

The History department thesis “Cuba’s Unresolved UMAP History: Survivors’ Struggles to Counter the Official Story” explores how the Castro regime and its victims remember the island’s reeducation camps. The Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) camps were created in 1964 and constructed throughout the province of Camagüey. Applicants for Cuban passports, gays, political dissidents, and religious minorities were detained and forced to work for below minimum wages to cultivate agricultural fields. The great majority of laborers worked in sugarcane fields to boost production. Prisoners were not only exposed to hard labor but also physical and emotional abuses. The Cuban Union of Writers and Artists led protests against the camps and managed to spread information about these human rights atrocities outside of Cuba, including hormonal experimentation on gay laborers. The level of negative press that these reeducation camps earned outside of the island prompted Fidel Castro to close and demolish them by 1969.

Research funded by an Almara fellowship involved survivors’ published and unpublished testimonies, an interview with the leader of a survivors’ organization, and various print sources dealing with the camps during the 1960s and their controversies later. Castro’s targeting of deviant labor led his regime on multiple occasions to reframe the image and stories surrounding these camps that were never officially commemorated by the state. While the official justification originally claimed the camps provided marginalized civilians the opportunity to reform themselves and contribute economically to Cuba, some victims of the UMAP camps saw themselves instead as the slaves of a regime that discriminated against them and disregarded their rights while exploiting their labor. The camps served as a stepping-stone towards the Ten Million Ton Harvest effort of 1970 that redefined the ideal patriotic man through the New Man campaign. The swift transition from the UMAP camps to these subsequent campaigns allowed for Cuban society to focus on its future rather than commemorate its past.

# **Cuba's Unresolved UMAP History:**

## **Survivors' Struggles to Counter the Official Story**

Rebecca San Juan

April 27, 2017

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted to the Department of History at Mount Holyoke College in partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

## Acknowledgements

Thank you first and foremost to my thesis advisor Professor Lowell Gudmundson for being the best editor. You nurtured my voice as a writer. Your patience and respect towards my writing and project meant the world to me. Thank you as well for all of the laughs during our meetings and bridging present current events to the past.

Many thanks to my reading committee for guiding me from the beginning. Professor Mary Renda you believed in me from the start. Your faith in me gave me strength and your direction helped me narrow my thesis topic, apply for research funding, and better edit my project. Your advice led to more analytical and polished drafts. I also have to thank Smith College Professor Sarah Hines for expressing interest a year ago in my project and supporting my research. Your course on the history of Latin American economies helped me overcome any hesitation towards addressing and studying the history and impact of sugarcane production in Cuba. Thank you for making me fearless.

I give credit to Professor Andy Reiter's course "Transitional Justice" and teaching style for influencing my interest in the UMAP reeducation camps. Your course inspired me to study how the Cuban state and survivors remembered these camps.

Thank you to Professors Lynda J. Morgan and Daniel Czitrom for awarding me the Almara Fellowship in 2016. Your financial support allowed me to expand my study and include archival research into this project.

Thank you to Public Services & Acquisitions Assistant Rosa María Ortiz at the Cuban Heritage Collection in the University of Miami. Thank you to librarian Annia González at the Special Collections & University Archives at Florida International University.

I am especially grateful to Anolan Ponce for sharing her wealth of knowledge of Cuba's 1960s history and connecting me to UMAP survivors in Miami. Thank you for your dedication and genuine interest in my research. It was an honor to receive your guidance.

I am also thankful to the President of the Association of Ex-UMAP Prisoners in Miami Renato Gómez for sharing his own lived experiences within these camps. Our conversation proved to be especially important for my research and understanding of former internees relationship to these camps then and now.

Thank you to my family for encouraging all of my goals no matter where they take me. You taught me that home is a call away and with an open door. I want to recognize Jesús Reíno Núñez in particular for inspiring me to take a closer look at my Cuban heritage and roots. Thank you as well to my mother Jeannette Agostino for providing strength, emotional support, and words of encouragement day and night. You are always the first to support all of my goals, including this one. Thank you to my father Dr. Carlos M. San Juan for supporting this endeavor, like so many others, by pointing me to the best resources and always being the first to celebrate my milestones. Thank you to my Papi José Agostino for your offers to edit and always pushing me to think critically. Thank you to Elda Betancourt for always helping her granddaughter in any way that she can. Thank you to the

Betancourt family, especially Pepito and Marina, for talking about their UMAP camp experiences. Last but surely not least, I must thank my entire San Juan family, including my grandmother María Theresa San Juan and aunt Maruchi San Juan, for their continuous support in this project and others; you celebrated my achievements and helped me move past the challenges.

Many thanks to my Mount Holyoke friends for your eagerness to read my work and sharing words of encouragement. Your unwavering faith meant so much to me. Thank you as well to my friends in Miami for always reassuring me that no mountain is ever too high to climb.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	6
CHAPTER ONE.....	18
<b>Sugarcane Cutters and Slavery: The Stigmas of a Bygone Era</b>	
CHAPTER TWO.....	25
<b>The Official Monologue: Castro Rallies Support through the State-Controlled Press</b>	
CHAPTER THREE.....	39
<b>And Off They Went to the Camps</b>	
CHAPTER FOUR.....	51
<b>Setting the Stage for <i>el Nuevo Hombre</i> in the Persecution of Gays</b>	
CHAPTER FIVE.....	63
<b>Silencing the Faithful</b>	
CHAPTER SIX.....	74
<b>The Tragedy of a Past Forgotten</b>	
CONCLUSION.....	84
CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	87
WORKS CITED.....	88

## Introduction

José Caballero Blanco arrived home after another sweltering day in Havana, Cuba. It was only May, but in the Caribbean, sweat-drenching heat arrives early.<sup>1</sup> After he closed the door, Blanco noticed and read an official letter waiting for him. A sense of dread overcame him. The Republic of Cuba ordered him to his *Servicio Militar Obligatorio* or Compulsory Military Service (SMO) for the next three years. In reality, Blanco would only serve in the SMO for a few months. He would later become one of the other 40,000 forced laborers cutting sugarcane in *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Produccion* or the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) reeducation camps. He would begin on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966. It just so happened to be his nineteenth birthday.

He would need to report before 8 a.m. to a stadium located in the neighborhood of Dolores. The government assigned Blanco to the Military Committee 701. He would work and live among other *compañeros*, none of whom he knew. Blanco learned that he was the only person from his neighborhood to be selected for the third recruitment: “It was as if I had won the lottery without having even bought a ticket.” Blanco would not be entirely alone. Other men of his age, 500 to be exact, met for the first time from a variety of social and racial backgrounds.

Blanco left early on the morning of his call for duty. He said goodbye to his parents at home, not wanting to prolong the inevitable. He arrived at Camp Armada in Dolores before his call for duty and watched as some passed the time playing games, while the majority stood there with somber, puzzled expressions, as if wondering why they were there in the first place. Silence fell over the crowd as a man in a military uniform walked in. He ordered everyone to say ‘present’ or ‘here’ after he called their name and to wait across the field. After Blanco’s name was called, he thought, “The

---

<sup>1</sup> José Caballero Blanco, *Una muerte a plazos* (Washington: D’Har Services, 2008) 1-20. The following three paragraphs are based on this memoir. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

same as when a fruit is wrapped in paper to force its' ripening, in this way, unintentionally, I entered into a period of forced aging." Blanco, like thousands of others, left home, witnessed human rights abuses for years, and returned a changed man.

Blanco's comment of "forced aging" suggests that the conditions internees faced in the UMAP camps entailed more than manual labor. Other prisoners shared Blanco's same sentiment and indicated that they too returned home as a different person. Although the extent of the abuses varied depending on the camp guards, prisoners endured Marxist indoctrination and experienced or witnessed physical abuses. Prisoners recognized the Marxist indoctrination taught during classes at the UMAP camps and tried to reject the ideology forced upon them. In addition, laborers underwent strenuous conditions and observed as their fellow campmates were emotionally and physically abused. The internees as a result of these lived experiences were left with an even darker impression of the regime.

Fidel Castro said he created the Military Units to Aid Production reformatory labor camps to provide marginalized civilians the opportunity to contribute economically to Cuba. Some victims of the UMAP camps saw themselves as the slaves of a regime that did not protect them from discrimination and disregarded their rights but yet utilized their labor to grow the economy. The camps became a stepping-stone towards the Ten Million Ton Harvest and the New Man campaign of 1970, which emphasized the ideal of the patriotic man. The swift transition from the UMAP camps to the Ten Million Ton Harvest campaign allowed for the regime's selective memory and reinterpretation of the events years later. I argue that the recruitment of deviant labor led the Castro regime to reframe the image and stories surrounding these camps that were never commemorated by the state.

\*\*\*

Sugarcane put Cuba on the map. With agricultural equipment made in England, Cuba quickly became Spain's star colony with increasing sugarcane production and trade in the late 1700s.<sup>2</sup> The increasing influx of slaves built a thriving and rapidly expanding agricultural sector.<sup>3</sup> Sugar production increased by 10,000 tons in the 1770s and only two decades later the island exported 16,000 tons.<sup>4</sup> Cuba's economy boomed and remained stable based on the export-led growth model. Nearby, the slaves of Saint-Domingue, otherwise known as modern-day Haiti, rebelled against France in 1791. The colony won its independence, but at the cost of nearly complete isolation. Their biggest competitor's loss became Cuba's greatest gain.

Cuba remained loyal to Spain as its other colonies fought for their independence. The colony took advantage of the situation to become one of the world's largest sugar producers by expanding their horizons. They traded with other global powers and over time the United States became their biggest market. By 1877, 82% of the island's sugar went to the United States while only 6% was shipped to Spain.<sup>5</sup> The United States remained a reliable market, even after beet sugar became widely traded throughout Europe by the 1880s.<sup>6</sup> After Cuba earned its independence from Spain in 1898, the sovereign state depended even more on the United States as a trading partner.

The Cuban sugarcane market took a turn for the worse during the 1920s. During the first few years, banks provided unlimited credit at cheap rates to mill owners and farmers. They lent out a total of \$80 million in loans on the sugarcane sector.<sup>7</sup> No one could afford to pay back their loans

---

<sup>2</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 61.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 225.

after sugar prices collapsed. Banks spiraled out of control and were forced to close their doors for the last time. Laborers faced the worst predicaments.<sup>8</sup>

Sugarcane workers led strikes starting in 1929 that halted production. The Cuban government realized they could no longer fall back on the United States as a safety net. Attorney Thomas Chadbourne worked with the U.S. administration in dividing the US market so that the country did not rely on a single supplier. He represented an organization of U.S. sugar producers known as the Chadbourne Committee to reduce produce and set quotas.<sup>9</sup> By 1930, Chadbourne reduced Cuban sugar exports and added multiple restrictions; the quotas were further reduced under the Jones-Costigan Amendment to the Agricultural Adjustment Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1934 that categorized sugar as a basic commodity and allowed for more control over quotas.<sup>10</sup> The United States held the upper hand and Cuba, relying primarily on their sugarcane exports and failing to diversify their production as well as their markets, paid a heavy cost. Plantation employees soon faced job cuts and those that remained on payroll saw their salaries shrink by 75%.<sup>11</sup> The Cuban economy fell off a cliff and the instability led to a dwindling government budget. Little money was left over for necessities by the 1940s, including for public transportation and repairing and building roads.<sup>12</sup> Labor unrest increased as unemployment rose and technology replaced certain jobs.<sup>13</sup>

The poor state of the economy led to the Sergeants' Revolt or Revolution of 1933. The collapse of sugar prices after 1929 intensified the Cuban society's tensions and frustrations with the government. Then-dictator Gerardo Machado took steps to silence anyone who questioned his

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>9</sup> "The Sugar Act of 1937" (The Yale Law Journal, April 1938), 980.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America Since Independence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 212.

<sup>11</sup> Pérez, Jr., 253.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 300.

authority in 1931 as he suspended the publication of about fifteen newspapers and periodicals and arrested its editors. He demanded the military to oversee the remaining editorial teams.<sup>14</sup> Fulgencio Batista took matters into his own hands. He organized the overthrow of Machado and his administration with the help of other low-ranking sergeants. His network consisted of primarily Afro-Cubans.<sup>15</sup>

Batista “restored order and tranquility,” and, as a result, “won the support of foreign capital.”<sup>16</sup> The new leader negotiated well with U.S. officials. His administration helped Cuba regain a somewhat larger percentage of the North American sugar market, and Batista invested money back into the community through expanding public work programs and public sector jobs.<sup>17</sup> The Cuban people experienced the benefits of improved relations and a stronger economy. Batista provided an array of social programs through the Civic-Military Institute, including health programs, welfare agencies, elderly care, and programs for orphans.<sup>18</sup>

Working-class families and the poor suffered as the island’s economy crashed soon after sugar prices dropped. After 1946, the price and supply controls experienced during World War II came to an end. The economy stagnated and the only people benefiting in Cuba were the middle and upper classes. Batista earned the support of the United States through a number of business transactions and eventually he prioritized their needs over those of the poor. In addition, despite his promising free elections, the public knew that, with support from the United States, Batista rigged elections. The politician soon followed in Machado’s footsteps, silencing any potential opposition: “Batista used proceeds from the lottery in ways that his predecessors could only have dreamed,” he

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>15</sup> George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 158.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 279.

paid off anyone that could have spoken against him. “To the Catholic Church he donated \$1.6 million, to labor unions he gave \$1.3 million outright and gave another \$3.7 million for social security funds. He lavished funds on newspaper editors and reporters. Government bribes to the press were paid at the rate \$1 million monthly.”<sup>19</sup> Another revolution was looming.

Fidel Castro envisioned himself as its leader. Before he came to organize the Cuban Revolution, Castro witnessed a society hurting under Batista. In terms of the sugarcane market, Cuba’s quota for the United States sank once again, even lower than it did during the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the United Fruit Company had taken over thousands of acres of land to cultivate for agriculture. Cuban plantation owners one day owned their stretch of sugarcane fields and then found that it had been re-sold for a larger asking price to the United Fruit Company.<sup>21</sup> U.S. citizens took advantage of what they determined was their own backyard: “The proposition that the United States had liberated Cuba conferred on American tourists a powerful sense of entitlement; they could do whatever they wanted to do because Cuba belonged to them.”<sup>22</sup> Batista buckled under the pressure of keeping the United States happy and maintaining the U.S. sugar quota. As a United States puppet, Batista would only hinder his own political prospects if he stood in the way of the U.S. government. Castro aspired to root out U.S. intervention. In terms of the economy, Castro, once in power, shifted his focus radically away from sugar to non-sugar exports, causing production to hit an all-time low.<sup>23</sup>

Castro, instead, prioritized establishing equality among the economic and racial classes. Castro said, “True democracy cannot exist in the midst of social inequality, in the midst of social

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Kalatozov, *Soy Cuba*, (1964).

<sup>22</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba In the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*, (North Carolina: UNC Press, 2011), 235.

<sup>23</sup> Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 338.

injustice, in societies divided between rich and poor.”<sup>24</sup> He defined the Cuban Revolution with the primary purpose of introducing socialism into Cuba. He aimed to turn Cuba into a communist country believing, even decades later, that the island remained socialist and still had to make significant strides to become communist or “the highest form of democracy.”<sup>25</sup>

The regime prioritized sugar production on and off again after it gained sound support during the mid-1960s.<sup>26</sup> For the first time in decades, the price of sugar increased. The Castro administration turned its attention back to the all but abandoned sugarcane fields in 1963 once they had expropriated all sugarcane production and businesses from mostly American owners.<sup>27</sup> Castro had cut ties with the United States by then, but the Soviet Union was eager to receive the majority of sugar supplies. The administration faced a problem: Who would work the fields?

Cuba could no longer rely on the backs of slaves to produce sugarcane as it once had, during colonial times, or harvest workers from Haiti and Jamaica during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Neither could the administration turn to the once impoverished peasants that had had no other option but to work under the scorching sun. The Cuban Revolution had enticed many of them to leave behind the fields and search for other opportunities. The cane fields would remain empty without enough workers. The Castro administration not only faced a stagnating economy, but also the threat of a disillusioned population.

The Cuban Revolution had polarized society. Civilians that belonged to the upper and upper-middle socio-economic classes soon realized, after Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist in 1961, that his vision for Cuba greatly differed from what he had claimed as a guerrilla fighter in the Sierra Maestra. The upper and middle classes felt betrayed by the Revolution, seeing that the poor

---

<sup>24</sup> Tomás Borge, *Face to Face with Fidel Castro*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1992), 69.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 339.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 339.

primarily benefited from new policies and that free elections never came.<sup>28</sup> The Castro regime kept an ever-close watch on those that remained and did not flee in the early 1960s, finding opponents and people deemed as deviant everywhere. Having cut off all relations with the United States, the administration required citizens to follow suit. The Castro regime grew suspicious of the mini-skirt wearing, longhaired youth that listened to songs like “Please Please Me” by the Beatles.<sup>29</sup> The leadership labeled what they saw as hippies the most visible threat and intended to weed out others based on their appearance. They later targeted religious minorities, from Catholics to Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Cubans that applied for passports. Castro sought to preempt any potential threats while helping to solve the economic crisis.

Raul Castro’s visit to China and the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in 1962 inspired his forthcoming agenda.<sup>30</sup> Both China and the Soviet Union had removed threats to their rule by killing opponents and placing so-called deviants in labor camps. The Cuban administration came up with a similar plan.

The Castro regime thought of isolating such deviants in rural locations, far from the capital. The plan for removal from society revealed the primary purpose of isolating any potential threats far from other civilians and the government. The administration would argue that the men sent to these forced labor camps were valued for their service in the sugarcane fields. According to Blanco, the reality as lived by a recorded 40,000 prisoners differed.<sup>31</sup>

The Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) forced labor camps were launched in 1964. They were built and scattered throughout the eastern province of Camagüey, a six-hour drive from

---

<sup>28</sup> Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Memories of Underdevelopment (1973).

<sup>29</sup> Héctor Santiago, “José Mario ‘El Puente’ De Una Generación Perdida” (Cuban Heritage Collection Héctor Santiago Papers, 1958-2002, University of Miami, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia* (Madrid: Editorial Egales, 2008), 88.

<sup>31</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 12.

Havana.<sup>32</sup> Their gated fences opened to the public in 1965. The administration targeted three different communities of men in Cuba at the time: hippies, gays, and the other, those who exhibited some form of improper conduct. The men were paid below minimum wage for their services and rarely allowed to visit home or receive visitors.

The supervisors recruited from the military acted more like drill sergeants and committed human rights atrocities left and right against prisoners. Records show that gays underwent new experimental and psychiatric treatments, including drug therapies. The lived experiences and testimonies of gay UMAP camp survivors are relatively well known. However, gays were not the only ones trapped within these camps. That is a misconception. In fact, gay survivors and other prisoners observed and recalled how religious minorities were treated and often were the most abused within the UMAP camps.<sup>33</sup> Religious minorities, especially, suffered at the hands of the supervisors. Jehovah's Witnesses especially suffered bloody beatings.

The UMAP labor camps were the sites of countless human rights abuses, none of which have been officially recognized by the state to this day. The regime faced an international backlash for organizing and confining civilians within these locations. They started to remove prisoners in 1968 and closed the operation completely by 1969. The regime moved on in silence. The camps remain one of the most controversial abuses of the regime. The government never issued a public apology nor made any effort to acknowledge the atrocities committed within these camps.

The UMAP labor camps were primarily created to remove all perceived threats to the regime posed by dissidents and to conduct surveillance on their actions. In addition, the Castro

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 83-84.

<sup>33</sup> Héctor Santiago wrote about the persecution of religious populations and the abuse that they faced in his non-fiction work in the early 2000s after living in exile within the United States. Gay internees featured in the book *Improper Conduct* and the documentary film released in 1984 by directors Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal also cite these accounts as well as former internees in José Caballero Blanco's *Una Muerte a Plazos*.

administration utilized the low-wage labor to strengthen and expand their agricultural output. The period from 1964 to 1969 exemplifies a transitional moment within Cuban history that connects to the forthcoming Ten Million Ton Harvest sugarcane movement in 1970. The movement encouraged the population to voluntarily cut ten million tons of sugarcane for export in an attempt to improve the economy. During this time, the government issued the New Man campaign, outlining their Communist expectations of what they defined as being a patriotic Cuban.

\*\*\*

I focus in this thesis on the experiences and image of the dissidents imprisoned in the Castro regime's UMAP forced labor camps during the mid-to-late 1960s. Some denominations, including Catholics, initially saw themselves as supportive of the regime and imagined themselves to have the capacity to both practice their faith while staying loyal to the program. Other denominations, despite not wanting to make themselves targets of the state, could not align themselves with the regime since their definition of loyalty often conflicted with their religious practices. Politicians argued during this time for equality and benefits for all classes that, according to them, could only be provided in what they deemed to be a socialist country. While campaigns for literacy and universal healthcare supported the ruling party's agenda, the act of forcing a select few into agricultural labor contradicted the Cuban Revolution's promises.

I explain in the first chapter the connection that prisoners saw between themselves and Cuba's history of slavery and the stigmas of the cane cutter. I analyze the image of the slave in Cuban history and why so many UMAP survivors compared what they faced to such a controversial Afro-Cuban historical fate. I go on to explain in the second chapter how the 'cult of personality' sought to convince a population that these efforts were legitimately assisting those who were made out to be lost souls. In the third chapter, I delve into the journey that internees underwent to get to

the camps as well as the targeting of hippies and applicants for Cuban passports. I then write of the persecution of gays in the fourth chapter. Ironically, cases of gay survivors are the most well-known and mentioned by the regime. At the time, the persecution of gays was never publicized in the state-controlled press, unlike the experiences of religious minorities.

### Illustration 1: Evangelical Pastors in UMAP Camps<sup>34</sup>



#### PASTORES DE DISTINTAS DENOMINACIONES EVANGÉLICAS

Castro no hizo distinciones en su agresión a hombres de fe. A la UMAP fueron enviados sacerdotes católicos y pastores de iglesias evangélicas. En esta foto histórica, tomada el 21 de septiembre de 1966 en los campos de la UMAP, aparecen de izquierda a derecha, los siguientes pastores:

Orlando A. Colás	Bautista
Joel Ajo	Metodista
Serafin	Pentecostal
Orlando	Metodista
Rigoberto Cervantes	Bautista
Orlando González	Bautista

Sólo en los escasos días de visita los confinados—religiosos o no—vestían estos uniformes de aspecto militar. Terminadas las horas de visita estos pastores evangélicos volverían—de inmediato—a vestir el sucio uniforme azul de trabajo con el que realizaban la misma dura y esclava labor de todos los confinados.

Cortesía de: Sergio Nieves

Sergio Nieves. The original image included the following caption in Enrique Ros, *La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista* (Ediciones Universal, 2004), 174: Pastors of Different Evangelical Denominations. Castro did not make distinctions in his assault against men of faith. Catholic priests and Evangelical pastors were all sent to UMAP. In this historic photo, taken on September 21, 1966 in the UMAP camps, appear from left to right, the following pastors: Orlando A. Colás (Baptist), Joel Ajo (Methodist), Serafin (Pentacost), Orlando (Methodist), Rigoberto Cervantes (Baptist), Orlando González (Baptist). On the rare visitation days the prisoners—religious or not—wore these uniforms with a military look. As soon as the visitation hours finished, these Evangelical pastors immediately returned to wearing dirty blue, work uniforms with which they carried out the same hard and slave-like labor of the rest of the of the prisoners.<sup>34</sup>

In the fifth chapter, I delve into the experiences of Jehovah Witnesses and determine how this community suffered the worst treatment. The above image captured a few of the many religious leaders trapped in the UMAP camps during 1966. As the caption detailed, on visitation days these prisoners were forced to change their uniform. Jehovah's Witnesses usually refused to change their uniform since the act of doing so would violate their religious beliefs in compliance with the demands of a political system.

I conclude by showing in the sixth chapter how recruitment of people considered by the Castro regime to be deviant led to the regime constantly reframing and highlighting only particular, fragmented details of the UMAP camps.

I highlight the slave population's experiences and how that sense of confinement persisted throughout the decades, when the few but impoverished were confined to the agricultural sectors. I note how some victims remaining on the island later would trivialize their own experiences and how their commentary played into the hands of the regime still in power. I focus on the treatment of the religious minorities in Chapter 5 and bring the abuses committed against them to light. Finally, I explore why the UMAP labor camps failed and explain how the regime moved onto future endeavors, including the Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest, without acknowledging the horrors of the past.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Sugarcane Cutters and Slavery: The Stigmas of a Bygone Era**

The Cuban government sought to convince civilians that the UMAP forced labor camps were critical to the survival of a relatively new Revolution. They aimed to put to work those that appeared to be tied to the United States and those discriminated against in the workplace. Threats further down the road included students in non-governmental associations. Hippies, gays, and religious minorities, the outcasts of an earlier Catholic, conservative nation were thrown into the camps. Fidel Castro claimed officially that these dissidents spent their time making excuses so as to not contribute to society and instead worked with imperialist powers to hinder the revolutionaries.<sup>35</sup> Castro forewarned that they would not be tolerated.

The revolutionary insisted that the few dissidents that remained would need to contribute to the economy through field labor. Castro desperately needed an immediate labor force to manage plantation fields. The UMAP internees labored in these camps from dawn to dusk cultivating land for tobacco, gathering fragrant flowers, and cutting sugarcane. However, the cultural stigmatization of field laborers weakened the allure of the program. Sugarcane fields had been the workplace of slaves for centuries.

UMAP camp survivors referred to themselves as feeling and working as slaves. I argue the connection that camp internees shared with Africans that once tended the field extends beyond the similarity of place. Slaves represented beings without access to their rights and were owned by a governing body. They were known for being disregarded and disrespected. UMAP laborers expressed similar accounts in which guards cared more about their production than their well being and personhood. As African slaves fell ill due to physical abuses, unsanitary living conditions, and

---

<sup>35</sup> Fidel Castro, "In the closing ceremony to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace," (Havana: 1963).

lack of nutrition, internees did as well. As African slaves passed away due to the extent of abuses, internees did too.

The image of cane cutters in Cuba had been stigmatized long before any of the UMAP prisoners arrived to work on the plantations. After the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the Haitian Revolution ended French dominance in the sugar trade, Cuba became one of Spain's most cherished colonies as a result of its export economy based on sugar. Plantation owners exploited slaves and later, when Britain set out to abolish slavery, they exploited other minorities that later included Chinese immigrants.

Cuban society had little respect or regard for plantation laborers, slave or free. Laborers were expected to be submissive and malleable. As Castro's regime sought to eliminate threats to the government, the UMAP labor camps were seen as levers of homogenization, a means of producing compliant citizens. The regime struggled to change the connotations attached to fieldwork and, ultimately, argued that hard work led to stronger, heterosexual men.

The island's history with slavery gave rise to a particular stigmatization of cane cutters. The growth of the sugar industry and what appeared as an endless supply of slaves made the laborers easily replaceable. Starting with Spain's Bourbon reforms in the 1700s, policies within Cuba focused on "economic growth and the increasing of tax revenues."<sup>36</sup> New equipment for sugar cultivation soon flooded into the island from England, allowing for far greater production.<sup>37</sup> Before 1760, Cuba welcomed on average 1,000 slaves per year. The numbers doubled by 1764, and from 1790 to 1810, 7,000 slaves came annually to the island.<sup>38</sup> By 1850, "fully one-half of the total number of enslaved

---

<sup>36</sup> Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Pérez, Jr. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 61.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

people in rural Cuba were engaged in sugar production.”<sup>39</sup> An increase of West Africans, East Africans, and Congo-Angolans can be attributed to three factors.<sup>40</sup> First, plantation owners needed cheap labor. The cost of producing sugar had to be lower in order to earn significant amounts of profit. In addition, foreign workers were imported due to a lack of a native, indigenous population. After Cuba was first colonized, few if any of its first inhabitants survived: “Between 1500 and 1550, the Indian populations of [...] Cuba [...] were annihilated by enslavement, excessive labor demands, and, most destructive of all, new European diseases.”<sup>41</sup> Second, Cuba succeeded in producing mass amounts of sugar during the colonial era. Spain provided more funding and support for expansion of sugar plantations as Cuba slowly but surely became one of its star colonies. An increase in plantations created a massive demand of labor. Third, after establishing free trade for the Caribbean in the 1760s, Spain allowed for any nation to dock its ship without any costs in its colonies’ ports and bring in slaves. In addition to the lower costs of purchasing workers, Cuba and its trading partners no longer had the price of transportation and port transactions. There seemed to be an endless supply of laborers. Laborers, in the eyes of their owners and of Cuban society across time, represented capital investment. Workers were a means to an end, a step towards production and profit.

The low purchase price, lack of restrictions on transportation, and the expanding sugar-based economy spurred plantation owners to overwork their slaves. If disease, including smallpox, yellow fever, and tuberculosis, or poor living conditions did not kill off a slave, then exhaustion typically did.<sup>42</sup> The majority of young male slaves lived only seven to eight years upon arriving on the

---

<sup>39</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London, 2005), 31.

<sup>40</sup> Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Pérez, Jr., *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society*, 31.

island.<sup>43</sup> Exhaustion stemmed from various factors, including poor sanitary conditions and lack of nutrition. Corporal punishment also wore them down.<sup>44</sup> Slaves lived under unchanging taxing conditions. Higher profits led to abusive conditions so long as the slave trade existed.

The relationship between the Catholic Church and Spain influenced the management of slaves. The relationship paralleled how guards forced Marxist ideals onto the internees and rejected any independent religious ideology or literature. Prisoners remained faithful to their religious beliefs despite the punishment. Survival was prioritized and then came identity. As a result, slaves appeared to convert to Catholicism, but instead they used Catholic saints to represent their own gods and added new rituals. In the mid-1960s, UMAP camp workers typically tolerated the Marxist indoctrination in order to survive another day without beatings.

Some Cuban slaves lived to earn or be given their freedom. Britain first attempted to abolish international slave trade in 1817. Spain abided by England's proposal of ten million pesetas to abolish slavery and with the imminent supervision of the Royal Navy in 1835. By 1820, Spain promised, no new slaves would be introduced into the island.<sup>45</sup> Plantation owners kept a hand in illicit trade, but the price of slaves quickly skyrocketed. They searched for alternative options.<sup>46</sup> Conditions for Afro-Cubans soon improved and by 1886 slavery officially came to an end. Although Afro-Cubans were considered to be free, they were largely discriminated against. The aftermath mirrored what UMAP laborers faced. Although many workers survived, they were still marginalized

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>45</sup> Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> Pérez, Jr., *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society*, 54. The Cuban government turned to China to import a fresh supply of laborers: "Ramón de la Sagra dates the arrival of the first 600 Chinese contract workers to Cuba in 1847. Over the course of the next thirty years, an estimated total 125,000 Chinese workers arrived in Cuba, most of whom were distributed among the sugar estates of the western jurisdictions." The island's immediate response to obtain foreign laborers exemplifies a lack of internal sourcing for workers, the result of owners searching to pay low wages for hard labor and poor living conditions.

and even more discriminated against in the workplace when they re-entered society. They were discriminated against not for their skin color but rather for having a mark of participation in the UMAP reeducation camps in their public records.

Castro knew about pre-existing racial divides and followed in the footsteps of his predecessor Batista when trying to promote equality. Batista became the first racially mixed leader of Cuba. He made sure to look after certain disadvantaged communities within the island: “[H]e undertook a program of social and economic reform that included agrarian reform, urban rent control, state-provided health insurance, and, as part of the Constitution of 1940, an unusually progressive labor code. Elected president that year, Batista continued and expanded these programs during the 1940s.”<sup>47</sup> Castro’s approach towards the UMAP labor camps followed along the same lines of his previous social stances. The young men forced to attend these camps were of different races and economic backgrounds. The relationship therefore that internees and slaves shared in common had nothing to do with skin color but rather social discrimination based on markers of difference.

Another basis for comparison between UMAP internees’ experiences and that of slaves included the location and layout of the camps. Illustration 2 exemplifies the type of barracks that the internees slept in. Reporter Paul Kidd wrote that about 200 camps existed, and that each housed different types of prisoners.<sup>48</sup> Guards divided the laborers based on the premise of their imprisonment, whether it be religious, sexual orientation, or political. Gays were typically ostracized from the rest of the other prisoners in an attempt to prevent homosexuality from spreading:

“Even while gay men were temporarily stationed at the camps for general internees, they were sometimes assigned to a separate platoon for homosexuals. To transfer internees to camps for homosexuals, the guards would call the entire camp to assemble and publicly select those who would be transferred. That the military

---

<sup>47</sup> Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 158.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Kidd, “[Castro’s Cuba: Police Repression Is Mounting](#)” (Washington, D.C.: United Press International, *Deseret News*, Nov. 9, 1966).

actively segregated gay men not only from society but also from within the camps demonstrates just how preoccupied the government was with curbing the “diffusion” of homosexuality.”<sup>49</sup>

The UMAP camps barely provided safe and clean living quarters. The living conditions were at best minimalist:

Each UMAP camp typically held 120 men split into three *compañías* of 40 internees, further divided into squads of 10. The number of internees could vary considerably, however, and some camps held several hundred internees. A typical camp was a few hundred meters long and about one hundred fifty meters wide and had three barracks, two for internees and one for military personnel. The camps were surrounded by a 10 foot tall barbed-wire fence and had no running water or electricity. Camp brigades were given *revolucionario* names such as “Vietnam Heroico,” “Martires de Giron,” and “Heroes del Granma.” Most camps had bunk beds with jute sacks slung between wooden beams for mattresses. Some camps had hammocks or no beds at all and a few provided actual mattresses. The UMAP uniform consisted of *verde olivo* or dark blue pants, a long-sleeve light blue denim shirt, and military boots.<sup>50</sup>

**Illustration 2: Barracks at the UMAP Camps<sup>51</sup>**



<sup>49</sup> Joseph Tahbaz, Demystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba (Delaware Review of Latin American Studies, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Kidd, “Castro’s Cuba”.

No single news outlet captured all of the lived experiences of prisoners within every single camp.

Each observation or testimony simply described the conditions within a particular camp:

“With hundreds of different camps scattered throughout Camagüey, conditions could range significantly in terms of the quality of food, beds, and the abusiveness of the guards. Conditions in the camps also changed over time. Several internees have reported that the quality of the camp food improved and the height of the barbed-wire fences was substantially reduced after mid-1966.”<sup>52</sup>

Although the prisoners suffered a variety of experiences that went unreported, others managed to have a tolerable existence.

Castro’s administration never publicly drew comparisons between the laborers and the island’s history with slaves. However, the victims and survivors of these experiences did. Author Jorge Ronet was a former prisoner in an UMAP camp. He remembered a time when Castro visited his camp. He said,

“So then, Fidel Castro, in one of those typical displays of his, went to inspect these camps. One afternoon that we were working, I think yanking out grass with our hands [...] he passed by. It was about five in the afternoon. We saw a caravan of Jeeps and behind, interestingly enough, came two loads filled with chickens [...] People started screaming things at him, but *against* him, of course. As always, he never gets close to the public. He passed by in his Jeep like a grand marquis, watching over the slaves, no?”<sup>53</sup>

The prisoners and the families of the victims constantly recall the complex imagery that existed of UMAP laborers and of slaves.

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 39. All translations, unless observed noted, are by the author.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Official Monologue: Castro Rallies Support through the State-Controlled Press**

Castro's speeches and the regime's restrictions on freedom of speech were both used as tools to craft a particular image of the forced labor camps. This chapter analyzes two speeches presented by Castro in 1963 and 1966 in order to better understand the language he used to vilify Jehovah's Witnesses. In the first, he directly condemned Jehovah's Witnesses. He charged them with being worshipers affiliated with the United States, a force threatening Cuba. He calls on Cubans to reject the imperial power 90 miles off their coast. His focus shifted from unity to bigotry in his second speech a few years later. His underlying message and concern shifted from patriotism to the state of the economy. His speeches emphasized how dissidents needed to be taught revolutionary values while also improving economic conditions by tending to the fields. In addition, the state-controlled press repeated Castro's messages about the camps in subsequent articles published in 1966 and 1967. I addressed how the media presented the internees in Boy Scout-like scenes and solely featured prisoners that were not gay. Although Castro could charge other internees with being affiliated with the imperialist powers, many gays thrown into the camps did not have any such record. Gay internees were included in the UMAP camps because their sexual relations were of a concern in a society dominated by machismo values.

The regime faced a stark reality soon after the Cuban Revolution. The people grew tired of the government's leadership and direction as the economy plummeted. American journalist Kidd witnessed the population's distaste when he reported on assignment in 1966:

[W]hen Castro came to power in 1959, it is freely admitted, he had more than 90 per cent of the Cuban population solidly and wholeheartedly behind him. Today, from conversation with countless Cubans of all occupations and ages, there seems little doubt that the vast majority of the country's 7.000.000 citizens detest the system.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Kidd, "Castro's Cuba".

The Soviet alliance led to copying many of their policies to control growing political threats and what they deemed as social undesirables. Two different explanations exist for where the idea for the UMAP labor camps came from. Some argue that the idea to incarcerate gays in particular came from a visit to Shanghai by Ramiro Valdes, the Minister of Interior Affairs at the time. He learned from the mayor that a community of gays had gathered in a park near a river during a festival. Several Chinese Communists gathered around them with stakes, killed them, and tossed their bodies into the river. That had been their solution to eliminate gays. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a Cuban novelist and once close to the regime, said, “[Valdes] [...] thought the solution was beastly, but there was no doubt that they were looking for a solution to this problem.”<sup>55</sup> Another claim is that the Cuban government looked to replicate Gulag-like encampments after officials visited Bulgaria.<sup>56</sup> Award-winning Cuban author Heberto Padilla said,

“In one of those trips that Raul Castro took, he saw in Bulgaria that the streets were “clean,” there weren’t any “antisocial” elements and he asked how they resolved that issue, especially of homosexuals, that in particular worried him. They answered, ‘We have a camp, in which we toss those antisocial, above all the homosexuals that worry you all so much.’ [...] similar camps were introduced in Cuba.”<sup>57</sup>

Cuba followed the worldwide phenomenon of persecuting gays simply for their sexual preferences. As in China, these initiatives were well hidden. The state-controlled press in Cuba rarely, if ever, featured gays at the UMAP labor camps. At the time of the camps’ opening, the regime solely promoted the inclusion of counterrevolutionaries in the UMAP camps. While the camp photos exemplified values associated with machismo, Castro had yet to emphasize on the importance of manhood until the Ten Million Ton Harvest. The Cuban Revolution, after all, promised equality not the continuation of discrimination faced in other, prior regimes.

---

<sup>55</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Improbia*, 88.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

The purpose of the regime's policies became clearer over time to the public, especially after analyzing Castro's speeches, the state-controlled press coverage, and the regime's reframing of the events. Castro claimed in 2006:

There were people who weren't very well educated, and the country needed them because of the tremendous drain on centers of production. [...] Second, there were certain religious groups who, out of principle or religious doctrine, refused to be subordinated to a flag or to serve in the armed forces. [...] Third, [...] Homosexuals were not called up into military service. You're faced with the problem of a strong resistance against homosexuals, and when the Revolution triumphed, during this period that we're talking about, machismo was an element that was very much present in our society, and there was still widespread rejection of the idea of homosexuals serving in military units. Those three factors led us not to call them up for military service, but that became a sore spot, because they were not called upon to make the hard sacrifice [for the country] and some people used that argument to criticize homosexuals even more harshly. With those three categories of people who for one reason or another were excluded [from duty], [the] Military Units to Aid Production) were created.<sup>58</sup>

The reality differed. The government opened these camps to control so-called dissidents, motivate the rest of the public in their cause, and encourage economic growth.

### **1963: Castro reinforced community tensions**

On March 13, 1963, Castro stood in front of a crowd of students at the University of Havana to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the victory against the attack on the presidential palace.<sup>59</sup> He emphasized that while plenty had already been accomplished, there was still more to be done. He said, "And, nevertheless, [those] who would believe that history is already written [...] would be wrong. Because there remains before everyone, and especially for you all, many more pages to be written, more to fight for, a lot to be done and lots to be created." He indicated that the future of

---

<sup>58</sup> Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: My Life*, (New York: Scribner, 2006), 223-224.

<sup>59</sup> Fidel Castro, "In the closing ceremony to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace," (Havana: 1963). The following details and translated quotes are based on this speech. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

Cuba lay before them. According to Castro, they still had much to accomplish for their society. He meant to motivate the future leaders of tomorrow to overcome the challenges that quickly arose.

The island faced harsh agricultural conditions. Droughts devastated the entire country during 1961.<sup>60</sup> On the one hand, its leaders were determined to keep the economy afloat: “Between 1959 and 1961, Cuban exports to socialist countries increased from 2.2 percent to 74 percent, while imports expanded from 0.3 percent to 70 percent.” On the other hand, newly implemented restrictions severed relations with certain countries. The government anticipated a backlash.

Castro took the opportunity to rally the majority against a common enemy. He said, “And we will see many times the enemy changing their tactics. And that is what imperialism did: how it changed its strategies when it saw itself crushed within the cities run by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.” The crowd applauded. The few years Castro had been in power, the United States had presented serious threats to his livelihood, including multiple death plots, from explosive cigars to deathly chocolate milkshakes.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the Central Intelligence Agency strategized various plots to destroy early on Cuba’s economic growth, such as sending paramilitaries to destroy sugar mills, other agricultural plantations, and railroad bridges.<sup>62</sup> He had enough legitimate concern and proven record of the States’ foul play to encourage civilians to rally behind him in standing against imperialist powers. He continued,

[T]he activities of two or three sects of religions, funded, precisely, in the United States, and that have been utilized on the forefront of penetrating into Latin America, sects funded and subsidized by the imperialists, because the sharks of imperialism, men, do not care about God, neither religion nor anything.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Perez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 345.

<sup>61</sup> “The Milkshake That Almost Killed Castro” (Great Big Story, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Perez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 347-348.

<sup>63</sup> Fidel Castro, “In the closing ceremony to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace,” (Havana: 1963).

Anyone who disagreed with the Communist Party became an enemy and was regarded as one by the administration.

The second problem that the administration had with these religions was in their refusal to participate in activities that supported the state during a delicate time. The right to decide whether to support an administration had to be earned through the success of the state as a whole, it was never a given. The issue was that the economic stability, the most urgent and present matter, would take time, and Castro insisted through these speeches and in opening these camps, the need for civilians to adapt to a certain image of a revolutionary, a model that eliminated for many values at the core of their identity.

He named the three denominations--Jehovah Witnesses, Evangelicals of Gideon, Pentecostals--as enemies of the Revolution. He said,

“For example, under the religious pretext, ‘no use of arms, don’t defend yourself, don’t join a militia’; or when there’s a cotton harvest, or of coffee, or of sugar, or any special job, and the masses join on a Sunday or Saturday or whatever day, they say, ‘don’t work the seventh day.’ And so they start under the pretext of religion to preach against voluntary work.”

Time and again these worshippers failed to show their support. Unlike Catholics who initially showed that they desired to be religious and revolutionaries, the religious practices of these denominations excluded them from having both identities.

Castro’s examples primarily revolve around economic issues that commonly affected the entire population. The religious minorities appeared to not be pulling their own weight as others struggled to meet the government’s call for volunteers. Castro’s speeches criticized these faiths as being ideal for those that did not want to participate in pro-revolutionary tactics and those working purposefully with the United States to derail the public’s revolutionary efforts.

Jehovah Witnesses, Evangelicals of Gideon, and Pentecostals struck a third chord. These sects preached beyond their households for others to stand with them. He said, “[Preachers] tell parents, ‘Do not send your kids to school on Fridays when they have to pledge allegiance to the flag.’” On the one hand, many parents, not just Jehovah’s Witnesses, worried about to what extent the regime would have control of influencing and educating their kids. Many families, in fear of the regime’s encroaching control over their kids, sent their infants and children to the United States through the Peter Pan flights that lasted from 1960 to 1963.<sup>64</sup> Operation Peter Pan allowed Cuban families to send their children to the United States to remain with family and friends stateside or in orphanages until they were reunited with their parents. Some reunited years later while others died with the aspiration of one day reconnecting with their loved ones. On the other hand, Castro sought after complete and total solidarity. He intended to see a united front and did not tolerate anything but full and complete loyalty. He said, “Should our country tolerate such behavior after fighting for independence, a free flag, and sacrificing heroes along the way? Should we tolerate any irrelevant attitudes against our country?” Castro appeared to secure the public’s support as they responded, “Stop them! Stop them!”

### **1966: Castro advocated for the UMAP forced labor camps**

Castro returned three years later on the same date, March 13, to the University of Havana to give another speech.<sup>65</sup> The talk fell on the ninth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace. Castro honed in on why sharing the same opinion as the state matters. He begins his speech by emphasizing how the Communist Party earned the trust of *el pueblo*.

---

<sup>64</sup> José Enrique Pardo, *Cubamerican* (Ño Productions, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Fidel Castro, “In the closing ceremony to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace,” (1966). The following details and translated quotes are based on this speech. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

The strength of the Revolution relied on its followers. The government knew that without widespread support they risked losing control. Their propaganda tactics emphasized unity against dissent. They emphasized through words and actions the importance of unity. Castro said, “All of the nation knows the strength which the Revolution counts on. It counts, in the first place, on the tremendous support of [public] opinion.” The crowd applauded. He continued, “It counts on a party united, with a single direction.”

Castro understood that in order for the people to have such total faith in the government they needed reassurance that it could be trusted. Castro said,

“Never has the Revolution abused its power. And that produces in all of the revolutionaries a sense of security: the security that injustice will never be committed against them, the security that no one will commit an abuse of power against them [...] This power is not mine, neither is it of the 10 nor 20, nor of the Central Committee or the Party, but of the nation.”

The crowd applauded. Castro tried to convince the attendees that the state was worthy of the nation’s trust, that they were able to execute the best plans without overstepping boundaries. The argument sought to prevent critics from claiming that the UMAP labor camps exemplified human rights abuses and an excess of power.

Castro recalled the past to reiterate the underlying message of his speech. He said, “The nation knows that there has never been an abuse of power [in the Revolution], and this has created a great climate of security, a great climate of confidence.” The repetition of “security” through a means of remembering the track record of the past few years provides further confidence in the state. The logic would follow: If the state never visibly committed an abuse of power in the past, then it would not commit one today. The argument for safety justified any and all discrimination and persecution.

Castro then argued against those that did not believe in the state. He said, “Of those few ten, some will have to go to prison [...] others will have to go to their Military Service, others will have to go to the UMAP, the Military Units to Aid Production, and others will have to go to rehabilitation centers according to the orders of the Social Defense Code.” The crowd once again loudly expressed their support. A clear message came across. Those that did not blindly follow the state would pay a cost. The reality soon became that thousands were thrown into the UMAP camps for reasons unjustified, despite Castro’s claim that all of their actions were indeed justifiable.

### **Silence of the press: The regime’s propaganda tool for forced labor**

The regime silenced the press early on, seeing it as a potential threat. With increasing tensions abroad with the United States, the government intended to avoid any issues from forming within the island. Any opposition, they claimed, could be sourced to the United States as a means of undermining the Cuban Revolution. Castro said, “We aren’t against people having opinions that differ from ours. In Cuba, the main thing is the battle between the nation—the Cuban people—and imperialism. There aren’t any third positions here—you are either with the Revolution or against it, nobody’s neutral.”<sup>66</sup>

Although the regime claimed to tolerate all opinions, at the end, just as in his comment, Castro implied that the public either embodied the regime’s beliefs or they didn’t. The government made sure that the latter parties would not be provided any platform so as to prosper. Castro said, “We aren’t going to be so stupid as to give means of expression to those who want to destroy the Revolution and our country. [...] Hence, there won’t be any mass media for the

---

<sup>66</sup> Borge, *Face to Face with Fidel Castro*, 74.

counterrevolutionaries, because the mass media in our country belong to the people and are at the service of the people.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Depictions of prisoners in *Granma* and *Olivo Verde***

The few camps featured in the state-controlled press tended to be for religious minorities.

Rarely, if ever, were encampments for gay prisoners featured in publications:

Numerous propaganda pieces produced by *Granma* and *Verde Olivo* between 1965 and 1968 stressed the presence of Jehovah’s Witnesses at the UMAP camps, complete with photos and personal interviews. Conversely, of the 11 *Verde Olivo* and *Granma* articles which reference the UMAP camps, not a single one mentions homosexuals. Since the purpose of the propaganda was to combat the camps’ poor reputation, representations of gays had to be excluded.<sup>68</sup>

*Granma* published several features of the UMAP camp. The image below is a copy of one of its reports. Luis Baez’s article published on Thursday, April 14, 1966 described the lives of prisoners in the UMAP labor camps.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Luis Baez, “Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Produccion (UMAP),” (1966). The following details and translated quotes are based on this article. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

## Illustration 3: Granma Published Staged Photos of the UMAP Camps

**Granma** La Habana, jueves 14 de abril de 1966

**reportaje**

### UNIDADES MILITARES DE AYUDA A LA PRODUCCION (UMAP)

- Todo joven debe pasar como un honroso deber el Servicio Militar
- El objetivo principal de la UMAP es contribuir a la formación de los jóvenes
- Se convertirán en hombres útiles a la sociedad
- No se les trata superficial sino profundamente
- Algunas sectas religiosas prohíben a sus miembros jurar la bandera, fumar y trabajar los sábados
- Son tratados con respeto y gran comprensión humana
- Las unidades están ahora concentradas en Camagüey
- También tendrán visitas el "Día de las Madres"

Por LUIS BAEZ / Fotos CORRAL

**Surge la UMAP**

Quedaba por ver el caso de una serie de elementos desorientados, pero que al igual que el resto de la juventud, se preocupaban por el futuro de la patria. Se les dio una solución: la UMAP. Se les dio una solución: la UMAP. Se les dio una solución: la UMAP.

**Están sujetos a una disciplina militar.**

**Terminando el desfile de pelotas los jóvenes llevan en hombros a un compañero del Ejército Rojo.**

**Practican deportes.**

En la forma de penetrar en la más profunda de las crisis de la UMAP, se les dio una solución: la UMAP. Se les dio una solución: la UMAP. Se les dio una solución: la UMAP.

**Revolucionario de la del 33-35, me trata bien y me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno.**

**Unos ven of-nos tiempo vital**

El primer domingo de cada mes tienen visita los jóvenes de la UMAP. Se les da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno.

**Aprenden labores agrícolas**

En la UMAP se les da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno. Me da un trabajo digno.

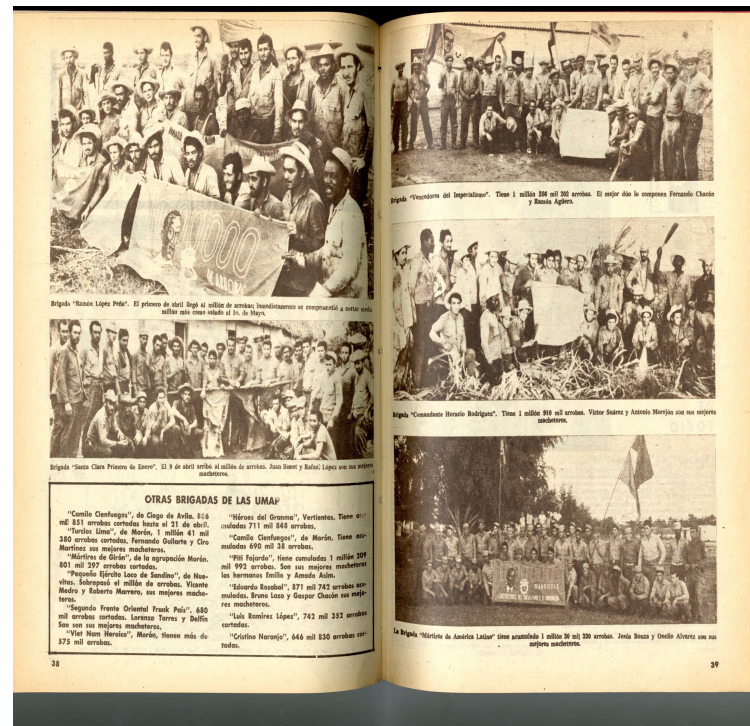
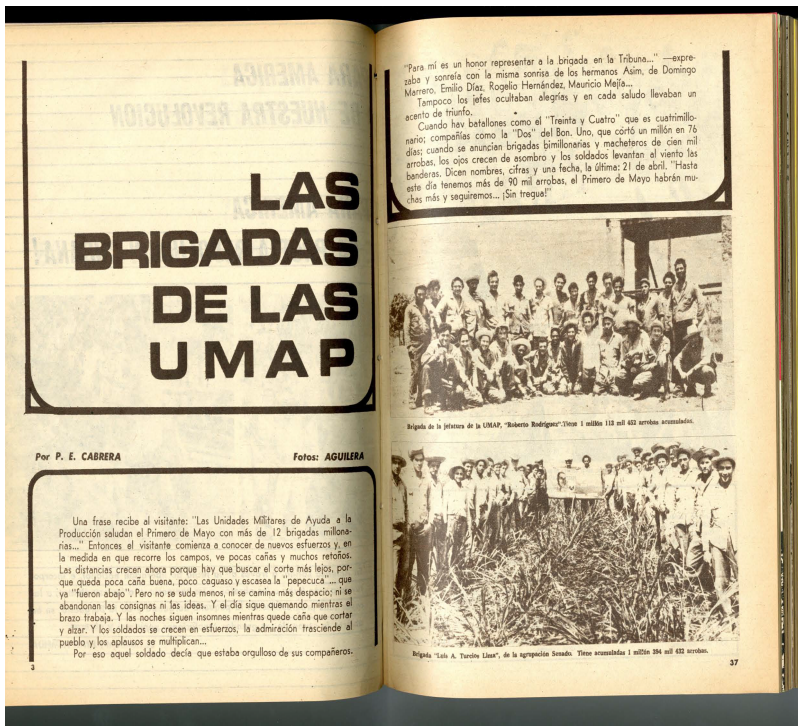
- Youth should enter the honorable Military Service
  - The main objective of the UMAP is to contribute to the formation of the youth
  - They would become useful to society
  - Some religious sects prohibit pledging allegiance to the flag, smoking and working on Saturdays
  - All are treated with respect and compassion
  - The units are now concentrated in Camagüey
  - They will have visits for Mother's Day
- Baez described that the Compulsory Military Service selections were the crème de la crème of young society: "Many others that were not studying, working, and hadn't [...] even found themselves included in the Revolutionary Militia or in the Rebelled Armed Forces were not picked."
- He then described the solution for those that were not enlisted and not participating in the Revolutionary Militia nor the Rebelled Armed Forces.

Baez said that the state general and other officials met with Castro to discuss what would be the solution to incorporate these members into society. The primary objective would be to change the attitudes of what would be described as a lazy population and educate them for the future: “Avoid that tomorrow they would become parasites, unable to produce anything or anti-revolutionary delinquents or common delinquents, useless people for society.” The men decided that Ernesto Castillas would be the best person to lead these camps and teach these men worth ethic.

Baez emphasized that the camps were not designed as places of punishment. Although discipline existed, the internees were well cared for. When the laborers simply stood next to the sugar cane, not trying their best, as the author wrote, the camp supervisor simply stood by them until they got the job done.

The camps appeared to resemble the Boy Scouts in certain capacities. The photos provide proof for this comparison. Take the photo on page 11, top page, bottom right as it shows one internee playing sports. During the annual sugar harvest, the camps participated and competed against one another to see which community cut the most sugar cane. The winners would supposedly earn prizes, such as motorcycles. The laborers interviewed for the article expressed gratitude rather than fear of being there. They also had excursions around town. Family visits were permitted the first Sunday of every month and, at times, the men could visit their families at home.

## Illustrations 4 and 5: UMAP Brigades Compete during Sugar Cane Harvest<sup>70</sup>



The author went on to describe the communities that were thrown into the camps for religious reasons. He began the section by describing how Jehovah Witnesses and Evangelicals did not register for the Compulsory Military Service since they could not join any such coalition according to their faith. Baez interviewed and featured one Jehovah Witness. René Jaime Socarrás came from humble origins and, besides learning how to read and write, lived according to his religious teachings. After joining the camps, Socarrás claimed that his world had changed. He read books that didn't pertain to his faith and felt gradually changing ideologically: "For the first time in my life, I

<sup>70</sup> P.E. Cabrera also reported on how the UMAP camps competed against one another during the sugar cane harvest. Here the brigades, "Roberto Rodríguez," "Luis A. Turcios Lima," "Ramón López Peña," "The First of January Santa Clara," and "Victors of Imperialism," "Commander Horacio Rodríguez," and "Martyrs of Latin America," rounded together for a photo with their flags. The camps received a flag for every victory that they made and major advancement in the competition. The piece published in *Verde Olivo* on March 19, 1967.

cut cane and I can sincerely say that I am doing well. The work is hard, but not like we spoke of before. For the first time I feel that I am doing something useful for my nation.” Fieldwork made revolutionaries out of men.

Baez concluded that the full appreciation of these camps would occur once the year was completed. No sooner would the public understand the extent of the contribution that these camps served for the nation. He ended the article with a quote by Castro: “Work will make you men.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Testimonies contradict the regime’s claims of UMAP camp conditions**

First-hand accounts reveal a range of experiences not represented in the government and the press’s depiction of the UMAP labor camps. More of the truth appeared in the letters mailed home during that time and later on in the testimonies given by survivors. Some recalled their own personal struggles. While at a few camps one internee noted, “there was enough food...we ate lots of canned meat, sardines, condensed milk; there was milk, rice, beans, there was plenty,”<sup>72</sup> others recalled consuming stray cats, hens, snakes and polluted water.<sup>73</sup> Others remembered witnessing horrific abuse: “At one camp, [Dr. José Luis Llovio-Menéndez] saw a young Jehovah’s Witness hung by his hands from the top of a flagpole.”<sup>74</sup> Foreign correspondents visiting the island took notice of these camps and reported on the situation to a certain extent.

---

<sup>71</sup> Michael Z. Wise, “In Totalitarian Cuba, Ice Cream and Understanding,” (1995), *The New York Times*. Wise reviewed the film “Strawberry and Chocolate” by Tomas Gutierrez Alea and included a brief history of the UMAP labor camps. Wise wrote, “In Cuba, thousands of homosexuals were sent to concentration camps in the late 1960’s, together with others deemed deviant by the Castro regime. Echoing the slogan on the gates of Auschwitz, the camps were emblazoned with the words, “Work will make you men.” In conducting my research and cross-checking information, it is important to note that not all victims recall seeing this sign on their camp. However, those that do remember seeing one always make the connection to Auschwitz.

<sup>72</sup> Blanco, 134.

<sup>73</sup> Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP”.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

One correspondent of *The New York Times* wrote briefly of the camp details in 1969, as the last of them were closing. He wrote of hippies being sent to camps in late 1968 as the government claimed they were closing the facilities.

The hippie phenomenon in Cuba was several months old but the authorities only took action when one small group broke into a high school, destroyed television sets used as teaching adjuncts in classrooms and tore down photographs of Che. Without warning, the police ringed the hippie area and indiscriminately led everyone in the streets into Leyland buses and drove them off to the police stations. Once there, anyone with proof that he or she worked, or belonged to a mass organization, was immediately released; those kept were sent off to state farms where work and study, the Cuban cure for all ills, is expected to rehabilitate them.<sup>75</sup>

The reporter failed to offer more details or to dig further into the matter. Readers outside of the island would fail then to understand the gravity of the situation, including the abusive working conditions and Marxist indoctrination.

Correspondents who dug deeper and investigated the camps showed a different perspective of these camps. Reporter Kidd, who became the first to photograph uncensored pictures of the camps, said, "I have been inside such a camp. The atmosphere was one of fear."<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> José Yglesias, "Cuban Report: Their Hippies, Their Squares" (*The New York Times Magazine*, January 1969).

<sup>76</sup> Kidd, "Castro's Cuba".

### Chapter 3 And Off They Went to the Camps

Castro was troubled by those who, based on religious convictions, refused to take up arms in defense of the revolution, and opposed the value of voluntary labor to strengthen the economy. On Scout's Honor, the UMAP press coverage therefore proclaimed, society's good-for-nothing, lazy boys would be made into productive men. In reality, the unpatriotic would be imprisoned and used as below-minimum wage labor until they were broken, body and soul. Government officials first sought to imprison two main groups: religious minorities, including Jehovah's Witnesses, and applicants for Cuban passports. Cuban historian Enrique Ros explained, "Others that fall into the first call exemplify two aggravating circumstances for the Castro regime: being religious and having applied for a [Cuban] passport to leave the country."<sup>77</sup> An application for a Cuban passport indicated to the Castro regime that a civilian intended to leave the country and marked him as counterrevolutionary. Survivors' testimonies demonstrate that state security was in fact of equal or more of a concern than sugar production.

The regime's survival was of utmost concern to Castro. Within earlier research, testimonies confirm that in fact the Castro government targeted forced laborers based on fears of long-term threats. The state still remains hesitant to come forward and admit the persecution and abuses committed within these camps. Government officials continue to claim that laborers were interned based on defined improper conduct, including gays, and have denied human rights abuses.<sup>78</sup> This chapter analyzes how Cuban expats remember their experiences and how, in contrast to the state, their language falls on the opposite, extreme end of the spectrum. Chapter 4 and 5 focus on the

---

<sup>77</sup> Ros, *La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista*, 48.

<sup>78</sup> Óscar Haza, "[A Mano Limpia](#)" (Florida: AmericaTeve, 2011).

persecuted gay and religious minorities. Chapter 6 then focuses on the challenges of preserving a memory of tragedy and persecution, given the array of conflicting memories and anecdotes.

First, I study the lived experiences of survivors, among the first to be persecuted on the basis of expressing their discontent verbally or physically, through the clothes they wore or by joining student activist groups. The chapter also mentions the precautions that the government took to weed out counter anti-revolutionaries within the Obligatory Military Service (SMO). The trainees were educated not only on the basis of physical labor but also Marxist ideological instructions indicating an attempt by the state to control youth through education. Then, experiences leading up to internment are highlighted and the mental and physical abuses suffered by the men revealed. Chapter 3 concludes by exploring the Soviet Gulag and Nazi Holocaust comparisons that survivors often assert when remembering the UMAP and how such examples themselves obscure more than they reveal over time.

### **Caught Off Guard**

Officials responsible for the opening of the UMAP labor camps scoured the streets to arrest civilians they deemed socially unfit and in need of firm revolutionary guidance. They physically judged and profiled several types of victims, including gays, based on appearance and mannerisms. So-called hippies were also detained during the camps' opening. UMAP survivor Jaime Bellechasse recalled waiting in line outside a restaurant in Havana with a few of his friends. Officials from the department of State Security, a branch of the Interior Ministry created in 1961 to counter any threats to the Cuban Revolution, stopped next to them and ordered the men to get into their car. After agreeing to their demands, Bellechasse and his friends were driven to a center from which other men were being shipped off to UMAP labor camps. He noticed a group off to one side that consisted

solely of hippies. Bellechasse said, “The ‘hippies’ were one of the groups [...] any youth that enjoyed ‘pop’ music, including the Beatles and enjoyed partying—what any teenager does, no?—had long hair—because that was in then—and colored tops, etc.”<sup>79</sup> While the state could claim that their appearance suggested problematic behavior, such as laziness and the desire to simply party all the time, reality was more complicated. In the eyes of the Castro regime, the hippie community represented a sector of the population already tainted with U.S. ideals and values. In addition, it would be easy to argue based on appearances, as was done later with gays, that hippies needed help to incorporate themselves into society as productive members. They wore the quilt of their government-defined crime on their sleeves.

### **Kicked Out of the Obligatory Military Service**

In late 1963, the administration established the Obligatory Military Service (SMO) under Law 1129. The government required all men 15 to 27 years old to enlist in the services and to serve for three years.<sup>80</sup> Officials soon noted a problem. As the President of the Association of Ex-UMAP Prisoners in Miami, Renato Gómez said, “There was this big dilemma in Cuba, what to do with the youth, young men that did not support the Revolution, but that technically could go to the military service...taking them there is training them.”<sup>81</sup> Once the UMAP camps were opened, servicemen in the SMO suspected of being anti-revolutionary were sent there.<sup>82</sup>

José Caballero Blanco would be among those who experienced both the SMO and then the UMAP. Blanco remembered his schedule at the SMO Barbosa camp. After waking up at 5 a.m. and

---

<sup>79</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 43-44.

<sup>80</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 47.

<sup>81</sup> The included translated quotes are based on an interview that the author conducted with survivor Renato Gómez on June 17, 2016 in Miami, Florida.

<sup>82</sup> Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP”.

being given exactly 10 minutes to get ready, Blanco ate a slice of bread with a side of condensed milk and rushed off to a series of classes on politics, military discipline, weaponry instruction, and then again political science courses. As Blanco saw it, “An incessant brainwashing.”

He remembered the first time he was caught mocking revolutionary instructions in the SMO. The instructor provided an example of what happens when productive forces break the production framework. The instructor said, “The productive forces were like a puppy stuck in a cookie jar that in itself represented a framework for production. As the puppy grew, it broke the production framework.”

Blanco whispered to his closest neighbor: “Don’t give the dog any food to see if it’ll still grow.”

An observer in the room shouted behind him, “On your feet. Clowns will not have the opportunity to develop their craft in the Revolutionary Armed Forces.”<sup>83</sup>

After the speaker demanded that he leave the class and wash dishes in the kitchen, Blanco better understood the costs of disagreeing within a militarized communist society: “He taught me to not trust, to not believe even the clothes on my back, the best way really to survive in a communist paradise.”<sup>84</sup>

After the incident in class, Blanco received a notice to meet with an agent from the Military Counterintelligence while at the SMO. The agent interrogated Blanco on his family history and observed out loud that his sister, brother-in-law, and niece had left for the United States. He said,

---

<sup>83</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 31. Agents from the division of the Military Counterintelligence within the Armed Revolutionary Forces, pertaining to the Interior Ministry, occasionally supervised the SMO. They handled investigations and sought to eliminate anyone that hinted at being against the Cuban Revolution. The men drafted into the SMO, and even the officials themselves that managed the camps, feared the Military Counterintelligence agents. A poor review from them would be a guaranteed one-way ticket to UMAP forced labor camps.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

“They’ve left you by yourself!” Blanco, infuriated by his superior’s mocking tone, pointed out that his parents still resided in the country. The agent then asked, “Are you thinking about leaving?”

“What do you think?”

The agent’s once amicable tone shifted to a growl. “Here, *I* am the one who asks the questions.”

“Well then yes. If I have the chance to leave legally, I will, but in the meanwhile I will comply with the laws in this country, hence why I am here in front of you, following the law of the *Obligatory* Military Service.”<sup>85</sup> Instinct told Blanco that he would be on his way to the forced labor camps. His gut was right.

### **Mental Breakdown**

UMAP guards attempted to destroy the tenacity of those the regime considered dissidents. The imagery and allusion to Nazi-like treatment flooded through prisoners’ minds as they headed to the camps. The phrases that officials used also reinforced the ‘us versus them’ rhetoric that Fidel Castro employed so often before in his speeches. Their language indicated that those imprisoned had two options: ‘*patria o la muerte.*’

The government sent some prisoners directly to the UMAP labor camps, or later after they spent some time in the SMO. Some, especially during the initial opening of the camps, left home with the impression of going to an SMO but were purposefully misled. Jose Antonio Nadal, commonly known as Jesús Nadal to family and friends, remembered when he attended to a government-sent letter drafting him to the SMO. He said,

“That summoned me to that office and there Captain Reina awaited me. He said that they would send me to the military service. He did not mention the UMAP. The

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 34.

following day, in my house, a policeman came with a telegram ordering me to appear the next day in Santiago de las Vegas. There, they directed us onto a Leyland coach bus with two soldiers in the front and back.”<sup>86</sup>

Families did not know where their sons were sent. Worried that no one would know of their whereabouts, some prisoners strategized to inform their loved ones where they were headed. However, not everyone had the opportunity to inform their families. As in the camps, each bus was supervised by different sergeants who monitored the laborers at their discretion. Different internees described different observations:

One survivor said, “Our families did not know where we were nor where we were headed. On the Leyland buses, we wrote notes on some scratch paper, added some change and tossed them out the window to the people we passed by.”<sup>87</sup>

UMAP prisoner Hector Aldao would be sent to the camp based on his sexuality. The harsh treatment towards gays was visible earlier than those sent for being ‘hippies’ or exemplifying improper conduct, excluding, of course, religious minorities. Aldao said, “Then they summoned us to Havana, to a place called the Botanical Garden, one day after sunset, and we left in Leyland buses towards the province of Camagüey. We did not know where we were going and neither did our families. Our trip from Havana to Camagüey took about eight or 10 hours. We couldn’t leave the bus nor call our families to tell them where they were taking us. In other words, we were going as detainees.”<sup>88</sup>

Jose Mario, another gay internee sent to the UMAP recalled how the guards never made rest stops during the trip. Mario said, “They did not let us get out and use a restroom. Then people crapped, urinated in the back of the bus. There were horrible smells during the entire night. Sometimes when we made stops, we asked people through the open windows for water since the guards did not give us any.”<sup>89</sup>

UMAP prisoners were taken to abandoned sugar mills and campsites by bus and cargo trains.

One prisoner remembered, “They moved us onto that train where there wasn’t even a place to sit, without water because the common prisoners that arrived—some of them, we later found out, were convicted for murder—had urinated in the water tanks.”<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 141.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>88</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 34-35.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 20.

Upon arriving to these sites, internees saw armed guards lined up at any possible exit, shoving them forward until they all gathered in the center of a stadium. According to Gómez, members of the Association of Ex-UMAP Prisoners remembered listening to the same speech warning them to conform to revolutionary ideology and commands. Gómez recalled them yelling, “You have arrived here and from here you’ll leave in one of two ways: you will either be reeducated. Defined as becoming a revolutionary, or you’ll leave here dead. There is no other way.”

The internees were stripped of their identity as soon as they entered the camps. They were handed two uniforms: An olive green one for visits and a blue, mixed fiber set for daily use. In addition, guards gave them their work tools: a hoe and a machete.<sup>91</sup> Finally, before dinner, they were assigned a number, no longer being called by name.

Officials also placed well-known criminals in the camps, not just those criminalized for their behavior, but to convince Cubans that the worst of their society were being reeducated.<sup>92</sup> Gómez recalled visiting the nearby town Cunagua for a doctor check-up. Civilians passing by avoided making eye contact. María Isabelle Torres was the only one who spoke to the men during their visits. She worked as a secretary at the clinic and responded to the internees when they spoke to her. During his first visit, Gómez asked whether she could help him and his friends send a telegram to their families. She agreed. After taking down his name, his family’s address in Pinar de Rio and his father’s name, she wrote his brief message: “I am doing well, Renatíco. Give a kiss to Mami.”<sup>93</sup> Once they left the clinic, locals spat, “Shameless,” and “*Viva la revolución*,” left and right.

---

<sup>91</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 47-48.

<sup>92</sup> The synopsis is based on an interview that the author conducted with survivor Renato Gómez on June 17, 2016 in Miami, Florida.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

## Hard Labor for the Fit and Disabled Alike

The men spent more than 12 hours Monday through Saturday working in the fields. Sundays were assumed to be designated for cleaning clothes and writing to families. Reality differed from expectations. Officials introduced what they called “voluntary work,” in which the men picked sweet potato and yucca without pay. While those capable could barely tolerate the hard labor, those with disabilities faced even more hardship as they were mocked and belittled during their work.

One laborer suffered from the virus poliomyelitis that impaired his motor skills in his left hand and leg. Sergeant López followed and called him ‘lazy,’ ‘low-class’ and ‘lame shit,’ while also threatening to send him to his superiors for working slowly.

Sergeants similar in character to López denied health care to their detainees, including in extreme emergencies. Blanco remembered the infamous lieutenant nicknamed *Caballo Loco* or Crazy Horse, after the Native American leader, and how *Caballo Loco* treated his neighbor sleeping in his hammock.<sup>94</sup> From the first day, he felt ill and yet was sent to work in the fields. His health worsened every day that followed. In an effort to force Crazy Horse to send him to the hospital, a few of the man’s friends gathered and recruited Blanco in their effort to force the lieutenant’s hand. Although internees could not refuse to go out to the field, they could and did rebel at times by working at an extremely slow pace. Upon seeing this, the supervisor rounded up the men and placed them against the wall, after calling them the “little girls of the Union.”<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 69.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 70. The phrase commonly referred to gays imprisoned in the UMAP labor camps, the majority of which were concentrated in another camp in the town of Vertientes

An Afro Cuban, number 109, said, “Military boss, we have a friend that has been sick for a few days already and the lieutenant denies him medical assistance. Until he is taken to a doctor, no one here will obey to your orders.”<sup>96</sup>

The supervisor screamed, “Insurrection! Insurrection,” and lifted rifles towards the men. *Clac, clac...* Bullets hit the walls around them.

Number 109 shouted, “There is no insurrection, we want to work, but we beg you to take him to the doctor.”

The supervisor ordered his soldiers to put their weapons down and agreed to send him to a doctor in return for their commitment to work the fields. The men agreed.

The men, including Blanco, helped carry their ill friend to a truck that would take him to the Camagüey Military Hospital. By the time the man arrived, it was too late. The young patient suffered far too long from leptospirosis, a bacterial infection that entered his body through exposure to rats’ urine. In moving forward, the man’s case established a precedent for other ill victims. They received medical assistance much sooner.

### **The State vs. the People**

The Castro regime argued that the groups targeted for detention in the UMAP labor camps engaged in deviant behavior. They emphasized that these camps would help these internees to perform better later in society. Afterwards, they emphasized that they were not prisoners. In fact, they would be treated well and paid for their labor. However, the treatment that the survivors,

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. The material comes from this same source.

especially expats, recall flatly contradicts the state's claims. To this day, the government has denied the widespread human rights abuses that occurred behind the 10 foot tall, wired fences.<sup>97</sup>

The UMAP guards readily invented excuses. As they traveled to the camps, the laborers communicated their observations to the armed guards. One inmate named Armando asked for permission to speak after waiting to be admitted into the camps.

He asked, "Why did you bring us using bodyguards with rifles and bayonets if, according to you, we are not prisoners?"

One of the men in charge answered, "It's for all of your protection so that no one hurts you during your travels."

### **The Local and the Global**

The language used by survivors and expats during my research described and compared their experiences of being forced to work in the UMAP camps. Three different actors are involved in constructing a convoluted portrayal and history of the UMAP camps: the Cuban government, survivors who denounce the abuses they faced and witnessed, and other internees who minimize or even trivialize their experiences. The third group largely remains on the island and is highly influenced their position vis-à-vis state officials. However, that is not to say that all UMAP prisoners living in Cuba minimize or trivialize their experiences.

The group that denounces the state for human rights abuses committed within these camps is characterized by their use of comparisons. Victims often largely compare the UMAP to Nazi concentration camps and Soviet Union Gulags. Descriptions offered in books such as Enrique Ros's

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 47.

*La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista* showed examples of these type of testimonies. Different survivors share different stories.

Jose Mario imprisoned in these camps for being gay drew a direct comparison to Auschwitz. Mario said, “At the entrance there was a huge placard that read: Military Unit 2.269 and a sign that read ‘Work will make you men,’ a phrase by Lenin. That is when I remembered that phrase quoted by Salvatore Quasimodo and that was at the entrance of the Auschwitz concentration camp, ‘Work will set you free.’”<sup>98</sup>

A non-gay, non-religious victim Joaquin Rodriguez said, “A concentration camp is a strip of land closed off with a wired electric fence and watchtowers with reflectors in which hundreds pile in their barracks overseeing starving slaves. The only thing missing in Camagüey were the crematories and to change the Cuban flag for a swastika.”<sup>99</sup>

Such comparisons shift the focus from a distinctive moment to a search for similarities and differences between cases that occurred in different contexts and other parts of the world. In addition, while UMAP survivors clearly did suffer human rights abuses, the camps pale in comparison to Nazi concentration camps or Soviet Gulags, commonly referred to cases claimed to be similar. First and foremost, hundreds of camps existed in the provinces of Camagüey. The lieutenants and guards each handled their camp slightly differently. Some might have been more tolerable than others. The claim, then, that the UMAP replicated concentration camps generalizes the experiences of all victims and homogenizes the array of stories and testimonies. Also, laborers led their own insurrections and managed to escape work through coordinated actions, including self-induced wounds.<sup>100</sup> Behavior was punishable, but the extent varied depending on the victim, especially if they were religious dissidents. Guards carried out fake executions by placing internees facing a wall and shooting around them. Such behavior, while traumatizing, could not be compared

---

<sup>98</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 37.

<sup>99</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 121.

<sup>100</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 57.

to the actual executions carried out in concentration camps where second chances rarely if ever existed.

The language that victims use in decrying human rights abuses is critical to preserving the memory for future generations of Cubans at home and abroad. A fuller discussion in Chapter 6 shows how homogenized and hyperbolic comparisons play into the hands of the Cuban state and its denials. Critics can more easily dismiss based on such overblown vocabulary. Victims must be wary of polarizing and hyperbolic language to avoid being misrepresented and denied due recognition.

## Chapter 4

### Setting the Stage for *el Nuevo Hombre* in the Persecution of Gays

In exile, UMAP survivor and writer Héctor Santiago contemplated the preservation of a narrative that contradicted the regime's focus on gendered behavior and excluded accounts of human rights abuses. He wondered why victims did not warn future generations of the horrors internees witnessed. He compared the lack of initiative to that of other survivors of human rights abuses around the world. He pointed to how the Jews of the Holocaust, the Polish victims of the Soviet Union, Hong Kongers governed by mainland China, and African Americans all recalled their tragedies and struggles.<sup>101</sup> Constantly. He wondered: "Why could the Cuban population not commemorate the history of the UMAP camps to such an extent?" Various factors contribute to the lack of public recognition of these camps within and outside of the exile Cuban community, essentially because the same regime that committed such horrors is still in power. One particular problem that former UMAP laborers face when retelling their story is the minimizing of their own lived experiences within these camps.

The majority of survivors living outside of Cuba, such as Héctor Santiago, agreed that their time in these camps scarred them for life. Others, primarily those who remained on the island, were often recorded as having trivialized their own experiences. The location of these survivors is critical when analyzing and understanding their reflections. Those who remained in Cuba were both more susceptible to Cuban government propaganda and subject to reprisals. They were easily swept up with regime-initiated economic campaigns that relentlessly left the past behind as the society was told to keep facing forward.

---

<sup>101</sup> Santiago, "José Mario 'El Puente' de una generación perdida," 1-2.

This chapter focuses on the persecution of gays allegedly based on moral grounds. I argue that the regime in the aftermath of the camps closing painted gays as victims and never showed their nor other internees moments of defiance. In fact, gays expressed their rejection and criticism of Castro and macho expectations through their plays at the UMAP camps. Although the camps were known for their abuses against these internees, gays were never the overwhelming majority of the victims thrown into these camps: “We can say that in every 30 battalion that existed in Camagüey, there were a group of them. That is to say, 120 sections of them times three calls for internees means that there were about 3,600 homosexuals in all.”<sup>102</sup> To summarize, a total of 3,600 internees were imprisoned in these camps for their sexual preferences during the entire time that these camps were opened. The following section analyzes the recorded experiences of gay internees, many or most of whom were writers, and the conditions they faced, including the human rights atrocities of chemical and hormonal experimentation. The chapter closes with the last section analyzing how survivors in exile remembered their experiences compared to those who continued living in Cuba.

Politicians opposed to accurately remembering Cuba’s UMAP camps actually used these self-demeaning accounts to either continue to deny the existence of abuses, such as mental and hormonal treatment, or to shift blame to camp commanders.

### **Discriminating Based on Moral Grounds**

The Castro administration fought early on against some of the island’s more infamous industries. Operation P started in the early 1960s and aimed to end prostitution. Cops patrolled the

---

<sup>102</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 78-79.

streets and arrested prostitutes, pimps and, eventually, pedophiles.<sup>103</sup> Castro went on airwaves criticizing immoral behavior and promising to put an end to the sex trade.

Cuban society soon after turned its attention to gays with the publication of a study in a medical journal. The *Revista Cubana de Medicina* published an article claiming to provide a treatment to cure gay behavior in men.<sup>104</sup> Dr. Eduardo Gutiérrez Agramonte extended Dr. Kurt Freund's Pavlovian treatments. Dr. Agramonte used electric shock therapy and hormone treatments on patients while asking them to select images between nude men and women.<sup>105</sup> These methods were used in camps during 1965 and reinforced the belief that gays could and should change. Soon after the article's publication, gays were publically criticized and persecuted.

A government-controlled newspaper published an article in 1965 calling for the expulsion of gays, considering them useless in the struggle for a successful Revolution. The article claimed, "No homosexual represents the Revolution, which is a matter of men, of fists and not feathers, of courage and not trembling, of certainty and not intrigue, of creative valor and not of sweet surprises."<sup>106</sup> At the time, the University of Havana expelled any student accused of being gay. César Bermúdez recalled how during assemblies students came forward and accused one another of being homosexual, with comments such as, 'So-and-so gave me a certain suspicious look the other day' or 'we shook hands and he held mine for a longer period of time than necessary.'<sup>107</sup> After such an accusation, students would either be forced to leave or willingly abandoned their studies. Another medical study further restricted professionals already in the workforce. The Ministry of Health

---

<sup>103</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 83.

<sup>104</sup> Pedro Marqués de Armas, "Psiquiatría para el nuevo Estado (1959-1972)." (Cuba: *La Habana Elegante*).

<sup>105</sup> Tahbaz, "Demystifying las UMAP".

<sup>106</sup> Carrie Hamilton, *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>107</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 30.

published a piece that same year that claimed that there were no biological causes for being gay but rather that a person learned how to be gay.<sup>108</sup> Those working then faced the cut of their jobs after a campaign began to eliminate gays from various professions, including teaching and working as writers.<sup>109</sup>

The camps opened soon and government agencies took part in sending gays to the UMAP. The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) stationed supervisors on every block to note any suspicious behavior and submit it to a local tribunal. These civilians deemed to be deviants attended their court hearing and soon after were forced to go to the camps as a rehabilitation method.<sup>110</sup> Author Reinaldo Arenas never went to the camps, not having had any confirmed gay relations at the time. However, he noted the different types of gays sent to the camps, from those easily spotted at police-supervised social scenes, to the artists. Some were not easily identified, including the bisexual victims that carried on heterosexual marriages and raised families. Others were untouchables:

Then came the *royal gay*, a species unique to communist countries. The royal gay is the one who, because of close contact with the Maximum Leader or especially important work with the state security apparatus [...] can afford to be openly gay and at the same time to hold an important public office.<sup>111</sup>

Arenas' observation pointed to the fact that the problem was not the so-called immoral behavior. Political views and economic need drove the regime to persecute the vulnerable and use them as a scapegoat to carry favor with the homophobic values of its supporters.

Male dancers were the only performing artists not persecuted as gays by the government. Although they were forced to do voluntary work every so often, they were considered the most

---

<sup>108</sup> Marvin Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality, and AIDS*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), 33.

<sup>109</sup> Luis Salas, *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba* (Conneticut: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 156

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>111</sup> Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls* (New York: Viking, 1993), 78.

privileged of the Revolution.<sup>112</sup> World renowned *prima ballerina* and Cuban National Ballet Director Alicia Alonso reached an agreement with the government to protect her dancers.<sup>113</sup> Secret back-door deals between influential figures and the government saved the lucky few from interning at the camps.

### **Defying Expectations**

The Soviet Union lent their laborers and a few technicians to design and build the camps.<sup>114</sup> They were hastily put together within a year. As part of the plan to segregate gays and attempt to change them through experimentation, a single camp was built that housed all of them. Camp “The Union” was located in the neighborhood of Vertientes in Camagüey.<sup>115</sup> Guards rarely mixed and moved prisoners from different camps. The few exceptions included moving religious minorities into “The Union” as punishment, or moving the gay internees to safer camps under the threat of severe weather conditions.<sup>116</sup>

Survivors recalled the dehumanizing experiences they lived through in the camps. The first abuse involved the removal of their names: “In being dehumanized, the prisoner in these camps lost their identity when they were assigned a number.”<sup>117</sup> In addition, inmates were forced to undergo hard labor and lectures on Marxist ideology. Psychologists from the University of Havana and a team of so-called experts further supported the camp’s regimen. One doctor said, “There is only a single cure and we have it: the Marxist philosophy alongside forced labor produces the masculine

---

<sup>112</sup> Julio Medina, “La Historia de los 10 Bailarines”, *Conducta Impropia* (Madrid: Editorial Egales, 2008), 131.

<sup>113</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 77.

<sup>114</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 33.

<sup>115</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 76.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. Author Blanco remembered that gay internees moved into his camp, nearby to Guasimal, as a hurricane swept into Cuba in 1966.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

consciousness and gestures.”<sup>118</sup> Finally, many gay internees were subjected to hormonal and chemical psychiatric treatments. Dr. Agramonte’s Pavlovian treatments were implemented in the nearby medical facilities. Prisoners received insulin or electric shocks as practitioners flashed before them photos of nude men. Doctors from the University of Havana and the Czech Republic’s Charles University conducted the studies. Psychologists from the Cuban Department of Health & Mental Hygiene and from France examined the results. Prisoners learned what responses to give in order to get out of these experiments. Heberto Padilla said that when the internees were shown photos of nude women, they shouted, “What hot women!” while sickening at the image of a naked man, saying, “How could I have ever looked at such a thing?”<sup>119</sup>

Prisoners went to great lengths to stay in the good favor of their guards, including providing sex. Some of the guards were notorious closeted gays. They sought out sexual relations with some of the internees:

It’s important to mention that some officials considered to be “super macho” and in charge of those *special* camps, were in fact removed from their posts and judged by the Ministry of the Armed Forces for having had sexual relations with the prisoners under their care.<sup>120</sup>

Gay internees not only manipulated such guards but also relied on one another to test their limits. The internees used a variety of coping methods to survive their time in the camps. Since many of them worked in the arts, they found solace in collaborative and creative pieces. They staged different types of plays, including some that mocked the regime. The made-up genre “Political Instruction” forced the prisoners to mimic Marxist texts and newspaper articles published by the state-controlled media.<sup>121</sup> Friends and bunkmates also decorated their living space. They used the resources they had

---

<sup>118</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 77-79.

<sup>120</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 76.

<sup>121</sup> Santiago, “José Mario”, 10.

at hand, including mosquito nets, blankets, towels, medical gauze, flour sacks, to create a more personal space.<sup>122</sup> Curtains, photos from newspaper and magazine clippings, and paper flowers usually adorned their space. Guards sat by at a loss for words and actions.

### **Memories Years Later**

The camps closed after leading international artists learned of the imprisonment of their gay counterparts in the island and expressed their outrage to media outlets. The Cuban Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) led protests against the camps starting in early 1967. Their publication of Heberto Padilla's anthology of poems caused international shockwaves.<sup>123</sup> A childhood friend and close ally of Fidel Castro in the early 1960s, Padilla observed first-hand as the government imprisoned artists who through their body of work criticized the regime. He wrote the following poem condemning the regime's persecution of their poets:

The poet! Kick him out!<sup>124</sup>  
He has no business here.  
He doesn't play the game.  
He never gets excited  
Or speaks out clearly.  
He never even sees the miracles.

The union included an appendix claiming that the anthology was "counter-revolutionary" and, soon after, Padilla faced house arrest until he apologized for his work.<sup>125</sup> The union sent letters to those in power and global leaders on behalf of the jailed artists, including Padilla.<sup>126</sup> Influential intellectuals joined them in their cause, including English novelist Graham Greene, Italian publisher

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>123</sup> Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 76.

<sup>124</sup> Heberto Padilla, *Fuera del Juego* (Ediciones Universal, 1971).

<sup>125</sup> Nick Caistor, "Heberto Padilla: Poetic symbol of intellectual repression in Castro's Cuba" (England: *The Guardian*, 2000).

<sup>126</sup> Salas, *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba*, 169.

Giorgio Feltrinelli, and French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>127</sup> Fidel Castro soon after disbanded the camps, starting in 1968, despite the military's opposition.

Societal attitudes and anti-gay sentiments remained in force and policy. The gay community faced clear, discriminatory disadvantages: "Although the UMAP camps were completely phased out by 1969, and public arrests of gay men no longer took place, coming out of the closet could be extremely disadvantageous. [T]o be accused of effeminate behavior could carry the same stigma."<sup>128</sup> Cubans knew that in order to survive they had to put the regime before their own needs. Everyone made sacrifices, including the art community. *The New York Times* foreign correspondent Renata Adler observed how the government's Cuban Cultural Council monitored and determined the extent of artistic freedom that any one expression could have. Any work that contained only limited revolutionary propaganda would have little chance of receiving approval. Adler observed how one remake of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, starring famed dancer Alicia Alonso, incorporated Communist rhetoric:

"Set to electronic music, and jammed even in rehearsal by enthusiastic crowds, the production ends with a little speech, explaining the moral of the story: Two lovers cannot oppose the system alone. It requires a united effort of the people."<sup>129</sup>

Although gays were no longer being thrown into reeducation camps, the administration was not going forward and promoting same-sex equality. Gays had to be cautious of their behavior in public.

One male dancer in 1970 put it, "The homosexual part isn't such a problem anymore: now that the whole UMAP thing is over, we can more or less live in peace, but you

---

<sup>127</sup> Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba*, 29.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>129</sup> Renata Adler, "Cultural Life in Cuba Thriving Despite Rein" (New York: *The New York Times*, February 1969).

always have to be careful about appearances—and you have to be a revolutionary, of course.”<sup>130</sup>

The first National Congress on Education and Culture announced in 1971 that gays were “sociopaths” and “notorious homosexuals” that should be kept apart from the younger population.<sup>131</sup> They wanted to prevent such behavior from being witnessed, thought to be tolerable, and replicated among future generations. A few years later, in 1978, a Labor Justice Code restricted gays from pursuing certain fields in which they could have close, physical contact with other people, including the army and medicine.<sup>132</sup> On the one hand, some conditions did improve after the AIDS epidemic when Castro personally worked with the Pedro Kouri Institute of Tropical Medicine in 1983 to provide treatment and prevention plans to victims.<sup>133</sup> The medical center tried to educate the younger population and distribute condoms as a means of prevention. On the other hand, politicians expressed little or no remorse for the regime’s past and continuing discrimination against gays. Former Cuban Minister of Justice Juan Escalona was reported as saying in 1984 that he was personally repulsed by romantic gay relations and amused by their mannerisms and style.<sup>134</sup> Politicians therefore conveyed the same discriminatory sentiments prior, during, and after the existence of the UMAP labor camps.

Fidel Castro was no exception in terms of expressing anti-gay views, especially before 1965. However, his excuses for the persecution of gays within the failed UMAP camps changed with the time. In 1992, Castro blamed the macho culture within Cuba for the discrimination faced by gays,

---

<sup>130</sup> Alma Guillermoprieto, *Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 99.

<sup>131</sup> Scott Larson, “Gay Space”, *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America* (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 344.

<sup>132</sup> Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba*, 160.

<sup>133</sup> Anastasia Haydulina, “Interview with Mariela Castro on the Future of Sex and Socialism in Cuba” *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 272.

<sup>134</sup> Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba*, 30.

saying that male chauvinism at one point influenced politicians' views and anti-gay policymaking. He tried to salvage his own reputation by distinguishing himself from the rest of his cabinet members:

"I've never promoted or supported policies against homosexuals [...] I've always had a more rational approach, considering it to be one of the natural aspects and tendencies of human beings which should be respected. I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals."<sup>135</sup>

In 2006, Castro pointed to the Cuban Embargo as yet another excuse for forcing the persecuted to work. He said,

"Homosexuals were not called up into military service. When the Revolution triumphed, during this period that we're talking about, machismo was an element that was very much present in our society, and there was still widespread rejection of the idea of homosexuals serving in military units."<sup>136</sup>

Castro seemed to excuse his lack of defense to the rights of minorities and claimed to have buckled under the pressure and found the UMAP camps to be a better solution. Finally, during an interview with Ignacio Ramonet, Castro suspected that other politicians were to blame for the discrimination and widespread abuse that occurred at these camps:

"I certainly had other ideas with respect to that problem. I had opinions, and for my part I instinctively opposed, and had always opposed, any abuse, any discrimination, because that society which had been based on injustice was saturated with prejudice. Homosexuals were most certainly the victims of discrimination."<sup>137</sup>

Yet despite his being the undisputed leader of the Communist Party and the country, Castro sat by as gays and other minorities were emotionally and physically harmed.

---

<sup>135</sup> Borge, *Face to Face with Fidel Castro*, 140.

<sup>136</sup> Castro and Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: My Life*, 223.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

Civilians still living under the Castro regime were clearly influenced by its rhetoric and the lack of any commemoration of the UMAP camps during the early 1970s. Some, not all, were swept away with a newfound economic plan that called upon the entire society for its success. Mexican journalist Alma Guillermoprieto experienced this lack of historical memory when she taught dance in Havana during the Ten Million Ton Harvest. She spoke with one of her dancers in 1970 who was imprisoned a few years before in an UMAP camp for being gay. The student in particular informed her about the UMAP camps and his own experiences. Guillermoprieto explained, he tried to trivialize his past at her shocked reaction:

“Look, it wasn’t *that* bad. I think that in the end the regime did away with the UMAP because the army officers kept complaining that they didn’t want to go on baby-sitting a bunch of *locas*. It was the officers who were going crazy, because you know how when two *maricas* get together, the first thing they do is start decorating. But of course! We even hung curtains in the barracks, and with little flounces too, made of the same sacks we used for harvesting. And the guards and their superiors were conflicted: Were they supposed to punish us for that? [...] It only lasted a couple of years: no one even talks about it anymore. And we all came out tanned and with physiques to die for—though my mother, so oblivious to aesthetics, poor thing, spent about two months stuffing me with food because she thought I’d been stricken with tuberculosis, I was so thin.”<sup>138</sup>

Some former UMAP internees quickly shifted from retelling their own tragedies to focusing on the present, mimicking their own leader’s behavior.

Many former UMAP prisoners found solace in an inclusive common cause—the Ten Million Ton Harvest. Such minorities knew that the regime did not value their safety and well being, yet they too supported economic agendas that promised to improve living conditions. Another of Guillermoprieto’s students said:

“I’ve often wondered what would happen if all the artists in the country piled onto a gigantic raft and went rowing off the ends of the earth. You can bet there wouldn’t be a single member of the honorable Politburo of the Cuban Communist Party or of the

---

<sup>138</sup> Guillermoprieto, *Dancing with Cuba*, 100-101.

whole Central Committee who would shed a tear. And yet I stay. Because if I were to abandon this process, then for the rest of my life I'd have to live with the consciousness of being nothing but a *come mierda*, a shit-eater. This Revolution is the only thing that has given my life any meaning.”<sup>139</sup>

National campaigns promoting ideals of manhood and collaboration for the Ten Million Ton Harvest bought the government temporary loyalty and time. Later views might have changed as more local UMAP victims came forward and demanded that their injustices be remembered. At that moment, however, Castro's push for the Ten Million Ton Harvest kept all civilians mobilized and working towards a promising future.

Gay victims struggled to create a unified narrative that represented a variety of differing experiences. Even comments told in confidence, particularly those trivializing, could undermine the preservation of memory. As Santiago reflected on the UMAP camps, he wrote about the hardships he lived through alongside other gay campmates and the coping methods they used to stay sane. Decades passed and the writer questioned why the camp's history seemed to be forgotten. In light of Castro's self-aggrandizing comments and with the same leadership still in power, UMAP survivors fight not only amongst themselves to record the truth but also, and most importantly, with the regime's denial. A fuller discussion of memory loss awaits but as Czech-born French author Milan Kundera said, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>140</sup> Héctor Santiago, “Teatro de resistencia en los campos de concentración de la UMAP en Cuba” (Cuban Heritage Collection Héctor Santiago Papers, 1958-2002, University of Miami ).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Silencing the Faithful**

The Castro regime discriminated against religious followers long before the camps opened. The Catholic Church would be the first organized religion to face government-led discrimination starting as early as 1960. After the Church lost a significant number of parishioners, the regime turned against the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1962. Eventually, Baptists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Gideons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and followers of Afro-Cuban religions would all be thrown into the forced labor camps.<sup>141</sup> Camp internees then recalled the widespread abuse and discriminatory methods used against the religious. Jehovah's Witnesses, according to various accounts, faced the worst treatment.

The Castro regime did not treat all religious followers alike. Seventh Day Adventists were regarded more favorably than other religious social institutions. The regime first calculated to what extent these groups expressed early political support versus resistance. The authorities then strategized to what degree the communities should suffer. I argue that a treatment towards denominations differed depending on how closely affiliated communities were with the regime and whether they supported Marxist values. The state's approach to these communities barely changed after the camps closed as a result of those first impressions at the start of the Revolution. The first section in this chapter delves into the policies and treatment faced by Seventh Day Adventists, the Catholic Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. I then discuss eyewitness accounts that support the argument that Jehovah's Witnesses endured the most extreme tortures and abuses. In addition, the section analyzes the most effective strategies UMAP victims used in order to retell their experiences. The final section notes the treatment that different believers encountered after the camps closed.

---

<sup>141</sup> Tahbaz, "Demystifying las UMAP".

## Government Policy and Religious Persecution before 1964

Seventh Day Adventists, ironically, had won early on the hearts of the guerrilla fighters before dictator Batista fled Cuba. During 1958, the Antillean Adventist College near the Sierra Maestra in Oriente provided a program that fed and sheltered wounded guerrillas.<sup>142</sup> Adventist families across the island exemplified their institution's sentiments by offering insurgents the little that they could. Pastor Argelio Rosabal's selfless act later resulted in the government's more tolerable treatment towards his denomination:

“Seeing that one of the men had no shirt because he had used it as a bandage to protect a wound, the father of the household [...] gave the revolutionary his only shirt. That wounded revolutionary – Ernesto “Che” Guevara – was so moved by the man's generosity that Che promised them the construction of a chapel.”<sup>143</sup>

After the guerrilla fighters' success, Guevara kept his promise and convinced other authorities to allow Adventists some leeway.

Adventists' pleas in regards to the first draft of the Obligatory Military Service (SMO) were well regarded. After 70 of their 110 college students were drafted, four pastors, including Rosabal, wrote to Guevara. They expressed their loyalty while still begging for their students to return on the basis that the SMO policy did not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. After Rosabal gave Guevara the letter on October 28, 1963, “Guevara interceded on behalf of his Adventist friend, Rosabal, for an exception to be created in the SMO for this sect.”<sup>144</sup> Although other denominations also supported the revolutionaries early on, they did not fare as well as the Adventists.

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

The Catholic Church initially supported Castro and his men in their cause to overthrow Batista. Despite their efforts, the Communist regime overlooked their efforts and eliminated many of their programs starting as early as April 1959. For example, the government filed a cease and desist note over the literacy courses provided by Catholic students to soldiers in the Managua Camp.<sup>145</sup> They also canceled prisons' religious assistance program, in which priests and nuns provide final blessings to those receiving the death penalty.<sup>146</sup>

Tensions between the Church and the government escalated in 1960 when priests published open letters and reiterated the same message during their sermons: they stood against communism and awaited genuine social justice.<sup>147</sup> In an effort to prevent the spread of anti-Communist sentiments, government agents disrupted masses and religious radio and television programming was banned by September. The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were created at the same time to organize community watchmen for every block and report suspicious anti-government activity, including attending mass.<sup>148</sup> In addition, the administration seized Church property and restricted resources for new constructions or repairs: "The obvious purpose of the takeover of these chapels was to further restrict the reach of the Church, especially within the rural areas."<sup>149</sup> As Christmas drew near, attempts were made by revolutionary commanders to replace images of the Magi.<sup>150</sup> Finally, el Comandante declared on December 26, 1960, "to be anti-Communist is to be a counter-revolutionary." From then on, having previously expressed anti-Communist sentiment, the Church became society's most visible black sheep: "[T]o be religious was tantamount to be counter-

---

<sup>145</sup> Juan Clark, *Religious Repression in Cuba* (Florida: Cuban Living Conditions Project and the North-South Center for the Cuban Studies Project of the Institute of Inter-American Studies, 1986), 4-5.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-37.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

revolutionary. Furthermore, a cunningly orchestrated anti-religious harassment campaign was started [...] making formal religious practice undesirable through discrimination or ridicule, while at the same time allowing the churches to remain open.”<sup>151</sup> The final blow came soon after the Bay of Pigs in 1962.

Catholic priests participated in efforts to undermine the government. Soon after, the single remaining anti-communist and Catholic publication, *La Quincena*, closed.<sup>152</sup> In addition, any remaining denominational schools were confiscated. Priests and bishops “became objects of harassment” and many were banned a year later.<sup>153</sup> The government forced schools to conduct a background check on teachers. Any hint that a candidate practiced any formal religion took them out of the running.<sup>154</sup>

Castro officially went after another sector with full force on March 13, 1963: Jehovah’s Witnesses, one of the largest denominations on the island with around 20,000 followers.<sup>155</sup> In a speech at the University of Havana he criticized “*pseudo-religiosos*” and those dressed in white gowns as being anti-revolutionary. He viewed Protestant religions, originating from the United States, as naturally being anti-Cuban. He condemned the Jehovah’s Witnesses in particular because according to their faith they could not participate in pro-government acts, including saluting the flag.<sup>156</sup> Soon, foreign-born Jehovah’s Witnesses were expelled from the island. CDR officials frequently reported and sent arrest warrants for the remaining Jehovah’s Witnesses for holding

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>155</sup> Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP”. A year earlier, the Ministry of Communication restricted Jehovah’s Witnesses from obtaining religious material. Cuba no longer accepted their book imports nor were they allowed to distribute any material using the mail system.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

assemblies without permits. As was previously done with Catholic Churches, all Kingdom Halls in Pinar del Rio province were shut down.<sup>157</sup>

### **Human rights abuses at the UMAP camps**

The peak of religious persecution in Cuba occurred in 1965.<sup>158</sup> Religious leaders from a variety of denominations were sent to the UMAP camps. They were stripped of any religious literature and sacred items.<sup>159</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses received special treatment in particular from the start: they couldn't receive family visits or leave the camps, nor could they receive or send mail.<sup>160</sup> Saturdays, another workday, became the most dreaded time of the week. According to Renato Gómez, a survivor of the camps Jehovah's Witnesses suffered the most frequent human rights abuses on the very day they designated for rest.<sup>161</sup>

Morning calls came and went. All campmates were expected to assemble in line. After a meager breakfast, each received their day's orders and went off to cut sugarcane. All prisoners typically obeyed orders except for Jehovah's Witnesses. They usually refused to follow orders during the weekdays, including wearing a uniform, but the faithful especially put up a fight on Saturdays.<sup>162</sup> The usual abuses included digging a hole and being buried neck-deep in soil, dirt

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Clark, *Religious Repression*, 21-22.

<sup>159</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 89. One Baptist recalled how a guard snatched his pocket-sized *New Testament* and refused to return it saying that he had the right to do so in defense of the revolution.

<sup>160</sup> Tahbaz, "Demystifying las UMAP".

<sup>161</sup> Interview with the author in Miami, Florida on June 17, 2016. Translation by Rebecca San Juan. Transcription available from the author.

<sup>162</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 87. Guards punished their resistance by forcing them to endure various abuses. One prisoner remembered seeing Jehovah's Witnesses forced to stoop and clean the sewage ditches with their hands.

stuffed into their mouths, beatings and feigned firing squads.<sup>163</sup> A few guards also threw the religious onto ant piles and forced their campmates to throw rocks at them.<sup>164</sup> Fellow prisoners recounted their observations of the would-be firing squads:

To some Jehovah's Witnesses in the camps, the guards pretended to organize a firing squad against them [...] and later told the rest that if they didn't want to face the same fate, they had to wear their uniforms and work. If they denied, they'd grab another and repeat the show. None of them accepted despite not knowing it was all a simulation.<sup>165</sup>

The first biggest incident occurred payday. The military service paid \$7 per month [...] The Jehovah's Witnesses, 15 or 20 of them, did not accept the payment and were subsequently smacked with their machine guns. They dragged them out front of the bungalows and placed them in front of the fences. More armed soldiers came. However, when the time came, they shot into the air. Jehovah's Witnesses returned unfazed to their hammocks.<sup>166</sup>

They placed them against a wall. The soldier asked, 'So, you believe in God? Tell God to save you from this.' *Takka takka* they would shoot around them with a machine gun.<sup>167</sup>

Saturdays were the worst. Camp guards went on violent rampages. Gómez recalled first seeing victims dragged like stray dogs by officials and tossed onto a patch of dirt.<sup>168</sup> As they struggled to get on their feet, guards reached for and clutched reams of barbed wire. They beat their victims, ignoring their cries and bloody wounds. One particular Jehovah's Witness was pierced by a piece of spiked metal that plucked out an eye. The soldiers ignored him. They screamed accusations

---

<sup>163</sup> Tahhaz, "Demystifying las UMAP".

<sup>164</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 192. Camp guards threatened prisoners that if they didn't cast their stones, they would wait until they did so or face another hour of punishments.

<sup>165</sup> Blanco, *Una Muerte a Plazos*, 87.

<sup>166</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 101.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with the author in Miami, Florida on June 17, 2016. Translation by Rebecca San Juan. Transcription available from the author.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

of them being “lazy” and “anti-revolutionary,” the guard stopped pacing, wiped their brow and asked if they intended to work. Jehovah’s Witnesses always said no.

Guards left their prey for a moment as they strode to their car on site. Onlookers, like Gómez, stayed frozen in place fearing that if they aided the distressed, they too would receive the same punishment. The guard soon returned with rope. They tied the Jehovah’s Witness’s wrists and yanked them towards the parked Jeep. They looped the other end to the bumper. The soldier jumped behind the wheel, revved the engine and pressed the pedal. Gómez said, “The Jeep moved forward. They would run after the Jeep but soon get tired, fall and be dragged behind the car.” After some time, the driver cut the engine, parked the car and lumbered over to see their victim. The Jehovah’s Witness was soaked in blood and sweat, limp with tender, dirt-covered bruises and sores. Gómez said their skin would peel off with a single touch.

Camp doctors eventually treated victims’ wounds. Their diaries and testimonies revealed other tortures commonly used against Jehovah’s Witnesses. A certain Dr. Llovio worked in the camps from 1966 to the summer of 1967 and wrote about a specific case study. A young believer was hung by his wrists from a flagpole and treated his “raw and bloody...numb and purplish” hands.<sup>169</sup> Another eyewitness account revealed that guards also hung Jehovah’s Witnesses by their feet. A 19-year-old Catholic adult was punished alongside other Christians and Jehovah’s Witnesses for refusing his SMO call:

We were deprived of food for twelve consecutive days. We received water only once a day. We were kept standing under the sun, the rain, mosquitoes and other plagues. By the eleventh day we were placed in a tank full of water. Since we refused to give up our faith, we were beaten; cold water was thrown on us at night and some were tied, and oxen yokes put around their heads. On two occasions firing squads were prepared, and we were told to stand in front of them. They even gave the order to fire but never did. Some of us were forced to live in barracks with homosexuals. But when we talked to them and explained our Christian position based on the Bible, we

---

<sup>169</sup> Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP”.

earned their respect. This only made the guards hate the Witnesses even more. We were under constant threat of death. In one case Ursulo Brito, (a Witness) was kept hanging by his feet from the roof for some time.<sup>170</sup>

Barbed wire soon became the soldiers' favorite torture toy. Gómez observed a common tactic: "Soldiers forced the worshiper to strip naked. They took a roll of barbed wire, ordered their victim to stand still and fenced them in. They'd place a piece of wood on the top so the wire would maintain its shape." Mosquitoes typically swarmed in the tropical, humid weather and feasted on their bare flesh.<sup>171</sup> Some tortured would be released by the end of the day while others, depending on the camp and sergeant in command, left them overnight. Campmates snuck out of their bunks in the middle of the night to aid those left outside. Gómez said, "The soldiers left these men without food and water. They would be left day and night for 12, 16, 24 hours." Gómez and his friend brought the victims water and bits of food, risking getting caught in the act. Another prisoner Eduardo Ruíz also snuck out snacks to the starving Jehovah's Witnesses. He said that after guards released and threatened them with death by fire squad. Ruíz overheard one Jehovah's Witness say, "Kill us. Kill us. Our purpose is not the same as yours. It is that of God."<sup>172</sup>

Some camps employed electric cables in addition to barbed wire. Although some guards were more lenient than other, letting some worshipers work without their designated uniforms, many snapped at any resistance. After refusing to wear his uniform, they tied one particular Jehovah's Witness with the surname Izueta to a post naked and hit him with electric cables. Drops of blood would bubble over and scab as hard as an animal's shell.<sup>173</sup>

Later camp prisoners gained more confidence. They resisted hiding in the shadows to help their fellow religious counterparts. Instead, they joined protests, refusing to work until their

---

<sup>170</sup> Clark, *Religious Repression*, 84.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>172</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 202.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 194.

campmate was released.<sup>174</sup> Another tactic that former internees used was calling out their torturers by name, attempting to publicly shame them years after the camps closed. An ex-forced laborer said, “Among the cruelest officers were Aldo Guerra, Victor Dreke, Jose Ramon Silva, Captain Magana, Montelier, and the mulato nicknamed ‘Cunagua.’ They were abnormal beasts.”<sup>175</sup>

### Long After the Camp Closures

The regime still played favorites after the camps closed. Once the camps started to close in 1968, Adventists participated in the SMO and Jehovah’s Witnesses were imprisoned for years:

“This history demonstrates that not all sects were sent to the UMAP camps because they were perceived as *contrarrevolucionarios*. For Adventists, the UMAP camps were a way to fulfill the SMO and provide more labor to the state. Jehovah’s Witnesses, on the other hand, were sent to the UMAP camps because in the eyes of the state they were *contrarrevolucionarios*.”<sup>176</sup>

No doubt in part as a result of favorable treatment, Adventists’ membership numbers grew over 50 percent in the coming decades, while other sects saw a significant drop as they lost their followers to expulsion and discrimination.<sup>177</sup>

The *Plan de calle*, otherwise known as the “Street Plan,” sabotaged religious classes given to children by insuring loud noise from recreational activities nearby during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Government agents gave up this strategy after a time, but religious services and churches continued to be disrupted and defaced well into the 1980s.<sup>178</sup> Civilians recalled how Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Kingdom Halls were attacked by mobs with stone, brick, and iron.<sup>179</sup> The

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>176</sup> Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP”.

<sup>177</sup> Clark, *Religious Repression*, 194.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>179</sup> Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP”.

government never persecuted any of the criminals; instead they promoted anti-Jehovah's Witnesses media campaigns portraying the worshipers as murderers and fanatics. The government later passed a new law that forbid parents from teaching their children rituals associated with being a Jehovah's Witness, including not saluting a flag. If a child refused to pledge their allegiance to Cuba, the teacher not only looked the other way as children teased their classmate but they also reported it to the authorities. Hundreds of parents were jailed for three to six months at a time.<sup>180</sup> Religious leaders came to defend their followers entrapped in the UMAP camps.<sup>181</sup> After negative media attention spread internationally, the camps closed and prisoners were released. Cuba's government sheltered Seventh Day Adventists while still abusing the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah Witnesses lost significant support as more of them were painted as criminals through government-led initiatives. In the early 1970s, police officers raided their homes and planted incriminating material, including drugs and weapons, as an excuse to send members to prison.<sup>182</sup> A new policy in 1976 claimed to protect freedom of worship, but Article 54 in the Constitution only mentioned the right to attend church.<sup>183</sup> By the mid-1970s, meeting places were closed and more faced charges for crimes they hadn't committed.<sup>184</sup> Junior high and high school teachers and principles attempted to persuade top-ranked students to sacrifice their faith, whether they were Jehovah Witnesses or Catholics, to compete for scholarships and academic opportunities.<sup>185</sup> The

---

<sup>180</sup> Clark, *Religious Repression*, 85.

<sup>181</sup> Renato Gómez said the Baptist and Evangelical Churches were the first to fight for their prisoners in the late 1960s, motivating the government to not only release religious victims but also close the camps. The Catholic Church would be among the last to plead with the government.

<sup>182</sup> Clark, *Religious Repression*, 85.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46. One Catholic parent in particular recalled the time her son returned home from school: "He told us how the teacher had asked the class about who believed in God. The few that raised their hands were set aside by the teacher who later gave them a lecture about the non-existence of God. I went the next day to complain to the teacher about this type of treatment of our

worshippers faced their final blow when 3,000 were randomly rounded up on short notice and exiled during the Mariel exodus in 1980.<sup>186</sup>

Fidel Castro expressed no regrets for his administration's blatant persecution of worshippers, rather he portrayed officials as victims of the public's biases. He said,

“We've had to struggle against many forms of discrimination. We had to tackle the problem of discrimination against religious believers, and it wasn't easy to win that battle in the Party – especially with the young people – and get them to understand that it wasn't fair to use religious beliefs as a reason for refusing to allow people who had all the required revolutionary and patriotic virtues to join the Communist Party.”<sup>187</sup>

The debate over whether policy changes and public attitudes improved towards Jehovah's Witnesses depends on one's perspective. On the one hand, one Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society observer in Brooklyn noted improved conditions in the mid-1990s. After three decades, Jehovah's Witnesses had access to printing and distribution resources. On the other hand, a representative from Miami's Cuban Committee for Human Rights said that the change was just for show and noted how many Jehovah's Witnesses' rituals remained banned by law.<sup>188</sup>

Castro lived and died without acting upon any remorse for his actions. He failed to commemorate the UMAP camps' past that marked how different religious sects would be treated years after the camps closed. He once said, “History will absolve me.” Many Jehovah's Witnesses and others persecuted by his regime would beg to differ. Christians, familiar with Biblical portrayals of betrayal and Judas, would more likely rebuke: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

---

son, and she told me she was only following “orientations from the region's educational headquarters,” and we had to struggle with this matter the entire year.”

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>187</sup> Borge, *Face to Face*, 141.

<sup>188</sup> Cuba: Information on the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses by the authorities (Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1995).

## Chapter 6

### The Tragedy of a Past Forgotten

*“None of this would be so tragic if we didn’t have so much unrecognized history to tell.”*  
-Hector Santiago

In critiquing how Cuba’s tragedies seemed to be lost on the exiled community, writer and UMAP survivor Héctor Santiago observed that Gulag and Holocaust victims recounted their stories often for future generations to preserve their memories.<sup>189</sup> Santiago’s underlying message in his article commemorating the life of another UMAP survivor posed the question: Where were Cuba’s storytellers and why had they not come forward to commemorate the island’s past tragedies? He said, “We are left without anything to tell because the voices are dying away, presses and universities of the ‘free world’ are denying us a voice, the tormentors—they have so much to hide—insist that remembering is acting upon ‘hate.’”<sup>190</sup> In addition to the presses and universities that Santiago mentioned, other former UMAP internees also found it difficult to have their voices heard. For example, when Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal adapted their manuscript *Conducta Impropia* for the big screen no studio in the United States or Spain wanted to fund the film.<sup>191</sup>

I argue that former UMAP camp internees have limited spaces to share their experiences and testimonies outside of the Cuban community if organizations, especially the media, reject projects based on their oral history. Politicians on the island take advantage of their ability to reframe the past while silencing any opposition within their reach. First, I explain why the preservation of lived experiences matters not only to survivors but also to the global community, and how UMAP survivors make attempts for their stories to be preserved. I then show how the Cuban state moved swiftly from destroying documented evidence of the UMAP camps to the *nuevo hombre* campaign to

---

<sup>189</sup> Santiago, “José Mario”, 3.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>191</sup> Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta Impropia*, 17.

mobilize harvest labor. In addition, I show how, in the following years, the Castro government shifted from denying to misleading the public about the UMAP camps and prisoners. I address the costs experienced within the island and internationally when a historical past is constantly blurred by an administration.

### **Why memory matters**

An administration's particular validation of oral history and the preservation of testimonies not only contributes to a better understanding of the past but can also exemplify the first step towards avoiding repeating previous mistakes. The Castro regime reflected solely on certain aspects of the UMAP labor camps' past since the camps' closure. For example, some political figures recognized the crimes against gays within these camps and their persecution to a certain extent. On the one hand, in a Mexican daily newspaper in 2010, Fidel Castro admitted to the persecution, of gays for their sexual behavior without any official charges against them during the 1960s through the 1970s. He said, "We had so many and such terrible problems, problems of life or death, that we didn't pay it enough attention."<sup>192</sup> Castro went on to describe the terrible problems in association with the human rights atrocities committed against them, including hormonal treatments. His admission made headlines and paved the way for more recognition of the abuses that occurred within these camps. On the other hand, Mariela Castro in 2012 rejected the term "concentration camps" during a press conference at the New York Public Library. She emphasized that the UMAP camps were "training camps."<sup>193</sup> The term "concentration camps" was the term commonly used by victims while "training camps" was the phrase politicians, including Fidel Castro, used before 2010.

---

<sup>192</sup> Shasta Darlington, "Castro admits 'injustice' for gays and lesbians during revolution" (CNN, 2010).

<sup>193</sup> Justin Rohrlich, "Cuba Wants You To Think It's a Gay Paradise. It's Not." (New York: *Foreign Policy*, 2014).

The term “concentration camps” implied physical and emotional abuses committed against internees, while the phrase “training camps” focused more on the supervised labor rather than abuses. Fidel Castro made one step forward, and Mariela Castro took the country two steps back. However, another problem persisted. The camps kept being associated with gay internee experiences, because the regime failed to mention as often or express remorse for the extent of religious minorities and their political dissidents in these camps. Memories should not be reassembled in fragmented pieces.

UMAP survivors found that their efforts to preserve and share their memories would be critical to informing the public and their community of their experiences, since the Castro regime has yet to recognize the range of experiences as lived by all of the camp internees. UMAP survivors and organizations, including the Association of Ex-UMAP Prisoners in Miami, went to great lengths to ensure that their stories were recorded. They used a range of tools to ensure that their voices were never lost, including publishing books, filming a documentary, organizing community events, and recruiting local university resources. The Association of Ex-UMAP Prisoners also constructed and maintained a strict member code, allowing only UMAP survivors to join the association in an attempt to maintain the first person legitimacy of the testimonies shared and preserved.<sup>194</sup> Only when Raul Castro and his generation retires, can truth and reconciliation for this community be envisioned on the island.

### **Nothing to See Here**

Immediately after the closing of the last camp in 1969, the regime sought to recruit a new source of free labor, including both men and women. The youth at the time, eager to have the regime’s approval in order to advance in their careers, presented a solution. The Young Communists

---

<sup>194</sup> Interview with the author in Miami, Florida on June 17, 2016. Translation by Rebecca San Juan. Transcription available from the author.

organization offered to send college-age students to harvest crops and manage fields for free as a means of community service in 1970. The new policy agenda received both national and international recognition, shifting attention away from the UMAP camps. The new campaign's typical schedule, one foreign reporter gushed, without a hint of irony, including waking up by 6 in the morning to start managing the fields by 6:30. The afternoon included coursework and more fieldwork. The campmates were tucked in by 10. :

The development project was proposed by the Young Communists and they recruited [...] mainly from the provinces of Havana and Oriente, to come work for two years. The land undulates more than Florida's and the horizon is broken by hills, but like Florida it is ideal for citrus and cattle, two products much in demand not only in socialist but also in European capitalist markets, where Cuba is anxious to earn hard currency to pay for machinery, trucks and buses.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Yglesias.

**Illustration 6: Youth Volunteer in Cuba's Agricultural Sectors<sup>196</sup>**



The administration later shifted its focus to the *hombre nuevo* or new man campaign of labor mobilization within that same year. Political rhetoric emphasized the same qualities highlighted during the opening of the labor camps: selflessness and sacrifice:

Material incentives were proclaimed incompatible with the goals of the revolution. Workers were no longer paid for quality of production or for meeting—or surpassing—production quotas. Overtime pay was eliminated. Production achievements were acknowledged in a non-monetary way with badges, medallions, scrolls, and awards, frequently distributed by Castro himself.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> Yglesias. The original image included the following caption: **In the Vanguard**—These girls in a camp called La Patria (Homeland), on the Isle of Pines, work in a citrus nursery. There are about 42,000 young volunteers on the island, which the press [assuming the state-controlled media] calls the “Isle of Youth.” The regime says it will be Cuba’s first Communist community.

<sup>197</sup> Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 340.

With an economic strain, voluntary work would be emphasized using guerrilla-era slogans.<sup>198</sup> The ultimate purpose would be to improve the economy: “They argued that communism required the creation of a new consciousness as a function of economic development. The development of the *hombre nuevo* and the attainment of economic growth were proclaimed to be one and the same process.”<sup>199</sup> By 1970, sugarcane plantations had expanded and the harvesting season was lengthened in order to meet the illusory ten-million-ton crop goal.<sup>200</sup> This target was intended to motivate the masses to contribute their free time cutting sugarcane, drawing attention away from UMAP victims and toward the future.<sup>201</sup>

The Cuban government pushed UMAP survivors into the shadows. According to Santiago, they were removed from their old jobs and reduced to especially degraded forms of manual labor.<sup>202</sup> After the camps closed, prisoners found themselves living under a reissued, colonial era law of General Miguel Tacón y Rosique’s: Vagrancy Law. The policy condemned anyone who did not work to prison for five years. The Armed Forces Ministry worked with the Labor Ministry to mark the records of ex-UMAP prisoners with a code written in a red pencil. The code ensured that these ex-laborers could not return to their old jobs and that they offered only a few designated positions, including grave digging and cleaning public bathrooms. Former UMAP laborers could only turn

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>201</sup> Maurice Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro* (California: University of California Press, 1981), 71. Cuban citizens wanted to contribute to the success of the ten-million-ton crop goal since such a grand prediction had been unheard of for the past several years. However, how unrealistic the target was soon became apparent: “Sugar production was scheduled to reach ten million metric tons by 1970, roughly double the annual average in the decade before the Revolution, and more than two and a half times the figure for 1963.”

<sup>202</sup> Santiago, “José Mario”, 23. The details in this entire paragraph originate from Santiago’s piece.

down offers twice before being sent to the Labor Tribunal where, after a brief trial, they would be sent to a prison. Santiago said,

“Neither José Mario nor I could return to the National Cultural Council, and much less the university, where they told us that we’d never be readmitted nor given degrees as graduates. In each and every meeting, they suggested 10 years of dedicating ourselves to one of those positions to demonstrate that we had ‘recovered’ and therefore could be ‘forgiven.’”<sup>203</sup>

Politicians incorporated lessons about the UMAP labor camps into the curriculum for middle school students. The classes spread misinformation designated to denounce the victims. Renato Gómez remembered his son arriving from school one day and asking him a question about his life in the UMAP labor camps.<sup>204</sup> He asked his father whether he was gay. Shocked at his question, Gómez, learned that his son’s sixth grade teacher had said that the UMAP labor camps were designed strictly for gays, to change their behavior. The teacher pointed out Gómez’s son and said that his father, having been an internee years ago, was gay.

The Cuban Communist regime suppressed testimonies and their defenders from coming forward and discussing the UMAP labor camps. Uruguayan foreign correspondent Fernando Ravsberg reported in 2016 that the government shut down the webpage discussing the UMAP camps. Members fought for awareness and against discrimination facing the LGBTI community in Cuba utilizing the WordPress site.

According to Ravsberg, “The blog of *Proyecto Arcoiris* (‘Rainbow Project’) was shut down for a month on Cuba’s official *Reflejos* (‘Reflections’) blogging portal because it violated Section 6 of the User Norms. In other words, it was off-lined for demanding that the government offer a public apology for those imprisoned in...(UMAP).”<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> The synopsis is based on an interview that the author conducted with survivor Renato Gómez on June 17, 2016 in Miami, Florida.

<sup>205</sup> Fernando Ravsberg, “Dark Chapters of Cuban History Still Taboo” (Cuba: Havana Times, 2016)

Jimmy Roque Martínez wrote the article that had upset public officials. The site's editorial team confronted the state's agency that oversees online content and asked what exactly in the article had violated the code. The program supervisor for the CubaVa Monitoring Department highlighted the following quote for what they claimed slandered the revolution:

It's been fifty years since the creation of the UMAP and not one of the people responsible have asked Cubans for any apologies. The highest officials behind the idea are still alive. The minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces at the time is the country's president today.<sup>206</sup>

Reporters who write about the UMAP, as with any other controversial subject matter, face threats and the possibility of exile. Government officials deny that there are restrictions on speech, despite long standing patterns of such censorship: Raul Castro's daughter Mariela Castro Espín said, "We haven't got an issue with freedom of expression. We can say whatever we want. Nobody can shut us up. This is just a media cliché invented in relation to Cuba."<sup>207</sup> A year after reporting about the threats faced by writers of *Proyecto Arcoiris*, Ravensberg received threats from extremist supporters of the Cuban government. He shared one of the many messages he received:

From here, in Cuba, it is easy because you know that nobody will kidnap you, disappear, torture or kill you, but we are not obliged to allow you to live and rant on our soil. That's why my offer for you is simple: Get the hell out of here or refine your writing. Remember that at your age your teeth won't come out again and dental implants are expensive.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Isbel Díaz Torres, "Hypocrisy and Censorship in Cuban Blogging Platform Cubava" (Cuba: Havana Times, 2016).

<sup>207</sup> Christiane Amanpour, "President Castro's Daughter Speaks Out" (CNN, 2014). The global non-Spanish speaking community rarely knows about the UMAP forced labor camps and other of Cuba's human rights abuses committed in the past. The problem revolves around translation and informing a non-Spanish speaking public, especially English speakers, of these past horrors in order to have foreign press conglomerates and journalists also hold officials accountable for preserving memory.

<sup>208</sup> Fernando Ravensberg, "Serious Threat Against Journalist in Cuba: 'They Threaten to Break My Teeth if I Continue Writing'" (Cuba, Havana Times, 2017).

## Remembrance Inside and Out of Cuba

The memory and imagery of these victims should highlight and explain in detail the experiences and its' ties to Cuba's historical context. Those learning of the UMAP camps for the first time need to understand that even if these camps were created out of necessity during an economic crisis, their purpose was less to change behavior that did not conform to the majority, and more to silence any potential political threats. Political leaders of Cuba in the future would also have problems admitting the facts. Evidence from these camps was destroyed:

It weighs on my conscious to know the exact number of murders, suicides, mentally ill and those that died from an illness. I have never been able to forget the 86 that I have in mind, and I fear that that it may never be known. Another collaborator Norberto Fuentes admits in one of his books that the UMAP registrations were burned during the 80s [...] and I even saw [...] how the camps in Camagüey had been leveled out with bulldozers or with dynamite not leaving a single trace.<sup>209</sup>

Detailed UMAP accounts offer a better chance for survivors' stories to become the foundation for truth and reconciliation for the exile and island communities. Cuba may no longer have any recorded physical traces nor proof of the existence of these camps. Detailed memories, including context and explanations of cultural norms, as provided in this project seek to suggest a platform for future generations to understand the conditions these camps created.

[A] critically informed memory is crucial in the attempt to determine what in history deserves preservation in living traditions, either as something to be criticized and avoided or as something to be respected and emulated. Conversely, history serves to question and test memory in critical fashion and to specify what in it is empirically accurate or has a different, but still possibly significant, status. Indeed once history loses contact with memory, it tends to address dead issues that no longer elicit evaluative and emotionally interest or investment.<sup>210</sup>

The fundamental problem lies in the regime's dogged denial of the past and how survivors might approach the matter. The regime continues to deny not just the extent of abuses that survivors

---

<sup>209</sup> Santiago, "José Mario", 22

<sup>210</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz: In the Shadow of the Holocaust* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 20.

said happened at the UMAP camps, but that any occurred at all. Although victims of the Cuban Communist Party criticize the regime for its past actions, the refusal of the Party to permit or even acknowledge the expression of non-official civic memory, the reality is that such discriminatory policies did not occur within a vacuum. These persecutions of gays, religious minorities, and political dissidents were worldwide patterns that continue to occur to this day.<sup>211</sup> In the spring of 2017, gays continued to be thrown into camps by Chechen police, and Russia's Supreme Court also deemed Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist groups that threatened the safety of the public.<sup>212</sup> The unique Cuban problem is that of memory loss. The regime not only remains in power but also continues to silence or discredit UMAP victims despite publications and organizations that revealed the realities of these concentration camps.

Victims should actively pursue increased awareness of these camps beyond their immediate Cuban communities and also pose new demands to the existing regime. Survivors could develop new strategies in an attempt to spread awareness beyond themselves and their own networks, including demanding the regime's official admission of the abuses that occurred within these camps. An apology, as sometimes offered by other national governments responsible for human rights abuses only came when new governments acknowledge the errors of the past, and can help nations move forward. Such an admission gives power to the survivors in more ways than just an apology. The apology, while recognizing the UMAP community's grievances, still places them in the role of the victim. An admission gives credit to survivors' in establishing their testimonies as the most reliable story. Survivors would regain a measure of power and justice from a regime that attempted to forever silence their voices.

---

<sup>211</sup> Tara John, "Chechen Police Are Rounding Up and Killing Men for Being Gay, Report Says" (New York: *Time*, April 2017).

<sup>212</sup> Andrew Higgins, "Russia Bans Jehovah's Witnesses, Calling It an Extremist Group" (New York: *The New York Times*, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The primary purpose of the thesis project was to analyze the experiences of Cuba's UMAP survivors through oral history and testimonies. In the Introduction, I argued that Fidel Castro claimed he created the Military Units to Aid Production reformatory labor camps to provide marginalized civilians the opportunity to contribute economically to Cuba. Some victims of the UMAP camps saw themselves as the slaves of a regime that did not protect them from discrimination and disregarded their rights yet utilized their labor to grow the economy. The camps became a stepping-stone towards the Ten Million Ton Harvest in which the ideals of what defined a patriotic man were reiterated through the New Man campaign. The swift transition from the UMAP camps to the Ten Million Ton Harvest and the New Man Campaign allowed for Cuban society to focus on its future rather than commemorating its past. I argue that Castro's recruitment of deviant labor led his regime to reframe the image and stories surrounding these camps that were never officially commemorated by the state.

I explained in the first chapter why UMAP camp internees commonly referred to themselves as slaves. I argued that UMAP forced laborers identified with slaves as a result of being valued only for their contribution on the agricultural fields rather than their personhood. Although Castro claimed to have opened these camps primarily as a result of economic need, the reeducation agendas as led by guards forced workers regularly to decide between cooperation and maintaining their own identity. In addition to exploring the internees' experiences and relationship to Cuba's slave history, I described the UMAP camps based on reporter Paul Kidd's photographs and descriptions. The barracks and layout of these camps drew another comparison between where and how slaves in Cuba lived centuries ago.

In the second chapter I explained how these camps came to exist and which groups were primarily targeted. I argued that the press at the time solely featured religious minorities and political dissidents rather than gays, because the regime's focus at that time was to exemplify that counterrevolutionaries would be taught to be loyal to their administration. The agenda and how the camps were later portrayed changed over time. Politicians later focused on the imprisonment of gays as a result of the 1970s New Man campaign. I also showed how Castro struggled to improve the economy in order to contribute to the relatively newly established relations with the Soviet Union. In addition, he prepared himself and civilians for attacks and for the battles that the United States waged against them. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place. He encouraged complete and total loyalty, as dissidents saw it, at the cost of their human rights. His speeches and the state-controlled media's images of the UMAP camps created tension between himself and those he portrayed as counterrevolutionaries.

Chapter Three included the lived experiences of prisoners going to the forced labor camps either directly from their SMO service or from their hometowns. I provide detail on how the most persecuted consisted of Cubans that applied for passports and religious minorities. Many survivors described their experiences using hyperbolic language, comparing the UMAP camps to the Nazi Holocaust and the Soviet Gulags. I argued that sticking to facts rather than a comparison of apples-to-oranges may bring these stories to a wider audience without being so easily dismissed by the regime and other critics.

I argued in Chapter Four that gay UMAP prisoners were not as complacent as the regime portrayed them in the press, during the 1970s and through 1990s. I showed how gays expressed themselves through theatre and how these prisoners and others expressed their rejection of Marxist teachings and macho, gendered-specific rhetoric reiterated by Castro and guards. I also studied how

the government's persecution of gays proved to be based on political rather than behavioral concerns. Some gays, as I noted, affiliated with the government and in the favor of politicians were not sent to these camps. Finally, I explained why some gay internees minimized their experiences immediately after the closing of the camps.

I wrote of Jehovah's Witnesses experiences in Chapter Five. I emphasized how religious minorities experienced the most human rights abuses in the UMAP camps' history.

In Chapter Six, I wrote of how the UMAP camps were remembered by the regime in the 1990s and mid-2000s. I emphasized the importance of former UMAP survivors' testimonies. I highlighted how politicians, especially Mariela Castro, seeks to reframe the UMAP history to shift focus on new political agendas, thus constantly reinterpreting the past as was done in the 1960s when the UMAP camps were known for religious minorities and political dissidents, to the 1970s to early 1990s when they were known for their gay internees. I highlighted these issues to show what is officially remembered and what remains to be seen.

## CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1: Evangelical Pastors in UMAP Camps, p. 16

Illustration 2: Barracks at the UMAP Camps, p. 23

Illustration 3: *Granma* Published Staged Photos of the UMAP Camps, p. 34

Illustrations 4 and 5: UMAP Brigades Compete during Sugar Cane Harvest, p. 36

Illustration 6: Youth Volunteer in Cuba's Agricultural Sectors, p. 78

## WORKS CITED

- Adler, Renata. "Cultural Life in Cuba Thriving Despite Rein." *The New York Times*.  
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9A0CE6D7153DE134BC4852DFB4668382679EDE&legacy=true> (accessed August 29 2016).
- Memories of Underdevelopment. Dir. Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás. Perf. Corrieri, Sergio. Wood, Salvador. Gallardo, José. DVD. 1973.
- Almendros, Néstor and Jiménez-Leal, Orlando. *Conducta Impropia*. Madrid: Editorial Egales, 2008.
- Amanpour, Christiane. "President Castro's Daughter Speaks Out." CNN.com.  
<http://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2014/12/18/intv-amanpour-mariela-castro-daughter-cuba-us-relations.cnn> (accessed March 5, 2017).
- Andrews, George Reid. *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Arenas, Reinaldo. *Before Night Falls*. New York: Viking, 1993.
- Baez, Luis. "Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (UMAP)." Havana: 1966.
- Blanco, José Caballero. *Una Muerte a Plazos*. Washington: D'Har Services, 2008.
- Borge, Tomás. *Face to Face with Fidel Castro*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1992.
- Bulmer-Thomas, Victor. *The Economic History of Latin America Since Independence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Caistor, Nick. "Heberto Padilla: Poetic symbol of intellectual repression in Castro's Cuba." England: *The Guardian*, 2000.
- Castro, Fidel. "In the closing ceremony to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace." Havana: 1963.
- Castro, Fidel. "In the closing ceremony to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the attack on the presidential palace," Havana: 1966.
- Castro, Fidel and Ramonet, Ignacio. *Fidel Castro: My Life*. New York: Scribner, 2006.
- Chomsky, Aviva. "'Barbados or Canada?' Race, Immigration, and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba" North Carolina: Hispanic American Heritage Fund and Duke University Press, 2000.
- Clark, Juan. *Religious Repression in Cuba*. Florida: Cuban Living Conditions Project and the North-South Center for the Cuban Studies Project of the Institute of Inter-American Studies, 1986.

- Conducta Impropia. Dir. Almendros, Néstor and Jiménez-Leal, Orlando. Perf. Arenas, Reinaldo. Monreal, Lorenzo, Ronet, Jorge. DVD. 1984.
- Cubamerican. Dir. Pardo, José Enrique. Perf. Bauer, Steven. Cantero III, Raoul G. Diaz-Azcuy, Orlando. DVD. 2013.
- Darlington, Shasta. "Castro admits 'injustice' for gays and lesbians during revolution" CNN.com.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/08/31/cuba.castro.gays/> (accessed March 5, 2017).
- Díaz Torres, Isbel. "Hypocrisy and Censorship in Cuban Blogging Platform Cubava." *Havana Times*.  
<http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=116829> (accessed April 6, 2017).
- Guillermoprieto, Alma. *Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004.
- Halperin, Maurice. *The Taming of Fidel Castro*. California: University of California Press, 1981.
- Hamilton, Carrie. *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Haydulina, Anastasia. "Interview with Mariela Castro on the Future of Sex and Socialism in Cuba." *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America*. Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.
- Haza, Óscar. "A Mano Limpia." Florida: AmericaTeve, 2011.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpJSOaMEZcM> (accessed January 15, 2017).
- Higgins, Andrew. "Russia Bans Jehovah's Witnesses, Calling It an Extremist Group" *The New York Times*.  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/russia-bans-jehovahs-witnesses.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/russia-bans-jehovahs-witnesses.html?_r=0) (accessed March 5, 2017).
- John, Tara. "Chechen Police Are Rounding Up and Killing Men for Being Gay, Report Says." *Time*.  
<http://time.com/4722601/chechnya-kill-gay-men/> (accessed March 5, 2017).
- Kidd, Paul. "Castro's Cuba: Police Repression Is Mounting" United Press International, *Deseret News*.  
<https://manuelzayas.wordpress.com/castros-cuba-police-repression-is-mounting-1966/> (accessed February 4, 2017).
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History and Memory after Auschwitz: In the Shadow of the Holocaust*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1998.

- Larson, Scott. "Gay Space." *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America*. Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.
- Leiner, Marvin. *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality, and AIDS*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1994.
- Marqués de Armas, Pedro, "Psiquiatría para el Nuevo Estado (1959-1972)." Cuba: *La Habana Elegante*.
- Medina, Julio. "La Historia de los 10 Bailarines." *Conducta Impropia* Madrid: Editorial Egales, 2008.
- Memories of Underdevelopment. Dir. Alea, Tomás Gutiérrez. Perf. Sergio Corrieri. DVD. 1973.
- Padilla, Heberto. *Fuera del Juego*. Florida: Ediciones Universal, 1971.
- Pérez, Jr., Louis A. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Pérez, Jr., Louis A. *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Pérez, Jr., Louis A. *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Ravsberg, Fernando. "Dark Chapters of Cuban History Still Taboo." *Havana Times*.  
<http://cartasdesdecuba.com/dark-chapters-of-cuban-history-still-taboo/> (accessed April 6, 2017).
- Ravsberg, Fernando. "Serious Threats Against Journalist in Cuba: 'They Threaten to Break My Teeth If I Continue Writing.'" *Havana Times*.  
<http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=123787> (accessed April 6, 2017).
- Rohrlich, Justin. "Cuba Wants You To Think It's a Gay Paradise. It's Not." *Foreign Policy*.  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/03/cuba-wants-you-to-think-its-a-gay-paradise-its-not/>  
 (accessed March 5, 2017).
- Ros, Enrique. *La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista*. Florida: Ediciones Universal, 2004.
- Rosenberg, Emily S. *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Salas, Luis. *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba*. Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1979.
- Santiago, Héctor. "José Mario 'El Puente' De Una Generación Perdida," circa 1993. (Cuban

- Heritage Collection Héctor Santiago Papers, 1958-2002, University of Miami).
- Santiago, Héctor. "Teatro de Resistencia en los Campos de Concentración de la UMAP en Cuba," circa 2000. (Cuban Heritage Collection Héctor Santiago Papers, 1958-2002, University of Miami).
- Soy Cuba. Dir. Kalatosov, Mihail . Perf. Corrieri, Sergio. Wood, Salvador. Gallardo, José. Bouise, Jean. DVD. 1964.
- "Sugar Act of 1937". Connecticut: The Yale Law Journal Company, 1938.
- Tahbaz, Joseph. "Demystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba." *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies* 14, no. 2 (2013).  
<https://www1.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html> (accessed March 11, 2016).
- Wise, Michael Z. "In Totalitarian Cuba, Ice Cream and Understanding." New York: *The New York Times*, 1995.
- Yglesias, José, "Cuban Report: Their Hippies, Their Squares." New York: *The New York Times Magazine*, 1969.