History, organization and belief among Cuban "plantado" political prisoners, 1959-1993

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History, organization and belief among Cuban “plantado” political prisoners, 1959–1993

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HISTORY, ORGANIZATION AND BELIEF AMONG CUBAN
"PLANTADO" POLITICAL PRISONERS 1959-1993

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
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in
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ABSTRACT

Anti-Castro activists began organizing guerrilla groups in the early 1960's to oppose the revolutionary government of Cuba. The perception that the new regime posed a threat to religion and pre-existing cultural values were among the motives for this activity. This thesis presents three case studies of individuals who due to their beliefs, became guerrillas, were imprisoned for that activity, and who subsequently refused to participate in the prison reeducation program. The findings of this study indicate that ideology and beliefs function to provide meaningful explanations to social life, and are not necessarily thin veils for self interest masquerading as principle. Rather, important religious and cultural beliefs take on a life of their own independent of material self interest; this allows for individuals to commit to causes where there are powerful incentives to renounce one's beliefs.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ................................................................................ iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................ v

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
  Belief Formation ....................................................................................... 5
  From Belief to Action ............................................................................. 7
  Methods ................................................................................................... 11
  Historical Background .......................................................................... 14

CHAPTER TWO: JOSE THE SOLDIER ......................................................... 18

CHAPTER THREE: VICTOR THE GUAJIRO ............................................. 39

CHAPTER FOUR: CARLOS THE STUDENT .............................................. 49

CHAPTER FIVE: PLANTADOS ................................................................. 57

CHAPTER SIX: STATE SECURITY ............................................................ 60

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE TRIAL ................................................................. 67

CHAPTER EIGHT: ISLE DE PINOS ............................................................ 71

CHAPTER NINE: LA CABANA ................................................................. 81

CHAPTER TEN: THE REHABILITATION PROGRAM ............................... 89

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSIONS ...................................................... 97

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................... 105
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William R. Yaworsky
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents the stories of three veterans of Cuban political prisons as case studies in the persistence of belief in the face of coercive environments. These men were interviewed in Las Vegas, four to fifteen years after their release, but their recollections remain vivid. All of these men were "plantados", those who refused reeducation by the Castro regime. The thesis approaches their story from a cultural and symbolic perspective in which the understanding of the meanings which individuals place on events in their lives and the choices that they must make are the primary focus of interest. By studying their life stories from the perspective of the actors, the thesis contributes to our understanding both of the process of the formation of belief, and of the dynamics of systems of incarceration which are commonly a feature of authoritarian regimes in both the developed and undeveloped worlds.

I chose to employ case studies for both theoretical and methodological reasons. The men who shared their stories with me came from all races and classes of Cuban society before the revolution, and apart from the system they confronted, their lives offered few superficial similarities. By using case studies, the formation of belief in each separate instance could be examined without generalizing and obliterating important aspects of the process. The data in this study supported those theoretical points of view which stress the
importance of primary group interaction in the formation and maintenance of closely held beliefs. A case study approach enabled me to examine the underlying processes of enculturation which produced the ability of these men to withstand severe deprivation and stress when confronting one of the most powerful and long lasting regimes in the Americas.

The three men whose stories are the focus of the thesis were selected from interviews with nearly a dozen former prisoners who have emigrated to Las Vegas. The people featured in this paper have been verified to me as actual plantados by Vivian Martinez, formerly of Catholic Relief Services, who was involved in the process of administering their arrival from Cuba to Las Vegas. All were able to produce identification cards which listed them as members of the Association of Historic Cuban Political Prisoners, and two of them are listed in the appendix of the book Twenty Years and Forty Days: Life in A Cuban Prison by Jorge Valls (1986). A photograph of one of my informants appears in an edition of Boyardo (newsletter of the former prisoners association) and the signature of another appears on a prison petition reproduced in the book Cuba: Memorias de un Presienero Politico (Pardo, 1992). Approval for this work was obtained from the UNLV Office of Research Administration on June 4, 1993, prior to any formal interviewing.

Because each story is unique, the cases are not presented as typical of all political prisoners. However, many of the elements in their stories can be found in the interviews I conducted with other former prisoners in Las Vegas. These common threads allow the anthropologist to examine the cultural processes which produce dedication to ideals and willingness to endure extreme hardship in service to a political ideology.
The conception of ideology as a clash of interests masquerading as a clash of principles is a much discussed idea in 20th century intellectual thought. The idea was anticipated by various theoreticians from Machiavelli to Marx, and has been elaborated on by such contemporary anthropologists as Marvin Harris (1979). Ideology is presented as a weapon, a mask that thinly veils material self interest. One example in anthropology of this conception of ideology as a rationalization for material relationships is Harris' argument that Aztec cannibalism arose and persisted not due to religious beliefs, but as a practical solution to a protein deficiency. The religious sanctioning of cannibalism is presented as something of an afterthought, an ideological garland of a cost-efficient material solution (Harris, 1979). In a wider sense, this viewpoint of ideology as a cover for self interest has gained a strong acceptance in the general public as well.

Clifford Geertz critiques interest theory's insights, arguing that it and similar materialist explanations have often lapsed into viewing beliefs solely as a form of narrow utilitarianism (1973:204). Too often, Geertz contends, the other functions of ideology are overlooked. Geertz notes that ideology provides a symbolic outlet for emotional disturbances generated by social disequalibrium (ibid:204). Moreover, interest theory also has difficulty explaining the persistence of belief in cases where there are powerful material incentives to switch ideologies. Interest theory undervalues the extent to which ideologies sustain individuals during times of strain, and provide meaningful explanations to sociocultural phenomena. Geertz traces this line of reasoning through Durkheim, Freud and Parsons.

Whatever else ideologies may be—projections of unacknowledged fears, disguises for ulterior motives, phatic expressions of group solidarity—they are, most distinctly, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the
creation of collective conscience... and it is in turn, the attempt of ideologies to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them, that accounts both for the ideologies highly figurative nature and for the intensity with which, once accepted, they are held. (Geertz, ibid:220).

This paper interprets the behavior, beliefs and experiences of a certain group of people from this viewpoint of ideology as a struggle for meaning. The plantados behavior in prison supports such an interpretation. Most had been sentenced to 15-20 year prison terms and were living in harsh conditions that included separation from family, inadequate medical attention and subjugation to various forms of psychological and physical abuse, including both beatings and bayonetings. If they would only accept the political rehabilitation program, they would be allowed more humane treatment, more frequent family visits, conjugal visits, an end to violent treatment from the guards, better food and medicine, and finally, an earlier release from prison. The plantados refused any and all compromise with the regime and would not participate in the rehabilitation program. For this refusal, the treatment meted out to them remained violent in nature and many were injured or killed.

Interviews indicate that my informants refused rehabilitation due to their adherence to beliefs that interest theorists would have labeled as masks. My study indicates that beliefs which have been enculturated into individuals at a young age take on a life of their own independent of material circumstances. They provide a source of meaning in which individuals can act purposefully and meaningfully, regardless of any perceived or latent self interest. These peoples motives for resisting were not, by any reasonable criteria I could come up with, based primarily on material incentives. Certain occurrences during the war and subsequent imprisonment have led me to
conclude that among the former prisoners that I have studied, personal beliefs and cultural values were more important than any cost-benefit analysis of their economic position when attempting to determine motives for resistance. This does not imply that they never acted in their own self interest or that they were not capable of calculating their options like anyone else; rather, I argue that certain cultural values and beliefs - both religious and political ideas - did at times act as exceptionally strong counterweights to material self interest.

Belief Formation

Spiro's (1984) discussion of belief formation provides a persuasive explanation of the power of these structures. According to Spiro, once a cultural proposition is acquired as a personal belief by social actors, it becomes a psychological event (a private and emotional element is added). The process by which these cultural frames inform personal beliefs and how social actions consequently construct social reality can be diagrammed as follows:

1. As a result of normal enculturation processes, social actors learn about the propositions (cultural frames).

2. The actors come to understand their traditional meanings as displayed in authoritative texts or by recognized experts.

3. The actors internalize the propositions and hold them to be true, correct or right. It is then that they are acquired as personal beliefs. The transformation of a cultural proposition into a culturally constructed belief serves to structure their perceptual world and guide their actions.

4. At this level, culturally constituted beliefs serve not only to guide but to instigate action - they process emotional, motivational and cognitive salience. Hence, anti-communism now becomes more than just a cultural
proposition for the political prisoner; it is internalized as part of the motivational forces and encourages him to action. Willing to act on his beliefs, the prisoner is not afraid to die and is prepared to face decades of imprisonment in order to stand up for his beliefs and values.

Spiro claims that the emotions and the self vary as a function of the diversity in cultures. I would suggest, alternately, that the relationship between the self and culture is better described not as dependent variable and cause, but as mutually interactive. Humans constantly create and recreate culture, interpret and reinterpret events, making the idea of a contradictory and subjective social reality with contingent meaning a viable conception.

The relativistic implications of this imply that cultural frames are susceptible of neither confirmation or disconfirmation (Spiro, 1984:336). This is because, in Spiro's understanding of Shweder, they are (1) arbitrary, being grounded in neither logic nor experience, and (2) being arbitrary, they are neither rational nor irrational but non-rational. Hence, beliefs lie outside the realm of the hard sciences, and the anthropologist must explicate the internal rules of coherence native to them. Cultural frames construct, more than reflect, social reality. In this sense, cultural frames are irreconcilable with one another.

So far, all that we have basically said is that people internalize beliefs and then act on them. What interests me is why we accept certain political beliefs and reject others. Under what conditions are we likely to act with force to further political goals? Under what conditions are recruitment into guerrilla armies likely to occur? What or who, actually influences genuine political development or conversion?
From Belief To Action

Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, (1991) addresses the issues of recruitment and mobilization in Latin American guerrilla groups. He has proposed a model that is relevant in both explaining the *plantados* original involvement with the clandestine opposition against Castro, and their subsequent behavior in prison, including the refusal to participate in rehabilitation. Wickham-Crowley first rejects the idea of "consciousness raising" as a model of mobilization for being untenable in the light of the majority of data derived from the study of insurgent groups. Consciousness raising as a process of mobilization can be diagrammed in the following manner:

1. There exist higher and lower levels of consciousness.

2. Peasants (guajiros), and the urban poor who fought against the revolution are ordinarily at a relatively low level of consciousness.

3. Peasants (or in the case of the political prisoners, counterrevolutionaries) do not understand the reality of their own social world. Corollary: The *plantados* are controlled by and have internalized the ideology of the ruling class or dominant group, and hence are suffering from "false consciousness" and cannot see where their true interests lie.

4. The world view internalized by the plantados inhibits their potential for revolutionary thought. Corollary: Acquisition of a different world view through consciousness raising will lead to radical acts.

5. The *plantados* can attain a higher level of consciousness only through interaction with revolutionary intellectuals.

Wickham-Crowley takes a relativistic stance, any converts to the new "consciousness" should not be regarded as holding an epistemologically privileged position (ibid:108).
I do not argue with the idea that we internalize the beliefs of our culture and then act on them, rather I take exception to the context in which this consciousness raising model conceives how certain ideas will be accepted and others rejected. Political beliefs are most likely to be accepted by the individual when the source of those beliefs stem from tight-knit, primary groups, that is, from people who with the subject has intimate and strong positive emotional bonds. To expect that people will accept ideologies derived from coercive secondary groups (aquaintances, strangers, people who are not emotionally close to the subject) which are already identified as the enemy in the individual's current belief system, to convert to a group that has already physically mistreated them, is unrealistic. Hence political rehabilitation is unlikely to recruit many genuine converts, those who join are most likely to be solely interested in reduced prison sentences and are ideologically dubious. And when proselytizing in this manner among the "hard-core" politically committed members of the guerrilla movement, the government can expect little more than rejection and the continued, even deepening adherence to previous political and religious beliefs.

Wickham-Crowley instead proposes his "attachment-network model of mobilization." This model is consistent with my data and outline the weaknesses of the consciousness raising model as an explanatory device. The group dynamics inherent in the attachment-network model would be for my informants, conducive for joining an insurgent group. The attachment-network model would also imply likely failure for such programs as re-education and rehabilitation that were offered in prison. While many prisoners undoubtedly participated in this program, it is highly unlikely that
it is going to be anywhere near as effective at recruiting or creating genuine converts as the attachment-network model.

I accept Wickham-Crowley's proposition regarding recruitment and will present it here:

Proposition: Guerrillas do not secure backing and recruits primarily through unstructured attempts at "consciousness raising." If shifts in peoples world views do take place-whether before or after recruitment into the guerrilla army- such ideological conversions will tend to take place through the operations of structured social networks, just as similar political and religious conversions have done elsewhere (Wickham-Crowley, 1991:20).

This is in direct contrast to the "consciousness raising" model of political proselytizing, which views ideologies as rational entities accepted or rejected based on the relationship solely between the target group and the proselytizing agent. It undervalues pre-existing social ties when determining the likely chances of successful conversion.

The attachment network model of mobilization, which I view as superior, runs like this:

1 Existence or formation of attachment network (In our case, kinship, religious orientation and schooling, primary group bonding in the armed forces).

2 Social pressures for ideological shifts toward network norm (gradual internalization of values and beliefs that are congruent with powerful primary group networks).

3 Ideological conversion, realignment (full identification with the guerrillas)
Successful recruitment, resource mobilization (active phase of guerrilla war)

Wickham-Crowley further adds that this model rests on "a wealth of sociological evidence that we form our political and religious beliefs in group contexts, often primary-group ones." (ibid:21).

One organization that followed this model is the CIA itself. The following quotation comes directly from one of their guerrilla recruitment and training manuals.

Primary Groups and Secondary Groups. Another principle of sociology is that we humans forge or change our opinions from two sources: primarily, through our association with our family, comrades, or intimate friends; and secondarily, through distant associations such as acquaintances in churches, clubs or committees, labor unions or governmental organizations. The Armed Propaganda team cadres should join the first groups in order to persuade them to follow the policies of our movement, because it is from this type of group that the opinions or changes of opinion come (Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare, 1983:26).

Moreover, it does not rely on the highly dubious assumptions that there exist "true" and "false" or higher or lower states of consciousness, or on the corollary assumption that people are too stupid to understand their own situations (Wickham-Crowly, 1991:21).

This model would also help explain the ineffectiveness of the governments various reeducation and rehabilitation programs offered to the prisoners after incarceration. The prison reeducation programs can be viewed as having relied on the extensive use of secondary groups (prison employees, teachers, political cadre) employing a "consciousness raising" model of political recruitment and conversion. The Cuban government was probably aware of the importance that primary group attachments play in political conversion, for they would have their "revolutionary instructors" of the rehabilitation programs eat sleep and live with the trainees. None of the ex-
prisoners in the rehabilitation program who I interviewed ever looked at the political cadre as part of the "in-group." They were still regarded as jailers. The "rehabilitated" prisoners said that they participated only to get out of prison faster, never became Marxists, and left for the United States at the first opportunity. Those prisoners who rejected rehabilitation (delineating the "in-group" from the "out-group" very clearly) and became "plantados" (die-hards, recalcitrants) to this day rely on one another as their primary support network. Since most came to the US. and Las Vegas without any family or money, the bonds that united them first in the guerrilla movement and then in prison find formal expression in the Organization of Historical Political Prisoners of Cuba. They joined the commandos through beliefs and networks formed from primary groups, they rejected rehabilitation because it violated their dearest beliefs and values (which were gradually formed from primary groups). Genuine conversion to ideologies being proselytized by secondary groups already identified as the enemy will rarely if ever occur.

Methods

I was first introduced to the former prisoners by a social worker who was familiar with their stories. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, as the informants did not understand or speak English. Most interviews were conducted with the help of a fluent bilingual interpreter. Occasionally I conducted interviews alone.

Most of my informants live in the area behind Vegas World known informally as the Naked City. It is a poor section of town with high rates of crime and gang violence. Most of my informants are employed in the casino industry as dishwashers. Some have kinsmen here in Las Vegas, but none
live with family members. The network of fellow former prisoners is the crucial social structure in their lives.

The accounts of the former prisoners are history from the point of view of the actors involved. The narratives are subjective documents. As such, they are a rich mixture of memories from as long ago as 1959, and subsequent experiences. Many elements are reformulations of earlier held beliefs. The passage of years affects memory, and translating a foreign language compounds the problem of interpretation.

A postmodernist perspective enables us to study such accounts without being trapped by issues of accuracy or representativeness. The data in the body of this work was informed by what Geertz (1983) defines as “experience-near” and “experience-distant” concepts. Experience-near concepts are those in which a subject, in our case an informant, might naturally use to define what he or his associates see, feel or think, and which he would readily understand when applied by others (ibid:53). An experience-distant concept is one which specialists such as anthropologists use as definitions in order to advance philosophical, practical or scientific concepts. Geertz (1983) cites “love” as an experience-near concept and “object-cathexis” as an experience-distant one. In my study, “Freedom Commando” would translate to experience-near and terms such as “insurgent” and “revitalization” would be defined as experience-distant. Unlike the distinction between etics or emics, the concepts are not polar opposites, but vary by matter of degree (ibid:53).

This thesis does not describe events using solely one or the other of the concepts. This is because neither concept is preferred over the other:

Confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon. The real question, and the one Malinowski raised...is what role the
two sorts of concepts play in anthropological analysis. Or, more exactly, how, in each case, ought one to deploy them so as to produce an interpretation of the way a people lives which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geographer. (ibid:53).

As always with ethnographies, the degree of cooperation from the various informants varied. Of the dozen or so prisoners I interviewed most seemed genuinely glad to talk to me. However one was nervous and agreed to only one interview, and informed me that Castro had spies and sympathizers in Las Vegas. Another informant, who I regarded as an excellent source, used to jokingly ask me if I worked for the CIA. I discarded using a tape recorder after one interview with a group of informants was interrupted by one of them yelling to another who was speaking (in Spanish) “Shut up! The tape recorder is on!” Hence pseudonyms are used in this thesis to protect the informants privacy.

Interviews were conducted in informants apartments, homes, and public restaurants. Generally three people would be present: myself, the informant, and the interpreter. As my interpreters were attractive Latino females, I had to consider the possibility that my informants would be reluctant to reveal anything that would make them appear weak; but generally, their demeanor and stories remained consistent whether the interpreter was present or not.

The informants appear genuinely interested in conveying their personal histories and opinions accurately and truthfully. Etics, emics, experience-near and experience-far categories aside, inaccuracies are rendered explicable when one remembers one of the assumptions of my study: this is history from the point of view of the actors involved.
Historical Background

Before turning to my case studies, a brief overview of the political developments of mid-20th century Cuba is appropriate. Cuba gained independence from Spain after a war (1895-1898) ended in victory for the Cuban independence forces, aided by the United States. However, US help in the war precipitated deeper US involvement in Cuban internal affairs. The Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution (1901) gave the United States explicit permission to intervene militarily in Cuba. Preservation of Cuban independence, property and liberty were cited as grounds for intervention (Wright, 1991). The US exercised this option and intervened militarily in 1906, 1912, and 1917. Cuba developed as a constitutional democracy, but experienced periods of military rule alternating with civilian control.

In 1933, Cuban strongman Gerardo Machado was overthrown in a coup led by army sergeant Fulgencio Batista. Batista in turn handed the presidency over to a moderate civilian, Ramon Grau San Martin. However, Batista overthrew San Martin four months later and remained an influence in Cuban politics for the next two decades, serving as president (1944-1948). After a period of civilian rule, (1948-1952) Batista launched another coup on March 10, 1952. This time a wide array of political parties, which had been anticipating the upcoming elections, opposed him (Wright, 1991). Clandestine cells grew out of both major political parties (the Authenticos and the Ortodoxos) and university students formed the Directorate Revolucionario (Revolutionary Directorate, or DR) to oppose Batista. Strikes, propaganda, and urban demonstrations became common.

In 1953, a young Ortodoxo lawyer named Fidel Castro launched an armed attack on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago, Cuba. The attack
failed and Castro was captured, but Castro gained instant national celebrity. After a 15 month imprisonment Castro was granted amnesty and left for Mexico, where he organized an invasion force. This force became known as the 26th of July Movement, in commemoration of the date of the Moncada barracks attack. With this force, Castro returned to Cuba and in 1956 launched a guerrilla war in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.

Castro’s force was not the only, or primary, opposition to Batista. The DR in particular, led a bloody and powerful urban guerrilla campaign against the dictator. The DR nearly toppled Batista during a daring attack on the presidential palace that saw the attackers fight their way to the third floor, where Batista himself was just able to avoid assassination. The ensuing repression killed much of the DR leadership (Wright, 1991).

Batista’s preoccupation with the urban front allowed Castro to strengthen his position in the mountains without much interference. His growing power forced Batista to launch a major offensive in 1958 to defeat Castro’s force. The offensive failed, support for Batista crumbled. Batista left for exile in December of 1958.

In January of 1959 Castro assumed his place as head of the new Cuban government. During the subsequent power struggle between the various victorious factions, Castro’s group, with the support of the communists, gained the upper hand. In April of 1961 Castro declared his program to be a socialist revolution, and in December 1961 he publicly declared himself a Marxist-Leninist. This announcement helped spark a second war (1961-1966) during which anti-communist guerrillas unsuccessfully tried to remove Castro from power.
The case studies represent men whose experiences varied broadly under the Batista regime. The story of José the soldier is the first case. As a young boy growing up in Havana, José learned from his padrino about the evils of communism and how it sought to destroy their religion and beliefs, both Catholicism and Abakua (an Afro-Cuban religion). Later when José joined the army, he learned from his fellow soldiers and officers that Castro was a communist and in league with the Soviets. During those impressionable years, in the midst of some bloody fighting in Oriente Province against the Fidelistas, José's loyalty had been cemented. When the war ended in December of 1958, the primary group most closely tied with José at the time—his army buddies from 22nd Company—had gone over to the guerrilla group "La Rosa Blanca" to continue the struggle. José joined them and would eventually be imprisoned for his activities.

The second case is that of Victor the guajiro. He had learned since childhood from his parents about the dangers of communism, and when a childhood friend formed a regional guerrilla group, Victor joined without hesitation.

The third study is the case of Carlos, who in 1959 was an idealistic 14 year old university student in a Catholic school in Havana. Carlos's then evolving world view centered around Catholicism, with the idea that Castro and communism were anti-Christian in nature. Communism had early on been identified to Carlos as a threat to his religion. His father's position as a second lieutenant in the army of Batista gave Carlos a second identifiable primary group tie with people holding anti-communist views. A third primary group source of belief formation came from a small group of his friends who were Fidelista soldiers forming a cabal to fight the revolution's leftward tilt.
Influenced by these sources, Carlos joined the "Unidad Anti-Communista" and was imprisoned for counter-revolutionary activities.

All three (Victor, Carlos and José) would eventually be captured, convicted of terrorism and sentenced to long prison terms. All three would reject the prison rehabilitation programs as being undignified, farcical affronts to their deepest beliefs. Now I would like to turn to their stories to show how this is so.
CHAPTER TWO

JOSE THE SOLDIER

Religion is...a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz, 1973:90).

This now famous description of religion by Geertz aptly describes the world of José, a world rich in symbolism and religious expression. Through normal enculturation processes from primary group sources such as his father, padrino, and later his fellow soldiers, José internalized a world view centered around belief in the saints and a perception that communism sought to replace religion with Marxism. When the new social order of 1959 appeared likely to violate the moral order that José had been taught, he saw no recourse other than armed guerrilla action.

José’s religious education began in a barrio noted for its religious activity. The Jesus Maria district of Havana was a poor barrio where José passed through his childhood in the 1940s. It was a busy district visited by both rich and poor alike for one reason: to receive the blessings of the Saints. Jesus Maria was the home of some of Havana’s most knowledgeable and experienced Santeros, and like many Cubans, José and his family grew up with great faith in them.

The religion known as Santeria is a syncretism of beliefs derived from Catholicism and the Yoruba religion of Africa brought to Cuba through the
slave trade. When the Nigerian-Yoruba slaves arrived in the new world, they were deeply influenced by the catholic saints which they identified with their gods and goddesses. They believed that their gods had died mythical deaths and had now returned to life in the form of the Catholic saints. Santeria is a common religion in Cuba, and involves belief in the powers of the Yoruba Orishas (deities), now syncretized as Catholic saints. The central tenants of santeria are the worship the saints, observation of their feasts, obedience to their commands and to conduct their rituals. In exchange, followers gain supernatural powers, protection from evil, and the ability to predict and influence the future (Gonzalez-Wippler, 1982:ix). Santeria in Cuba also goes by the name Lucumi.

There are three main sects in the Cuban variant of Santeria. The first is the Lucumi, or santeria proper. It is the most common. The second sect is known as Palo-Mayobe or Palo Monte, and traces its origins back to the Bantu tribes of the Congo. The third sect is called the Abakua, which has as its core an all male secret society, and its followers are known as nanigos. The nanigos trace their ancestry back to the Efik of the Niger delta (Murphy, 1988:32). Many whites considered the nanigos to be political subversives and gangsters, in part due to the inordinate secrecy associated with the sect, and also because the Abakua had as its stronghold some of the poorer and crime ridden barrios in Havana- Belen, Manglar, Cayoguesa, and Jesus Maria (ibid 34). There was also a certain amount of political rivalry between the Abakua and the Palo-Mayobe, which centered around mutual and conflicting accusations of the use of black magic.

It was here in Jesus Maria that José and his family lived. They were of African ancestry and were followers of the Abakua. Before he was even born,
it had been determined that the "Orisha" (guardian saint) Saint Lazarus would protect José. "Lazar" is also known as Babalu-Aye, and aside from his kindness and compassion was famous for helping the sick (Gonzalez-Wippler, 1982:124). Saint Lazarus was also protecting José's grandparents.

Sometime between the ages of 7-10, José had been watching a parade during Armed Forces day. As the soldiers marched by, a stranger came up to José and gave him two pesos and a packet of leaflets to hand out. The leaflets were from a group called the Acción Revolucionario Guitera (Guitera Revolutionary Action). José was happy to get the pesos and began distributing the leaflets. Stamped on the leaflets were the "Hoz y un mattia" (hammer and sycle).

Another man stopped José and asked him from where he got the propaganda. Today, José believes that this second man was a member of BRAC- the Cuban secret police. José explained to him what happened and the man took the leaflets away. When José went home that day, he told his father and padrino what had happened.

José's padrino (godfather) was a man named Roberto Valdez-Montenegro. He was a man who José looked up to and respected for his wisdom. Valdez-Montenegro was the jefe of an agricultural union and was widely respected in the community for his ability and leadership qualities. The padrino's Saint was Santa Barbara, the goddess of war.

His father and Padrino began explaining to him that the man who gave him the money was a communist. The padrino began explaining to José the dangers of communism. "El terrorismo del comunismo". Not only was communism a threat to family and country, the Padrino said, but it was a
threat to our religion. José was too young to understand much about politics, but he would remember what his Padrino had taught him.

Cars of the rich would arrive at all hours of the day in Jesus Maria, and policemen, soldiers and their wives, rich whites, blacks, literally people from all walks of life would arrive to seek the blessings and protection of the Santos through the help of the santeros. Trucks with chickens and other animals earmarked for religious ceremonies were a common sight. José and his 18 brothers and sisters (his father had married more than once) quietly passed into their teens in this poor but exciting neighborhood.

By the mid 1950's it was obvious that the nation faced a political crisis. Although he was becoming increasingly isolated, Batista support was strongest in the Afro-Cuban community and among the practitioners of Santeria. José had gone through his asiento ceremony at age 16, (a rite of passage marking the transition to adulthood) where he had been initiated into fuller secrets of the Abakua sect, and now could interpret political events in the light of his newly acquired wisdom. Many observers (Bonachea and San Martin, 1974:132) agree that among the believers, there was a diversity of opinion on how to interpret the political developments. The 1957 palace attack sent a wave of alarms through the santeria community: Batista was supposed to be infallible and had the mission of leading Cuba, but only if he had the protection of the Saints. Some sent carved wooden profiles of the caudillo that had been blessed to the palace to help protect him. José says that Batista was under the personal protection of Santa Barbara, who was one of the most powerful of all the saints, and had her full backing. Others wondered if the attack was a message from the Saints to step down. Some anthropology students were believed to be the source of this rumor (ibid:132).
By this time José’s life had changed dramatically. In 1956 at the age 17, José had joined the army after dropping out of trade school due to his families economic difficulties, which arose after his father died from injuries suffered in an industrial accident. He had been sent to Oriente Province and put on a mortar team. By late 1958, the battalion was holed up for the decisive battle.

In the beginning back in 1956, things had been quite different. José was trained as a field soldier and sent to a field unit which participated in the early counterinsurgency actions against Castro. Back then they had Castro’s guerrillas on the run. The 22nd Company, 1st Battalion, which José was a member of, had ranged across Oriente province, always tracking the elusive subversives.

José’s battalion was commanded by Angel Sanchez Mosquera. Although there is widespread agreement that among other things, Batista’s army suffered from poor leadership and an almost universal reluctance to aggressively sweep deep into the Sierra on anti-guerrilla missions, this was not true of all units. Sanchez Mosquera is reported to have been one of the few officers who penetrated deep into the mountains, engaging in violent ambushes and counter ambushes (Bonachea and San Martin, 1974:104). José says that Sanchez-Mosquera was always out in front of the troops, and was protected by Santa Barbara (Goddess of war, patron of fire, thunder and lightning; she who brings victory over enemies and all difficulties). José’s mortar section had seen much combat supporting the infantry companies during these search and clear operations in the mountains. It was here that José came under his baptism of fire, an action in which three of his fellow soldiers died.
22nd Company itself was "devoted to" (under the protection of) the Virgin de Cobre, who doubled as the patron saint of Cuba as well. In order to gain further protection from the saints, and to purify their weapons, José and his fellow soldiers would perform magical spells called Ebbos. Using candles, water coconuts and candy, they performed rituals that furthered their military objectives through the help of the saints.

During the campaigning José would wear a crucifix around his neck, the army's "Viejo Poncho" (old Poncho) bulldog patch sewn firmly on his shoulder. The dog on the patch itself, "Viejo Poncho" was affectionately known as "chief of the army" and was under the protection of Santa Barbara. On his arm José had a tattoo of Christ drinking from the holy grail. Other soldiers wore necklaces of red and white beads symbolizing Santa Barbara (Chango) the god of war, or yellow ones representing the Virgin of La Caridad (Ochun). Black necklaces represented Saint Lazarus, white ones Obatala (the equivalent of Jesus) and white and blue ones Yemana (life).

While still in training, José had already been instructed in classes organized to discuss the necessity of defending the nation and the constitution from communist infiltration and sabotage. Now in the sierra, José learned from his fellow soldiers and the officers, more about politics and the dangers of communism. Specifically, how Castro and the rebels were in league with the Soviets. José says that they intercepted radio messages and found documents that proved Soviet complicity with the rebellion.

Aside from the communists, José was also aware of the mysterious powers of a large black bird called "Latinosa" that lived in the Sierra. Latinosa fed on the dead, but only after a small white bird called "La Carrida" tested the carrion for him by eating the eyes. If La Carrida did not die, it meant that it
was safe for **Latinosa** to eat. It was potentially dangerous for humans to touch **Latinosa**, because he did have mysterious powers and was also a symbol of God. **Latinosa** would get violently sick and vomit if touched by humans, because they were alive and he could only come into contact with the dead. José and the other soldiers maintained a healthy mutual respect with **Latinosa** whenever he was encountered during section battle drills.

These section battle drills had been unable to eliminate the enemy columns. José knew that the peasants had been helping Castro all along, and because of that, the battalion was in its current predicament.

During that decisive month of December 1958, José's section was surrounded. The company had been separated from the rest of the battalion, which was holed up in Moncada barracks, Santiago de Cuba, several miles away. By December 12, 22nd company had been entirely cut off on all sides by the rebel army and had been reduced to using all their mortars in a series of heavy bombardments in order to keep the rebels from closing with and destroying them. The fighting went on for 4 days, and by December 15, out of the original 178 men in the company, 8 were dead and close to 40 wounded, some seriously. Four Lieutenants had been ambushed and killed that day while trying to find a way out of the trap. José and his fellow soldiers were very worried.

It was Captain Amando Acosta who betrayed the company and tricked the majority into surrendering to the rebels. Fidel had Acosta in his back pocket - José was certain of that. But only some- José estimates about 80- surrendered. The Other 50-odd, veterans like José and his friends, would not. On the night of the 15th, they managed to force their way out of the trap. Armed with a Thompson .45 caliber submachine gun and four Colt .45 caliber
semi automatic pistols, José and four other soldiers quickly moved northwest across the countryside.

Three years later and several hundred miles to the west, José and his friends were again in uniform. Only this time they were the guerrillas. Castro's triumph in January of 1959 had left José and his fellow Batista soldiers desperate. Those who had escaped the destruction of 22 Company had drifted back to Havana or to their families and homes in the countryside. José had first stopped off at a sympathetic peasant's home. The peasant gave him some civilian clothing and a guitar case. Dressed as a civilian and toting a Thompson gun in his guitar case, José boarded a train from Santiago and arrived in Havana about a week later. José had a wife and relatives living in Havana, but it was too dangerous to stay at his home or with relatives. But he went to her home to talk to her one last time before disappearing. He told her straight out that if he were caught he would probably be shot. José told his wife to pray for him and left.

In addition to the apolitical civilian clothes that the peasant had given him, José had received green pants and a white t-shirt. The clothes were in style with Castro's fighters, who were now entering Havana in triumph. They would help José blend into the city, no longer dressed as a Batista soldier, but dressed as a revolutionary.

José could not return to his pre army life -before the war he had been a carpenter apprentice- without documentation. But he knew his barrio and knew who would be sympathetic to the cause. He kept in close contact with several other survivors of 22 Company. For a while they had lived in the streets of Havana, eating garbage and participating in Anti-Castro demonstrations. José would arrange to meet secretly with his wife and family
members. They would give him food, money and clothes. Sometimes José would sleep in the homes of sympathizers, other times in the streets. Soon José had gotten involved with an anti Castro group called the "AAA". (Most likely the Triple A of Sanchez Arango). José no longer remembers what the initials stood for, but thinks that it might have been "Alienicia Anticommunist de Los Americas". AAA was a creation of the old Authentico party. After Batista's 1952 coup that overthrew the authenticos, that party formed two clandestine organizations to oppose the dictatorship: AAA and the Authentic Organization. AAA was led by Aureliano Sanchez Arango, Mario Escoto, Pepe Utera and Mario Villar Roces. They began operating against Castro as soon as his communist intentions became apparent. AAA had close ties with Latin America's democratic left, and aside from former soldiers like José, it drew the support of university students.

AAA worked in alliance with a parallel guerrilla group called La Rosa Blanca. Rosa Blanca was run by an ex-Batista general named Pedraza who was in exile in Miami. An ex-captain from Castro's army who went by the name of "Cara Linda" commanded the AAA urban section that José belonged to. José says that operationally, the two groups acted as one, combined they had maybe 400 members, roughly 200 in each group. They operated 2 main fronts, one in Havana and one in the Pinar Del Rio mountains. Smaller fronts existed in other regions of the country. Aside from their ties to General Pedraza in Miami, they were also supported by the United States base commander at Guantanamo bay, an officer named Mckenzie. A base cook had introduced Mckenzie to José and several other representatives of the organization. Mckenzie predicted that communism would eventually die all around the world, told them to hold out and keep faith. Mckenzie gave them
money, some M-3 submachine guns, and most importantly, a small printing press. With the printer, the group was able to set up another method of provisioning themselves. They returned to Havana and began printing war bonds, which they would in turn sell to local merchants who they knew stood to lose everything if Castro went ahead with his drive to socialism. José says that most of the rich had fled to Miami, he reports that the merchants who supported the movement were middle class in nature.

They also began printing leaflets and other forms of propaganda. The leaflets would be targeted at parents and middle class students. The leaflets would state that if communism triumphed, then the rights of parentage would be taken away and children would be indoctrinated by the state. Communism would pit father against son, mother against daughter. José and his fellow activists would load the leaflets up in a vehicle and speed down the street, heaving bundles out the window at concentrations of people whenever the tactical situation permitted it.

Often at university demonstrations, an inside cadre would be stationed in the crowd when the leaflets were dropped to observe the target audience’s reactions. This was a role that José played on more than one occasion, and it was how the movement identified and recruited new members. If any of the students were overheard to be talking sympathetically about the leaflets or the movement, José would survey the situation. Based on his appraisal of the risks and suitability of the prospects, he would approach and announce that he was a member of the organization. They too could join the struggle if they were willing to die. José would tell them straight out that he was in the group because he had made that commitment to die if it were necessary. Only those who would pledge this death oath were accepted.
The new recruits were given easy and non-dangerous tasks at first: painting slogans on walls, delivering messages, throwing pamphlets, acting as informants. It would only be after the neophytes had completed a "hard action" that they would be fully admitted into the trusted inner circle of the cadre. A hard action was a rite of passage that consisted of armed action usually in the form of an assassination or commando attack. José gives this example: The organization had become aware that two informants named Jaime and Basquez had infiltrated them. The two were employed at the telephone company. José asked one of his contacts, a man named Loco Bringa, to arrange a meeting with them.

At the central park where they were to meet, a lone man stood at each corner: José, Loco Bringa, and two new men who were going through their first hard action. The two new men were armed and they had orders to kill Jaime and Basquez. A car pulled up, but all four of the urban guerrillas noticed two cars following the first. The two younger men panicked and fled, throwing their weapons away. José took off also, but he recognized as his primary duty the recovery of the weapons, he accomplished this and also escaped undetected. Later the two nervous young men would go on to complete a "hard action" and become distinguished and respected commandos.

José cites as his rite of passage as having been his baptism of fire in the Sierra Maestra during the Batista-Castro war. Three of José's fellow soldiers died in that shootout.

AAA and Rosa Blanca operated with the cellular structure common with urban guerrilla groups. A cell would comprise three people all with fictitious nombres de guerre for security purposes. They might not know a
single other member of the organization except for their one outside contact. This cellular structure ensured that if anyone were caught, he could only give away three other individuals (his two cell mates and the contact). José states that AAA had 3-5 person cells. José's cell had three persons, two men and a woman. José went by the name "Mongito" (a diminutive slang name for Raymond). José's primary role was to be a contact with the guerrilla "Focos" (secure base camps deep in the backcountry) in Santa Clara, Pinar del Rio and other rural areas. It was due to this role that he came to the conclusion that the group had 400 odd members, and through this role he became familiar with the cellular structure of the group as a whole.

The female member carried leaflets and was involved in propaganda dissemination. For these missions, she carried a .38 revolver. Her name was Mercedes and she was very brave and very pretty, and was devoted to Santa Barbara. Their outside contact, Loco Bringa, worked with them often. Another man, the chief, knew the identities of all the cell members in all the cells and often appeared in person to give orders. On occasion he would use runners. As José knew more than three outside persons the cell was not hermetically sealed, but it operated for well over two years without detection.

José maintains that Castro formed the CDR's -Committees to Defend the Revolution- after AAA/Rosa Blanca disrupted one of his university speeches with firecrackers and "Communism will take your children" leaflets. People were rounded up and arrested for this action, but the government dragnet failed to catch any of the actual perpetrators.

From then on, AAA/RB proselytized hard in corporate groups that they felt Castro was making inroads into labor for example. José's group had also now upped the level of campaigning to sabotage— they began burning factories
down. They would tip off the inside cadre first, so that they could escape unharmed, and then firebomb the target factory.

José says that not many people liked to work with him because of his propensity for getting involved in risky military situations. Although he had first learned about communism when he detected Acción Revolucionario Guitera (ARG) in his neighborhood, it was José's involvement with the Armed Forces had exposed him to the military ethos. He continued with this military style orientation while with the AAA. On one occasion soldiers came to the house of a 17 year old AAA member to arrest the youth. A shoot-out occurred, and the boy escaped with a bullet wound in the leg. A sympathetic doctor rendezvoused with them at a bar called "El Gangrejito" (the crab) and operated on the youth. José was posted as guard outside when a black cadillac pulled up. A shoot-out ensued, leaving the doctor and the youth dead. José had wielded and fired his .45 pistol and fled to his barrio. State Security encircled the neighborhood but failed to catch him as he knew the district.

One major blow to the organization occurred around April of 1960 when a supply ship exploded, killing in José's estimation, 400-500 civilians, some of them members of the AAA/RB. A once trusted commander in Castro's army, an American mercenary captain William Morgan, had thrown his lot in with the AAA and was secretly supplying them from his ship docked at Talla Pierda harbor. José says that the authorities knew of the ship, but thought that it was under government control; they did not realize that Morgan was aiding the rebels. This source of munitions had served AAA/RB well in the past. Nobody seemed to know who owned the ship or what country it was from, but the urban action groups received both rifles and munitions from it. The ship just blew up one day, probably due to some overheated ammunition. A
nearby electrical plant was hit hard by the blast, killing some AAA members who worked there. José and his associates ran to the harbor after the explosions and tried to help retrieve bodies out of the sea. After this occurrence, their quantity of supplies was severely restricted.

In early 1962 José became one of "Los Quemados" (The Burned Ones). Los Quedamos were those people who's cover had been blown and who were now identified by the government as with the rebels. José had been staying in a safe house in Havana that was protected by the saints. A small figurine of a rooster stood behind the door, along with the Viejo Poncho shoulder tab. Between the rooster and Viejo Poncho was a plate with a coconut on it. This was an offering to the powerful Ellegua, messenger of the Orishas and guardian of the doors. Without the consent of Ellegua, nothing could be accomplished. José says that the porcelain rooster acts as a lookout and if the rooster crows three times, it meant that you were going to be betrayed. José says that the local CDR had been watching him and had their suspicions, a CDR member then caught José moving some weapons into his house. The informant looked in José's window and saw him with a FAL rifle, the Tommygun and his .45 pistol. José's female cousin was with him; (his padrino had already been imprisoned with a 25 year sentence for being a Batista accomplice) they bundled the weapons up tied them to a rope, hauled them up on the roof and José took off, traveling on the roofs of the interconnected city dwellings.

A rendezvous was arranged and a Chevy Bel Air picked up José and the weapons, and drove them to Santa Clara. There he stayed for two days with a contact. On the third day, he began walking with another Quemado named Bernardo to the Lomas del Pan Mountains. They had different contacts at
various points in the mountains, but there was always plenty of mutual suspicions as infiltrators were common.

A 15 man guerrilla column linked up with them. Heavily staffed by ex-military from the old Army of Cuba, they had their own ways of sorting the infiltrators from the legitimate reinforcements and recruits. Castro's infiltrators did not have the same professional military experience as the ex-Batista soldiers, nor the concomitant military attitude or aptitude. Aside from ex-military, hacendados (landowners) and well-to-do educated elements formed the backbone of the column, whereas the infiltrators were generally uneducated urban workers who could display little of the genuine ethos or values of the true Freedom Commando.

José remembers that life as a guerrilla was much more difficult than that as a soldier in a regular army. They did not have access to proper medical attention or any of the other logistics associated with garrison life. Now they were the hunted. They were outnumbered by the increasing legions of miliciano and regular soldiers that were committed to the campaign. The guerrilla column was known as "La Rosa Blanca" (The White Rose) and had approximately 150 fighters. The name was derived from a poem written by the great Cuban hero Jose Marti:

Cultivo una rosa blanca
en junio como enero para el amigo sincero
que me da su mano franca...
    cultivo una rosa blanca

I grow a white rose
in June like in January, for a sincere friend
who gave me a generous hand...
    I grow a white rose
They were armed with the ubiquitous FAL rifles, Garands, M-3 "grease guns" and José's favorite, the Thompson SMG, that both sides had used throughout the conflict. The final arms shipment of FAL's from Belgium to Batista had been appropriated by La Rosa Blanca and was now the main weapon of the guerrilla force. In addition to using the FAL, José kept his beloved Thompson and his .45. "I would let them go for nothing" is how he puts it.

The Virgin of Cobre was the patron saint of La Rosa Blanca. José knew that all the saints were against Castro, but the communists drew supernatural power from the evil "Cazuela" sect of Palo Mayobe. Castro had kept his communist intentions hidden, but once it was out in the open, the only way he could maintain power was by turning to black magic. Hence, on assuming state control, Castro had made a pact with the evil forces of the African Palo Mayobe mafia. Because Castro had dictatorial powers, José says that he (Castro) was able to use human sacrifices to appease the supernatural powers of the Palo-Mayobe. Castro's political power enabled him access to whatever sacrifices were necessary to muster up the most potent of black magic available, thus making it exceedingly difficult to defeat him.

On the sleeves of their uniforms, the column members wore either a white band with the red and blue letters "AAA" emblazoned on them, or a simple patch depicting a white rose. Other than that it was difficult to distinguish them from Castro's soldiers: military boots, olive green uniforms, baseball style campaign caps. They would often remove their insignia to confuse the enemy during infiltrations and other black operations. The columns were highly nomadic and never had any permanent home bases,
this meant that infiltrators who deserted could never report their location or where they would be next.

José says that the column mimicked Che's style of guerrilla warfare. For security purposes everybody used pseudonyms. They were not organized into permanent platoons or companies, but ad hoc task forces. They had no artillery or mortars, the FAL (a 7.62mm select fire rifle with a 20 round magazine) was their most powerful weapon. They were primarily organized as an irregular force of light infantry. The column contained no female members.

José says that the peasants of the Pinar del Rio were sympathetic to their cause and would help the Rosa Blanca. They would affectionately refer to the peasants as "Los Guajiros". Also there were plenty of sugar farms, pig farms and fruit haciendas in the surrounding areas, and the hacendados were their natural local base of support, as they were the social class that stood to lose the most under Castro. It didn't take long before the government confiscated the haciendas, robbing the column of a cooperative source of food and supplies.

The column conducted psychological operations with the regional guajiros, explaining to them how communism would destroy the country and suppress religion. Leaflets with these ideas were also distributed. Reinforcements arrived primarily in the form of Los Quemados sent from the urban front.

By 1965 they were holed up in the wilds of the Pinar del Rio mountains. José knew that an enemy force of several thousand men was tracking them down, and once again, like in December of 1958, José and his comrades were desperate. Increasingly, they would have to fight their way out of
encirclements, and to steady their nerves while going into the attack, they
would sing "Linden Basol".

A las villas valientes Cubanos
a occidente nos mande el deber
de la patria arrojar los tirando
a la carga morir o vencer.

De Marti la memorias dorada que los llena de intenso fuegor
y nos envia la furgida espada de Maceo el caudillo en Basol.

From the valiant Cuban towns
to the west duty sends us
from our homeland we fling them away
to the charge we die or triumph

from Marti the golden memory
that fills us with intense furor
and he sends us the forged sword
of Maceo the caudillo in Basol.

Finally, in much the same way that 22nd Company was destroyed, the
column was encircled and began to prepared for its final battle. They looked to
their leader, Captain Bernardo Corrales, for the solution. He would know
what to do.

Bernardo was a leader of almost legendary stature, and José and the other
guerrillas had great faith in him. Bernardo had been a member of Castro’s
rebel army, but had grown disillusioned with the course of the revolution’s
growth. A nationalist and a democrat in the tradition of Jose Marti, Bernardo
joined the counter-revolution because of the regime’s totalitarian tendencies.
He was a real fighter, "muy guapo" as José says. Bernardo was also devoted to
the Virgin of Cobre.
The role of insurgent leader requires one to be capable of forming cross-cutting alliances between different social groups (Greene, 1990:52). In Bernardo’s case, he was coordinating rural and urban groups, guajiros and hacendados, people of different religions and races, and most delicately, ex-Batista soldiers and ex-guerrillas from the 26th of July Movement, the DR, and the Second Front of Escambray. The section gathered close as Bernardo outlined the plan.

They would take the captured miliciano uniforms, put them on and just walk through enemy lines. It was a bold, and potentially suicidal plan, but José felt that Bernardo was worth following.

The guerrilla column split up into small groups in order to exfiltrate through the enemy positions. Bernardo, José, and three other soldiers, dressed as government militia, walked through enemy lines unchallenged. They avoided confrontations in this way and arrived at the town of San Cristobal. In town, a militiaman recognized Bernardo. Bernardo was quick with his submachine gun and got off the first shots, but then fell badly wounded in a hail of bullets. The other guerrillas scattered.

Due to the severity of his wounds, Bernardo was taken to the local hospital. José and his comrades got word of where Bernardo had been taken and were unwilling to leave him there. The guerrillas regrouped and returned to the hospital with the intention of liberating their wounded comrade. 15 members of La Rosa Blanca, José among them, entered the building and spread out, searching for Bernardo. A militiaman discovered what was happening, and one of the guerrillas shot him in the head, killing him instantly. Bedlam ensued. The militia poured in reinforcements immediately, and the Rosa Blanca was forced to abort their plan to liberate
Bernardo. The guerrillas separated, and soon José and his friends were having
difficulty evading their pursuers. A shoot-out occurred, and five of the
guerrillas were killed outright. With the column being destroyed in the
subsequent massive counterinsurgency operation, José carefully wrapped up
his Thompson and .45, buried them in the forest and disappeared into the
back country. Most of the column were captured and imprisoned. He knew
the rules of warfare in this struggle: if he were caught armed, it meant
execution by firing squad. He wandered down to the lowlands and made his
way back to Havana Province, where he was apprehended in Marianao
District. José was taken to Havana, where he was incarcerated in the State
Security prison on 5th Avenue and Calle 14 in the Mirimar District.

In José's opinion, the defeat of La Rosa Blanca can be attributed to two
main factors. First, the war was fought on two levels, materially and
spiritually. In the spiritual world of the Orisha Saints and other supernatural
forces, Fidel's alliance with the dangerous powers of the Cazuela cannot be
minimized. José agrees with his friend Barbaro that in order for Castro to die,
one of the 13 most powerful Babalaos (high priests) would have to die also.
Not one was at that point prepared to step forward and be sacrificed. While
others believed that Castro was in alliance with the powerful Eleggua
(Gonzalez-Wippler,1982:109), José maintains that it was actually the Palo
Mayobe Cazuela sect that gave aid to Castro. José says that all the saints were
with the Commandos, but Castro's ability to use human sacrifices offset their
support. Batista was only able to escape to Spain with the help of Santa
Barbara.

Second, in the physical world, the Freedom Commandos most powerful
supporter, John F. Kennedy, had abandoned them. Whereas Castro had the
full material and economic support of the Soviet Union, the commandos were left without a superpower backing them. Kennedy had come to an agreement with Castro after the October missile crisis, and after that supplies dried up. Combining those two powers— the Soviets and the African Palo-Cazuela, produced a force that the Freedom Commandos, even with the backing of the Saints, were unable to defeat.

The story of José has so far traced the intellectual journey of a young man who increasingly combined his religious views with a strong military ethos. These religious ideas and military values were developed from intense, primary group relationships with such figures as the padrino and Bernardo Corrales. He came to see the struggle itself as more than just political in nature, but as a cosmic, historic crusade. These loyalties and beliefs, as we will see, would play a decisive role in José’s subsequent refusal to participate in the reeducation program after being sent to prison.

Before turning to José’s imprisonment, I will now discuss the events leading to the capture of my other case studies, Victor and Carlos.
CHAPTER THREE

VICTOR THE GUAJIRO

Like José, Victor grew up in a family that had a strong tradition of anti-communism. This would, in a sense, pre-adapt him to life as a guerrilla. Yet there are some important differences between José and Victor. Whereas José’s entry into the guerrilla resistance was simply a continuation of a military lifestyle and struggle, Victor had been a civilian with no prior experience in the armed forces. Victor’s sedentary, civilian pre-guerrilla life contrasts sharply with the nomadic and regimented life that José had led with the battalion. Underneath these apparent lifestyle differences, the two men shared certain similar values, most noticeably strong religious beliefs.

Victor was 40 years old when the revolutionary forces entered Havana. At that time, he was a "guajiro" (campesino) who made a living harvesting sugarcane and was living in the Santa Gertrudes community in Matanzas, which was built around a small sugar mill.

Victor had learned about communism from his father who was the owner of a Fincita (small parcel of land). He identifies himself and his family as guajiros and says that they were poor. Victor’s father had taught him when he was about 9-10 years old that communism bred nothing but poverty and misery, and if the communists ever came to power they would enslave the town, suppress their religion and replace it with communism. The communists were known to be murderers who bombed schools and
participated in other acts of sabotage. Victor says that he was trained as a child never to accept candy from a communist or talk to one. He knew about the 1917 revolution in Russia and was alert for signs of it occurring in Cuba. When his sister began a romance with a communist, she risked being disowned by the family. The suitor came by on his horse one day to court her, and the father sternly told the young man not to even bother dismounting; he was told to never return and that was the last Victor ever saw of him.

Victor says that he knew Castro was a communist from the beginning. The Americans and many Cubans were fooled, but Victor knew better. On the 8th of January 1959 Castro gave his first speech, and Victor could read between the lines: communism.

When Castro took power, Victor immediately began participating in political action against the regime. His role was to get young people together for political awareness meetings to alert them to the fact that Castro was a communist. There were about 60 people in the youth group that Victor led and helped organize. There, Victor led discussion groups which centered on the theme that if communism triumphs in Cuba, there would be no private property or religion and that everything would be managed by the state. At this time the group had no arms so they tried to appropriate them from armories and barracks. Victor was also feeding, hiding and housing guerrillas. A younger man who he had known as a child, Martin Campos, led a guerrilla band in the nearby woods. Martin had been a member of the 26th of July Movement, leading a small column of the rebel army fighting Batista's troops around Matanzas. He had taken up arms again now that the regime was showing its true orientation. Martin Campos heard that Victor was organizing against the government and an alliance developed between the
two groups. Campos would send little groups of men to Victor and Victor would in turn hide them in a little colony in the sugarcane fields he had hidden away. Martin Campos himself hid there one night. Other men from the pueblo would come to Victor for asylum, he would send them to Martin.

The Martin Campos guerrillas were a column of the anti-Castro Movement of Revolutionary Recuperation, or MRR. The leader of the MRR was a man named Manuel Artime, who during the revolution had been a competent and respected member of the Agrupacion Catolica Universitaria (ACU), a group which had opposed Batista. In 1958 Artime served in the Sierra Maestra in Fidel Castro's rebel army. He went on to be put in charge of land reform in Oriente province and organized the Rural Commandos with the help of his friends from the ACU. Now actively conspiring against the government, Artime had gone on to lead the MRR and its student front, the Revolutionary Directorate, in armed guerrilla action (Montanar, 1981:198).

The movement was supported by the CIA by channels originally established by Juan Antonio Rubio Padilla, a member of the ACU. The CIA ties with the ACU were direct, close and organized; they were less so with MRR (and other groups like the Second National Front of Escambray and the November 30 Movement). Through their links with the ACU, the MRR would eventually become one of the CIA's main allies. The religious nature of the MRR had limited historical precedents in Cuba; Montenar (1981:198) likened them to the Cristeros of the Mexican revolution. Unlike groups such as UAC, they had only weak ties to the non-communist elements in the government at that time (Montaner, 1981:198).

Victor describes Martin as "more brave and energetic than educated or intelligent"; he was a soldier at heart, not a politician. Martin was perhaps 33
years old in 1959. According to Victor, his only political beliefs were "contra la dictadura" (against the dictatorship). They had known each other since childhood, and Victor considered him to be a good friend. Like Victor, Martin came from a poor guajiro family which worked a fincita; his father and son would die along with him in the ensuing war. Martin's background fits well with what many observers (Greene, 1990:58) had already observed: that rightist and centrist insurgent leaders (I.E. Martin Campos, Osvaldo Ramirez, Bernardo Corrales) are drawn primarily from middle and lower classes and are sociologically representative of their organizational base. In contrast, Marxist or leftist revolutionary leaders - Fidel Castro and Che Cuevara for example- tend to be better educated and from a higher social class than their followers (ibid:57).

Both sides (The government and the counter-revolution) had infiltrated informants into the others ranks: Victor was tipped off by some spies that he was going to be arrested and fled to Havana. However, State Security was efficient and in November of 1960, to evade capture, Victor left for the forests around Mataguay. There he joined the "Grupo Martin Campos" guerrillas. He was now an armed fighter.

The Martin Campos group had about 200 combatants under arms. The group operated in a series of platoon sized formations that would unite or disperse depending on the mission. Because he was older and had experience as an organizer, Victor was put in charge by Martin of one of these small platoons that operated as an independent task force.

The column maintained itself economically through a special relationship that developed with the hacendados of the region. The hacendados could see the writing on the wall: if Castro solidified his power
and put through his programs they would lose everything. They came to an understanding with the Martin Campos group that they (the guerrillas) could slaughter cattle from their haciendas and that they would in turn overlook it. This gave the guerrillas a stable supply of meat. The hacendados were also generous with medicine, money, intelligence reports and other assistance.

Recognizing the socioeconomic bloc that provisioned the insurgency, the government moved in and confiscated the haciendas. Victor's father had died several years before, but the sugar mill was still owned by his mother. This was confiscated and his mother was sent to live with a daughter in Havana. The government also moved in militia units in large numbers, as well as several special counterinsurgency units.

The situation for the Martin Campos column was tenuous from then on. In a secluded wooded area along the north coast of Matanzas, Martin Campos himself called a meeting in which all 200 guerrillas attended. The decision was made to split up into small groups of 5-6 combatants and disperse throughout the countryside. Victor's nephew had joined up also, and the two of them were assigned to the same commando squad. Dispersal and retreat are common guerrilla tactics when confronted with a numerically superior and well organized enemy force. This allows the guerrilla opportunity to evade capture and makes it extremely difficult to track down all members of the organization. It also increases the possibility that some of the squads will remain undetected and be in a position to regenerate the movement at a later date.

On the negative side, military forces operating below the battalion level of organization (200-1000 combatants) cannot undertake offensive actions that can overthrow state power. The retreat to remote areas cuts the guerrilla off
from contact with the social base, which is the absolute priority objective in a political war. This separation from the towns frustrated Victor, as it limited their ability to recruit and conduct what we would describe as psychological operations with the people.

Deep in the woods, the political orientation among the guerrillas was simple and by face to face communication. There was no specific political officer and the older men like Victor would take it on themselves to explain "porque luchamos" to the younger recruits. They would tell the younger recruits that the communists would bring the exact opposite of what they preached—Castro promised liberty but brought slavery, he preached respect for religion but wanted to destroy it. Each guerrilla was issued a cotton armband with one of three acronyms written on it; M-R-R; DC or DN. These stood for Movimiento Recuperacion Revolucionario, Democracia Cristiano and Democracia Nacional, respectively. When possible they would paint slogans on the walls on the outskirts of towns: "Abajo Communismo", "Cuba Si. Russia No" and other slogans with similar themes.

An urban branch of the MRR called "La Trinchera" (the Trench) was composed of university students and conducted political activity such as protesting the visit of the Soviet Vice Premier. Before it was censored, their newspaper (also called Trinchera) discussed the beliefs of the movement. One editorial warned that communism denied "human freedom, property rights, freedom of thought, and family, love and religion." (Suchlicki, 1969:98). It accused the regime of "treachery to the spiritual values of Marti's fatherland." (ibid:98). "The communists are materialists...the Cuban people and students are humanists." (ibid:98). The objective after the overthrow of Castro was to have a "national Christian order based on freedom justice and a youth
movement based on Christian principles and ideals." (ibid:98). La Trinchera supported armed urban actions once the struggle had moved to a military phase (ibid:95-96). The world view and ethos of the movement centered around this concept of a Christian and democratic crusade against the anti-Christian and totalitarian pretender, Fidel Castro. Recognizing the blend of Christian imagery and democracy that motivated the anti-Castro guerrillas, the CIA went so far as to propose alerting Cubans of the impending return of Christ. On the day of the announced second coming of Jesus, a submarine would surface offshore and secretly set off fireworks in order to help prompt a general rebellion against the anti-Christ, Castro (Wright,1991:63).

To deal with the Martin Campos group, The government decided on a strategy of cordon, search and clear. Several battalion sized militia units would completely encircle a forest or area where guerrillas were known to operate, and then special units would be sent in to drive the guerrillas towards the entrenched soldiers ringing the perimeter. Victor says that when this would happen he and his squad would become very desperate and then select a section of the ring to rush, M-3s blazing. Victor said that he knew at this time the government soldiers were not taking prisoners, so the only hope of escape lay in these near suicidal shock actions against the encircling enemy. He remembers that they shot down a section of enemy troops once and ran off through the bush, only to find themselves slowly being caught up in the dragnet again.

Victor remembers many little things about war in the mountains. He chose the facade name "Chiri" to use as his nombre de guerre as it was customary for security purposes to conceal your real identity. Sometimes he carried an M-1 Garand - this was the best gun, says Victor, because the
communists were afraid of it. It made a large, explosive wound. Other times they preferred the smaller M-3 "grease gun" when assaulting enemy positions, due to its massive close range firepower. The light R-2 rifle was "buena", but the "San Cristobal" sub machine-gun that they got from Santa Domingo was not so good, because its barrel would overheat and warp easy. Using these type of weapons and bloody nose tactics, they were able to play hit and run in this manner for the next 6 months around Mataguan. It was impossible to ever return to his farm to visit relatives, but since Victor was not married at the time, he had no one that he was responsible for.

There were no priests or full time religious specialists operating with the column. Each fighter carried his personal religious icons with him and conducted his prayers and religious observances quietly and without fanfare. The Virgin of Cobre, patron saint of Cuba, protected the column. Sometimes small offerings were made to her, but nothing elaborate like those offered during pre-war pilgrimages to her shrine in Oriente. Her protection was needed, because Victor states that shortly after taking power, Castro had been initiated into a black magic cult by some powerful brujas (witches) sent from Africa specifically for that purpose. The initiation was conducted in a river in Matanzas and involved the use of drugs. Every year since then, Castro has, according to Victor, returned secretly to Africa to meet with powerful witch-doctors, and would use the blood of prisoners during sacrifices. "It's not a story, everyone in Cuba knows it" says Victor. Manuel, another ex-prisoner who I interviewed and is friends with Victor, concurs.

The war was going badly. Castro's army killed many of Victor's friends. Victor in fact estimates that most of the members of the insurgent column were either killed in action or executed by firing squad. He reports of knowing
of only 20 of the original 200 insurgents surviving the war. Martin was one of the last to be tracked down and killed, reportedly in 1966.

On May 28 of 1961 Victor received a message from a runner connected with another squad that truckloads of soldiers were in the region. Victor, his nephew, and four other men began the days movement and stopped a little while later in a sugar cane field. Victor stepped back into the bush to relieve himself -his gear and .38 caliber revolver 20 feet away- when the shooting suddenly started. Victor's nephew had a Garand and they returned fire with this. The nephews return fire was unexpectedly effective, from the reaction of the enemy, they could tell that they had hit somebody. The death of an enemy soldier in this encounter would later become a key issue in Victor's subsequent trial and conviction.

The firing slackened off and then ended, but another group of the enemy was trying to outflank them. Victor's group split up and fled and the four of his comrades were tracked down and captured by the militia. The nephew was also captured and imprisoned. (Today he lives in Miami). Victor was trying to hop a fence when he was surrounded and captured.

Expecting to be executed, Victor had fortunately been captured by a militia unit commanded by one of his childhood friends. Victor says that this man saved many peoples' lives, and still lives in Cuba today.

They were taken to State Security headquarters called "Capitain" in the small town of Colon. Someone put a gun to Victor's head and told him to start talking, he was frightened but says he played stupid. When shown another member of his squad he replied that he knew the man but was not associated with him. There someone noticed the armband Victor wore that read "Democracia Cristiano". The soldiers said "get a rope" and put Victor
up against a tree. The captain who Victor knew, arrived and ordered his men back, saying that he wanted to talk to Victor in private.

"Guajiro, where did you get that armband?".

"I just saw it lying on the ground and saved it."

"You do well."

Victor says that there was an unspoken understanding between the captain and him that he was playing dumb. The captain was sympathetic but could do little for Victor. From there, they were sent to the G-2's interrogation center in Matanzas.

Like José, Victor had a pervasive influence of anti-communism imparted from primary group sources such as his father. Martin Campos seemed to play a similar role to Victor as Bernardo Corrales played to José: a friend who’s loyalty could not be betrayed. Victor’s religious ideas concerning Castro’s participation in African witchcraft impart a cosmic as well as political dimension to the struggle. Both men had relatives participating in the campaign with them (José’s cousin, Victor’s nephew). Like José, these pre-existing loyalties and beliefs would keep Victor from joining the political rehabilitation program while in prison.
CHAPTER FOUR

CARLOS THE STUDENT

When discussing their personalities, José is essentially a soldier at heart, and Victor a guajiro. The third informant is Carlos, a student and an idealist. Like José and Victor, Carlos had strong pre-existing primary group ties to anti-communist elements. His religious ideas also imparted a cosmic as well as political meaning to the war.

In 1959 Carlos was a member of a Catholic youth group. He was 14 years old at the time, and was enrolled in the Belen Catholic School of Havana. Carlos dreamed of becoming an engineer one day.

Carlos came from a middle class background. His father had been a second Lieutenant in the army of Batista and his mother worked for the Catholic church. They were of African ancestry. His three brothers taught math, Spanish and architecture in Havana and a sister was studying languages in Spain before she died. The parents taught them to be true believers in education and to value personal growth and achievement. The family had a traditionally Catholic value orientation.

During Castro's guerrilla war, military officers would gather in Carlos's father's home to discuss the political situation. Although he was now retired, the father kept in close contact with other officers and Carlos was able to follow developments in the political situation through them.
Through friends, acquaintances and self study Carlos furthered his political education. One book influenced him greatly: *La Gran Estafa*. It was written by an ex-communist named Educio Rabines and focused on communism's influence in Latin America. Carlos also respected another book by the same author: *America Latina, una Continente en Erupcion*. (Latin America, a Continent in Eruption). This book continued with the theme of communist upheaval in Latin America, and how they were infiltrating legitimate political parties.

He learned of communism "through practice, not theory." Carlos was from an educated, middle class background and had come to the conclusion that any system which was anti-Christian in nature, such as communism, was bad and wrong. He was shocked at the way Castro was received that January:

Castro was treated like a God, a messiah. In reality it was profane, they were treating him like he was Christ, a savior of humanity.

Carlos knew of Marx, Lenin and Marxist-Leninist theory. He knew that Marx called religion the opiate of the masses. It was while a student in 1959, at the Belen school, that he would learn something else that would affect his life irreversibly.

Carlos met quietly one afternoon with some friends of his who had been guerrillas with Castro in the Sierra Maestra. They warned him that Castro had been a secret communist during his time in the mountains, and would lead Cuba to tyranny. They admitted to Carlos that even though they were still members of Castro's revolutionary army, that they had formed an internal cabal to destroy the communists. They felt betrayed, as they believed that they had been fighting to bring representational democracy to Cuba. This "*Lucha*
Internal" and early factionalism was seen by Carlos as perhaps the last and best chance to stop communism in Cuba.

Carlos and his friends joined a covert group called UAC (Unidad Anti Communista). The UAC was one of 30 separate democratic groups organized into a coalition called Frente Democratica Nacional, or simply FDN. The FDN was led by Osvaldo Ramirez, an ex-commander in Castro's army.

While the UAC was organizing, Castro was busy also. Carlos believes that throughout history, certain ancient symbols with mysterious, malevolent powers have been exploited by political leaders such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon to seek control over mankind. Carlos believes that Castro made a careful study of Hitler and copied his magical way to power. Carlos states that Castro studied how Hitler sent Himmler on a search throughout the near east and the Indian subcontinent, looking for these symbols. Himmler returned with the swastika, a religious symbol from ancient India with the directions of the crosses' open ends now reversed. The powerful forces inherent in the swastika had been preserved throughout the middle ages by monks, who brought it to the Tiber river, where they reactivated its potency. The power of the swastika gave Hitler clairvoyancy, and in that respect, Carlos compares Hitler to Jules Verne.

Following Hitler's road to power, Carlos says that Castro went to Ghana dressed in white with a green sash, in order to collect mystical symbols. He found these secret symbols, and brought them back to Cuba. These symbols are incorporated into flags and uniforms, and have the power to attract people like a magnet.

Carlos believes that Castro also traveled to Haiti, where he embraced the religion of Voodoo. Castro brought Haitian Voodoo priests back to Cuba with
him and they help him perform human sacrifices, which solidify his power. Also according to Carlos, Castro is, by biblical interpretation, a Satan worshipper.

Carlos came to the conclusion that Castro and the system were choking Cuba and the peoples rights. At first, Carlos believed in a "Lucha Legal" - a legal struggle involving propaganda and demonstrations. In 1961 Castro dropped all pretenses to western style parliamentary democracy and publicly declared himself a communist/ Marxist Leninist. Carlos quickly realized that only armed action could save the day. UAC was quick to react. Carlos became a coordinator for an 8 man team that ran a warehouse where the movement stored arms, ammunition, boots, shoes, clothing, medicine food and other provisions necessary to sustain an armed operation against the false regime. Carlos states that the warehouse received its supplies from the CIA and the Pentagon, who would ship in the materiel by boat from Florida. Carlos and his cell would meet the boats at deserted beaches, unload the supplies, and transport them to the warehouse. There they would oversee the distribution and provisioning of the field units. When someone from the movement had been uncovered to the authorities, Carlos’s team would take them to the beach for escape to the safety of Miami. People would move both ways across the straits of Florida. These infiltration teams played a significant role in the subsequent urban and rural guerrilla warfare that was soon to spread.

The other way of provisioning the UAC/FDN was by obtaining weapons from dissatisfied elements within Castro’s armed forces. This dual supply channel (recognition from the CIA/Pentagon, internal cabal from Castro's forces) would make it difficult for the regime to isolate and destroy the movements supply network.
A partial list of the UAC/FDN arms stockpile in Carlos's warehouse includes M-2 carbines, both Thompson and M-3 submachine guns, .45 pistols, Garand rifles and C-2/3 explosives. Secure channel radio equipment was also provided, compliments of the US. government.

Training classes were provided on weapons maintenance (particularly the FAL) machine gun employment, disinformation and propaganda. Carlos cites this as an example of disinformation: that they would "tip off" the authorities that a certain police station was going to be attacked, when in reality they would sabotage aircraft at a remote field. In this way they could tie up the security forces at distant locations.

During this training Carlos also learned of certain styles of military organization. He became familiar with the G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4 and G-5 organizational style common with US. influenced forces.

Carlos admits that they were young, inexperienced and made a lot of mistakes in organizing. They were not like the Europeans, who Carlos says were more experienced in war. But even the CIA was making many mistakes, as people were new to this type of operation.

"The star of the north was always an inspiration" Carlos says, referring to the USA. They knew that they could win only with US help. They fought for representational democracy, patria and libertad. Eisenhower had always supported them fully. "He was out to get Castro," says Carlos. As events would unfold and Kennedy became president, things would change.

There was a small printing press that they kept, and the movement produced simple leaflets outlining the dangers communism posed to not only Cuba, but to all of Latin America. The message that the UAC put out was this: Communism tries to turn people not only into physical slaves, but
mental slaves, so that they become robots. All rights and liberties will be stripped away. Communism feeds off of the people in order to inspire revolution in all of Latin America. Carlos would write short stories and poems to illustrate these points. In one story, two men, one an ex-guerrilla from Castro's rebel army, the other an older man, are talking.

"Why did you fight?" the older man asks.

"For freedom." replies the ex-soldier.

"Freedom of what?"

"Freedom of conscience, expression, freedom of the press, economic liberty."

"I think you were wrong and fought in vain. Communism buries those liberties, it destroys society, eradicates love honor and respect."

The older man leaves. The ex-soldier slowly starts walking away, lost in thought. He suddenly stops under a streetlight and comes to a conclusion. He reaches into his pocket, takes out his red communist party I.D. card and slowly starts tearing it up. Blood starts dripping from the card and forms a deep pool, into which the ex-soldier slowly sinks and disappears.

Propaganda leaflets expressing similar themes would be left by the movement in untied bundles on the roofs of houses, with only a single light pebble on top of the stack to hold them in place. The wind would pick up later in the day, blowing the pebble off and scattering the leaflets onto the crowded streets below, with the UAC/FDN propaganda team by then safely dispersed.

The moment of decision was to come in April of 1961. Brigade 2506—the invasion force—stormed the beaches at the Bay of Pigs. The UAC, the other 29 groups of FDN, and all democratic forces in Cuba that had been carefully organized in Castro's armed forces, civil service and all sectors of society
waited for the radio message from Command X: The order that would set in motion the general uprising of the united front's organizations to help Brigade 2506 create the necessary effects in society to replace the false regime. The message they received was: "STAND BY."

The 2,000 man invasion force was pinned on the beach and after 72 hours forced into captivity. Carlos says that Kennedy promised air support but none came. Castro, now fully aware of the power of the opposition, went all out to infiltrate and destroy them.

The missile crisis of October 1962 ended as a strategic political defeat for the UAC/FDN. Whatever agreements were reached between Kennedy and Castro had the net effect of markedly reducing the supplies from the US. Logistically, and politically, the movement was set back.

This deterioration of the situation and the increasing degree of government pressure on the urban organization made him decide to join the guerrillas in the mountains. Carlos and his confederates stockpiled ammunition, medicine and other supplies. They then left Havana in trucks, traveled through Matanzas and were now moving through Las Villas. Destination: to link up with the El Escambray group "Commander Osvaldo Ramirez" guerrillas.

This force (The Osvaldo Ramirez group) was only one of an estimated 179 armed columns active in the country at this time, comprising over 3,500 armed insurgents (Raul Castro 1970, Valladares 1984:79). Ramirez himself was perhaps the most famous of the guerrilla leaders, held in awe by the local peasantry and reportedly the only caudillo who Castro offered amnesty (Montener, 1981:201). The Government sent in the "Battalones de Lucha Contra Banditos" (Battalions that fight against Bandits, or LCB's) to track
them down. A national revolutionary militia of over 100,000 strong was mobilized to support the LCBs (Mazarr 1990:263). Militia units encircled the Escambray mountains by setting up a series of manned foxholes and trenches 40-50 yards apart and waiting while special search and clear teams hunted the rebels down.

For their part, Carlos and his associates were quite sophisticated at this point. They had special radio equipment, codes and messages. The trucks were loaded with supplies for the guerrillas. Eight young men, disguised as militia driving trucks loaded down with ammunition and supplies, slowly wound their way through the mountains.

The basic tenants of counterinsurgency doctrine recognize the necessity to confront the incipient movement politically as well as militarily (Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare, CIA- Contra training manual, 1983). Understanding that guerrilla war is essentially a political war, Castro was able to compromise the security of the Escambray insurgents through a series of bribes, quiet negotiations and other political-economic initiatives. A massive counter-guerrilla operation that included wide scale forced relocation of guajiros and systematic cordon and search tactics was implemented. This became known as "the Escambray cleanup." It was in this type of political climate that Carlos's group found themselves in as they approached their rendezvous point with the main guerrilla group at the fringe of the Escambray range.

Along the way they were betrayed and intercepted. G-2 State Security forces surrounded them, and in the ensuing gunfire Carlos was hurt and captured. Like José, he was taken to the special prison for State Security, and the Escambray front was destroyed in the ensuing campaign.
Guerrillas and activists like José, Carlos, and Victor would soon come to be recognized as a special type of prisoner in the Cuban penal system: plantados. The word plantado comes from the verb plantar, which means to stand firm. In this case, it signifies those political and military prisoners who refused any compromise with the Cuban revolutionary state. Plantados would include not only violent opponents to the regime (like José, Carlos and Victor) but prisoners of conscience and other people who were not engaged in armed struggle. Plantados would become a special and altogether new class of persons in Cuba, created by the prison system of the early 60s. The word plantado became associated with these prisoners by about the year 1967, when those prisoners who were incarcerated on the Isle of Pines were transferred back to Cuba proper and subjected to various measures designed to coerce them into participating in the State's rehabilitation program. The plantados refused to do this, and were subjected to a continuation of draconian measures designed to elicit their cooperation. Although some prisoners accepted the Government's offer of reeducation and rehabilitation, many others like José, Carlos and Victor refused and became plantados. Hence they continued to wear the yellow prison uniform given to the counter-revolutionary inmates and refused the blue uniforms of the common criminals. As a result they were segregated from the other prisoners.
The plantados originated out of the guerrilla war and massive revolutionary mobilization process of the early 1960s.

One of the assumptions of this section is that the plantados beliefs originated from intense, primary group interaction with family, friends, and peers before and during the guerrilla movement. The failures of the government's subsequent rehabilitation program I attribute to an undervaluing of pre-existing primary group ties by the part of the government, and an unrealistic belief that secondary groups that are already detested by the target audience will be viewed as a legitimate source of political guidance. The rehabilitation programs were a creation of a specific type of State system - the "mobilization system." The concept of the mobilization system was first developed by David E. Apter (1963). A mobilization system can be defined as a sociocultural process involving all elements in society- from the military to the arts- organized as a task force with one clear political objective. The consequences of the seizure of State power by a revitalization movement, whether revivalistic or revolutionary in nature, is characterized by the appearance of a mobilization system. Traditional elites can impose a mobilization system also, "the Counterinsurgency State" in Guatemala during the early 1980s for example.

Richard Fagen (1966) was the first to apply this model to Castro's Cuba:

It is this elite commitment to total exploitation of human resources in the service of revolutionary goals which both indexed and motivated the transformation of Cuba in less than five years from a standard repressive dictatorship under Batista to a mobilization system. (Fagen 1966:204-205).

It is my contention that such a system will not be effective in recruiting genuine converts from the opposition. The rehabilitation program overvalues the effectiveness of political prosylitizing and too narrowly views the relationship between the revolutionary vanguard and the target group as
one of simple "consciousness raising." The plantados are a reaction to such a system. The government's hope of being able to use secondary, coercive groups as a legitimate source of belief transformation when proselytizing with the politically committed proved to be illusory. I will now turn to the prison experiences of our case studies to show how this is so.
CHAPTER SIX
STATE SECURITY

The Revolutionary Army Department of Investigations (DIER), or simply G-2, was in the early 1960's the Cuban state security organization. Later it would be reorganized and called Departamento de Seguridad de Estado (DSE, or Department of State Security). My informants refer to it as "G-dos" (G-2) or "Seguridad de Estado." It falls under the direction of the Ministry of the Interior and oversees that country's penal system. In the posh Mirimar district in Havana, G-2 had taken possession of 2 city blocks worth of homes confiscated from Batista's supporters. A series of tunnels connected the homes and they now formed a complex security and detention center. Two-car garages without toilets served as jail cells.

The first day at G-2 State Security center was one of interrogation for Carlos. The first thing State Security tried to do was entice the eight captured guerrillas to talk and cooperate. They were told that they would not be hurt. Carlos and the rest remained silent. When it became apparent that they would not talk the authorities moved on to stage two. The detainees were now separated and questioned individually. Carlos was put into solitary confinement with no lights. His toilet was a hole in the ground. He was not allowed to bathe. He had no bed, so he slept on the floor. The food was heavily spiced and came in small portions. He lost all sense of time and could not tell when it was day or night. Three times a day he would be
interrogated. They kept asking and repeating questions, and finally told Carlos that he was going to be killed if he did not cooperate.

Trivial and irrelevant ice breaking questions would be initially asked to get the prisoners used to talking. Questions not concerning the organization at all. The first serious question asked was "who was the head of the group?" That was an easy one that had been pre arranged well before: no one was superior to any one; they took their orders from a mysterious and unknown messenger.

The next, and most repeated line of questioning dealt with the group's links to the CIA, Florida and the United States. This represented the power that Castro truly feared.

Carlos made up lies to placate them. The authorities were apparently dissatisfied with Carlos's answers so they moved on to stage three. The once passive officer took out a pistol and put it to Carlos's head. The officer told Carlos to talk or he would die. Carlos was familiar enough with intelligence gathering that he was convinced that the officer would not shoot him. At this point they still wanted information and the officer would get into trouble if Carlos was shot. Carlos told the guy "Go ahead." The officer hit him and told him he was crazy.

Three German Shepherds were brought in. Carlos said that the dogs would bite him enough to cause pain but not enough to cause massive irreparable damage. The dogs were obviously trained to detain but not rip apart prisoners. Carlos had dogs at home and knew well enough to not show any outward signs of fear to the animals. He knew the dogs would kill him only if the trainer present gave the order. He was also aware that his reactions were being filmed, and observed by the guards.
Next they brought in cassette tapes of people being shot - Carlos was certain that they were authentic. They would play the tapes for Carlos with the clear implication that he was courting with disaster. Carlos's responses were still unsatisfactory so State Security began leaving internal organs and human hair in his cell. Carlos says he continued to give them false information, especially when they threatened to torture his parents and family. He was pistol-whipped in the head for being uncooperative. Some of Carlos's friends were thrown into the swimming pool with chains wrapped around them. The known CIA personnel from the Bay of Pigs were treated the worst. Finally, after what turned out to be 30 days Carlos was transferred to the maximum security prison in Havana known as La Cabana. Eventually, some documents "from Brazil" turned up in the hands of G-2 which spelled out all of Carlos's activities with the UAC. Infuriated by the lies Carlos had told, the authorities shipped him back to G-2 for another 6 months worth of interrogation.

At the G-2 interrogation center in Matanzas, Victor and his comrades were kept up all night and interrogated. Victor and the men captured with him would be separated and interrogated one by one. The interrogators would return to the isolated prisoner and tell them that one of the others had already talked. Victor was not fooled by this tactic and says that he kept silent. At this time Victor says that the government's policy was to interrogate then shoot captured guerrillas. According to Victor, this policy was reversed 4 or 5 days before his capture, due to "UN. pressure." Victor remembers that the G-2 officer kept a loaded pistol on the table during the interrogation in order to intimidate him. Victor called it mental torture. The police used the technique
of claiming that the others had betrayed him already. He was finally thrown into a humid cell where he developed an ear infection.

72 hours later (May 31) he was taken to the prison called **El Castillo de San Severino**. This was a former "palace" located in Matanzas near the sea. It had been built by the Spaniards for security purposes. San Severino had underground detention cells with dirt floors and Victor was jailed there. He was given newspaper to use as a carpet. There were insects in the cell and Victor had an ear infection. On September 8 (Virgin's Day) a hearing was held, and Victor was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Three days after his trial Victor says that capital punishment was again reinstated for captured guerrillas.

The first day with G-2 for José started out simple enough. They did not hit him, they only asked him questions over and over: who was aiding the rebels, where were their base camps, where did they store their arms, what were their connections with other groups. The important thing was to deny any involvement with Florida or the CIA as people directly implicated with foreign powers were subject to death by firing squad. José says that he kept silent and refused to say anything. When I asked him why didn't he just lie and give them false information, he told me that is not the way he does things. The day finished with no change in technique of interrogation.

The second day was different.

"We know that you were in Pinar del Rio. We know that you are responsible for sabotage."

"You can't prove it."
They set in on him and began beating José with sticks, machetes, fists and kicks. He says he was almost was kicked to death, but he wasn't going to take it passively and got in a few good punches in return before he went down.

Now they started hitting José every time that he refused to answer. They were very interested in who the group’s contacts were in Miami, and the real identities of the other column members. José didn't have to lie in regards to that question; he really did not know most of their true names. José says he could tell that they were not professionally trained interrogators because they relied on brutality as their method for eliciting cooperation. José says that this is not a good technique and they could have extracted more information from the prisoners if they had acted more professionally. He says that he still remained silent in response to all their questions. Needless to say, he got hit.

On the third day they finally got tired of José and threw him into a room that was kept at very low temperature. I have read that potentially useful tactical information can be rendered useless by the detainee if he can keep quiet long enough (a minimum of 24 hours) so that his section can clean up their traces and vanish. Apparently, after 3 days the authorities came to the conclusion that they would get no tactically relevant information, in any case, the interrogations stopped.

Bernardo appeared the next day. He still had bandages and an intravenous tube in him as he was recovering from the effects of 3 bullet wounds. Bernardo stayed for 2 days and was then sent to La Cabana prison. José would later hear from the guards that Bernardo had been immediately on arrival at La Cabana, put in front of a firing squad and executed. The intravenous tubes were still attached to Bernardo’s body when they shot him. This story would later be corroborated by other prisoners when José was
transferred to La Cabana 6 months later. The historian Hugh Thomas says that "the total number of executions by the revolution probably reached 2,000 by early 1961, perhaps 5,000 by 1970." (Valls, 1986:v).

José was kept in limbo at State Security for the next 6 months, incommunicado and without being formally charged with any crime. The State Security facility was known as "the waiting room of hell." José did not know what the authorities would decide to do with him. Then one day he was suddenly sent to La Cabana Prison in Havana. On arrival at La Cabana, he waited 6 months before his court trial was convened. The prosecuting attorney sought a 30 year sentence. José was convicted of terrorism and conspiracy and was handed a 17 year prison term.

The time spent with State Security was a period when the individuals of two separate corporate groups- G-2 and the counterrevolutionary suspects- had to make decisions that would affect the detainee's status and identity indefinitely. G-2, not the Cuban judicial system, would make the decision if the individual prisoners were guilty or not. A look at the evolution of their status reads like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Etic Status</th>
<th>Self Definition</th>
<th>Government's View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insurgent</td>
<td>Freedom Commando</td>
<td>Bandit, Terrorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detainee</td>
<td>Political prisoner</td>
<td>Terrorist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A certain transformation had now occurred. Jose, Victor and Carlos were no longer guerrillas, but had now assumed the identities of political prisoners. This new status would be ceremonially formalized during their trials, which I will now describe.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TRIAL

Carlos’s first stay at La Cabana was short: G-2 discovered that the stories he had given them were false, so he was hauled back to State Security for another round of interrogations. Carlos says that when the G-2 decided that they could not break him psychologically, they made the decision to break him physically. They began a process of beatings, which included being struck in the face, stomach and genitals, sometimes with brass knuckles. They also screamed in his face. Eventually he was sent to Isle de Pinos prison, thrown into solitary confinement and told that he would be shot. During a beating there, he was struck on the back and it still affects his handwriting today.

After his second go round with G-2, Carlos was then taken back to La Cabana for his trial. He was given a public defender for his trial, but says it was a kangaroo court. Carlos knew that he could at best hope for a 30 year sentence, but would probably get the death sentence. His family was present for the trial. They could not intercede for him. If they said that Carlos was innocent, they would be considered counter-revolutionaries. Carlos was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

José’s trial was conducted at La Cabana also. Five State Security guards, not the regular La Cabana prison guards, took José, loaded him in a truck with three other prisoners and drove him to another portion of the prison. The guards were armed with AK-47 rifles. State Security ran the proceedings. José
detected friction between State Security and the prison security services; State Security did not have confidence in the prison guards. José attributes this friction to the reportedly incompetent performance by the prison guards during the execution of William Morgan.

At the trial the prisoners sat in the first row, the five guards in row two, and more guards in the third row. The charges were read against José; he stood accused of "rebellion and illicit reunion." (conspiracy). He was not allowed to say in his defense anything concerning the treatment meted out by State Security or the prison guards. The military tribunal handed José a 17 year sentence.

Victor's trial was also conducted by State Security. He was charged with crimes that he did not commit. For instance, the judge read the charges, and accused Victor of killing a sergeant during the firefight he was captured in. When Victor denied it, the judge shouted at him "descardos!" (how dare you deny it!). Victor says that he was not allowed to testify on his own behalf, but would say out loud the words "no" whenever a false charge was leveled at him. He says that maybe a sergeant could have been killed in the fight that led to his capture, but there would be no way of determining who shot who. So many of them had been shooting you could not tell what happened. The Jefe de G-2 wanted the death penalty. Victor says he was accused of "20,000" crimes: he was "contra la patria" (against the nation), and was called a "bandito."

The guards tied Victor up again and the revolutionary tribunal went to deliberate. They returned and handed Victor a 30 year sentence.

Twenty days later Victor went to get his sentence in writing. The same lawyer who was appointed to represent him at the trial and a minister from
the government had to sign the document along with Victor. The sentence had been downgraded to 15 years. The minister said that "G-2 wanted the death sentence, and the tribunal had given him 30 years, but the revolution would show Victor mercy and reduce the sentence to 15 years. Look how generous the revolution is to you."

The lawyer advised Victor to sign and not to appeal his case. Victor believes that the lawyer was a good man with his (Victor's) best interests in mind. The lawyer had admitted to him "look, I can't help you, it has already been decided." Victor knew that if he did not sign he could be faced with new charges of rebellion and possibly receive the death sentence, so he signed. He also did not file an appeal because he knew of one guy that had received a 20 year sentence, appealed, and had the charge upped to the death penalty. That man was shot. Victor says he would have signed even if the sentence were 30 years.

After a few (5) years in prison Victor reports that a new law came into being where they could again petition for reduced sentences or freedom. Victor reports that people did petition, as there were many people in prison for spurious charges. People who were basically innocent had 10 year sentences dropped to five years and hence released on the spot. Victor believes that this was the government's way of admitting some people had been imprisoned by dubious evidence and false charges. Others dropped from 30 to 15 years. Some actually had their sentences increased from 15 to 20 years. Victor knew well enough not to petition, as he had been "caught in the act" of being a guerrilla. He did not want to press his luck.

The prisoners were now faced with the prospect of long prison terms. The final decision that they would make affecting their self definition would
be whether or not to participate in the political rehabilitation program. I will now turn to their prison experiences to illustrate the context in which these decisions were made.
CHAPTER EIGHT

ISLA DE PINOS

Isla de Pinos prison, also known as "Model Prison" was built in the 1930's by Cuban strongman Gerardo Machado. It is located on the Isla de Pinos (Island of Pines) off the south coast of Cuba. Aside from various administrative buildings and a round two story dining hall, the prisons main features were the four 7-story round, stone buildings called circulars. The four circulars surrounded a 4-story stone guard tower. It was in these circulars that the prisoners lived. There were 93 cells per floor. The circulars had been built to house 930 inmates apiece, but at times held up to 1,300 (Valladares 1984:51). It would be here that both Carlos and Victor would spend much of the early 1960's.

Isla de Pinos was one of the prisons where the early rehabilitation program was set up for political prisoners.

After being sentenced for 30 years, Carlos and one other member of the group of eight refused to join the political re-education program and became plantados. The ones who accepted rehabilitation would receive conjugal visits, classes in communism, and would receive more humane treatment. After his 6 months with G-2, Carlos for his part was sent back to the Isla de Pinos, which he calls "an old style Chinese communist torture system." Here, Carlos says that at meals he would sometimes be served a bowl of soup with animal genitalia in it. Some prisoners went crazy, some committed suicide.
Isla de Pinos was different from anything Carlos had previously encountered. Here they were administered intelligence tests, psychological evaluations, interrogations and had their complete files reviewed. The prison authorities separated the prisoners into four different mini-prisons, depending on their assessment of who you really were. The four prison compounds were circular 7-story stone buildings called "circulars". Each circular housed roughly 1,000 prisoners. When combined with the two square buildings that completed the prison, Isla de Pinos housed around 6,000 prisoners. In circular number 1 Carlos found himself with university students, high ranking military officers, lawyers, and politicians. The people in Circular #1 were all educated, intelligent members of society who had held positions of leadership and responsibility. Another former prisoner recalls that Circular #1 was jokingly referred to as "Generals and Doctors" (which parodied the title of a popular novel) and that the inmates were called "cebecillas" (hotheads, pinheads) by the prison authorities due to their intellectual nature (Valladares, 1984:218). Circular #2 held low ranking enlisted soldiers from Batista's army, guajiros, and some urban workers with little formal education. Circular #3 held people who were implicated in the clandestine groups and the guerrilla columns. Carlos says Circular #4 was similar to #2.

Carlos believes that the prisoners were segregated in this manner in order to make the government's rehabilitation/re-education program more effective. He believes that the authorities had little confidence in being able to genuinely re-educate the prisoners in group #1. The "ones" were put to work in the fields, and in the rock quarry, performing heavy manual labor. Carlos thinks that this was to give idealistic college students a taste of real labor, as
well as to punish class enemies. Carlos reports that prisoners were at times shot, bayoneted, or beaten in the fields. It was only after several months of work that they would be approached with the offer of more lenient treatment if they would only renounce their opposition to the revolution and in fact, put their support for the revolution into writing. They would then be allowed to have family visits, conjugal visits, better food, and an end or reduction of forced labor. They would receive better treatment from the guards. (No more genitalia in their soup). They would have better correspondence, be separated from the "rebel" prisoners, and promised that they would have their sentences reduced and quickly be reintegrated into society. Of the seven men captured with Carlos, six agreed to join the rehabilitation program. Carlos and the other man refused.

From his friends in circular #2 Carlos had gotten the impression that the re-education program had gone ahead with more carrot and less stick. Carlos believes that the prison authorities thought that they would be more successful proselytizing in this group. They believed that the people in group two were less educated and more easily susceptible to propaganda. It is difficult to gauge the relative success of the program in these two prisons, but soon there were two distinct groups: rehabs and plantados. The rehabs were moved to a separate square building and became known as "Squares." Carlos defines plantados as "the rebellious ones." Carlos reports that plantados formed in prison groups 2, 3 and 4 as well. Carlos does not know the exact numbers, but says at one time there were 6000 political prisoners, of which half (3,000) were plantados.

Politically this was an expedient way to "divide and conquer" and to further break down the prisoners into typologies not based solely on their
background or education level, but on the degree of resistance or cooperation that they showed.

Although Carlos reports that prison group #4 was organized and treated like prison group #2. Other accounts (Valladares, 1984) indicate that circular 4 had a mixed composition of educational levels. It seems that the prison authorities may have tried various groupings at different times, or simply transferred prisoners to break up intricate escape attempts.

From what he knows of the rehabilitation program from others Carlos says that the it entailed more classes in Cuban history from a Marxist perspective and taught the benefits of the revolution. The classes were not particularly theoretical and would not appeal to someone from prison group #1. Carlos also believes that group one was separated from the rest because they were leaders, and that the authorities wanted to keep them from organizing the guajiros into any further resistance.

Carlos is less certain on how the rehab program was conducted with group #3. They were kept separated from group one, possibly to separate those with leadership and political connections from those skilled in certain clandestine techniques.

A fifth square building held prison group #5, which was composed of common criminals. These people were used by the prison authorities to intimidate the political prisoners. Eventually the common criminals were transferred and the building was used to hold the squares. A sixth building was used as a punishment pavilion. The 2-story kitchen and dining facility reportedly could feed 5,000 people at one time (Valladares, 1984).

Carlos says that the purpose of the rehab program was to break political morale and religious principles. He calls it "a psychological plan to desensitize
you. To train you in Marxist doctrine”. Those who refused to participate in
the rehabilitation program were often beaten, some were bayoneted and some
were shot and killed. Periodic inspections were characterized by extreme
brutality on the part of the guards. They would order the prisoners out of the
building and as the prisoners were forced out by rifle and bayonet toting
guards, other guards would rain blows on them with chains and wooden
clubs.

Victor had arrived at Isla de Pinos in September of 1961 by boat and
incarcerated in circular 2. He had been stripped of his clothing and issued a
yellow prison uniform (an old Batista army uniform). He was assigned to 1st
floor, cell #52, and shared it with one other prisoner. He reports that every
day a group of them would be taken out for indoctrination. They were
promised better food, family visits and liberty, but only if they agreed to join
the rehabilitation program. The plan was called the "three steps to liberty."
Victor says the program was a hoax and only used for brainwashing people.
The rehabs would be sent to the square building, had to sing the international
and shout "viva Fidel Castro." Victor reports that the prison authorities
would try to turn the squares into informants and that their promises were
lies.

There were 216 prisoners on the 1st floor of circular 2 and one day the
authorities called them all out to formation. They were offered the
rehabilitation program again during this formation. Nobody volunteered and
so the entire group was marched off to the punishment building (square
building 6) and forced to perform heavy manual labor for the next six
months. Victor was put to work busting rocks in a nearby quarry. He had to
work 10-12 hours everyday. Victor became sick and stressful, and went bald
during this period. The authorities believed that the prisoners would give in. One day in the quarry Victor grew so weak that he could not walk. He was taken back to the prison and offered the rehabilitation plan again. He refused and was hit for this. He says that it was against his moral principles and would rather die than be a communist. He also prayed that the United States would help.

Victor also says that in response to the Bay of Pigs invasion the prison administration wired dynamite around the prison compounds with the intent of killing the prisoners en mass if the Americans invaded. Earlier accounts (Valladares, 1984) corroborate this. The dynamite had been dug into the foundations of the circulars, placed in some of the ventilation shafts and stored in the basements. The circular guard tower was packed with dynamite, turning it into a four-story fragmentation grenade. Valledares reports that a prisoner named Americanito had climbed through the plumbing shaft into the basement and returned with sticks of dynamite and fuses. Americanito told the rest of the prisoners that the dynamite seemed to be wired by cables so that it could be electrically ignited from a distant point. Some imprisoned American CIA agents who were familiar with explosives were given samples of what Americanito found. The CIA agents, led by Daniel Caswell, called it a "double fail-safe detonation system" that is, both electrical and mechanical. Some of the imprisoned technicians in circular 4 set about trying to defuse and deactivate as much of the dynamite as possible, others built homemade grenades, and some of the less educated prisoners took to hanging a piece of wood around their necks in the belief that if you bit down on wood during the explosion, it would mitigate the effects of the blast. When it was too quiet at night, some of the prisoners would grow terrified that the guards had been
evacuated because the order for the TNT to be exploded had been given (Valladares, 1984: 91-94).

When Victor arrived in September of 1961 the dynamite was still there, it stayed until after the October 1962 missile crisis. In September of 1962, just before the time of the October crisis, Victor says that some of the prisoners felt there was nothing to live for and wanted to set off the dynamite prematurely in order to kill as many guards and officials as possible. Others in their despair, found a meaningful explanation to the problem of the dynamite in religion. One of Victor’s fellow prisoners wrote the poem "Presidio Modelo Dinamitado" (Dynamite Model Prison, Ruidiaz-Marichal, 1990:17) that in part reads:

Hemos visto con accion
los trabajando,
el T.N.T. colando
con cuidado y precausion.
De nosotros la explosion
ni uno solo dejara,
el comunismo podra
tal vez, realizar su anhelo
pero hay un Dios en el cielo
y de eso encargara.

Triste vida que sellada
junta con la muerte ronda
en una fuerte y redonda
circular dinamitada.
avolar en pedacitos!
Fidel pregontado a gritos
que desapareceremos,
pero al morir llevaremos
mas moral que Moralitos.

We have a plan of action
the technicians are working
putting the TNT away
with care and precaution.
For us the explosion
not one person will say
that communism will be able to perhaps realize its dreams
but there is a God in the sky
and in Him we have faith.

Sad life that we finish
together in the circle of death
in a strong and round circle of dynamite.
Oh mother of destiny
return us in pieces
Fidel is shouting that we will disappear
but we will go to our deaths
more moral than the Moralitos.

The prisoners were frustrated and finally began a hunger strike, it got out of control and turned into a riot. The prisoners had contraband matches and went crazy, people began hauling their mattresses out of the cells, setting them on fire, and throwing them over the ledges. Burning mattresses were falling from all stories and piling up on the first floor. The prison guards ran away and the prisoners were laughing, Victor says that it was the only time they were ever able to get even with the guards. Victor says that the prisoners didn't really believe that the burning mattresses would be close enough to the dynamite to ignite it, but the guards believed that the prisoners had gone insane and were going to kill everyone in a mass suicide-homicide.

Armored vehicles and tanks surrounded the prison the next day. At 6 a.m. the prison director himself appeared and asked the prisoners through the Major if they would come out of the circular quietly for a peaceful inspection. "You can see what's surrounding you, come down and leave it in God's hands." They agreed and everyone (over 1,000 men) was evacuated from circular 2. This event came to be known as "La Pacifica." On the first day, circulars 2 and 4 were stripped bare, on the second day the guards cleared out circulars 1 and 3. The guards entered and removed everything flammable or
not nailed down - mattresses, sheets, blankets, books- everything. It went on
till 6 p.m. and Victor estimates 300 soldiers took part. The prisoners were
stripped naked, many were beaten, and spent 15 days without clothes while
the authorities decided what to do. The solution was to clear all prisoners out
of the first floor so that nobody could get anywhere near the dynamite. The
first floor of all the circulars were stripped of their bunks and only guards
were allowed to loiter there. After the October missile crisis the dynamite was
removed and the prisoners were told to write to their families and to ask
them to send them new clothes.

Inspections were as violent as those at La Cabana. Violence was used
both to back up prison regulations and as an arbitrary way of dealing with
prisoners. At La Cabana José had been beaten so badly that he once was
unconscious for two days. Carlos was beaten at Isla de Pinos and suffered
nerve damage. All the prisoners cite seeing people bayoneted or hit by the
guards and report that many prisoners died from this treatment.

Organized forced labor groups were formed in 1964 for those prisoners
who refused to participate in rehabilitation. Some worked in the quarries
near the prison, others cut sugar-cane. Both Carlos and Victor were members
of these work groups.

Carlos says that the U.N. has some microfilm smuggled out from the
prison. Che Guevera went to address the UN. and the films were shown, and
Che said that "We shoot people and will continue to." Carlos says that when
the Red Cross asked to visit the prison, Castro said only if they came in
combat.
Carlos spent 8 months at Isla de Pinos, Victor three years. Several human rights groups looked into it and the camp was closed down. The inmates were transferred to various prisons.

Carlos and Victor were now no longer simply political prisoners, but had assumed the identity of the plantado. As a right of passage in the evolving self-image of these men, this transformation to plantado status is the concept by which they would henceforth identify themselves.
CHAPTER NINE

LA CABANA

La Cabana fortress was built by the Spaniards during colonial times to protect Havana from English pirates. Built on high ground overlooking the city, it is strategically placed so that its guns can cover both the harbor and the Presidential Palace. Batista's artillery school had formerly occupied the fortress. Due to the extreme number of political prisoners incarcerated since the revolution, La Cabana had been transformed into a large prison by the new Marxist state. A special vehicle known as "the bitch" which was a poorly ventilated armored truck, would transport the prisoners across the drawbridge that spanned the moat to the fortress. There are some old buildings immediately inside the fortress, just past the iron gates behind the drawbridge, that serve as a processing station.

On his arrival at La Cabana, José arrived during the night with four other prisoners. The guards took one look at him and one shouted "how can a Negro be a counter-revolutionary?"

The guards rounded on José and began punching him and prodding him with bayonets. He was herded directly to a punishment cell that was separate from the other general prison facilities. This cell for the most part was solitary confinement cell, although on occasion 2-3 other prisoners were tossed in with him. Other than that, José says that the rats were his only friends during this time, and he was kept there for the next two months.
On release from solitary, José was allowed to shower and then issued a prison uniform. The prison garb was the old khaki-yellow uniform from the Army of Cuba (Batista's army). José was placed in a large rectangular galley which contained about 400 prisoners. A grill blocked off both the entrances to the galley and a large pit lay outside of the back. The galleys were 3 stories high, and to the front of each was a central courtyard. They were basically long mailbox shaped tunnels barred off at both entrances. The walls were estimated to be 3 feet thick. Two machine-gun nests called garitas were built into the outer wall which closed off the prison. Four .30 caliber machine guns, one at each corner of the fortress wall, covered the prison compound. Ten armed guards manned the outer wall. There were eleven partially underground galleys, numbered 7-17, as well as a number of others, including a special one known as galera 22 which at times held those who were common criminals, at other times ex military personnel condemned to death. Small punishment cells called capillas (little chapels) were located behind galley 22. All were facing a walled off patio. The galleys are 120 feet long with 50 beds apiece, with the exception of galley 14, which had 17 beds. The galleys had domed ceilings, with rooms approximately 20 meters long and less than 8 meters wide. There were 2 toilets near the entrance and a small shower and sink in a separate cubicle. Bunk beds stacked either 3 or 4 high filled the rooms, which had central passageways of less than 2 meters wide. One former prisoner, John Martino, estimates that at one time there were about 1,500 prisoners in La Cabana and only 675 beds (Martino 1963).

When morning broke on José's first day in the general prison, he was still somewhat frightened. The day started out ordinarily enough. The prisoners were lined up for roll call at 5 a.m. and then at 6 a.m. a breakfast
line formed up for bread, water and sugar. Typical prison routines. Then all of a sudden the guards burst into the compounds with fixed bayonets, swinging rifle butts into prisoners faces. José did not know what was happening.

This was the first of many “requistas” or surprise inspections. Another former prisoner, Armando Valladares (1984) describes the inspection process:

For the inspections the platoon of soldiers armed with wooden truncheons, chains and bayonets, and anything else they could beat us with, would erupt into the galleras shouting and striking out blindly. The order was that we prisoners were to come out of the cells the instant the cell doors were opened. But when the cell doors would be opened the angry mob of soldiers would rush in like a whirlwind, meting out blows at random. Prisoners, also like a whirlwind would be trying to get out into the prison yard, and so a knot of prisoners and guards beating them would form at the door, since we all couldn't fit through at the same time. We were always in mortal terror of those inspections. We would be gripped by panic, desperation and worst of all confusion- we would try to escape unharmed, but that was virtually impossible since outside the patio a double file of guards armed with rifles and fixed bayonets made sure that no one failed to receive his quota of blows and kicks.” (Valladares, 1984:21-22).

Aside from intimidation, the inspections were geared towards uncovering contraband items, as at one time even a contraband radio was in the prison. José says that major inspections would always occur a day or two before the 26th of July, as it was an important political day for the government and they did not want any prison disruptions.

Carlos corroborates both José's and Armando Valledares accounts of the beatings. "Soldiers would get in a line and hit you. A lot of people got broken legs and backs." José's current roommate Eduicio, who spent 6 years (1964-1970) as a political prisoner, says simply, "Golpe, golpe, golpe." Eduicio also concurs with the others in regards to the violence.

The prisoners were beaten quite forcefully that day and then herded out into the courtyard. After much confusion and harassment, José returned back to his galley in time for lunch. The dining hall was in a separate building and
the prisoners would file through, one galley eating quickly before they were ordered to leave and the next galley sent through. Lunch was usually a sort of vegetable stew with peas, often infested with grubs and cockroaches. If you had relatives who knew where you were being held, they would sometimes bring gofio (roasted flour), caramel candies and powdered milk to supplement your diet. Water was strictly rationed and amounted to 4 cups per prisoner per day. This made proper hygiene problematic.

José referred me to a book (Valls, 1986) that he believes is an accurate description of the routine at La Cabana, and the next three paragraphs are based on this source.

After lunch, the prisoners were allowed to mingle in the open courtyard and get some fresh air, or visit friends in other galleys. Waiting in line to use the toilet was one of the more frequently recurring daily frustrations. As diarrhea was a constant problem, people would sometimes defecate in sinks, showers, buckets or other assorted locations. Depending on how many prisoners were being held at the time there might not be enough beds. José arrived at a time of sufficient bedding, he slept on the first level of bunks as it was customary among the prisoners not to require those arriving from solitary confinement the hassle of having to climb up and down three levels worth of bunk beds. At other times the prisoners tried to clean the floor with whatever water that they could obtain late in the day or evening, so that prisoners like who slept on the floor might find it partially clean (Valls, 1986:23-24).

Each prisoner was given a plastic water bottle or a pail and sometimes prisoners pooled their water to take baths. Bunks were moved and a small bathing area set up, which the prisoners waited patiently in line to use.
During the rainy season the galleys would flood and sometimes the toilets and sinks would overflow, sending feces and dirty water everywhere (Valls 1986:22).

Dinner was served at 4 p.m. (More pea stew). The prisoners were allowed to socialize until 9 p.m. and then were returned to their galleys. Lights out would come at 10 p.m. after a final roll call. A large spotlight would beam through the back grill at night, and an armed guard would keep watch. The prisoners would have to inform the guard through the galley chief if they needed to use the toilet in the night; otherwise the guard was liable to shoot at anyone making unauthorized movements. Those sleeping under the beds and on the floors would often encounter rats making their nocturnal rounds (Valls 1986:22).

It was in the evenings and throughout the nights that the executions would take place in the trench that surrounded the rear entrance to the galleys. It was here that Bernardo was killed. José says that in some galleys you could not watch the executions in person, only hear the shootings. Other galleys had a more direct view. Those condemned to die were kept in a small holding area near galley 22 where the common criminals could ridicule them by shouting "Viva Castro!" Often the prisoners being executed would shout "Viva Cristo Rey" just before their deaths. A fence kept the common criminals from mingling with the political prisoners under normal circumstances, but those being led to execution would have to pass by them and they would be spat on and have trash thrown at them. Some of the prisoners tried to protest but their complaints were ignored.

One of the internal problems among the prisoners that José pointed out was that many common criminals would be labeled as counter-
revolutionaries by the authorities for crimes such as stealing, rape etc. and thrown in with the true and committed members of the organization. Professional soldiers like José could generally detect if their fellow prisoners possessed the skills and experience of a true freedom commando and again like in the mountains of Pinar del Rio, categorize the true from the false.

José reports that the prisoners developed their own set of rules. He lists the following in this order.

1. Respect for military men, regardless of what army they had previously served in (Batista’s Army of Cuba; Castro’s 26 of July rebel army,)
2. To clean the floors three times a week (to avoid lice)
3. To study (languages, the Bible)
4. Everyone is serving one cause

Victor lists the implicit prison rules as (1) respect, (2) unity, (3) ideology and (4) equality and friendship. Victor, Vincente and Javier all say that there were no thieves or spies among the political prisoners.

Psychological and spiritual strength were derived in various forms from writing poetry and stories, conversations between inmates, and for José especially, reading the bible.

José and his friends would find paragraphs in the bible that dealt with Christ’s sufferings and draw parallels with their own lives. Saturday and Sunday afternoons were special because the prisoners would be left unmolested for two hours to hold religious observances in the hallways. José says that since some of the guards were religious, they would respect their quiet time for worship. The prisoners would sit around the hallway and present to one another inspirational readings in this manner. I asked José if he had a particularly favorite section from the bible during this time. He
replied yes, Apocalypse was his favorite section, as it hinted as to what was in
store for the communists in the end. José gave me a book by one of his fellow
prisoners to help explain these ideas, the prisoner, a man named Pardo, had
written a poem that in part reads:

El Kremlin se propaga debajo del talon
Y avanza agazapado
Armado de escarnio, el odio y la traicion.
Las manos encrispadas,
Diabolicas de Lenin, parecen dos guadanas,
-Satan esta de fiesta!-
La tetrica y mecabra
Doctrina communista, plagada de rapina
-No es mas que la Paz-Siega-
Que oculta el idea del pueblo soerano.
Despiertan las Naciones
No toman del brebaj e malefico e inhumano
Cercenen el avance
Del monstruo uniformado con mascara de oveja.
No crean en desarme..
Las hienas quiren sangre e inundan los lugares
Andando enmascaradas
Preparense los pueblos de libres continentes
Venced el infortunio
Marxista-Leninista que hace cual serpientes
Emponzonar las tierras
Bailando la vil danza con de esclavitud.
Antorcha libertadora...
Enciende la maleza...sembrando la virtud...

The Kremlin spreads beneath the curtain
and advances armed with utter taunting words
The hatred and the treason
Lenin's diabolically convulsive and twitching hands
they resemble two scythes
Satan is in celebration!...
...the gloomy macabre
communist doctrine, plagued with looting
It is nothing more than blind peace!
it conceals the ideal of the sovereign nation
Nations wake up!
Do not drink of the evil and inhumane concoction.
Curtail the progress of the uniformed monster
in sheep's clothing!
They do not believe in disarmament... the hyenas want blood
and they flood the places
roaming in disguise ...prepare yourselves nations of the free continents
conquer the misfortunate Marxist-Leninists
that as serpents poison the land
Dancing their dastardly dance
with the tune of slavery
The liberating torch set the thicket afire...
Sewing virtue...

José also enjoyed the stories about Paul because "he was such a good
t friend to Jesus." However eventually his bible was taken away from him.

La Cabana and Isle de Pinos are but two of the prisons inhabited by
plantados; Boniato, Kilo Siete, El Principe and Guanajay were some of the
other prominent prisons. All separated plantados from the rehabs and
common criminals, all were marked by requistas and rehabilitation programs.
Two of my informants, Roman and Javier, joined the rehabilitation program,
they report that they were treated well and feel that being in the program was
instrumental in securing them earlier release dates. They say that they were
not hit, but that the plantados were treated worse.
CHAPTER TEN

THE REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Amnesty International has been concerned for many years about reports of ill treatment of (Cuban) political prisoners... Many of the most serious allegations have been related to the prisoners who have come to be known as "plantados." Amnesty International has received many reports over the years that, in response to their refusal to cooperate with the prison regime, they were deprived for long periods of many rights. Many spent years without visits and correspondence or access to sunlight and exercise. Medical treatment was reportedly withheld or insufficient and food and sanitary conditions inadequate. Several, particularly in the early years, died in detention, in some cases apparently as a result of inadequate medical attention, others while on hunger strike, and yet others apparently as a result of beatings and severe prison conditions. The organization has consistently expressed concern to Cuban authorities regarding their conditions of detention...

The inter-American Commission of Human Rights (of the OAS) has published two reports on the situation of political prisoners and their families in Cuba: the information has been gathered from allegations made by Cuban prisoners and their families. In these reports there is a wealth of allegations of physical and psychological torture, executions and simulated executions of prisoners, and inhumane prison conditions. Most of these allegations are gathered from the early 1960's...Prisoners have alleged that when they refused to accept the ideological rehabilitation courses imposed by the Cuban government, they were subjected to numerous tortures.

As the Cuban government has consistently refused to accept an international commission of inquiry, it has been impossible to check these allegations...(Amnesty International, 1988).

The refusal to participate in the political rehabilitation program was the defining event of the plantados prison experience. The program was called "the three steps to liberty" and was offered in both Isla de Pinos and La Cabana during the early 1960's. The three steps involved prison, rehabilitation camps,
and parole. Victor says that the plan was designed with the objective of causing dissension among the prisoners and dividing them. Carlos said it was a "psychological plan to desensitize you. To train you in Marxist doctrine." José thought that the plan might originally been proposed by some rich prisoners in La Cabana as a means of reducing their sentences.

In La Cabana, a small school was set up called "Escuila" where the prisoners undergoing rehabilitation underwent political studies. Animosity arose between the rehabilitation prisoners and those who refused to participate; the latter came to be known as "plantados" (diehards). One day after the escuelita let out some of the plantados began throwing orange peels and trash at the rehabilitation prisoners, a brawl developed and from then on the two groups were kept separated. The authorities simply labeled the plantados "Rebel Prisoners" and cordoned off sections of the prison so the two groups could not mingle. The prisoners in rehabilitation at Isla de Pinos were moved out of the circulars into the square buildings (thus gaining the nickname "squares"). They performed a play in the dining hall one day called "The three steps to liberty" which the plantados felt was mocking and derisive. If the objective of rehabilitation was to divide and weaken the opposition early results seemed to indicate that it was working for the government.

Victor did not join rehabilitation because he said that he would not let the jailers divide him from his comrades, and that he had moral principles that he could not violate. He did not want to betray Martin Campos, democracy and the struggle. He says that he knew that he would receive a sentence reduction if he participated, but that he refused all the same.
"The plan had no meaning for those with beliefs. I was born in a democratic system, I was raised in a democracy and I will die for democracy" says Victor.

Victor's elastic definition of democracy, which seems to include the Batista regime, can be defined as an experience near concept.

José says that he did not participate in rehabilitation because he "didn't want to." José says that it would mean surrender and that you would have to submit to their rules. He says that to join rehabilitation would be almost "sacrilegious." He refused, primarily, because of those people like Bernardo who had been executed or died in the war: José could not betray them or their ideals. To join the program would be like "rejecting everything." At La Cabana, those who refused rehabilitation were subjected to a continuation of the requista system or sent to San Severino, another prison with a notorious human rights record. José cites the fact that rehabilitated prisoners were sent to agricultural work camps: he did not want to provide the communists with free labor. The authorities made repeated overtures to José and his friends to join rehabilitation, but they could not sway him. Having made the choice to remain a plantado, he would wind up paying a heavy price for his recalcitrance. José was eventually shipped to San Severino prison, where on arrival, a prison officer named LT. Ramirez (derisively called "Chanclética" by the prisoners) took one look at José and shouted "how can a Negro be a counter-revolutionary?" and plunged a bayonet through José's shoulder. Writhing in pain, José was sent to the prison doctor, who treated his wound. The bayonet had pierced José straight through the tattoo of Christ's Holy Grail. The symbolism of this wound wasn't lost on José.

Several months later, during a requista, the guards beat José so badly that he lapsed into a coma for three days. He awoke on the third day back at La
Cabana, where he was sent to because of its superior medical facilities. José convalesced there for the next six months.

Vincente, another plantado, says that rehabilitation was for the "gullible" and he did not accept it because he was not fooled.

Carlos believes that to join the program would have meant to betray all his ideals and like José and Victor, also refused. For this, both he and Victor were put into forced labor groups working in quarries and agricultural labor around the Isla de Pinos.

The forced labor began for plantados at Isla de Pinos began in August of 1964 and was known as the "Plan Camillo Cienfuegos." Both Victor and Carlos say that the authorities made them do heavy manual labor until the prisoner would break and ask for rehabilitation. Of the 216 prisoners in Victor's forced labor group, only 83 held out from requesting rehabilitation after 9 months worth of ill treatment.

Although they all agreed rehabilitation was a moral quandary, they soon saw how the program could be manipulated. Not all their friends who had joined rehabilitation were betraying them. Victor says that they were still "brothers." When the plantados would go on hunger strikes, some of the rehabilitated prisoners even joined them. The rehabilitated prisoners, with access to better mail and medicine, soon began smuggling food, candy, cigarettes, water, medicine and mail to the plantados. They provided a link to the outside world, and became effective allies in the struggle to ameliorate living conditions, and to let the UN and other human rights organizations know of the plantados situation. Victor had some good friends in the plan and did not hate them.
Victor cites this example of both guards and "squares" helping the plantados. A collaborator had been designated as "chief of the prisoners", that is, he was appointed by the authorities to be a overseer of his fellow prisoners. Victor says that the man, known as "Commander Prado" was worse than the guards. Prado had sent a number of prisoners into a punishment cell called "El Hucio."

It was cramped and poorly ventilated and the prisoners were protesting. Prado decided to let some of the less rebellious prisoners out, when Victor and 8 others began chanting "all or none!" Prado yanked the 8 aside and told the guards "these are your strikers. The CIA has infiltrated the prison." A guard named Monjo who didn't like Prado ordered all the prisoners released from the punishment cell. Monjo told Prado, who lived with the rehabilitated prisoners, that he was going to send him to live with the plantados. Prado became frightened for his life, and broke down crying. Finally Prado was allowed back to the "squares" building, where some rehabilitated prisoners beat him up so badly that he was put into the hospital.

José said that he could not judge the rehabilitated prisoners because he did not know each man's personal circumstances. Victor says that the plan appealed to people with long sentences who had no other hope. Victor, José and Carlos all report that certain guards were helping them also. They report that some of the prison guards, on receiving orders to escort the prisoner back to his cell and beat him, would forgo the beatings. After a while they could distinguish the humane and sympathetic guards from the sadistic ones. Some of the sympathetic guards went on to participate in smuggling for, and helping, the plantados.
I interviewed three ex-prisoners who participated in rehabilitation. Javi had been imprisoned in 1965 after he had been caught in downtown Havana loitering with a Czech submachine gun concealed under his coat. He had been sentenced to 20 years in prison. He joined rehabilitation to get out early, and did so after 10 years. He says that he was treated well in rehabilitation, but that the plantados were treated worse. He did not believe in Communism and left for the states when the first opportunity (Mariel Boat lift, 1980) presented itself. I asked him what he thought of the plantados. "The truth?" Javi said, glancing at Victor and Vincente, (both plantados) and then looking me right in the eye. "I thought they were stupid. Why serve 20 years when you only have to do 10." Victor and Vincente said nothing.

Ramon was also a participant in rehabilitation during the 1960s. He too reports a reduction of his sentence, better treatment, saw the plantados ill treated, and says that he did not believe in communism. He to emigrated to the United States at the first available opportunity.

Waldo was in rehabilitation during the 1980's. He says that he did not become a plantado because he knew that he could not take the ill treatment. He played the game but did not believe in the political indoctrination either, and left for the states when the opportunity (Mariel) presented itself.

It is unclear why the prison authorities would want people in rehabilitation if they were dyed in the wool recalcitrants. By Castro's own admission there were 20,000 political prisoners being held in Cuban jails during the year 1965 (Lockwood,1969:247). This was not only an economic drain, but a political liability as well, since many of the prisoners were imprisoned for minor or dubious reasons (ibid, 247-48). Castro told Lockwood that the aim of rehabilitation was to "neutralize" the prisoner politically, so
that he would offer no further resistance upon release. To convince them that they fought against the revolution out of ignorance (ibid:250). One official said of the program:

We do not try to indoctrinate them. Most of the internees have such a low level of political understanding when they come to us that they would not understand it if we did."(ibid:250).

"All we thought about was politics" says Victor.

Lockwood got a hold of one of the textbooks used in the political studies program course in rehabilitation program. He cites the following examples of the text:

"Bourgeois sociologists and politicians declare as accidental and unnatural an event so in accordance with the laws and necessary from the historical point of view as the great October Socialist Revolution, only because that revolution and that socialist state system contradict the interests of the bourgeoisie."

"Humanity has traversed a long and complex road, stretching from the primitive community, through slavery, feudalism, and capitalism to the socialism of today, formed in the powerful Socialist camp...

"In order to carry out the great, historic fight which our country is leading in Latin America, it is necessary to understand the real causes and motivating forces of historical events and the laws of development...

"Historical materialism was born in the decade of the 1840's, created by Marx and Engels, great sages and thinkers, teachers and guides of the working class. The appearance of historical and dialectical materialism represented the most magnificent practical revolution in science...(ibid:250-251).

The math lessons from the rehabilitation text also had political overtones:

In the semi-colonial colonies of Latin America about 4 people die of hunger, curable disease, or premature old age every minute. How many people die in Latin America every 3 minutes under the social system of exploitation which imperialism has established?

Let us multiply 3x4 = 12.

Answer: The result of multiplying the number of people who die every minute by 3 minutes gives us the number of Latin Americans who die in our continent every 3 minutes and would not die under a just social system. (ibid:251-252).
Valladares echoes Victor's and Carlos's analysis of political rehabilitation as division and psychological warfare, he says that the program had one strategy: "to snare leaders... to keep out men they thought unimportant, and psychologically break down the rest." (Valladares, 1984:219). Lee Lockwood, an American journalist who visited prisoners going through reeducation on Isle de Pinos in 1965 reported that no pressure is brought on a prisoner to join. (Lockwood, 1969:249). Victor laughed when I mentioned this to him.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

For Victor, Carlos and José, to accept rehabilitation would be tantamount to surrender, and betrayal of all their beliefs. It would be like accepting a social order incongruent with the moral order of existence. Victor served out his full 15 year sentence at prisons such as Isla de Pinos and San Severino, and finally, Avica prison. He was released on May 28, 1976. While out processing, a guard asked him "why didn't you accept rehabilitation? You could have been out in 5-7 years." Victor replied that as he respected the guard's beliefs, he expected the guard to respect his. He did not believe in rehabilitation and his ideology was to have mutual respect. The guard should understand and accept this.

Victor lived quietly with some relatives in Cuba before emigrating to the US. during the 1980's. Today he lives on a small pension in a tiny apartment in the heavily Latino neighborhood behind Vegas World known as "the naked city." He is friends with other ex-prisoners, particularly Vincente and Ramon.

Carlos was released in 1989 and emigrated to the US after a series of agreements between the US and Cuban governments allowed for this to happen with former political prisoners. After a brief marriage, and divorce, he became a kitchen helper at a local casino.
After La Cabana, (1965-1968) José served time in Prison "5.5" (1968-1973), San Severino (1973-1974) and Nuevo Morajon (1974-1977). He was released in 1977. None of his prison experiences "neutralized" him. After 6 months of living quietly with his wife in Havana, under the watchful eyes of the local CDR, José got involved with a small circle of people who were organizing against the government. José had found work as an electrician (He had learned the trade while in school before joining the army after his father's death). During the 1982 Pan Am Games in Havana, José was working as one of the maintenance men in Lenin Park hotel, where all the athletes were staying. José was in the generator room and switched all the currents from 110 to 220. This shorted out the electrical system and destroyed several motors. Meat and perishable foods in the hotels refrigerators and freezers quickly spoiled, and all the lights and electricity went down. José was accused of sabotage but denied it. He told the investigators that if he had of set the currents to 220 the whole place would have burned down. Since José and his friend Rubio were the only ones working in proximity to the power room that day, it was obvious to the investigators that they had to be responsible, but there was just enough doubt that they did not get into legal trouble. Nevertheless, they were booted out of Lenin Complex and not allowed to return.

José's group was infiltrated shortly after that and the members imprisoned. José served a second prison term from 1982 to 1989 during which he maintained his defiant attitude and behavior. One example of his continued defiance during his second prison term that is illustrative of José's continued uncompromising behavior occurred during the US invasion of Grenada. News reached the prisoners that the commander of the Cuban
contingent to Grenada, a man named Tortolo, had become an object of national ridicule after several of his subordinates reported on a television interview that Tortolo had panicked and fled his post at the onset of the US invasion. Jose and a friend had made a huge poster out of cardboard that showed a tennis shoe and read “si usted quiere correr rapido y veloz usa tenis Tortolo” (if you want to run fast, use Tortolo tennis shoes). The authorities called the prisoners to formation and asked who was guilty of drawing and posting the derisive cartoon. In order to keep all the prisoners from getting in trouble, Jose and his friend stepped forward. They were taken to see an official named Boyes.

“Oh, so you are the two artists who drew Comrade Tortolo” Boyes said laughing.

“We were just doing a drawing of Comrade Tortolo.”

Boyes may have been amused, but still sentenced them to six months in solitary confinement, during which José states that he was fed only once a day.

José contends that the government’s reaction to dissent continued to be arbitrary and unjust during the 1980’s. One of José’s favorite stories which he backs up the claim with is about a fellow prisoner, an old man named Juancito. Juancito was 65 years old and before his imprisonment, he had a dream one night that Raul and Fidel Castro had died and Cuba had become a western style democracy. Juancito told his wife about the dream and told her not to repeat it to anybody. At the market that day she was gossiping with friends and other vendors and told them about her husband’s dream. The lower classes in Cuba are very superstitious about dreams and soon the story had spread throughout the area. The police got wind of the rumor going
around that "Castro is going to die, Juancito saw it in his dreams." The old lady also repeated the story to the Local CDR leader. José says that Juancito received a five year prison sentence for "conspiracy and terrorism"-for having a dream.

José also claims that he knew another guy who was imprisoned for criticizing the milk producing capabilities of Castro’s favorite cow, Matilda.

In 1989 José was released from prison and sent to the United States after the US and Cuba came to an agreement on the release of political prisoners. Today he is a dishwasher in a popular Las Vegas Casino. José also has a daughter and some nieces that live in Las Vegas.

In the summer of 1992, José was living in Las Vegas with his social worker (a Cuban woman who grew up in the same neighborhood as José) and another former prisoner named Leo. During a domestic dispute, Leo shot José twice with a small caliber pistol, hitting him once in the torso and again in the wrist. José fell to the ground in pain, and began to call out to Lazaro to save him from dying. Lazaro answered Jose’s prayers.

Today, Jose still has a bullet lodged in his body. For protection, José has behind his front door a small shrine. There is a statue of a rooster, and in front of the rooster, a glass of water. In front of the this is a plate with a coconut on it, surrounded by some candies. A figurine of a small bird in front of a second glass of water sits across from the rooster, as if they are having lunch together. A candle is lit next to them every evening. This is for protection. "If the rooster crows three times, it means that you will be betrayed" says José.

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The strange opacity of certain empirical events, the dumb senselessness of intense or inexorable pain, and the enigmatic unaccountability of gross iniquity all raise the uncomfortable suspicion that perhaps the world, and hence man's life in the world, has no genuine order at all—no empirical regularity, no emotional form, no moral coherence. And the religious response to this suspicion is in each case the same: the formulation, by means of symbols, of an image of such a genuine order of the world which will account for, and even celebrate, the perceived ambiguities, puzzles and paradoxes in human experience. The effort is not to deny the undeniable—that there are unexplained events, that life hurts or that rain falls upon the just—but to deny that they are inexplicable, that life is unendurable and that justice is a mirage. (Geertz, 1973).

From accounts of African and Haitian Voodoo priests to stories about Castro's cow, various apocryphal religious beliefs of the prisoners served to stress the illegitimacy of the Castro regime and suggest a meaningful counter-order to the system. And much like Evans-Pritchard's (1937) description of the Azande belief system, the prisoners' behavior is logical and conduct is rational if one accepts the basic assumptions they believed in: that communism was intrinsically evil and in the end justice would prevail. José knew from reading the Bible that the communists would receive supernatural punishment come judgment day. It was the duty of every Christian and Democratic Freedom Commando to fight them to the death. Material considerations were an insignificant triviality when compared to the cosmic scope of the battle being waged.

Religious beliefs involve not a Baconian induction from everyday experience—for then we should all be agnostics—but rather a prior acceptance of authority which transforms that experience. (Geertz, 1973).

I further argue that this a prior acceptance of religion that Geertz alludes to invokes the idea of primary groups as the source of these beliefs. The padrino, Carlos's father, and Diego's parents all helped socialize these deep rooted beliefs into our informants. These religious beliefs and the idea that communism would destroy religion took on a new urgency with the
realization of Castro's victory. A long feared pariah group, the communists had seized power and our informants worst fears were materializing. They saw no recourse but to fight, regardless of the odds. By the time José was captured his relationships with members of the guerrilla force were as powerful as family ties. For both Victor and José, intense primary group ties-with people such as Martin Campos, and Bernardo Corrales, and other soldiers of the Commando, helped cement these loyalties.

In regards to beliefs, religion, communism and ideas on the relative merits of parliamentary democracy vs. those of a Soviet style state were important. Religious and political enculturation from their parents and childhood was augmented by either their exposure to the military ethos (traditionally anti-communist in Latin American militaries), or during their immersion in the Counter-revolutionary mystic of the guerrilla movement. Our informants internalized the basic themes, values and identity of the movement. This military ethos that was internalized during this phase stressed themes of legitimacy, in-group vs out-group, and inevitable victory. These themes are common in guerrilla war and enable the participants to arrive at an understanding of the groups need to engage in armed actions. These beliefs solidify the corporate group identity and heighten political awareness, and the concomitant motivation associated with these phenomena. Psychologically it adds a dimension of meaning to what otherwise can be a Spartan existence. This phase above all fosters a self identity in the participants, an identity based on their role in the struggle. Legitimacy themes-democracy and freedom- are stressed to help build a positive self image, as it implies that the participants are engaged in a historic and just war to achieve the moral regeneration of the nation through the
overthrow of the false and illegitimate regime. This ties into the second “in-group out-group” theme, where the battle lines are clearly delineated. When the enemy has been clearly identified, actions can be taken in a swift and decisive manner. Inevitable victory themes (God is on our side, freedom cannot be suppressed) also increases the participants morale and functions as a bandwagon effect during recruitment.

The religious beliefs were structured to give intellectually satisfying answers to any possible outcomes of events. Castro’s involvement with Voodoo gave plausible explanations to the setbacks of the 1960-1965 guerrilla campaign. The ethos of the Freedom Commandos was augmented by these beliefs about the Saints sanctioning and aiding the cause. In prison, potential death from the dynamite explosion was rendered meaningful and articulated in poems which gave a religious solution to the terror that the dynamite invoked. This solution served to reduce stress and induce moods of resolve in the prisoners. Suffering, bayonetings and death all came to be understood in a systematic way. Communism’s defeat at the hands of God and the Saints was inevitable, and the prisoners based their actions on these beliefs.

In prison the former commandos continued to organize, rejecting the symbolism of the blue uniforms and clearly distinguishing themselves from the common criminals. Shouts of “Viva Cristo Rey” publicly announced their continued ideological position. Bible reading sessions, solidarity in the face of punishment (the cry of “all or none” during time in El Huicio), the refusal to betray the memory of fallen comrades, all underline the importance of religion and primary groups when determining loyalties and conducting political recruitment.
Hence, we as anthropologists must guard against lapsing into the narrow view that ideology serves solely as a mask for material self interest, for it is an erroneous assumption. By honoring the wider view of culture and belief as a question of meaning and not one of utility, we come closer to describing that social reality.
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