

# More on Characteristics and Challenges of Cuban Freemasons in the XX Century<sup>1</sup>

**Submitted to:**

**American Lodge of Research**

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## **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

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an expanded and revised version of the one presented at the International Conference on American and Latin American Freemasons, UCLA History Department and Grand Lodge of the State of California, which was published in its Proceedings, in a special issue of REHMLAC

## 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), then after the loss of Soviet economic subsidies (1989-2007), and finally 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 (and perhaps several other Grand Lodges) can enhance its contributions to the development of their respective civil societies.

This paper addresses several research questions. First, is 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? Finally, how does GLC fit within the rest of Cuba's contemporary Civil Society (CS)? And what activities could GLC develop, to more efficiently participate in, and contribute to, 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 our data analysis is the GLC, which comprises 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Freemasons (*Blue Lodges or Symbolic Freemasonry*). We analyzed the yearly time series of GLC membership, from 1948 to 2010. We do not discuss the origins of Cuban

Freemasonry. Readers interested should consult Bro. Aurelio Miranda<sup>2</sup>, for the history of GLC up to the XIX Century, and Dr. Eduardo Torres-Cuevas<sup>3</sup>, for more recent developments.

### Summary of our previous work

The first part of our study discusses in detail the period 1945-1980, and can be found in Romeu<sup>4</sup>. The second part of our study, found in Romeu<sup>5</sup>, 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 Effective<sup>6</sup> masons. Data from the GLC were obtained from Gustavo Pardo Valdes, at the time, President of the Academy of Higher Masonic Studies<sup>7</sup> of the GLC. He obtained them from the Grand Secretary of the GLC. Population data were obtained from Cuban Censuses<sup>8</sup>. The ensuing extensive statistical analysis<sup>9</sup> originated several academic research papers<sup>10</sup>.

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

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<sup>2</sup> Aurelio Miranda Álvarez. *Historia documentada de la masonería en Cuba*. (Molina y Cia. La Habana. 1933).

<sup>3</sup> Eduardo Torres Cuevas. *Historia de la Masonería Cubana: seis ensayos*. (Edición Imágenes Contemporáneas. La Habana. 2003).

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> 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>

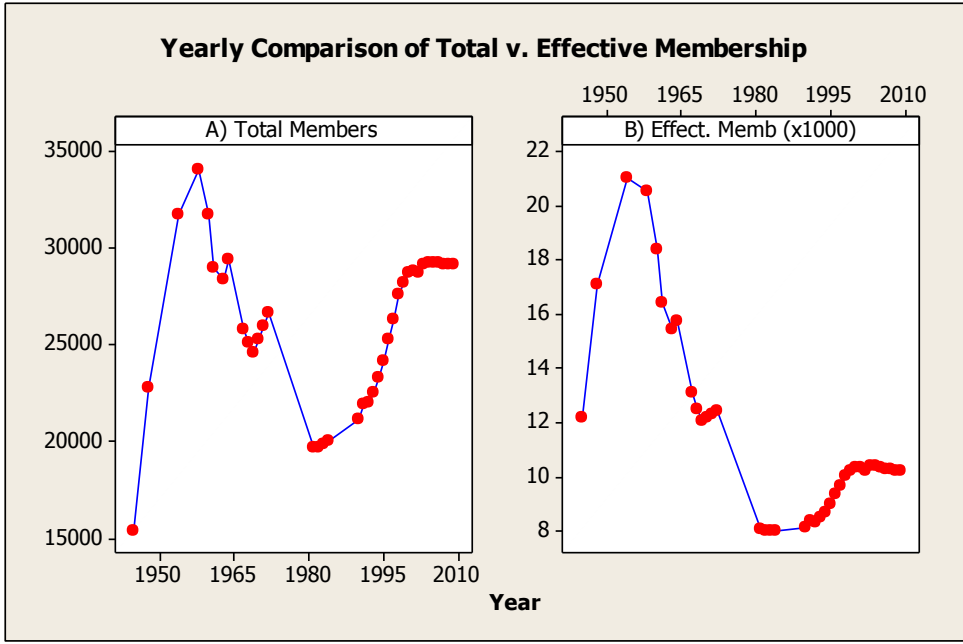
<sup>6</sup> Effective masons: a statistic developed by the author to standardize (i.e. compare across time and space) the data. Yearly total masons are divided by one fourth of the corresponding total population (for females and men younger than 21, as well as those with criminal records and serious physical and mental disabilities, cannot be masons).

<sup>7</sup> Akin, in nature and functions, to our Lodges of Research

<sup>8</sup> 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](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.

<sup>9</sup> 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>.

<sup>10</sup> Jorge L. Romeu and Gustavo Pardo Valdes. “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.



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.

To place the data in context we show, in Table 1 and for selected years, GLC membership with their corresponding number of lodges, *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 policies<sup>11</sup>; 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

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 shows how GLC membership stabilized at about 29,000 during the first ten years of the XXI Century. Also, notice the strong yearly turn-over (members joining and leaving, the GLC) of about 10%. After a decade under 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
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<sup>11</sup> 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=palabrasalosintelectuales> (Accessed: May 2011). Examples to discourage participation in organized religion or Freemasonry, included restricting college and job opportunities.

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, a 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

<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>Lodges</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>PercLodgs</b>	<b>PercMmb</b>	<b>Effective</b>
TOTAL	316	29,127	100	100	10.42
<b>PINAR del RIO</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2,706</b>	<b>5.38</b>	<b>9.29</b>	<b>14.9</b>
<b>PROV. HABANA</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2,494</b>	<b>9.18</b>	<b>8.56</b>	<b>14.03</b>
<b>CIUDAD HABANA</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>9,329</b>	<b>35.13</b>	<b>32.03</b>	<b>16.95</b>
<b>MATANZAS</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2,370</b>	<b>8.86</b>	<b>8.14</b>	<b>14.14</b>
<b>VILLA CLARA</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2,667</b>	<b>9.18</b>	<b>9.16</b>	<b>13.05</b>
<b>CIENFUEGOS</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1,387</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>4.76</b>	<b>14.04</b>
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 organizations<sup>12</sup>, 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 Castro<sup>13</sup> who, in 2006, substituted his brother Fidel.

Our overall conclusion from observing 65 years of GLC evolution, is that the degree of government control over the economy, which can seriously affect individual 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.

### **Some Relevant Characteristics of Cuban Freemasons**

The demographic analyses presented in the previous sections have helped identify several factors affecting the evolution of the GLC membership. In this section we discuss several characteristics that make the GLC (and possibly Freemasonry in general) a singular organization; one whose ideas and ideals may be considered extremely dangerous, and even subversive, by some regimes and political organizations who find their interests seriously affected by these.

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<sup>12</sup> 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

<sup>13</sup> *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.



*Inclusion* is one characteristic that makes the GLC<sup>14</sup> a singular organization. For it admits male members from all religions<sup>15</sup>, races<sup>16</sup>, walks of life<sup>17</sup>, socio-economic strata<sup>18</sup>, regions of the country<sup>19</sup> and political persuasions<sup>20</sup>. This makes the GLC a cross-cut of Cuban society<sup>21</sup>, as its diverse membership can get to know, and thence to appreciate and accept better, others very different from themselves. Such tenet does not bide well with concepts such as racism, classism, regionalism, ideological or religious preferences, etc. enforced by some organizations.

Then, Freemasons are *egalitarian*: all Master Masons (MM) enjoy the same rights and obligations. They are *democratic* (lodge officers are elected, and every MM can aspire to join the Line and eventually hold any position in the lodge). Masons 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). This tenet does not bide well with pyramidal organizations, where all instructions come from the top, and must be silently accepted and obeyed by its lower echelons.

Another characteristic of the GLC is its tradition of *participation in Cuba's civic life*, through peaceful means. This is only natural and stems from its dictum: *Freemasonry take some good men and make them better*. Naturally, some of these better men may feel a call to work on behalf of their peers. Several GLC members became leaders in Cuba's autonomic movement, at the end of the XIX Century<sup>22</sup>. 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 so<sup>23</sup>. Again, this is not necessarily a unique situation in Cuba –but may be applied to Freemasonry at large.

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<sup>14</sup> Grand Lodges may incorporate specific characteristics of their respective countries and communities,

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> In most every lodge one finds factory workers, clerks, technicians, as well as college professionals.

<sup>18</sup> Traditionally, from working and professional lower and middle classes.

<sup>19</sup> There are over 300 lodges in almost every town, throughout the country. One third, concentrated in Havana.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> Women have a separate organization, *Acacias*; and the young had another one, *AJEF*, which was closed in 1966.

<sup>22</sup> Dominique Soucy y Delphine Sappez. “Autonomismo y Masonería en Cuba” REHMLAC. (Vol.1, No. 1. 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Alternative civic organizations, such as Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, etc. were not as widely developed, in Cuba.

The involvement of GLC 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*<sup>24</sup>.

There are *other important practical characteristics*, in addition to Freemasonry's ethical teachings, which are developed by active participation in lodge. Many of these characteristics, honed in Lodge, can help explain why Freemasonry can be seen (and is actually feared as such, by some autocratic governments and organizations) as a *school of Leaders*.

These characteristics include the fostering of reading habits<sup>25</sup>, the honing of organization skills, of democratic methods of leadership, of managing people, living within a budget, effective and public speaking, as well as art of listening and arguing respectfully, of negotiation based upon persuasion and reason rather than force, and abiding by a system of rules and regulations.

Freemasons constitute a *Fraternity*, and must exercise *Brotherly Love*. Brethren must thence exercise *Tolerance*<sup>26</sup>. These two characteristics enable Freemasons, at least in principle, to *develop open and free forums* where, through peaceful *interaction* (a key element for the development of *Social Capital*) creative exchanges of ideas can take place. Such free exchange and analysis of ideas can become a really revolutionary concept, for intolerant regimes.

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<sup>24</sup> Grand Lodge of Cuba. 1936. *La masonería: sus fines, su historia, su obra*. Molina y Cia. Habana. Page 36

<sup>25</sup> In addition to degree liturgies and catechisms, masons read books on history, rituals, philosophy, etc.

<sup>26</sup> Some masons think that Tolerance is not enough, and that Acceptance is the contemporary right attitude.

As a result of the strong fraternal bonding fostered among its members, and its tolerance principles, Lodges produce environments conducive to civil exchange of divergent views, cross-fertilizing them in lieu of suppressing each other. This may very well be *the most important contribution that Freemasonry in general, can make to Cuban (and also to other) CS.*

Summarizing, there are *three key functions* that Freemasonry, and thence the GLC, can provide to society in general, as a result of the above-discussed characteristics. These are, (1) the *connecting* function<sup>27</sup>, (2) the *disseminating* function<sup>28</sup>, and (3) the *incubating* function<sup>29</sup>. Because of these characteristics, some political regimes have historically encouraged the development of Freemasonry while others have, openly or discretely, usually 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 effort<sup>30</sup>. 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 occurred 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 CS<sup>31</sup>? This constitutes an excellent research question to which several answers may be advanced: (1) GLC civic and patriotic trajectory, which included members in the 1959 revolution, (2) GLC wide acceptance among Cubans, (3) its heterogeneous socioeconomic base, (4) its many international connections<sup>32</sup> and, (5) that the GLC came under effective government control, through certain mandatory measures<sup>33</sup>. In an *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* paper, to appear, we explore in detail the above-mentioned hypotheses.

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<sup>27</sup> Lodges help establish new contacts, thus fostering interaction among its members.

<sup>28</sup> Lodges help spread new ideas among its own members, among members of other lodges, and beyond.

<sup>29</sup> Lodges foster the creation of new organizations that implement the new ideas.

<sup>30</sup> 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).

<sup>31</sup> Other institutions such as Rotary, Lions, Boy Scouts and the Catholic Youth, were disbanded shortly after 1959.

<sup>32</sup> Including figures like Presidents Lazaro Cardenas, of Mexico, and Salvador Allende, of Chile.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

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 began developing. Thence, during the 1990s, hundreds of new Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were created<sup>34</sup>, 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 indirectly through *Caritas*<sup>35</sup>, its international charitable organization, the Catholic Church began developing new religious, social and educational programs<sup>36</sup>, and reviving some old ones. Several new Internet publications appeared<sup>37</sup>, edited by the Dioceses<sup>38</sup>, in particular that of Havana<sup>39</sup>. 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 prisoners<sup>40</sup>. All of which provides an excellent roadmap for new activities the GLC could undertake to contribute to enhance CS, as well as its own status.

For, GLC is indeed a *bona-fide* member of CS, as it fulfills the three key elements in its definition<sup>41</sup>. 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 specific contributions that the GLC could offer the Cuban CS<sup>42</sup>?

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<sup>34</sup> 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

<sup>35</sup> Caritas Cubana [http://www.caritas.org/worldmap/latin\\_america/cuba.html](http://www.caritas.org/worldmap/latin_america/cuba.html) Accessed on V/1/13

<sup>36</sup> Centro de Bioetica: [http://www.cbioetica.org/congre\\_fibip/academic\\_eng.pdf](http://www.cbioetica.org/congre_fibip/academic_eng.pdf) (accessed V/10/13)

<sup>37</sup> *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,

<sup>38</sup> 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](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](http://www.arquidiocesisdelahabana.org/contens/webs/ind_main12_formacion.htm)

<sup>39</sup> Archidiocesis of Havana Web Site: <http://www.arquidiocesisdelahabana.org/> (accessed V/10/13)

<sup>40</sup> El Pais [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/07/07/actualidad/1278453615\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/07/07/actualidad/1278453615_850215.html)

<sup>41</sup> V. Pérez-Díaz. *The Return of Civil Society*. (Harvard University Press. 1993).

<sup>42</sup> This question can also be posed to many Grand Lodges, as Freemasons can indeed contribute to CS in general.

One can answer this important question by referring back in history to the time when modern Freemasonry originated. For, since their early beginnings in the XVII and XVIII Century England, masonic lodges were conceived as elementary embryos of an emerging CS. These ideas, clearly discussed in Margaret Jacob's study *Living the Enlightenment*<sup>43</sup>, are still valid today.

Jacob affirms that "Lodges were spaces in a new zone of civil society"<sup>44</sup>. 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"<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, *lodges constitute a forum* for novel ideas that perhaps cannot be yet shared as freely, in other more established social forums. Again, such tenets can (and have been) considered very dangerous by several political regimes.

Jacob continues her analysis stating that "First and foremost, *Lodges were schools of government*"<sup>46</sup>. We can extend this statement: they are *schools of Leaders*. It is important to underline that masonic lodges are ruled by written regulations, not arbitrarily. And that their officers are democratically elected among their peers<sup>47</sup>. Thence, Jacob states that Lodges foster "the creation of constitutionally governed civil societies"<sup>48</sup>. In them, "merit should be the sole criterion for status within the Lodge"<sup>49</sup>. *Merit* here, is understood as *personal achievement*. At the time, such idea was revolutionary and dangerous; and it still may be in some societies. These tenets go against the grain of pyramidal organizations, ruled by the top, that reward its members by their allegiance and obedience to the controlling leadership, and not for their contributions.

Jacob then discusses the *egalitarian* masonic concept of "Promotion within the lodge as grounded upon real worth and *personal merit* only"<sup>50</sup>, instead of the rank or the wealth that an individual would hold in society, sometimes inherited or assigned, and not directly earned.

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

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, page 57

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, page 143.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, page 124

<sup>47</sup> *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.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, page 135

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, page 56

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, page 54

All the above-expressed concepts may help explain *the growth of the GLC*, which began *in the 1990s*. Before then, some individuals such as Cuban government and party officials were not allowed to join the GLC, and vice-versa. Then, *many citizens* economically dependent of the state would have thought twice, before joining the GLC. And other individuals, considered by the official society<sup>51</sup> insufficiently qualified to join its higher structures (because they held some unwelcome personal values<sup>52</sup>) *may have sought acceptance in the ranks of the GLC*. In the XVII Century such behavior was developed by individuals who were also poorly valued by their own official society, *and sought recognition and advancement* through their masonic lodges.

### **Some proposed new activities for the GLC**

Currently, the GLC holds a low-key presence in Cuban society at large and in the CS in particular<sup>53</sup>. During the years 1960-1990, few persons outside the GLC have known of its existence, or have felt its influence. For, GLC had no access to the media, and was unable to develop any public programs. Such had never happened since Cuba's independence.

That a change of such unfavorable circumstances is possible has been demonstrated by the recent achievements of the Catholic Church, discussed in the previous section.

First and foremost, the GLC needs an effective public voice and presence. At this time, the GLC has a dated web site, whose main page shows an October 2012 message from Grand Master Evaristo R. Gutiérrez Torres. The site also contains several sections of general information about the GLC, and a dated Blog. Such poor performance may be explained by the high cost in CUCs<sup>54</sup>, and/or the lack of qualified personnel, for operating it<sup>55</sup>. To be effective the GLC web site needs to keep its content current and relevant. And its affiliated Blue lodges need to have the necessary computer equipment and Internet access to view it. Economic problems can be resolved with the aid of GLC international connections, just like the Catholic Church has done through the help of its international arm, *Caritas*.

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<sup>51</sup> Such as the Cuban Communist Party, the government, and in some professional positions,

<sup>52</sup> Religious, philosophical, economic, political, social, or other ideologies.

<sup>53</sup> Again, such situation may also be true of other Grand Lodges, whose influence is barely felt in their own CS.

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

<sup>55</sup> GLC Web Page <http://www.granlogiacuba.org/> costs US\$600/year to operate, paid with donations from brethren abroad, which provides 60 hrs/month of connection time and a small buffer, evidently insufficient to keep it up-to-date. (Personal Communication from the Chair of GLC Committee for Foreign Relations. Email of X/21/2013)

The *Supreme Council of the 33 Degree for the Republic of Cuba*<sup>56</sup> (SCG33), in turn, has recently renewed its leadership. Its octogenarian Grand Commander Jesús L. Armada Peña, who ruled between 1991 and 2011, passed away and was substituted by Lazaro F. Cuesta Valdes, of Afro-Cuban descent<sup>57</sup>. Grand Commander Cuesta Valdes is several years younger, and obviously more dynamic. He has visited NMJ and SMJ Supreme Councils in the US, as well as Italy<sup>58</sup>. Such international exposure and contacts could also greatly help GLC in its quest to achieve a larger relevance and impact in contemporary Cuban CS.

The SCG33 has also shown that it is possible to have an up-to-date web site, with relevant information, and even to have a Facebook presence<sup>59</sup>. In addition, the SCG33 has successfully organized two International Conferences on *Freemasonry and Integration to Current Society*<sup>60</sup> (the second of which is co-sponsored by GLC). I was attended by several Cuban and foreign presenters, whose papers can be read in SCG33 Web Site. The selected theme shows an interest in developing broader masonic participation in Cuban CS.

Furthermore, 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 *Seminario de San Carlos y San Ambrosio*<sup>61</sup>, joint business graduate courses with the University of Havana (UH). UH also has an *Institute*<sup>62</sup> interested in Cuban Freemasonry. And small steps have been taken for GLC to work with such Institute<sup>63</sup>. GLC could team with UH to offer joint courses, workshops and symposia, on masonic history and related themes, in a similar way as the Grand Lodge of California and UCLA have, to sponsor the 2011 Masonic Conference.

Moreover, hundreds of Cuban Freemasons, former members of GLC, live abroad, and have joined lodges in the US, Spain, and Puerto Rico. The GLC could allow these former members, if they so choose, to maintain *dual affiliation* with their original Cuban lodges, as

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<sup>56</sup> SCG33 Web Page: <http://www.supremocuba.org/> (Accessed on V/10/13)

<sup>57</sup> First Afro-Cuban mason to occupy such high position, in the history of the SCG33.

<sup>58</sup> See the SCG33 web page for details of such trips and meetings.

<sup>59</sup> SCG33 in Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/supremoconsejogrado33cuba> (Accessed on V/10/13)

<sup>60</sup> [http://www.supremocuba.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=6](http://www.supremocuba.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=6) (V/10/13)

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

<sup>62</sup> 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)

<sup>63</sup> 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](http://www.oocities.org/es/hagadu_cub/facultad.htm) (Accessed V/10/13)

well as to be able to visit them, and to participate in their work, as some Puerto Rican Freemasons do with American lodges, when they move to the US mainland.

### **Policy versus Politics: a Key connotation difference**

Some readers may interpret our above proposals as advocating *political activity* in lodge, where discussions about politics and religion are not allowed<sup>64</sup>. But this is not the case. Firstly, we are proposing the discussion of *policy and not politics*. Secondly, consideration of such topics are legitimate during the interaction that occurs before and after formal lodge sessions.

In addition, there is a clear difference between *policy and politics*<sup>65</sup>. The first term is concerned with *theoretical concepts* such as the place of religion or education in society. These have always been themes of interest for Freemasons. For example we *address God* in a manner independent of any particular religion: as the *Grand Architect of the Universe*. We *meet on the level* and provide Brethren equal treatment in lodge, using the term *Brother*, in lieu of Sir, Earl, Count etc., which is independent of wealth, social class or occupation. Freemasons did that under the strongly hierarchical societies of the XVIII Century. And we continue to do it in our days. Both of these masonic examples clearly address and resolve *policy matters*.

By contrast, *politics* is concerned with *specific and partisan solutions* to the transcendental questions outlined by policy. These are *usually advanced by political parties*, who are designed to deal with their implementation. For example, discussing the design and adoption of a particular state education curriculum, would be political. Freemasons are free to address such political issues outside the Lodge, by joining political associations of their choice. In addition, the discussion of *partisan politics* is forbidden by most Grand Lodge constitutions, because it is a *potentially divisive*<sup>66</sup> theme, that endangers *harmony, an essential characteristic of all institutions, especially that of ours*.

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<sup>64</sup> 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](http://www.grandlodgeofvirginia.org/education/programs/monthly_talks/The_Ancient_Landmarks_of_Masonry.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> 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.

<sup>66</sup> 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.



## Conclusions

Through a demographic approach, we presented the evolution of the GLC during the second half of the XX Century. GLC holds, at this time, a weak and low-key position in the emergent Cuban CS. We have also suggested how GLC could strengthen Cuban CS, if it would increase its participation, just as other organizations, such as the Catholic Church, have done. GLC would especially help Cuban CS by developing open forums where GLC members, of diverse (and sometimes conflicting) ideologies, could interact in an atmosphere of brotherly love, respect and tolerance, conducive to positive resolutions, instead of sterile disputes.

In principle, the GLC and its Freemasons are capable of developing such forums because of the three key functions of Freemasonry: (1) connecting, (2) disseminating, and (3) incubating, so necessary in the process of developing new and fruitful ideas, as well as the men and leaders to carry them out. In addition, GLC could develop again rich and valuable cultural, social and economic programs of general interest, as it successfully did in the past.

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

These suggestions can also be extended to other Grand Lodges. The GLC holds the singular characteristic of having grown substantially, in the decade of the 1990s, while most other Grand Lodges have shrunk. Reasons for such reduction in membership and relevance, and helpful suggestions for reversing such trends, have been seriously discussed in the past<sup>67</sup>. Many Grand Lodges may want to take advantage of them, and put them to good use.

## Acknowledgements

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<sup>67</sup> For example, in *The Future of Masonry*, by Bro. Joseph F. Newton, and in the MSANA Report *IT'S ABOUT TIME: Moving Masonry into the 21st Century*: [http://www.msana.com/aboutime\\_foreword.asp](http://www.msana.com/aboutime_foreword.asp)