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### Demystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba

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#### Abstract

The UMAP, *las Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción*, were forced-work agricultural labor camps operated by the Cuban government during the mid-1960s in the east-central province of Camagüey. The current academic literature on the UMAP camps has exclusively taken into account homosexual internees' experiences and has characterized the camps solely as an instance of gender policing. This paper will argue: 1) the UMAP was an integral component of the Cuban Revolution's larger economic, social, and political goals, 2) the experiences of the diverse gamut of UMAP internees cannot be generalized into a single, concentration-camp narrative, and 3) although gay men certainly endured horrific treatment at the camps, Jehovah's Witnesses were the victims of the worst brutality at the UMAP.

**Keywords:** Cuba, UMAP, forced labor, gender, race, homosexuality, Jehovah's Witnesses

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#### Introduction

The only third-party testimony of the UMAP camps comes from Canadian journalist Paul Kidd, who was expelled from Cuba on September 8, 1966.<sup>1</sup> The Cuban Foreign Ministry alleged that Kidd had written articles critical of the Cuban Revolution and had taken photos of anti-aircraft guns visible from his Havana hotel room window.<sup>2</sup> Paul Kidd had just returned from an unauthorized trip to Camagüey, where he "had the unique experience ... of tracking down a forced-labor camp hidden in the lush sugar fields of central Cuba" (Kidd 1969, 24). What Paul Kidd chanced upon were the "camps ... known simply as UMAP" (24).

For nearly half a century, historians have almost entirely omitted the UMAP camps from Cuban history while Cuban exiles have denounced the UMAP as concentration camps.<sup>3</sup> The current, scarce literature on the UMAP camps has exclusively incorporated homosexual internees' experiences and has characterized the camps solely as an instance of gender policing.<sup>4</sup> This article argues that the UMAP was not a fringe of revolutionary policy aimed at a sliver of the population, but an integral and multifaceted component of the Cuban Revolution's economic, social, and political aspirations. Firstly, the UMAP was a means of repressing insufficiently *revolucionario*<sup>5</sup> elements of civil society, such as religious groups and secret societies. Secondly, the UMAP constituted the extreme fringe of a nuanced spectrum of coerced, unpaid labor that was central to the Revolution's economic goals. Thirdly, the UMAP sought to "correct" those who exhibited a revolutionarily improper masculinity and discriminated against not only homosexuals, but also Afro-Cubans. Finally, while gay men certainly endured horrific treatment at the camps, history ought to remember Jehovah's Witnesses as the victims of the worst brutality at the UMAP camps. At the same time, however, the experiences of the diverse gamut of UMAP internees – ranging from Catholic priests to *los hippies*, as well as artists and intellectuals – cannot be generalized into a single, concentration-camp narrative. Instead, the UMAP camps performed many different functions and held many different meanings. Because a topic of this nature is nearly impossible to study in Cuba, the arguments put forth in this article draw upon sources such as Cuban newspapers, memoirs of the camps, and interviews with former internees.

#### Operations

The UMAP, *las Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción*, were agricultural forced-work camps operated by the Cuban government between November 1965 and July 1968 in the east-central province of Camagüey.<sup>6</sup> Two years before the first internees were sent to UMAP camps, the Cuban government published Law 1129, which established a three-year SMO – *Servicio Militar Obligatorio* (Obligatory Military Service).<sup>7</sup> Under the pretense of the SMO, those considered unfit for the regular military service were sent to the UMAP camps. Two former Cuban intelligence agents have both estimated that of approximately 35,000 UMAP internees,<sup>8</sup> about 500 ended up in

psychiatric wards, 70 died from torture, and 180 committed suicide (Fuentes 300–3; Vivés 238). The persons most frequently interned at the camps were *religiosos* (religious zealots) and gay men.<sup>9</sup> The large swath of internees included Jehovah's Witnesses (Ros 191), Seventh Day Adventists (Blanco 73), Catholics (Cardenal 293), Baptists (Muñoz; Blanco 73), Methodists (Yglesias 295), Pentecostals (Blanco 87), Episcopalians (Blanco 73), practitioners of Santería (Santiago), Abakuá members (Santiago; Izquierdo; Llovio 151; Cabrera 164), Gideon members ("Unidades," 8), those suspected of intending to flee the country (Cabrera 12; Blanco 34, 67; Ros 47), priests (Ros 62), artists (Guerra 2010, 268), intellectuals (Guerra 2010, 268), ideologically nonconforming university students (Blanco 66; Ros 122), lesbians (Guerra 2012, 254), *los hippies* (*Improper Conduct*; Cabrera 55), *marihuaneros* (potheads) (Muñoz), drug addicts (Yglesias 299), political prisoners (Santiago), government officials accused of corruption (Llovio 160), criminals (Ros 152; Former), prostitutes (Guerra 2012, 254; Garinger 7; Martínez 70–71), pimps (Yglesias 299), farmers who refused collectivization (Fuentes 300–3), persons who worked for themselves illegally (Fuentes 300–3), *vagos* (deadbeats) (Blanco 2013), and anyone else considered "anti-social" or "counter-revolutionary." With no single group forming the majority, the term "UMAP internee" represents a decidedly plural collective.

The UMAP was no state secret. In a roaring March 1966 speech delivered on the *escalinata* (large stairway) of the University of Havana, Fidel Castro remarked "some have to go to the SMO; some have to go to *la UMAP, Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción*" (Castro 1966). In 1966 and 1967, at least a dozen different articles in the Cuban press referenced the UMAP camps, complete with photos of lush sugarcane fields and interviews with cheerful internees.<sup>10</sup>

The two main *recogidas* (round-ups) of UMAP internees occurred in November 1965 and June 1966 (Ros 146, 151). The *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDR) – a nationwide government organization located on every block – was mainly responsible for informing the military who were destined for the UMAP camps (Yglesias 27, 275; Blanco 72; Lumsden 67; Santiago). Most individuals were taken to the camps through a false notice to appear for military service (Santiago; Ros 52, 79, 94, 101, 141). Individuals would receive a telegram with a notice to appear for SMO at locations such as sports stadiums (Ros 37, 73; Cabrera 37). Instead of being transferred to an SMO military camp, these individuals were transported by train, truck, or bus to UMAP agricultural forced-work camps in Camagüey (Ros 15). Conditions on the eight-hour trip across the island were often very poor, with many internees deprived of clean water and food (Cabrera 45; Ros 72–75). Often provided no stops and no facilities on the ride, they had to relieve themselves within the passenger compartment of the train or bus (Cabrera 45; Santiago; Ros 72–75; *Improper Conduct*). Alternatively, instead of receiving a false SMO notice, many individuals were directly rounded up off the streets into buses and shipped to UMAP camps (*Improper Conduct*; Martínez 66; Llovio 156). This selection method was reserved for gay men and *antisociales* (anti-socials) such as *los hippies*. Former UMAP internee and *Ministerio del Interior* (MININT) informer José Luis Llovio-Menéndez wrote in his memoir that "MININT officers would patrol known homosexual gathering places ... they rounded up anyone who looked like a homosexual and shipped these people off to UMAP" (156). According to Cuban propaganda at the time, homosexuality looked like tight pants, dark sunglasses, and sandals.<sup>11</sup>

Each UMAP camp typically held 120 men<sup>12</sup> split into three *compañías* (companies) of 40 internees further divided into squads of 10 (Ros 34). The number of internees could vary considerably, however, and some camps held several hundred internees (Cabrera 245; Former). 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 (Former; Sanger; Muñoz). The camps were surrounded by a 10 feet tall barbed-wire fence and had no running water or electricity (Cardenal 294; Cabrera 54; Blanco 47; Ros 10; Muñoz; Sanger). Camp brigades were given *revolucionario* names such as "*Vietnam Heroico*," "*Mártires de Girón*," and "*Héroes del Granma*."<sup>13</sup> Most camps had bunk beds with jute sacks slung between wooden beams for mattresses (Kidd 1969, 25; Cabrera 50; Former). Some camps had hammocks (Cabrera 53) or no beds at all (Ros 84) and a few provided actual mattresses (Cabrera 167). The UMAP uniform consisted of *verde olivo* (olive green) or dark blue pants, a long-sleeve light blue denim shirt, and military boots (Ros 95; Yglesias 278; Cabrera 53; Blanco 47; Llovio 147; Muñoz). As each camp held roughly one hundred individuals and there were tens of thousands of internees, hundreds of UMAP camps were scattered throughout Camagüey (Kidd 1969, 24).

The internees were often divided by category (Jehovah's Witnesses, gay men, Catholics, etc.) en route to the camps (Ros 24, 55). Each internee was called by a number which was assigned to them upon arriving at the camps (Santiago; Cabrera 61; Muñoz). In general, there were two types of camps: camps only for gay men and camps for everyone else (Ros 55, 87; Former; Llovio 156). Even while gay men were temporarily stationed at the camps for general internees, they were sometimes assigned to a separate platoon for homosexuals (Cabrera 58; Viera). To transfer internees to camps for homosexuals, the guards would call the entire camp to assemble and publicly select those who would be transferred (Ros 176). That the military 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.

Internees performed a variety of agricultural tasks, ranging from picking *boniato* (sweet potato), yucca, and fruit to tearing down *marabú*,<sup>14</sup> applying fertilizer, and weeding. Nonetheless, internees were primarily engaged in planting and harvesting sugar cane (Ros 131–32; Blanco 100; Bejel 100). Both SMO recruits and UMAP internees received an equally meager salary: seven pesos a month – exactly one-tenth of the state’s monthly minimum wage in agriculture at the time (Ros 31; Mesa-Lago 1981, 147; Kidd 1969, 24). Internees worked Monday through Saturday and sometimes had to perform what was called *trabajo voluntario* (volunteer work) on Sundays, which consisted of more agricultural labor, but without any production quotas (Former; Blanco 100–101). Otherwise, Sundays were spent resting and doing activities such as washing clothes and writing letters to family members (Blanco 100, 104). The camp *político*<sup>15</sup> gave internees daily talks about current events and communist ideology, with longer sessions on Sundays (Kidd 1969, 24; Blanco 53; Former). Certain internees were released early in 1967 while others stayed longer, but in general they were held at the camps for about two-and-a-half years, i.e., until the dissolution of the camps in 1968 (Llovio 172–3; Yglesias 294; Former; Ronet 55).

The most vital function of the UMAP camps was not killing or torturing civilians, but exploiting the labor of Cuba’s supposed degenerates. The experiences and conditions in the UMAP varied widely, but the one constant among all the testimony is the inhumane number of hours these internees were forced to work. One internee recalled that each worker’s daily quota for cutting sugar cane ranged between 18 and 24 *cordeles lineales*, which is between 366 meters and 488 meters of cane.<sup>16</sup> On average, internees worked about 60 hours a week, but some internees have reported working even more, at 12 hours a day, six days a week (Blanco 100; Cardenal 294; Kidd 1969, 24): “during the *zafra* [sugar harvest], we would get up earlier, sometimes at four ... we worked nonstop until lunch ... a few minutes of rest and we returned to cutting sugar cane until dusk” (Muñoz). Llovio-Menéndez wrote that the work schedule at one camp during the *zafra* began at 4:30 AM and ended at 7:00 PM with one 15 minute break at 10:00 AM and two hours allotted for lunch (147). Working hours were longest during the *zafra*, which typically lasted from January to April, but due to labor shortages in the 1960s was lengthened from November to June (Pérez 236). For essentially half of the year, UMAP internees were forced to cut sugar cane from sunrise to sunset six days a week.

Certain internees were granted passes to leave the camps for lengths of time ranging from one afternoon up to ten days (Cabrera 153–55, 176, 179, 203; Muñoz; Viera). Typically, they were only permitted to visit a neighboring town or village, but sometimes they could go as far as Havana. Internees were also given a week to spend with their families for Christmas vacation and the New Year (Cabrera 228; Blanco 123; “Vacaciones,” 1966). For all of these trips, internees had to pay for their own transportation (Blanco 124). Internees could also write and receive letters and even receive packages, but all correspondence was censored (Santiago; Cabrera 87–88). After three to six months in the camps, internees were usually allowed to receive visits by family members on one designated Sunday out of the month (Sanger; Blanco 91, 108; Former; Kidd 1969, 24). Family visits were supervised and internees could not exchange uninspected documents with family members, but they were allowed to bring internees items such as cigarettes or food (Kidd 1969, 24; Cabrera 112). Family visits were held at an off-site location where family members were allowed to take photos with the internees (Blanco 109; Muñoz). To maintain the illusion that the UMAP camps were part of the standard SMO, the recruits wore a special uniform and marched in unison for family visits (Cabrera 109; Muñoz). Besides family visits, Catholic priests and Catholic youth occasionally visited internees and even administered the Eucharist (Cabrera 136–37; Ros 185). These visitation privileges demonstrate how the conditions at the UMAP differed in some measure from what one would typically expect at forced-work camps.

Many internees have reported that the quality and quantity of food in the camps was very poor. One internee, who claimed to have gone from 170 to 120 pounds by his first family visit, remembered that at his camp they ate stray cats, hens, and snakes they captured while working in the fields (Blanco 108, 134). To the contrary, one former UMAP internee claimed that “there was enough food ... we ate lots of canned meat, sardines, condensed milk; there was milk, rice, beans, there was plenty” (Former). Although internees generally were not starved, internees did not receive food if they had not completed their production quota for the day (Former; Blanco 57). One reason for the scarcity of food was that military officials would hoard foodstuffs for their personal use or sell them to *guajiros* (people from the countryside) (Ros 166–68; Blanco 83). Water deprivation was another form of mistreatment (Blanco 55). Former internee René Cabrera wrote in his memoir that at one camp they were allotted just three glasses of water a day while they spent all day outside in the sun cutting sugar cane (138). As a result, internees had to drink contaminated water they found accumulated in the fields (Cabrera 144; Blanco 55). Internees were granted access to medical treatment and when necessary were transferred to military hospitals for illness. Still, the denial of treatment by arbitrary camp guards resulted in the deaths of some internees (Blanco 70–72, 115–22; Ros 179–84).



There are many reports of physical abuse at the camps, especially directed towards *testigos de Jehová* (Jehovah's Witnesses). Former internees have reported Jehovah's Witnesses being beaten, threatened with execution, stuffed with dirt in their mouths, buried in the ground up to their necks, deprived of food or water, forced to stand in latrines with waste water, and tied up naked outside in barbed wire without food or water until fainting (Ros 80, 101, 112, 193; Cabrera 63, 71, 197; Former). Llovio, who was sent to the UMAP camps for over a year from early 1966 to June 1967 for accusations of corruption and later became a camp doctor, witnessed first-hand the physical abuse some internees received (Llovio 159, 160, 167). At one camp, Llovio saw a young Jehovah's Witness hung by his hands from the top of a flagpole. Llovio lowered the man and treated his hands, which he described as "raw and bloody ... numb and purplish" (153–54). For one afternoon, Llovio was sent to provide medical care to the Malesar unit, a camp for homosexuals. There, Llovio described the physical condition of the internees as "deplorable" (157). As a doctor, he treated patients whose bodies were covered with insect bites and others who had bruises left over from beatings. The internees Llovio treated at the homosexual camp told him that many of their privileges, such as receiving visitors and mail, would be arbitrarily suspended. In addition, the camp guards practiced a wide range of abuses: forcing internees to work past sunset, sending ill internees to work, regularly beating internees while working, forcing internees to stand at attention all day in the sun, and making internees stand naked in ditches of camp sewage (Llovio 157, 158). Many camps even had designated punishment cells (*Improper Conduct*, Viera; Santiago). For a respite from the camps, many internees mutilated themselves so they could be transferred to a hospital (Ros 205–8; Cabrera 192; Blanco 57–58). There also exist accounts of suicide at the camps. A Catholic internee reported that he saw a gay man hang himself in the UMAP camps (Cardenal 293). Former internee José Blanco, who was transferred from the regular SMO to the UMAP for admitting that he considered the possibility of emigrating from Cuba, also recalled cases of internees committing suicide in camps not for homosexuals (34, 139).

Former internees have generally described the camp guards as arbitrary, abusive, and incompetent, but there were exceptions (Former; Blanco 52; Cabrera 141, 157). One former internee recalled Lieutenant Falcón, who had been transferred to the UMAP camps after a dispute with a superior, as a man who was "competent" and "respected everyone and was respected by everyone" (Ros 88). René Cabrera developed a friendship with one guard, who asked Cabrera to teach him how to read and even confessed that he was ashamed of the abuses at the camps (Cabrera 185, 210). As former internee Alberto Muñoz explained:

Of the officials ... there were all types of persons. Some treated us with respect and consideration. Others certainly admired us and did not fail to show it. With many of them, we gained friendship. In many circumstances we had officials who helped us and avoided committing injustices ... but there were also others who acted without the least bit of sensitivity, making it difficult for us to find any human feelings in them.

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 (Cabrera 167, 169). 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 (Cabrera 167, 169; Viera; Blanco 2013; Muñoz).

If former Cuban intelligence agents' statistics are correct, approximately 0.75 percent of internees died as a result of the conditions they endured in the camps. This would mean that there was roughly one death or suicide at each UMAP camp during a course of two-and-a-half years. Although the conditions at the UMAP were brutally inhumane, these figures also reveal that life-threatening torture was not systematically practiced at the camps. The UMAP camps were a huge tragedy, but they were not quite "Cuba's concentration camps." Sadly, Cuba already experienced this phenomenon during the Cuban War of Independence in 1896 when the Spanish government gathered about half a million civilians into camps called *reconcentrados*. As a result of the insurgents and counterinsurgents' mutual strategies of pillage and destruction, approximately 10 percent of Cuba's entire population perished in the makeshift *reconcentrados* (Tone 192–224). Unlike their nineteenth-century forebears, however, UMAP internees were not literally left to die. The most vital function of the UMAP camps was not to kill civilians, but to exploit the labor of Cuba's *lactra social* (scum of society) – without any concern for what the human cost might be.

### **Labor, Economics, and Sugar**

In revolutionary 1960s Cuba, there existed a wide spectrum of unpaid labor funneled toward the state ranging from *trabajo voluntario* to coerced labor by political prisoners. Economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago divides state-sponsored unpaid labor in Cuba into five categories: overtime in the workplace, work through the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC), socialist education in the *escuelas de campo*<sup>17</sup> and the university, SMO, and "rehabilitative work" performed by political prisoners (Mesa-Lago 1969, 340). The UMAP camps lie somewhere on the extreme fringe of this spectrum of coerced, unpaid labor.

The UMAP camps were indeed forced-work camps, but to properly contextualize the UMAP camps it must be emphasized that state-sponsored unpaid labor was not the exception but the norm in 1960s Cuba. In 1967, state-sponsored unpaid labor constituted between 8 to 12 percent of the labor force and between 1962 and 1967 totaled approximately 1.4 percent of the national income (Mesa-Lago 1969, 354–55). During these years, approximately one-third of state-sponsored unpaid labor in Cuba was coordinated through the workplace, 45 percent through the military, 10 percent through students, 10 percent through the penitentiary system, and about 2 percent through the FMC (340, 354–55). As early as 1960, the government “reeducated” un-revolutionary Cubans at a work camp in Guanahacabibes.<sup>18</sup> Revolutionary theory, meanwhile, both elevated the value of labor and laid down the ideological justifications for Cuba’s new labor regime.<sup>19</sup>

During the years of the UMAP, *trabajo voluntario* was widely employed in the sugar harvests. According to government publications, over 57,000 unpaid workers participated in the 1965 *zafra* and over 71,000 in the 1966 *zafra* (Mesa-Lago 1969, 346). The source does not specify whether this figure included UMAP internees, but since internees received a monthly salary the figure most likely only referred to “volunteers.” For the 1967 *zafra*, a third of these “volunteers” were recruited from the services sector and another third from the construction sector, two industries which at the time were overemploying migrants from *el interior* (inland Cuba) (346). The use of *trabajo voluntario* to offset economic imbalances in the labor market reveals how revolutionary economic policies had both ushered in new opportunities for *campesinos* (people from the countryside) and resulted in acute agricultural labor shortages. For the 1963 *zafra*, the *Comisión Nacional Azucarera* estimated that 352,000 cane cutters were needed, but only 260,000 were available (Pérez 59). The number of professional sugarcane cutters declined from 370,000 in 1958 to just 160,000 in 1964 – a decline of over 60 percent (59). “How should this problem be solved?” asked one UMAP article from the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) publication *Verde Olivo* in reference to Camagüey’s acute *zafra* labor shortages (“¿Qué es la UMAP?” 1967). The government’s answer to this daunting economic challenge was the UMAP.

A range of structural changes in the Cuban economy contributed to Cuba’s severe agricultural labor shortage. During the 1960s, the labor force participation rate actually declined because of the emigration of working-age Cubans, higher school enrollment rates, and liberalized retirement laws (Mesa-Lago 1981, 188). In addition, Cuba was witnessing an internal migration from *el interior* to urban centers. Havana’s population grew 4.4 percent annually in 1960 and 1961, and 2.1 percent in 1964 (128). Migrants from *el interior* found jobs in the army, state security, police, mass state organizations, and bureaucracy (125). These new urban residents filled the some 400,000 jobs which were added in the services sector – mostly in the army and social-services administration – between 1958 and 1964 (114). Agricultural workers who previously faced seasonal unemployment due to the economic swings of the *zafra* now found stable, yearlong employment through state farms and a guaranteed minimum wage (125). Seasonal unemployment in agriculture had been virtually eliminated by rural migration, guaranteed jobs, and overstaffing in state farms (189). Accompanying these sweeping economic reforms was lower productivity. A survey of 136 state farms in 1963 found that employees worked 4.5 to 5 hours a day on average, but still received pay for 8 hours (125). Lower productivity meant that yet more people had to be hired to achieve production goals, thereby worsening the labor shortage even more in a vicious, compounding cycle. Mesa-Lago estimates that the overall productivity of the agricultural sector in 1965 was just 78 percent of 1962 productivity levels. By 1965, the productivity of the industrial sector had declined almost 10 percent since 1962 (134). To make matters worse, Cuba was also witnessing alarming rates of worker absenteeism (47–49, 157).

Internal migration, overemployment in the urban job market, newfound economic security for farmers, lower productivity and worker absenteeism – all of these interlocking factors compounded into a severe shortage of labor in agriculture. Absent the societal structures of slavery or capitalism harnessing and exploiting individuals, apparently no one wanted to cut sugar cane. In turn, the state took on the role of coercing its citizens to perform labor through the mobilization of “volunteers,” soldiers, and political prisoners. The astounding inefficiency of *trabajo voluntario*, however, meant that it could not resolve Cuba’s economic woes. For the 1964 coffee harvest, university student volunteers picked coffee one-fifth as efficiently as salaried workers (Mesa-Lago 1969, 351). In the 1962–1965 sugar harvests, unpaid workers cut less than one ton of sugar cane per day while skilled workers chopped down two to three times that amount (351). Consequently, the production efficiency of the 1967 sugar harvest was a staggering 22 percent below that of the 1957 harvest (351).

As a result, the Revolution’s economic policies were taking a serious hit on the island’s most lucrative resource: sugar. Paramount to Cuba’s entire history, sugar also played a leading role in the history of the UMAP. When the Revolution’s lavish industrialization plans and efforts to diversify agriculture failed to materialize, Cuba’s leaders turned to sugar to move the country forward (Pérez 12–13). In 1963, the Cuban government developed the Prospective Sugar Industry Plan, which between 1965 and 1970 would implement a series of aggressive development policies: increasing land dedicated to sugarcane cultivation by 50 percent, planting higher-yield

varieties of sugar cane, and setting a production target of 10 million tons of sugar by 1970 (12–13). The increased income from sugar sales would help Cuba pay off debts to the Soviet Union and buy the capital goods needed for industrialization (12–13). Essential to the success of this plan was economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. In January 1964, Fidel Castro traveled to Moscow, where he signed a sugar trade agreement with the Soviet Union. Cuba was to deliver 24 million tons of sugar between 1965 and 1970 at a price of 6.114 cents per pound – well above world market prices during the late 1960s (Pérez 140, 143; Brunner 55). The income gained from record sugar harvests and guaranteed prices would finance massive, state-sponsored industrialization that would fuel the economic growth which would finally land Cuba into communist paradise (Pérez 12–13). The only thing standing between Cuba's ambitions and the Prospective Sugar Industry Plan was a labor force to actually cut the cane. The UMAP was that key stepping stone to the prosperous communist future which Cuba's leaders were promising.

### Security

Throughout the early 1960s, the Cuban Revolution had been fighting to secure its existence, dealing with the threat of a US invasion and suppressing thousands of armed counterrevolutionaries in rural Cuba (Domínguez 1978, 345–46). By 1965, after having finally secured the Revolution and holding well over 20,000 political prisoners, the state now proceeded to neutralize those considered potential long-term threats (253–54). Although technically part of the military, the UMAP was not designed to tranquilize external, violent enemies but internal, latent threats: namely, homosexuals and members of civil society whose loyalties were not wholly dedicated to the Revolution. Unique in that it targeted not Cubans actively against the regime but Cubans deemed insufficiently *revolucionario*, the UMAP camps were the pinnacle of revolutionary Cuba's repressive, authoritarian policies.

Internees were *not* sent to the UMAP only because they were *religiosos* or homosexuals. There existed gay Cuban men whose sexuality was an open secret but were never sent to the camps.<sup>20</sup> A Cuban was interned at the UMAP because they were not adequately integrated into the Revolution and their membership in a particular social category was enough to render them *contrarrevolucionario* (counter-revolutionary) and thereby justify their internment. The UMAP was as much about political repression as it was about bigotry.

Achieving security, however, meant paying for a massive, costly military. In 1963, there were 300,000 soldiers in the military – 10 times as many as in 1958 – and military expenditures accounted for 6.5 percent of the national income (Domínguez 1976, 322). After the *campesino* uprisings were finally extinguished in 1965, the military sought to find economic relevance and professionalize its forces, many of which were inexperienced or not formally trained (324). There was no role for the many uneducated or illiterate veterans in the plans for a modern army. Instead, many of these officers were transferred to the UMAP camps as a sort of demotion (Llovio 143). As a result, many of the military personnel assigned to the UMAP camps were illiterate or functionally illiterate veterans of the 1959 Revolution (Ros 45–46; Domínguez 1976, 324; Yglesias 280). As a March 1966 article from *Verde Olivo* entitled “¿Qué es la UMAP?” explained, the personnel at the camps were “old members of the Rebel Army” of “intermediate level” and “almost all of peasant background,” which prepared them for “the difficulties and characteristics of agricultural work.” The labor harvested through the SMO would also reduce the economic burden of the military. Promoting the three-year SMO, Raúl Castro elaborated on the military's economic mission in a 1963 government meeting, “If we only want an army, we can have [the draftees] for two years ... [but] because the armed forces should help in the nation's economy ... [we intend to make] the burden of military expenditures on our people a bit lighter ... we must work as part of our service, especially in the sugar harvest” (Domínguez 1976, 324).

By neutralizing perceived potential *contrarrevolucionarios*, creating a dumping ground for FAR personnel who did not meet the standards of the modernizing military, and contributing to agricultural production and thereby reducing the economic costs of the ballooning military, the UMAP camps simultaneously helped accomplish three distinct goals all essential to the military's transition to a professionalized, newly relevant institution. In this respect, the UMAP was a highly strategic move by the Cuban military.

### Testigos de Jehová

Those interned on grounds of their religious activity probably made up the largest proportion of UMAP internees, and of them, Jehovah's Witnesses were the most severely abused.<sup>21</sup> Young, active Catholics were frequently sent to the UMAP camps and their experiences are very well represented in the body of published testimony. However, Catholics comprised just a small fraction of UMAP internees. One Catholic former internee estimated that just 2,000 Catholics were interned out of a total of 35,000 internees – just over 5 percent (Cardenal 293). Protestant religions and sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses<sup>22</sup> were viewed as especially counter-revolutionary because of their historical and allegedly treasonous connections with the *norteamericanos* (North Americans, esp. from the United States). On March 13, 1963, in front of the University of Havana, Fidel Castro gave a speech where he condemned the “*pseudo-religiosos*” whom he called *batiblanco*s: “there are three principal sects, which are instruments of today's imperialism, they are: Jehovah's Witnesses, Gideons International, and Pentecostals.”<sup>23</sup> Later in the speech, he claimed that “these sects ... are directly headed by the United States ... and they are used as agents of



the CIA, State Department, and Yankee policy” (Castro 1963). Since many Protestant religions in Cuba originated from the United States and many still had ties with the US, these sects were perceived as un-Cuban and potentially *contrarrevolucionario* (Rosado 88, 93, 95, 134–35, 145). In addition, the resolutely apolitical stance of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which motivates their resistance to practices ranging from saluting the flag to fulfilling draft requirements, rendered them the pariah of the boisterously patriotic and authoritarian Cuban Revolution (Yero 24). When resistance met resistance at the camps, some of the very worst abuses unfolded.

In 1938, there were only about one hundred Jehovah’s Witnesses in Cuba. By 1947, that number had grown to 4,000 and by 1965 there were nearly 20,000 – making them one of the largest organized religions on the island (Aguirre and Alston 171; Rosado 194). In 1962, the Ministry of Communication banned the import of Jehovah’s Witness religious literature and prohibited Jehovah’s Witnesses from using mail for distributing religious materials (Aguirre and Alston 190). In 1963, foreign Jehovah’s Witnesses were expelled from Cuba, just one year after over one hundred Catholic priests had been banished from the island (Aguirre and Alston 190; Treto 45). That same year, hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses were arrested for assembling without having obtained a permit from their CDR and hundreds more on account of their proselytizing activities (Calzon 14; Aguirre and Alston 191). In Pinar del Río, nearly every Kingdom Hall was shut down and its property confiscated (Aguirre and Alston 191). In the late 1960s, when there were incidents of Kingdom Halls and other meeting places being attacked by mobs with stone, brick, and iron, the government refused to prosecute the perpetrators (Calzon 14). Numerous propaganda pieces produced by *Granma* (Cuba’s state newspaper) and *Verde Olivo* between 1965 and 1968 stressed the presence of Jehovah’s Witnesses at the UMAP camps, complete with photos and personal interviews.<sup>24</sup> 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.

There does not exist any testimony from *testigos* in the UMAP camps; all information about their experiences comes from the eyewitness testimony of other internees. This is not because these former *testigo* internees are unknown or have all passed away. Rather, *testigos de Jehová* have been extremely hesitant to share their experiences with those who will publish their testimony. The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, upon religious principles Jehovah’s Witnesses tend to shy away from anything that even remotely relates to government or politics. Secondly, because conditions for Jehovah’s Witnesses in Cuba have begun to improve over the past two decades, *testigos* in the Cuban-exile community do not wish to publicize any criticisms of the Cuban government which may put these meager religious liberties at risk.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the highly traumatic experiences of many *testigos* make it emotionally challenging for these former internees to open up to outsiders. Jehovah’s Witnesses were by far the most abused at the camps (Viera). As former internee Héctor Santiago, who was sent to camps for gay men, emphasized:

With us, they were terrible, but let me tell you the truth, they treat you like a lady compared to the *testigos de Jehová*. Oh my god, they really, really were terrible with them, terrible. The things that they did to them ... horrible, horrible.

Former internee René Cabrera, who was interned for his Catholic activities, corroborated in his memoir, “The Jehovah’s Witnesses, as always, were the principal victims of the government’s intention of those crimes” (97).

*Testigos de Jehová* were not permitted to receive family visits, were not granted passes to leave the camps, and did not receive packages or letters (Cabrera 88, 113; Muñoz). In one instance, a camp guard did not allow a *testigo* to see his mother who had come to visit him because he refused to put on the *verde olivo* pants which had to be worn for family visits (Muñoz). When first transferred to the camps, many Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to participate in any camp activities and many refused to even wear the camp uniform (Former; Cabrera 59; Muñoz; Blanco 86). *Testigos* faced severe punishments for their non-participation, such as beatings, being buried in the ground up to their necks, or being forced to stand outside for hours until fainting (Blanco 86; Ros 101, 112, 194; Cabrera 59–60). However, most Jehovah’s Witnesses began to participate in camp activities and work after the great deal of coercion they faced (Cabrera 74). Less strict guards did not force *testigos* to wear the UMAP uniform (Former).

Jehovah’s Witnesses experienced a variety of tortures in the UMAP camps. In addition to the practices explained earlier, at some camps a guard would take individual Jehovah’s Witnesses who refused to wear the UMAP uniform out into the fields and fire a pistol, pretending to shoot them while the others were still in earshot. After faking this execution, the guard would return to the camp and select another Jehovah’s Witness who refused to put on the uniform. Former internee José Blanco wrote in his memoir that he did not see even one *testigo* concede to wear the uniform in the face of these simulated executions (87). Another common punishment was forcing *testigos* to stand

in latrines filled with excrement up to the waist or chest (Blanco 86; Former). At some camps, guards forced Jehovah's Witnesses to scoop the sewage from camp ditches with their bare hands (Blanco 86).

The Cuban government justifies its persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses by claiming that the sect was part of a scheme orchestrated by the CIA. For example, in January 1963, the Cuban government released a statement announcing that it had sabotaged a CIA spy network based in Oriente province, where they claimed to have found "a large quantity of buried weapons ... 36,000 Cuban pesos and some Jehovah's Witnesses' prayer books" ("Broke CIA Spy Ring," 1963). In a 1985 interview, Fidel Castro remarked that "Jehovah's Witnesses cause problems everywhere ... we were highly sensitive. Threatened by the United States, we needed to apply a strong defense policy – and we found ourselves faced with a doctrine that opposed conscription. We didn't have any trouble over beliefs; rather, all our problems were over ideas – and you don't know whether they're religious or political" (Borge 186–87).

### Seventh Day Adventists

Seventh Day Adventists had a unique relationship with the Revolution and represent a very different relationship with the UMAP than other religious minorities. In 1956, there were nearly 5,000 Seventh Day Adventists in Cuba, with more than half located on the more rural, eastern end of the island. Oriente, the province where Castro began his uprising, was also the province with the most Seventh Day Adventists (Rosado 169). In Oriente, one family of Adventists gave food and shelter to a band of revolutionaries who were fighting dictator Fulgencio Batista. 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, Argelio Rosabal, 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 in the future (which was indeed constructed) (172–74).

In December of 1958, Antillian College, a school ran by Seventh Day Adventists, fed and took care of wounded soldiers who were fighting in the Sierra Maestra (172–74). When the first draft for the SMO was enacted, 70 of the 110 eligible students at Antillian College were drafted. After asking the government to release some of their students so that the school could function, the majority of the recruited Adventists returned to school. Still, the SMO was problematic for Seventh Day Adventists because it did not make a distinction between combatants and non-combatants (203). In response, the Seventh Day Adventist Church created a commission to write a memorandum asking the government to exempt the remaining 12 Adventists who had been called for SMO. The memorandum explained the distinction between serving combatant vs. non-combatant roles, Adventists' unique Sabbath observance, and their loyalty to the government. The commission chose four pastors to deliver the memorandum along with one lay member, Argelio Rosabal – the same man who had sacrificed his only shirt to Che Guevara in the Sierra Maestra. Rosabal personally delivered the memorandum to Che, who on October 28, 1963, sent a letter enclosed with said memorandum to the head of the Agrarian Reform program, Carlos Rodríguez. In the letter, Che wrote, "[Argelio Rosabal] is the Adventist I spoke to you about ... you will know how to evade the law, or how to divert my attention" (203–5). Che Guevara interceded on behalf of his Adventist friend, Rosabal, for an exception to be created in the SMO for this sect.

Later, it ended up that Adventists would be sent to the UMAP camps, but sociologist Caleb Rosado stresses that they were sent to the UMAP "simply ... because [they] refused to bear arms [and] there was no other place to locate them" and not because they were considered *lacra social*, as the government regarded other UMAP internees (205–6). Indeed, former internees have not stressed abuses against Seventh Day Adventists, but have mentioned the fairer treatment Adventists received in comparison with Jehovah's Witnesses. Former internee José Blanco wrote in his memoir that at one camp there were two Adventists who refused to work on Saturday but compensated for their quota during the rest of the week. The lieutenant at the camp did not bother them and allowed them to fulfill their quota in this manner (Blanco 89). However, Blanco has also stressed that Adventists received fairer treatment only because they were the hardest working internees (Blanco 2013). Adventists were apparently not the only sect granted the right to rest on their respective Sabbath. In *Granma*, a member of Gideons International said, "They allow me to rest on Saturday and work on Sunday" ("Unidades," 8). However, like so many other aspects of the UMAP, the relatively better treatment that Adventists received cannot be generalized for all camps. At least one former internee recalled seeing Adventists forced to work on the Sabbath and receive terrible abuse similar to that endured by Jehovah's Witnesses (Ros 112).

Through the relationship that some Seventh Day Adventists forged with revolutionary leaders in the Sierra Maestra, Adventists had a privileged relationship with the revolutionary government which granted them more flexibility in their religious activities than most sects. As a result, Adventists were able to give their direct input to revolutionary leaders regarding the SMO and thus helped inform what would eventually become the UMAP policy. Even after the UMAP was closed, Adventists were given accommodations to allow them to serve in the SMO whereas Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned (Rosado 206). Crucially, 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* and, consequently, suffered terrible mistreatment. Seventh Day Adventists, however, were not associated with the same *contrarrevolucionario* stigma and thus were not the target of abuse in the camps.

Outside the camps, Adventists also faced a relatively hospitable environment. Whereas the number of clergy in most Protestant churches dropped drastically between 1960 and 1963, the number of Adventist clergy actually grew over 20 percent (Rosado 193). Between 1960 and 1984, the membership of Seventh Day Adventists grew over 50 percent to nearly 9,000 members – whereas the number of Catholics, Jews, Presbyterians and Methodists all faced drastic losses due to emigration, the expulsion of foreign clerics, and discrimination toward religiously active citizens (194). Evidence of regular abuse of religious groups other than *testigos* is scant. In the memoir *Dios No Entra en mi Oficina*, former internee Alberto Muñoz, who was sent to the UMAP as a young Baptist seminarian, asserted that Christians were treated better in the camps because “we had earned prestige and we had better relations with our superiors.”

Although all former inmates have recalled their experiences in the UMAP as highly negative, not all internees turned against the Revolution as a result of the abuses in the UMAP – as was the case for a few *religiosos*. Nicaraguan Catholic priest and liberation theologian Ernesto Cardenal met one Catholic who affirmed, “there [in the UMAP camps] I became a revolutionary” because “in the concentration camp I realized that I ought not to leave. That to fight to make the Revolution better you have to be a revolutionary” (Cardenal 292–94). This particular Catholic was not the only *religioso* who came out of the UMAP camps wishing to stay on the island and improve the Revolution. One high-profile former internee is Jaime Lucas Ortega, who was sent to the UMAP camps as a young Catholic priest and is currently the archbishop of Havana (Ros 62). Former internee Raúl Suárez, a Baptist who attended Western Cuba Baptist Theological seminary, went on to become a member of Cuba's parliament and in 1990 secured the right for Christians to assemble in their homes for religious purposes (Blanco 98; Esqueda 30; Feinberg). A few UMAP internees left the camps not dejected, but determined to improve the plight of their *patria*.<sup>26</sup>

### Abakuá

By the eve of the Revolution, the Abakuá secret society, founded by slaves in Regla in 1836, had over 130 branches and controlled employment at ship docks, tobacco factories, and slaughterhouses (Palmié and Pérez 219; Routon 380–81). This mutual-aid secret society was problematic for the Cuban Revolution for a number of reasons. As its membership was predominantly black (white members were accepted as early as 1857 and later Chinese-Cubans also joined (Routon 380–81; Miller 171)) and working-class (Palmié and Pérez 219), the class-conscious and race-conscious organization was inherently an artifact of the capitalist, racist superstructures that the Revolution intended to destroy. Further, the organization's significant wield over labor markets challenged the Revolution's new state-run economic system. Early in the Revolution, the government manipulated the Abakuá Society by playing favorites with individual branches to turn them against each other (Routon 384). In 1968, 458 Abakuá members were in prison in Havana alone (384).

Abakuá members were amongst the many individuals sent to the UMAP camps (Santiago; Izquierdo; Llovio 151; Cabrera 164). Accounts of the UMAP camps frequently describe “common delinquents” among the inmates, but many of these accounts may be referencing members of the Abakuá Society, which has long been associated with criminality (Guerra 2012, 262). For instance, in one memoir a former UMAP internee wrote that “in the camps there were also common delinquents. The most well-known was Eleguá who came to the UMAP from a juvenile correctional facility in Jaruco. Eleguá ... was a young black Abakuá which was why he was the protagonist of the sad episode” (Blanco 67). Clearly, the former internee conflated Eleguá's criminality and his Abakuá membership. Eleguá is introduced as serving in the UMAP because he is a “*delincuente común*” (common delinquent), but the next sentence says that his Abakuá membership was the reason he was sent to the UMAP. Although some accounts of the UMAP camps may have conflated criminality and Abakuá membership, it should be emphasized that some UMAP recruits actually were criminals who had been transferred from jails where they had been serving time for serious crimes such as murder and rape (Llovio 12).

Abakuá were not explicitly labeled *contrarrevolucionario*, but revolutionary policies still seriously hindered their activities. The Revolution's attitude toward the Abakuá initially celebrated the Society as a unique component of Cuban culture and identity. Early in the Revolution, the government recognized the Abakuá for their participation in Cuba's wars of independence by inviting Abakuá members to a commemoration ceremony (Guerra 2012, 155). Soon, the expression of traditions with African heritage, including Santería and Abakuá, became marginalized by the government. The act of wearing necklaces or shaving one's head as part of Santería practices could risk one's job and the initiation of children into Santería was banned (Falola 270). Publications began to portray religions of African heritage as primitive belief systems at odds with the goals of communism (272). Representations of African

heritage and tradition were not celebrated, but treated as cultural relics of the past which would eventually dissolve with the creation of a truly communist society (272).

An article published in the magazine *El militante comunista* the very summer that the UMAP camps were closed expressed these same condescending attitudes toward Abakuá. The majority of the article gives a thorough history of the Abakuá in a non-politicized manner, but concludes by urging the end of the Society: “enough with remembering the leopard-men, who have served as the themes of literature and sensationalist film” (“La sociedad secreta Abakuá,” 36–45). The author explained that the Abakuá Society is obsolete because “in our socialist society ... mutual-aid societies are not necessary. The revolutionary state, which is today the people, jealously guards the security and well-being of all citizens of the country” (44–45). The initiation of young people into Abakuá is derided as “filling heads with reactionary obscurantism, teaching customs and traditions, which, sooner or later, will lead them to a clash with the authorities and with the rest of society” (44–45). The article ends by forecasting that the Abakuá will disappear in the “development of the revolutionary process” (44–45). Representations of African heritage in the early years of the Revolution, although sometimes giving a voice to Afro-Cubans for the first time through theater and music, ultimately never treated African-derived traditions as truly legitimate elements of Cuban culture, but as relics of the past which would fade in the march for communist progress.

These condescending attitudes toward Abakuá were reflected in the government’s hindering of their day-to-day practices. In the mid-1960s, a special permit was required to authorize religious ceremonies (Falola 275). The application process required submitting a list of the attendees one month in advance and an explanation of why the event needed to be held. These restrictions caused so much difficulty for some Abakuá members that during the 1960s some ceremonies ceased for years (275). The Revolution’s attitudes toward Abakuá and the over-regulation of their activities reveal that race still mattered in revolutionary Cuba. The patronizing discourse of the Revolution, led almost entirely by white men, against the African-derived, predominantly black Abakuá reinforced existing racial hierarchies under the guise of “communist progress.” As the case of the Abakuá demonstrates, traditions of African heritage were imagined as primitive and incompatible with an advanced, communist society. As a result, since one’s local CDR president helped determine who was sent to the UMAP camps, the racist prejudices of individual CDR members probably contributed to many Abakuá members’ placement in the UMAP camps instead of the regular SMO.

A gendered interpretation of the UMAP cannot exclude the presence of Abakuá at the camps, long notorious for being the site of Cuba’s most extreme gender policing. Masculinity is an essential component of the Abakuá Society, a brotherhood that aims to foster a correct manliness amongst its members. Effeminate or homosexual men can never join the Society (Leiner 22). As the organization’s oft-repeated criterion for the proper member states: “A man is not just one who is not homosexual, but also one who reflects the purest dignity of a human being through being hard-working, fraternal, happy, rebellious against injustice, and a follower of the Moral Code established by the founders of Abakuá” (“Sociedad Secreta Abakuá” 2013).

The Revolution viewed Abakuá as a threat because its brand of masculinity was considered overly aggressive and degrading to women (Routon 384). The 1968 article in *El militante comunista* challenges the masculinity of the Abakuá in exactly this manner, arguing that they fostered a *machismo* detrimental to society:

It is very important the role that ‘machismo’ plays, mistaken concept, primitive and twisted of manliness, in the *ñañiguismo* [another term for Abakuá]. It considers the woman a beast of burden and an instrument of pleasure. They cultivate revenge for allegations of real offenses to manliness or to religion ... These acts of vengeance, curious thing if one thinks about *machismo*, are always carried out in a treacherous and cowardly way... It is not necessary to stress the attraction these things have for *lumpen* [underclass scum]. Innumerable people have committed bloody acts in the name of Abakuá, uncountable the unpunished crimes thanks to their false concept of manliness and companionship. (“La sociedad secreta Abakuá,” 44–45)

Here, the *machismo* of the Abakuá is portrayed as a violent, misogynist extreme of the true *hombria* (manliness) of the Revolution. In this manner, the Cuban Revolution used the rhetoric of gender policing against those on either end of the traditional masculinity spectrum, both those who were insufficiently masculine and those who were excessively *machista* (chauvinistic). The article’s use of the term *lumpen* to describe Abakuá – a term which referred to a web of different types of individuals including *vagos*, homosexuals, *enfermitos*,<sup>27</sup> etc. – further links the Abakuá to the government’s global gender policing goals (Ros 9; Lumsden 71; Castro 1966). On both ends of the spectrum, the Revolution reinterpreted certain gendered behavior as detrimental to the goals of a communist society.

## Gender

During the 1960s the Cuban Revolution severely and systematically restricted gay citizens' rights. Gay people were not allowed to teach, go abroad, join the military, attend university, practice the fine arts, work in the press, or join the communist party (Lumsden 76; Young 28; Santiago; Salas 160–61). In the university, students were purged for accusations of homosexuality in public trials attended by hundreds of students. Trials for accused homosexuals had the same procedures as those for accused counterrevolutionaries (*Improper Conduct*; Guerra 2012, 247). Employment of *antisociales* and homosexuals was regulated through one's *expediente*, a government dossier on every citizen which is reviewed for hiring (Lumsden 76). Government documents such as *expedientes* and military IDs contained symbols which marked one as an *antisocial* or a homosexual (Young 38; Santiago). Héctor Santiago, for instance, was barred from returning to his work in theater after leaving the UMAP because his *expediente* indicated his *antisocial* status (Santiago). Even in the legal system, gays were excluded. Court cases handled through popular tribunals (a localized legal system for minor cases implemented in 1963) were all held publicly, except for certain cases involving a woman's "honor," juvenile delinquents, or homosexuals (Domínguez 1978, 256). In a communist country aspiring for classlessness, gays were an underclass.

Historians have characterized the UMAP as the pinnacle of the Cuban Revolution's gender policing (Guerra 2010, 268). However, the vagueness of this academic catchphrase lends itself to misinterpretation and fails to fully describe the event of the UMAP camps. Firstly, not all the gay men sent to the UMAP exhibited queer or effeminate behavior. Men interned at camps for homosexuals could be effeminate, masculine, or *whatever* (Santiago; Viera). Although classical *machismo* prioritizes gender performance, what specifically preoccupied the Cuban Revolution was its citizens' sexual behavior. As one former internee emphasized, "What mattered was homosexual sexuality" (Santiago).

Secondly, the Revolution's repressive policies against homosexuals did not merely police the gender of queers, but of the entire population. For example, the Revolution's rhetoric of gender policing justified repression against Abakuá because they projected a deviantly *machista* masculinity. In this way, people on either end of the spectrum of gender-normative behavior were at risk of being sent to the UMAP camps. Moreover, straight and/or gender-conforming individuals were also impacted by the state-sponsored campaign against homosexuality because they now had to fear that an agent of the state – as close as the CDR up the street or a fellow classmate – may accuse them of homosexuality. As a young, self-identified heterosexual and revolutionary Cuban explained, "The persecution of homosexuals ... is hateful and unnerving. Not that we're homosexuals. But there's always the fear that they'll think you are, because of the long hair or because you're an artist or a poet ... It's all repression" (Cardenal 21). Indeed, the very point of the state's gender policing was to enforce *machista* norms amongst all members of society. All men and women had to check their own gender performance and expression to ensure that their masculinity or femininity was never questioned, lest they face the state's consequences. Although homosexual men were the direct targets of the Revolution's repressive policies, Cuba's gender policing was truly directed toward the whole population – to intimidate all Cubans into adopting ever more *machista* gender norms to achieve the realization of the illusive *hombre nuevo* (the "New Man") who would usher in the communist future.<sup>28</sup>

Thirdly, describing the event of the UMAP as gender policing implies that gay men were its principal victims. To the contrary, numerous former internees from camps not for gay men have insisted that homosexuals only numbered somewhere between 10 to 15 percent of all internees (Blanco 79; Cabrera 13; Muñoz). Another internee from a camp not for gay men reported that up to one-fourth of the internees at his camp were homosexual (Viera). Since gay men were segregated, however, testimony from former internees cannot reveal the overall proportion of homosexuals in the UMAP. Consequently, these figures are most likely underestimates because they are only based on the number of internees seen transferred from camps not for gay men to camps for homosexuals and thus fail to include those who may have been sent directly to camps for gays (via government raids of the streets of Havana, for instance). Although not strictly accurate, these estimates remind us of the larger truth that gay men were only one group amongst a diverse gamut of internees.

Finally, the term "gender policing" obscures one of the central purposes behind the UMAP, which was not "policing" the gender of gay men, but actually eradicating homosexuality. After having waged a highly effective anti-prostitution campaign during the early and mid-1960s (Salas 100–102), the Cuban Revolution next attempted to eliminate homosexuality. In addition to the social and political stigmatization of homosexuality, the medicalization of homosexuality heavily informed the "treatment" gay men received in the UMAP.<sup>29</sup> A 1965 study in Havana to determine the cause of effeminacy in boys concluded that both environmental factors and inherited characteristics contributed to male effeminacy. Certain children, then, were born prone to developing effeminate and eventually homosexual behaviors, but only if "triggered" by certain environmental factors. The study urged that the prevention of male effeminacy and homosexuality "can only be done through the organs and mechanisms of education at the disposition of the State" (Leiner 39–40). Steeped in this medicalized understanding, it was believed that



homosexuality was preventable. Under this rationale, homosexuals would be banned from most work involving the public. In 1965, the Ministry of Health published a report on homosexuality which found that there was no known biological cause of homosexuality. The report concluded that homosexuality must be a learned behavior and urged that “research as well as prevention must start very early in order to influence the mechanisms of this learning process” (33). As part of these efforts in the 1960s, boys perceived as effeminate or prone to homosexuality were transferred to special schools called “Yellow Brigades” where they were taught to engage in gender-normative behaviors such as playing sports and practicing self-defense (Salas 164; Leiner 34). Again, the ideology behind the Yellow Brigades was rooted in the idea that homosexuality is a medical illness and social ill which the state must seek to contain. In parallel, gay men were segregated at the UMAP camps as part of the government’s efforts to contain the perceived contaminant before it “infected” society.

During this same period, efforts were made in Cuba to develop cures for homosexuality. In 1962, the director of *La Revista del Hospital Psiquiátrico* published an article in the *Revista Cubana de Medicina* entitled “*Una nueva modalidad del tratamiento de la homosexualidad*” (Marqués). In the study, Dr. Eduardo Gutiérrez Agramonte developed treatments inspired by Czech researcher Kurt Freund, including electroshock therapy and hormone treatments. In Pavlovian experiments, patients were administered positive or negative stimuli while being asked to select between images of nude men and women (Marqués).

Similar medical experiments were researched and conducted at the UMAP camps. While Llovio was stationed at the Camagüey Staff Headquarters to work as a doctor, his roommate was Lieutenant Luis Alberto Lavandeira, a veteran of the Cuban Revolution (Llovio 171). Lavandeira and researchers from the University of Havana went to camp Malesar to research “rehabilitating” homosexual internees. Lavandeira told Llovio, who had been assigned as a representative for the project, that homosexuality could be cured, but, “There is only one medicine and we have it at hand. It is Marxist philosophy, accompanied by hard labor that will force them into manly consciousness and gestures” (171). The inmates were uncooperative, however, and simply guffawed at Lavandeira’s questions regarding their sex lives. The project was soon canceled and Lavandeira was transferred to work at a psychiatric ward. Former gay internee Jorge Ronet wrote in his memoir that “foreign psychiatrists came with translators and we were forced to receive injections of unknown substances” (53–54). To avoid undergoing any further medical experiments, Ronet purposefully misbehaved so he would be transferred to another camp (53–54). In another possible reference to these experiments, a letter written by an internee in the UMAP states that a fellow internee was taken to a camp for the mentally ill after seeing a psychiatrist.<sup>30</sup> Héctor Santiago, a former UMAP internee who was sent to camps for homosexuals, further described the medical experiments to “cure” homosexuality:

They thought they could apply that [Pavlovian experiments] to the gays. Then they would give you an insulin shock and an electric shock while they showed you photos of nude men and afterwards they gave you, while they gave you food, gave cigars, they showed films of heterosexual sex. They thought like that they could ... convert you into a heterosexual ... Sometimes they left you without food and water for three days and then they showed you photos of nude men and later they gave you food when they showed you the photos of the women. If you are not diabetic, and they give you an insulin shot, it shocks you, you urinate and defecate and vomit ... Electric shock ... you lost your memory and two or three days after you don’t know who you were and you are catatonic and you cannot speak.

The therapy would be repeated until “they think they were successful ... after the treatments they interviewed you and then they asked you about women and if you were having relations with men ... you were smart and you learned that if you say yes to everything that they asked you, they stop the whole thing” (Santiago). In the film *Conducta Impropia*, Cuban poet Heberto Padilla also discussed these Pavlovian experiments in the UMAP. Santiago reported that the government realized these abusive medical experiments were ineffective and terminated them after six to eight months. Unfortunately, because of the scarcity of testimony by gay former internees, generalizations cannot be made about the exact nature of these medical experiments or how frequently they were carried out. However, medical experiments of some sort were certainly conducted in the UMAP camps with the intention of “curing” homosexuality.

Ultimately, the Revolution never transformed the homosexual into the *hombre nuevo* and internees at the UMAP persisted in their non-gender-conforming behavior. While working as a doctor at one camp, Llovio overheard a lieutenant shouting angrily about the unauthorized activities of the internees: “Last night, they had a party in the barracks ... [for] a goddamn wedding ... they decorated the barracks ... It looked just like a church ... with a wedding dress and everything!” (157). During a hurricane in 1966, one barrack of *pájaros* (gay men) pulled off a fashion show, transforming their *verde olivo* uniforms into bikinis (Blanco 76). Alberto Muñoz remembered that at camp Laguna Grande he saw “the pride with which the majority boasted of their homosexuality.” Unsurprisingly, there was also plenty of sexual activity at the UMAP camps. Muñoz recalled that in his camp the area behind the

bathrooms was “the meeting place of the homosexuals.” In addition, some UMAP officials were removed and put to trial for having sexual relations with the internees (Blanco 75; Muñoz). As one gay former internee put it, “They put all the homosexuals together, and what they do, they fuck with the guards ... At night, the gays escape and they fuck with the soldier, they fuck with the peasant, they fuck with everybody” (Santiago).

### The Legacy of the UMAP

During Canadian journalist Paul Kidd’s startling 1966 encounter in rural Cuba, he managed to enter the barracks, take photos, and even speak with internees. Kidd, the sole third-party source regarding the UMAP camps, described what he witnessed as “forced-labor camp[s]” and a source of “almost slave” labor (Kidd 1969, 24). In the exile community, the UMAP camps are similarly remembered as Cuba’s “concentration camps.” Historian Enrique Ros’s book on the UMAP camps echoes an oft-repeated maxim amongst the former internees: “The UMAP, where there was never a human gesture” (231). Interestingly, one former internee responded to this dictum in his memoir by regarding it as hyperbole, explaining that although he respects “the judgment of the author, who like everyone, certainly suffered very much, my experience was different ... I met respectable officials who, from their point of view, tried to accomplish their work in the best way possible ... at the same time I met others ... far from humane” (Muñoz). Clearly, the experiences of UMAP internees resist broad generalizations and cannot conform to a single, concentration-camp narrative. Instead, the varied experiences of UMAP internees reflect how the camps were a vital component of the Cuban Revolution’s diverse economic, social, and political goals. What ties together the narrative of the UMAP is a revolution bent on achieving a fantastical, communist utopia – a Cuba where record *zafras* catapulted the economy into abundant prosperity, a Cuba where everyone’s allegiance was dedicated exclusively to the Revolution, and a Cuba where no one was homosexual. Forty-two years after the closure of the camps, Fidel Castro himself finally decided their legacy in response to an interview question regarding the UMAP: “Yes, there were moments of great injustice, a great injustice!”<sup>31</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Kidd, “Cuba Expels Reporter,” *Edmonton Journal*, September 10, 1966, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Enrique Ros, *La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004), 9, 254, 278.

<sup>4</sup> Lillian Guerra, “Gender policing, homosexuality and the new patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965–70,” *Social History* 35.3 (2010): 268; Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 55–81.

<sup>5</sup> The term *revolucionario* connotes a patriotic Cuban communist who supports the government and Fidel Castro.

<sup>6</sup> José Caballero Blanco, *Una Muerte A Plazos* (2nd Edition. Lexington: D’Har Services, 2008), 155; Ros, *La UMAP*, 15; Emilio Izquierdo, interview with author, December 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Ros, *La UMAP*, 13; Jorge Domínguez, *Armies and politics in Latin America* (Holmes & Meier, 1976), 324.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the 35,000 figure is an estimate of the total number of internees. The number of internees at any given moment may have been lower. The reason for the discrepancy between the total number of internees and the number of internees at a given moment is that internees had to be replaced due to escapes, medical discharges, deaths, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the difficulty of researching this topic in Cuba, this assertion is not a quantitatively backed claim but an educated guess based on the author’s survey of available testimony.

<sup>10</sup> “Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción,” *Granma*, April 14, 1966, 8; “Vacaciones en la UMAP por fiestas de fin de año,” *Granma*, December 13, 1966, 1; “Vacaciones desde mañana a los de UMAP,” *Granma*, December 20, 1966, 5; José Armas, “En los cañaverales,” *Verde Olivo*, April 17, 1966, 8; Carlos Selva Yero, “Operación: Testigos de Jehovah,” *Verde Olivo*, April 23, 1966, 22–24; José Armas, “Ascensos en las UMAP,” *Verde Olivo*, June 12, 1966, 31–33; P. E. Cabrera, “Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción: Un recorrido,” *Verde Olivo*, March 19, 1967, 34–38; Luis Pavón, “¿Qué es la UMAP?” *Verde Olivo*, March 27, 1967; “Las Brigadas de Las UMAP,” *Verde Olivo*, May 15, 1967, 38; P. E. Cabrera, “Un millón en 75 días,” *Verde Olivo*, May 7, 1967, 19–21; José Armas, “Premios en las UMAP,” *Verde Olivo*, October 30, 1967, 14–16; Alberto González Muñoz, *Dios No Entra en mi Oficina*, (4th Edition, 2012), eBook.

<sup>11</sup> “Hablemos de ‘Comentemos’” *Mella*, October 1, 1964, 14; “Los Vagos se disfrazan de enfermitos,” *Mella*,

October 5, 1967, 9.

**12** The author uses “men” in lieu of a gender-neutral term to emphasize that, in all likelihood, nearly all internees were male. All available testimony from male, former UMAP internees concurs that all UMAP internees were male. The fact that the UMAP was technically part of the SMO further strengthens the argument that nearly all former UMAP internees were male. Historian Lillian Guerra, however, reports that women were also interned at work camps. See *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 254. For more testimony regarding women in work camps, see *Ocho Amigos*, 70–71.

**13** “Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción: Un recorrido,” *Verde Olivo*, March 19, 1967, 37; “Las Brigadas de Las UMAP,” *Verde Olivo*. May 15, 1967, 38.

**14** *Dichrostachys cinerea*, a weed in Cuba.

**15** As described, the *político* was the camp official in charge of politically educating UMAP internees.

**16** Blanco, *Una Muerte*, 56; Real Academia Española, “cordel,” <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=cordel>.

**17** Schools where students split their time between learning in class and working in agriculture.

**18** Jorge G. Castañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 178. In addition to camp Guanahacabibes, another interesting precursor to the UMAP was the trial of Marcos Rodríguez. In 1964, Rodríguez (better known as “Marquitos”) was found guilty of treason and executed. Since Rodríguez’s peers perceived him as gay, the transcripts from the trial provide insight into how Cubans connected being homosexual with being un-revolutionary. See *The Taming of Fidel Castro* by Maurice Halperin.

**19** See Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s “Socialism and Man in Cuba.”

**20** Alfredo Guevara, former head of the Cuban film institute ICAIC, is a common example. Lumsden, *Machos*, 64; Santiago, interview with author, September 8, 2013.

**21** As before, this assertion is not a quantitatively backed claim but an educated guess based on the author’s survey of available testimony.

**22** Jehovah’s Witnesses should not be lumped together with Protestant sects. From the perspective of Cubans, however, Protestant religions and sects such as Jehovah’s Witnesses from the United States all seemed *protestante*.

**23** “Discurso pronunciado por el comandante Fidel Castro Ruz,” March 13, 1963, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1963/esp/f130363e.html>.

**24** “Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción,” *Granma*; “¿Qué es la UMAP?” *Verde Olivo*; Yero, “Operación: Testigos de Jehovah,” *Verde Olivo*.

**25** “Cuba: Information on the treatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses by the authorities,” *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6aba994.html>; “Testigos de Jehová ganan espacios en Cuba,” *Cubanet*, December 28, 1998, accessed June 23, 2013, <http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y98/dec98/28o14.htm>; “Celebran asambleas Testigos de Jehová,” *Cubanet*, December 7, 2006, <http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y06/dec06/08a2.htm>.

**26** The author does not represent these cases as brainwashing because that would imply that the camp *político* played a prominent role in the UMAP. Testimony from former internees, however, has neither emphasized the role of the *político* nor characterized the UMAP as an instance of “brainwashing.”

**27** A person who is considered un-revolutionary because they adopt clothing styles of capitalist countries. See *In the Fist of the Revolution*, 203–4.

**28** *Hombre nuevo* refers to a term Che Guevara used to describe the communist man of the future. See Che’s “Socialism and Man in Cuba.” For analysis of how the concept of the “New Man” was incompatible with homosexuality, see *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba*, 165.

**29** It must be stressed that the association of homosexuality with capitalism also played an extremely important role in rationalizing the Revolution’s policies against homosexuals. See *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba*, 165–66



and *Machos*, 65.

**30** Letter from unidentified former internee to Héctor Santiago, dated March 3, 1966. Part of the “Héctor Santiago Papers” available at the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection, <http://proust.library.miami.edu/findingaids/?p=collections/findingaid&id=504>.

**31** Carmen Saade, “Soy el responsable de la persecución a homosexuales que hubo en Cuba: Fidel Castro,” *La Jornada*, August 31, 2010, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/08/31/index.php?section=mundo&article=026e1mun>.

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