalientes de esta institución y su relación con el desarrollo de la sociedad civil cubana actual.

Palabras Clave: Masonería, Cuba, siglo XX, análisis demográfico, sociedad civil

Abstract

We present a statistical and historical analysis of the development of the Grand Lodge of Cuba during 1945-2010, based on our demographic study of this institution. Research identifies and evaluates important factors that have contributed to membership growth and decline, in the second half of the XX Century. Important characteristics of this institution are identified and discussed, as they relate to the development of the evolving Cuban civil society.

Keywords: Freemasons, Cuba, XX Century, demographic analysis, civil society

Introduction

During the second half of the XX Century, Cuban Freemasons have lived through an interesting and difficult period. It included a pluralistic phase (1944-1952), Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship (1952-58), the advent of the Cuban revolution up to the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1959-89), developments after the loss of Soviet and other socialist countries economic subsidies (1989-2007), and developments after General Raul Castro took over the government from his ailing brother Fidel (2006+).

The present paper pursues three objectives. The first is to overview, using a demographic approach, the evolution of the Grand Lodge of Cuba (GLC) during the second half of the XX Century. The second is to identify and analyze several important characteristics of Cuban Freemasons that relate to the Cuban civil society. The third is to propose specific approaches through which the GLC can enhance its contributions to the development of Cuba's civil society.

This analysis addresses three important research questions. First why, if in any way, is the GLC still a relevant institution? Secondly, how has the GLC evolved during the second half of the XX Century, becoming what it is today? What difficulties has it found, and what solutions has it implemented to deal with them? Finally, how does the GLC fit within the rest of Cuba's contemporary Civil Society (CS)? And what other activities could the GLC develop, to more efficiently participate in, and contribute to, CS? For, as we will soon show, GLC is one of the oldest, largest and most widely spread organizations of such CS.

The study of the GLC is important because, with over 150 years, it is one of the oldest organizations of Cuban civil society. With about 30,000 members, nation-wide, in over 300 lodges located in almost every town, it is one of the largest and most widely distributed Cuban organizations. The GLC has traditionally admitted members of all races, social classes, political persuasions, and religions. Finally, the GLC, directly or through their members, has traditionally participated very actively in Cuba's political, economic and social life.

The scope of our research (and of our data analysis) is the GLC, the confederation of all Cuban *Blue Lodges*, which include 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree Freemasons (*Symbolic Freemasonry*). Some masons obtain higher degrees in some concordant bodies such as the Scottish Rite (4th to

33rd) known as *Philosophical Freemasonry*. However, these Freemasons are also required to belong to a Blue (or Symbolic) Lodge¹.

We have analyzed the yearly time series of the membership in the GLC, from 1948 to 2010. We have not included, in our analyses, data from two other Masonic organizations that operate in Cuba: *Caballeros de la Luz* and *Odd-Fellows*. Their membership is smaller than that of the GLC, and their data was not available to us.

We will not discuss the origins of Freemasonry in this paper. Readers interested in this subject should consult other sources. For the origins of Freemasonry in the Caribbean, see Ferrer Benimeli². For the history of Cuban Freemasons during the XIX Century, readers are referred to Miranda³. For more recent developments, readers are referred to Torres-Cuevas⁴.

Summary of our previous work

The first part of our study discusses in detail the period 1945-1980, and can be found in Romeu⁵. The second part of our study, found in Romeu⁶, discusses in detail the period 1980-2010. In this section, we summarize the main results of these two studies.

Figure 1 presents the graph of the yearly membership of the GLC, 1948-2010, with Total and Effective⁷ masons. Data from the GLC were obtained from Gustavo Pardo Valdes, at the time, President of the Academy of Higher Masonic Studies of the GLC. He obtained them from

¹ In 2010, out of the 29,000 members of the GLC, 4,213 of them, or 14.5% had obtained higher degrees. Annual Message for 2011-12. I.P.H. Lázaro F. Cuesta Valdés 33. SGC (p.s.r) of the Supreme Council, 33 Degree.

² José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli. "Vías de penetración de la masonería en el Caribe", en *REHMLAC* Vol.1, No. 1, 2009. pp. 6—9. Freemasonry entered through England (Jamaica), France (Haití) & USA (Charleston; Philadelphia).

³ Aurelio Miranda Álvarez. *Historia documentada de la masonería en Cuba*. (Molina y Cia. La Habana. 1933).

⁴ Eduardo Torres Cuevas. *Historia de la Masonería Cubana: seis ensayos*. (Edición Imágenes Contemporáneas. La Habana. 2003).

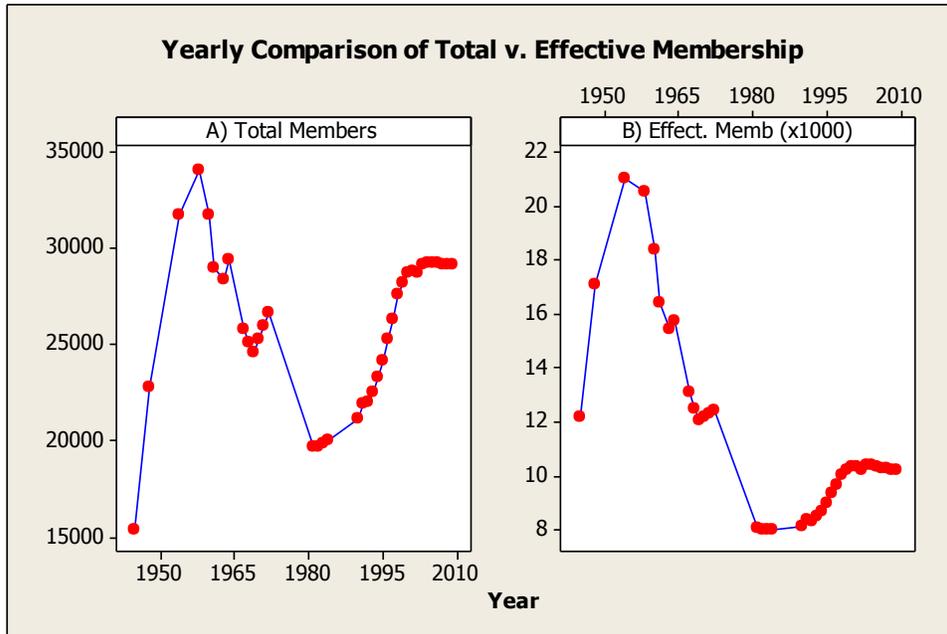
⁵ Jorge Luis Romeu. "Estudio Estadístico del Auge y Declive de la Gran Logia de Cuba Durante el Periodo de 1945 a 1980", en *REHMLAC* Vol.3, No. 2, Dec. 2011-Abril 2012. pp. 158—184. <http://rehmlac.com/index/vol3n2>

⁶ Jorge Luis Romeu. "Estudio Demográfico del Nuevo Auge de la Gran Logia de Cuba: Período de 1980 al 2010". Actas del Simposio del CEHMLAC (Centro de Estudios Historicos de la Masoneria Espanola). Gibraltar. Octubre 2012 (to appear). Available at author's web page: <http://web.cortland.edu/romeu/Cehme2daPtMason2012.pdf>

⁷ Effective masons: a statistic developed by the author to standardize (i.e. compare across time and space) the data. Yearly total masons are divided by one fourth of the corresponding total population (for females and men younger than 21, as well as those with criminal records and serious physical and mental disabilities, cannot be masons).

the Grand Secretary of the GLC. Population data were obtained from Cuban Censuses⁸. The ensuing extensive statistical analysis⁹ originated several academic research papers¹⁰.

Figure 1. Yearly membership in the GLC: A) Total Members; B) Effective Masons.



Source: Yearly membership reports from the Grand Secretary, GLC and author's calculations.

In both panels of Figure 1, one can observe *three* distinct cycles. The first two, from 1945 to 1959, and then from 1959 to 1980, are analyzed in our first (REHMLAC) paper. The third cycle, from 1980 to 2010, is analyzed in our second (CEHME) paper. In turn, each of these cycles can be decomposed into periods, characterized by specific social, political and economic events. To help answer the research question “what happened during these years?” we compared the GLC time series data with their concurrent historical events. Serial change points were used to identify the beginning and the end of the cycles and the periods we defined.

⁸ Data from the 1943, 1953, 1971, 2002. Cuban censuses Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas: Web Page Cuba.Gov http://www.cubagob.cu/otras_info/censo/index.htm; and ONE: <http://www.one.cu/>. Oficinas del Censo, Republica de Cuba. (Accessed December 5, 2011). Inter-censal yearly values were linearly interpolated.

⁹ Jorge L. Romeu y Gustavo Pardo Valdés. *Análisis demográfico de la masonería cubana*. Habana. 2010. Accesible in the autor's Web Page: <http://web.cortland.edu/romeu/MasonDemoTodos.pdf>.

¹⁰ Jorge L. Romeu and Gustavo Pardo Valdés. “Demographic Study of Cuban Blue Lodge Masons”. Presented to, and published in the *Proceedings of Social Statistics*, 2012 Annual Conference, American Statistical Society, and in the Journal *Estadística*, of the Inter-American Statistical Institute, Vol. 63, No. 181, pp. 57—75.

To illustrate the size of the data we give in Table 1, for selected years, GLC membership and number of lodges, with their corresponding *Total Cuban population* and *Effective Masons*.

Table 1. GLC membership for selected years, 1945-2008.

Year	Members	Lodges	Population	Effective
1945	15361	207	5048750	12.17
1958	34025	340	6638133	20.50
1968	25072	332	8040800	12.47
1981	19690	326	9794900	8.04
1990	21153	314	10433000	8.11
2000	28689	314	11142000	10.30
2008	29110	316	11417246	10.20

Source: Romeu and Pardo Valdés, pp. 2 and 3

Notice how, 1958 and 1981 (highlighted) are the two years where GLC achieve the Maximum and Minimum number of Lodges, *Total* and *Effective* Members, during the period of 1945-2010. Table 2 presents our seven defined historical periods, with their related main events.

Table 2. Historical periods derived from the GLC annual membership data.

Historical Epoch	Years	Membership Trend	Relevant Events
Before the revolution	1945-1958	Accelerated growth	Grau, Prío, and the struggle against Batista
First Years after the revolution	1959-1969	Accelerated reduction	Emigration; Bay Pigs; October Crisis; Revol. Ofensive; UMAP
Second Revolutionary Period	1970-1976	Slower reduction Missing Data.	Zafra de los 10 Millones; End of Legal Emigration
Third Revolutionary Period	1977-1980	Accelerated reduction	State Economy; Visits from “Community”; Mariel boatlift
Fourth Revolutionary Period	1981-1990	Slower growth Missing Data	Gorbachev; Disolution of USSR; Economic Liberalization after the Mariel Boatlift:

Fifth Revolutionary Period	1991-2000	Accelerated growth	IV Congress of PCC; Special Period; Rise of Tourism
Sixth Revolutionary Period	2001 to date	Stability	New Millenium; Tourism; Support from Venezuela; Raul Castro

We then developed and fitted a statistical model that explains the data variation:

$$\text{Members CurrentYear} = \text{Members PreviousYear} - \text{Losses} + \text{Gains}$$

$$\text{Losses} = \text{Withdrawals} + \text{Politically_Motivated} + \text{Deaths}$$

$$\text{Gains} = \text{New members (affiliations)} + \text{Re-affiliations}$$

Withdrawals refer to masons who became disillusioned and left the GLC. *Politically motivated* losses include: (1) emigration caused by the 1959 revolution; (2) demits (or never joining) GLC due to government policies¹¹; and (3) demits (or never joining) GLC because the new revolutionary ideology was more attractive than that of Freemasonry. Model results, discussed at length in the mentioned papers, were satisfactory. Thence, they supported the plausibility of said model, including the hypotheses upon which such model was developed.

In the 1990s, membership growth rates in the GLC tripled, after the IV Communist Party Congress allowed its members to join and non-government work in tourism, increased.

Table 3: Comparison of GLC growth rates, before and after the IV Party Congress (1991)

Year	Members	Effective	Estimation (0.01)	Estimation (0.03)	Difference
1991	21918	0.0084	21365	21809	444
1992	21962	0.0083	21584	22485	901
1993	22539	0.0085	21803	23182	1379
1994	23321	0.0087	22029	23900	1872
1995	24169	0.0090	22262	24641	2379
1996	25301	0.0093	22504	25405	2902
1997	26344	0.0096	22757	26193	3436
1998	27635	0.0101	23020	27005	3985
1999	28173	0.0102	23296	27842	4546
2000	28689	0.0103	23578	28705	5127

Source: Yearly reports from the Grand Secretary and author's calculations

¹¹ During the early years of the Cuban revolution the government developed a deliberate policy to obtain adherence to its cause, characterized by Fidel Castro's phrase "Within the Revolution, everything, outside the Revolution, nothing". *Discurso a los Intelectuales*. Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba. Havana, June 1963. Ministerio de Cultura: <http://www.min.cult.cu/loader.php?sec=historia&cont=palabrasalointelectuales> (Accessed: May 2011). Examples to discourage participation in organized religion or Freemasonry, included restricting college and job opportunities.

Table 3 presents two membership estimations, using rate 0.01 (of the 1980 decade) and rate 0.03, of the 1990s. This comparison shows an increase, in year 2000, of 5127 new members that would have not joined the GLC, had growth rate remained that of the 1980s.

Table 4 presents how GLC membership stabilized at about 29,000 during the first ten years of the XXI Century. Notice the strong yearly turn-over (members joining and leaving, the GLC) of about 10%. After a decade of such a high turn-over, the GLC membership may be very different from that of the 1980s, or even before.

Table 4: GLC yearly membership data, in the first decade of the XXI Century

Year	Members	Effective	Lodges	Dropped	Joined
2001	28772	0.0103	314	2170	2075
2002	28677	0.0102	314	1247	1697
2003	29127	0.0104	316	2141	2239
2004	29225	0.0104	316	***	***
2005	29276	0.0104	316	***	***
2006	29192	0.0103	316	***	***
2007	29134	0.0102	316	***	***
2008	29110	0.0102	316	***	***
2009	29169	0.0102	316	***	***
2010	28863	0.0101	316	***	***

Source: Reports from the Grand Secretary GLC, and the author's calculation.

Finally, wide geographical distribution of GLC members is illustrated via provincial data, shown in Table 5. Notice how, in each of Cuba's fourteen provinces there are several lodges. Metropolitan Havana captures one third of all lodges and members of GLC. Urban provinces have higher Effective masons (concentration) than more rural ones.

Table 5: GLC Provincial membership data, circa 2007

PROVINCE	Lodges	Members	PercLodgs	PercMmb	Effective
TOTAL	316	29,127	100	100	10.42
PINAR del RIO	17	2,706	5.38	9.29	14.9
PROV. HABANA	29	2,494	9.18	8.56	14.03
CIUDAD HABANA	111	9,329	35.13	32.03	16.95
MATANZAS	28	2,370	8.86	8.14	14.14
VILLA CLARA	29	2,667	9.18	9.16	13.05
CIENFUEGOS	14	1,387	4.43	4.76	14.04
SANCTI SPIRITU	11	991	3.48	3.4	8.61

CIEGO DE AVILA	8	449	2.53	1.54	4.36
CAMAGUEY	14	709	4.43	2.43	3.62
LAS TUNAS	6	604	1.9	2.07	4.6
HOLGUIN	12	1,138	3.8	3.91	4.46
GRANMA	10	1,104	3.16	3.79	5.37
STGO DE CUBA	19	1,992	6.01	6.84	7.69
GUANTANAMO	7	1,187	2.22	4.08	9.36

Source: Reports from the Grand Secretary, GLC and author's calculations

Based on the analyzed data, events and model, key characteristics were identified for each period. They are discussed in detail in the mentioned papers, and summarized below:

Period 1945-1959: doubling of GLC membership, was possibly impacted by a strong post-war economy and growth of urban middle classes, which nurtured a large segment of members. *Period 1959-1980:* 40% decrease, largely among young and professional members was possibly impacted by wide state control of Cuba's economic life, which triggered strong emigration and demits and few affiliations. *Period 1980-1992:* end of accelerated decline, and beginning of a slow growth, was possibly impacted by new possibilities of self-employment and a more relaxed governmental policy (the first political dissenters appeared). *Period 1992-2000:* accelerated growth, with more young and professional members, was possibly impacted by the 1991 Cuban Communist Party Congress decision to allow members to join religious and fraternal organizations¹², and vice-versa, as well as by greater self-employment opportunities generated by large growth of international tourism. *Period 2000-2010:* stabilization at 29,000 members, was possibly due to member saturation, as well as by government liberalization in several political, social and economic areas, introduced by the new administration of General Raul Castro¹³ who, in 2006, substituted his brother Fidel.

Our overall conclusion from observing 65 years of GLC evolution, is that the degree of state control over the economy, which can seriously affect private citizens' opportunities for advancement (e.g. for studying and working), was a key factor in the (positive or negative) development of Freemasonry in Cuba, during the second half of the XX Century.

¹² IV Congress of the Cuban Communist Party. October 1991. *Radio Rebelde* <http://www.radiorebelde.cu/50-revolucion/congresos/4-congreso.html>. Accessed on V/1/2012

¹³ *Revolution in Retreat*. (**The Economist**. Vol. 402, No. 8777. III/24/2012. Special Report Insert). Examples of (1) economic changes: state land leased to private farmers; (2) political changes: limitation to two terms of five years, for heads of state (Fidel Castro had lead Cuba, under several titles, for 47 years); (3) social changes: Mariela Castro, daughter of President Raul Castro, heads the defense of homosexuals, previously seriously curtailed.

Some Relevant Characteristics of Cuban Freemasons

We just saw how, in the second half of the XX Century, GLC membership went from accelerated growth (1945-1959), to accelerated decay (1960-1980), to stabilization (1981-1991), and finally, again to accelerated growth (1992-2010) and membership stabilization¹⁴. Through the analyses we identified several factors affecting this evolution. In this section we present and discuss several characteristics that make the GLC, as an organization, particularly interesting.

Inclusion is one characteristic that makes the GLC¹⁵ a singular organization. For it admits male members from all religions¹⁶, races¹⁷, walks of life¹⁸, socio-economic strata¹⁹, regions of the country²⁰ and political persuasions²¹. This makes the GLC a cross-cut of Cuban society²².

Then, Freemasons are *egalitarian*: all Master Masons (MM) enjoy the same rights and obligations. They are *democratic* (all officers are elected, and every MM can aspire to hold any position in the lodge). They are *participative* and not a captive audience (any MM has the possibility of respectfully arguing for, or against, any statement or proposal made in lodge).

Another characteristic of the GLC is its tradition of *participation in the civic life* of the country, through peaceful means. Several GLC members became leaders in Cuba's autonomic movement, at the end of the XIX Century²³. And many others have continued to be leaders in the political, educational and social life of the country, perhaps because GLC provided those Cubans wanting to participate outside the political parties and the government, an opportunity to do so²⁴.

¹⁴ After 1992, we find ten years of intense turn-over in the membership, both in initiations and demits. By the year 2003, almost as many new members had joined (and perhaps left) the GLC, as there were in 1980.

¹⁵ Grand Lodges may incorporate specific characteristics of their respective countries and communities,

¹⁶ Many masons are Catholic, which is the prevalent religion in the country; but others also belong to Protestant denominations. Others are Jewish; and some practice Afro-Cuban religions.

¹⁷ Since the creation of GOCA (Gran Oriente de Cuba y las Antillas) in 1861, lodges included non-whites. GLC has been a racially intergrated organization. Currently, the Grand Commander of the Supreme Council is Afro-Cuban, as well as many lodge officers, and several members of the Grand Line.

¹⁸ In most every lodge one finds factory workers, clerks, technicians, as well as college professionals.

¹⁹ Traditionally, from working and professional lower and middle classes.

²⁰ There are over 300 lodges in almost every town, throughout the country. One third, concentrated in Havana.

²¹ Includes members of the Cuban Communist Party, government officials and security apparatus (e.g. Past GM Collera Vento was a member of the security apparatus); internal dissenters and ex-political prisoners (e.g. Hector Maseda, a member of the Supreme Council, is a dissident and ex-political prisoner) and non-committed citizens.

²² Women have a separate organization, *Acacias*; and the young had another one, *AJEF*, which was closed in 1966.

²³ Dominique Soucy y Delphine Sappez. "Autonomismo y Masonería en Cuba" REHMLAC. (Vol.1, No. 1. 2009).

²⁴ Alternative civic organizations, such as Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, etc. were not as widely developed, in Cuba.

The involvement of GLC members in the civic life of the country can be illustrated via the example of several past Grand Masters. Regüíferos, Llansó Simoni, Llansó Ordoñez and Muñoz Sañudo were civic and economic leaders. Wolter del Río and Santos Jimenez were university professors and cabinet ministers. Antonio Iraizoz was a prominent newspaper editor.

To help understand such involvement, we present a key definition of GLC philosophy, from a book edited under Grand Master Santos Jiménez's tenure. It states: *(Freemasonry) does not intend to impede the struggles for the different ideals that exist among men, but to seek that everyone may be able to defend one's principles, against the principles of others, without using any other weapon than reason, and without bringing to the struggle any other pursuit than the noble desire of seeing their ideals succeed, based upon their own merits. (Freemasonry) does not pretend to castrate the human thought, but on the contrary, to energize it in such a way, that it is no longer necessary to use imposition by force, to succeed*²⁵.

There are *other important practical characteristics*, in addition to Freemasonry's ethical teachings, which are developed by active participation in lodge. These include the fostering of reading habits²⁶, the honing of organization skills, democratic methods of leadership, managing and living within a budget, effective public speaking, the art of listening and arguing respectfully, the art of negotiation based upon persuasion and reason, and abiding by a system of rules and regulations. All of these characteristics contribute to prepare good civic leaders.

Finally, and at least in principle, Freemasons constitute a *Fraternity* where Brothers must exercise *Tolerance*²⁷. Because of these two latter characteristics, Freemasons are potentially able to *develop open and free forums* where, through *interaction* (a key element for developing *Social Capital*) productive exchanges of ideas can take place.

Because of its fraternal and tolerance principles, lodges may become *incubators of novel ideas*, where members may discuss divergent views, cross-fertilizing each other. This may well be its most important contribution, as an organization.

²⁵ Grand Lodge of Cuba. 1936. *La masonería: sus fines, su historia, su obra*. Molina y Cia. Habana. Page 36

²⁶ In addition to degree liturgies and catechisms, masons read books on history, rituals, philosophy, etc.

²⁷ Some masons think that Tolerance is not enough, and that Acceptance is the contemporary right attitude.

Summarizing, there are *three key functions* that Freemasonry, and thence also the GLC, provide to society as a result of the above-discussed characteristics. These are, (1) the *connecting* function²⁸, (2) the *disseminating* function²⁹, and (3) the *incubating* function³⁰. Because of these characteristics, some political regimes have encouraged the development of Freemasonry. And others have, openly or discretely, opposed it.

Cuban Freemasons and Civil Society

Cuban civil society (CS) is a topic that has interested this researcher for several years, and to which we have dedicated time and effort³¹. For, CS and the GLC are closely related.

It is worth noticing how the GLC was not disbanded in Cuba, a one-party Marxist state after 1959, as it was in Nazi Germany, in Fascist Spain and Italy, or in the Soviet Union, all of them also one-party, ideological states. Such exception constitutes a unique case in modern history. Why was the GLC not banned or disbanded, as were other members of Cuba's pre-revolutionary CS³²? This constitutes an excellent research question to which several answers may be advanced. These include (1) GLC civic and patriotic trajectory, with many members in the 1959 revolution, (2) GLC had a wide acceptance among Cubans, and (3) a heterogeneous socioeconomic base, as well as (4) many international connections³³. Finally, (5) the GLC came under effective government control, through certain obligatory measures³⁴. In a future paper, we intend to explore further the above-mentioned hypotheses.

After the 1990 collapse of the Soviet Union and the European Eastern Block, Cuba lost substantial economic subsidies, plunging it into a severe economic crisis. Thus, it turned to international tourism as a source of badly needed income. At the same time, the island's CS

²⁸ Lodges help establish new contacts, thus fostering interaction among its members.

²⁹ Lodges help spread new ideas among its own members, among members of other lodges, and beyond.

³⁰ Lodges foster the creation of new organizations that implement the new ideas.

³¹ Jorge Luis Romeu. "Un Análisis de la Literatura sobre la Sociedad Civil Cubana". En *Caribbean Studies*. U. de Puerto Rico; Rio Piedras. Vol. 41, No. 1 (enero-junio de 2013).

³² Other institutions such as Rotary, Lions, Boy Scouts and the Catholic Youth, were disbanded shortly after 1959.

³³ Including figures like Presidents Lazaro Cardenas, of Mexico, and Salvador Allende, of Chile.

³⁴ GLC was controlled under the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party, requiring lodges to submit detailed session reports, with names of attendees and topics of debate, under severe fines, and surveillance through overt and covert members of Cuban security apparatus, such as Past Grand Master Collera Vento.

began developing. Thence, during the 1990s, hundreds of new Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were created³⁵, exerting a growing influence in the life of the island.

One of the most prominent of these CS organizations was the Catholic Church. Directly through its dioceses and parishes, or with help from *Caritas*³⁶, its international charitable organization, the Catholic Church began developing new religious, social and educational programs³⁷ and reviving some old ones. Several new Internet publications appeared³⁸, edited by the Dioceses³⁹, in particular that of Havana⁴⁰. The strengthening of CS in general, and of the Catholic Church organizations, in particular, increased after General Raul Castro succeeded his brother Fidel, in 2006. For example, in 2010 Cardinal Jaime Ortega mediated in the process of releasing dozens of Cuban political prisoners⁴¹. All of which provides an excellent roadmap for activities the GLC could undertake to contribute to CS, as well as to enhance its status.

For, GLC is indeed a *bona-fide* member of CS, as it fulfills the three key elements in its definition⁴². The GLC is (1) independent of the state; (2) its membership is voluntary, and (3) its legitimate goals are advanced through peaceful means. Therefore, as one of the oldest, one of the largest, and one of the most geographically widely expanded organizations of the Cuban CS, the GLC has an important and active role to play.

What are then, some of the contributions that the GLC could offer the Cuban CS?

One can answer this important question by referring back in history to the time when modern Freemasonry began. For, since their early beginnings in the XVII and XVIII Century

³⁵ Bildner Center/City University of New York (CUNY) Report on Cuban ONGs:

<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/dept/bildn/publications/documents/Reaud15.pdf> Accessed on V/1/13

³⁶ Caritas Cubana http://www.caritas.org/worldmap/latin_america/cuba.html Accessed on V/1/13

³⁷ Centro de Bioetica: http://www.cbioetica.org/congre_fibip/academic_eng.pdf (accessed V/10/13)

³⁸ *Vitral*, of Diocese of Pinar del Rio <http://www.vitral.org/> and *Palabra Nueva*, of Diocese of Havana

<http://www.palabranueva.net/newPage/index.php> (accessed V/10/13) are two good examples,

³⁹ Several Dioceses web sites and its formation centers (accessed on V/10/13) can be found in:

http://www.palabranueva.net/newPage/index.php?option=com_weblinks&view=category&id=14%3Asitios-diocesanos&Itemid=6 and http://www.arquidiocesisdelahabana.org/contens/webs/ind_main12_formacion.htm

⁴⁰ Archidiocesis of Havana Web Site: <http://www.arquidiocesisdelahabana.org/> (accessed V/10/13)

⁴¹ El País http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/07/07/actualidad/1278453615_850215.html

⁴² V. Pérez-Díaz. *The Return of Civil Society*. (Harvard University Press. 1993).

England, masonic lodges were conceived as elementary embryos of an emerging CS. These ideas, clearly discussed in Margaret Jacob's study *Living the Enlightenment*⁴³, are still valid today.

Jacob affirms that "Lodges were spaces in a new zone of civil society"⁴⁴. She continues by stating that "lodges occupied a middle ground" in this society. In the lodge, "some men and a few women sought to express *those* ideals sociably"⁴⁵. Therefore, lodges constitute a forum for novel ideas that perhaps cannot be yet shared as freely, in other more *established* social forums.

Jacob continues her analysis stating that "First and foremost, Lodges were schools of government"⁴⁶. It is important to notice how masonic lodges are ruled by written regulations, and how their officers are democratically elected among their peers⁴⁷. Jacob then states that Lodges foster "the creation of constitutionally governed civil societies"⁴⁸. In them, "merit should be the sole criterion for status within the Lodge"⁴⁹. *Merit* here, is understood as *personal achievement*. At the time, such idea was revolutionary and dangerous; and it still may be in some societies.

Jacob then discusses the *egalitarian* masonic concept of "Promotion within the lodge as grounded upon real worth and personal merit only"⁵⁰, instead of the rank or the wealth that an individual held in society, often inherited and not directly earned.

All the above-expressed concepts may help explain the growth of the GLC, which began in the 1990s. Before then, some individuals such as government and party officials were not allowed to join the GLC. Some citizens that later became economically independent of the state, would have not join the GLC. And some other individuals, considered insufficiently qualified to join higher structures by the official society⁵¹, because they held unwelcome personal values⁵², may have sought acceptance in the ranks of the GLC. In the XVII Century such behavior was

⁴³ Margaret Jacob. *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasons and Politics in XVIII Century Europe*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford. 1991).

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, page 57

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, page 143.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, page 124

⁴⁷ *Blue* lodges have only three degrees. Once a member has obtained the third or highest degree, *Master Mason*, he becomes eligible to hold any office in the lodge, and is endowed with the right to vote in every lodge election.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, page 135

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, page 56

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, page 54

⁵¹ Such as the Cuban Communist Party, the government, and in some professional positions,

⁵² Religious, philosophical, economic, political, social, or other ideologies.

developed by individuals who were similarly poorly valued by their own official society, and sought recognition and advancement through their lodges.

Some proposed activities for the GLC

Currently, the GLC holds a low-key presence in Cuban society at large and in CS in particular. For well over thirty years (1960-1990), few persons outside the GLC have known of its existence, or have felt its influence. For it had no access to the media, and was unable to develop public programs. This had never happened since Cuba's independence. And, at this time, the GLC has few levers to change such unsuitable situation.

That a change is possible has been demonstrated by the achievements of the Catholic Church, discussed in the previous section, which also provide several good examples of strategies to pursue, and of programs to develop.

First and foremost, the GLC needs a voice and a presence. At this time, the GLC has only a web page⁵³, showing a message from Grand Master Evaristo Rubén Gutiérrez Torres, dated October 30, 2012. The page also has several sections of general information about the GLC, and a Blog with messages dated up to 2011. Such poor performance may be explained by the high cost in CUCs⁵⁴ of operating a web page, and/or for the lack of personnel to man it. Both of these problems can be improved with the help of the many GLC international connections⁵⁵, just like the Catholic Church has done through *Caritas*.

The GLC web page needs to keep its content current and relevant. And its affiliated Blue lodges need to have computer equipment and Internet access in order to read it⁵⁶.

The *Supreme Council of 33 Degree for the Republic of Cuba*⁵⁷ (SCG33) has shown that it is possible to have an up-to-date web page, with relevant information, and even to have a presence in Facebook⁵⁸. In addition, the SCG33 has successfully organized an International Conference on *Freemasonry and Integration to Current Society*⁵⁹. The selected theme reveals the SCG33 active interest in developing broader participation. Said conference was attended

⁵³ Web Page GLC: <http://www.granlogiacuba.org/> (Accessed on V/10/13).

⁵⁴ One CUC, Cuban Convertible Peso = 25 CUPs, Cuban Peso, which is the currency in which people are paid.

⁵⁵ Freemasonry is an international organization, and the GLC belongs to several international masonic bodies.

⁵⁶ Computer access is expensive in Cuba; providing access to individual lodges could be a useful service.

⁵⁷ SCG33 Web Page: <http://www.supremocuba.org/> (Accessed on V/10/13)

⁵⁸ SCG33 in Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/supremoconsejogrado33cuba> (Accessed on V/10/13)

⁵⁹ http://www.supremocuba.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=6 (V/10/13)

by several national and foreign presenters, whose papers can be read in said SCG33 Web Page. A second international conference is being organized for 2014. Attendance costs are comparatively high, and do not facilitate a wider participation of foreign masonic scholars.

One explanation for the effective development of the SCG33 may reside in having renewed its leadership. The SCG33 past Grand Commander, Jesús L. Armada Peña (1991 – 2011) an octogenarian, was substituted by Lazaro Faustino Cuesta Valdes, of Afro-Cuban descent⁶⁰, who is several years younger, and obviously more dynamic. Grand Commander Cuesta Valdes visited the US Supreme Council Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, in Ohio, last year. And he has received an invitation to visit the US Supreme Council Southern Masonic Jurisdiction, in Washington DC, this year. International exposure and contacts could greatly help GLC in its quest to achieve a larger relevance and impact in contemporary Cuban CS.

In addition, the GLC could develop again social and educational programs, not only for its members, but also for the greater society. Throughout the 1950s, the GLC operated the Masonic University. The Catholic Church is currently developing, at the *Seminario de San Carlos y San Ambrosio*⁶¹, joint graduate courses with the University of Havana, which also has an Institute⁶² that is interested in Cuban Freemasonry. Some contacts have already been developed between GLC and such Institute⁶³, that could be expanded by the teaching of joint courses, workshops and symposia on masonic history and related themes, in a similar way as the Grand Lodge of California and UCLA have teamed and have sponsored this conference.

Finally, many hundreds of Cuban Freemasons, formerly members of the GLC, now live abroad, and have joined lodges in the US, Spain, Puerto Rico, etc. It might be useful for the GLC, in more than one way, to allow these former members to have *dual affiliation* with their original Cuban lodges, as some Puerto Rican freemasons have with American lodges, when they move to the mainland, to be able to visit them, and to participate in their work, if they so choose.

⁶⁰ First Afro-Cuban mason to occupy such high position, in the history of the SCG33.

⁶¹ <http://www.arquidiocesisdelahabana.org/contens/webs/seminario/> (Accessed V/10/13)

⁶² Casa de Altos Estudios Don Fernando Ortiz, de la Universidad de La Habana.

<http://www.filosofia.cu/site/institucion.php?id=15> (Accessed V/10/13)

⁶³ An attempt in this direction was made with Catedra Trans-Disciplinaria de Estudios de la Masoneria Cubana: http://www.oocities.org/es/hagadu_cub/facultad.htm (Accessed V/10/13)

Some may interpret our above proposals as advocating political activity in lodge, where discussions about politics and religion are not allowed⁶⁴. However, this is not the case. First, we are suggesting the discussion of *policy and not of politics*, Secondly, interaction occurs before and after the formal lodge session takes place. There, consideration of such topics is legitimate.

We stress the clear difference between *policy and politics*⁶⁵. The first term is concerned with *theoretical concepts* and questions, such as the place of religion, education, social hierarchy etc. in society. These have always been themes of interest for Freemasons. An example is the abstract question of addressing God in a manner independent of religion: *Grand Architect of the Universe* is used. For the abstract question of equal treatment in lodge, for members that had a different status, wealth, social class or occupation, in the strongly hierarchical societies of the XVIII Century, the term Brother was used. Both of these issues clearly address *policy*.

On the other hand, *politics* is concerned with *proposing specific solutions* to resolve the transcendental questions defined by policy. These are *usually outlined by political parties*, who deal with their implementation. For example, should there be, or not, a state religion? And if so, which? Freemasons are then free to address this issue through their (liberal or conservative, etc.) political associations, and still keep in touch through their masonic links. *Partisan politics* is not allowed in lodge by most Grand Lodge constitutions, because it is *potentially divisive*⁶⁶.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this paper shows how, at this time, GLC has a weak and low-key participation in the Cuban CS. We have also shown how the GLC would strengthen Cuban CS, if it would increase its participation, just as other organizations such as the Catholic Church have done. GLC would especially help by developing forums where its members, of diverse (and

⁶⁴ The XXV Ancient Landmarks, compiled by Albert Mackey in 1858, do not mention discussions of politics or religion inside the Lodge. These are instead proscribed in the Constitutions of many, if not most, Grand Lodges. http://www.grandlodgeofvirginia.org/education/programs/monthly_talks/The_Ancient_Landmarks_of_Masonry.pdf

⁶⁵ According to *American Heritage Dictionary* (Houghton Mifflin. Boston, MA. 1980) *Policy* is defined (p. 1014) as a course of action or guiding principle; *Politics* is defined (p. 1015) as using, displaying or proceeding from policy.

⁶⁶ GLC Grand Master German Wolter del Rio admirably addressed this difficult issue as follows: “*Cada hermano en particular, con las enseñanzas y el ideario doctrinal masónico, deberá por si, dar a esas conclusiones, independientemente de la Institución, aplicaciones*”. (Each brother, in particular, with the masonic teachings and ideology, should by himself, and independently, give to these conclusions its applications). Translated by the author.

sometimes conflicting) ideologies, could interact in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance, conducive to positive resolutions, instead of sterile disputes.

In principle, the GLC and their Freemasons are capable of developing, in such forums, (1) the connecting function, (2) the disseminating function, and (3) the incubating function so necessary in the process of developing new and fruitful ideas.

In addition, the GLC could develop valuable cultural, social and economic programs of general interest, as it successfully did in its past.

But most importantly the GLC needs to realize that it must seize the historical moment and actively participate in the important events that the island is currently living through. If the GLC fails to participate in this process, while other Cuban CS institutions successfully do, then the GLC may pay a heavy price in terms of remaining, in the future, a relevant organization⁶⁷.

Acknowledgements

We thank UCLA History Department, and the Grand Lodge of the State of California and its Masonic Foundation, for their invitation to present our research on Cuban Freemasons at their 2011 International Conference, as well as for their support to attend it. In particular, we want to thank Professors Margaret Jacobs and Maria Eugenia Vazquez Semadeni, of UCLA, and Mr. Adam Kendall, at the Henry Coil Library and Museum of Freemasonry, GL of CA, for their help and encouragement.

⁶⁷ This comment may be applicable to other Grand Lodges, with the due constraints and adaptations to their respective environments and situations.