

# Image and Authority: Political Trials Captured in Cuba and Panamá, 1955-1959

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## Abstract

The assassination of Panamanian President José Antonio Remón in 1955 and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 brought about public trials of immense political importance. The article compares the ways legal processes in Panamá and Cuba were represented in the media, with particular focus on visual images. In both cases, images were key to the shifting of public sensibilities and understandings of the trials. But although in both Cuba and Panamá legal consciousness became highly politicized, in the former, the trials solidified public support for the young Revolution, whereas in Panamá, the notion of a corrupted legal process undermined the regime as a whole.

**Keywords:** photography, political trials, legal consciousness, José Antonio Remón, Cuban Revolution, print media

## Resumen

El asesinato del presidente panameño José Antonio Remón en 1955 y el triunfo de la Revolución Cubana en 1959 provocaron juicios de gran importancia política. Este artículo compara las formas que esos procesos judiciales fueron representados en los medios de comunicación en Panamá y Cuba, con especial atención a las imágenes visuales. En ambos casos, imágenes fueron claves para efectuar cambios en la sensibilidad jurídica del público y su entendimiento del proceso político-judicial. Pero aunque en Cuba y Panamá la conciencia jurídica se politizó, los tribunales solidificaron el apoyo público a la joven Revolución Cubana, mientras que en Panamá la noción de un proceso legal corrupto socavó el régimen en su conjunto.

**Palabras clave:** Fotografía, juicios políticos, conciencia jurídica, José Antonio Remón, Revolución Cubana, prensa escrita

A set of trials with enormous political significance hypnotized Panamá between 1955 and 1958, and Cuba in the first half of 1959. In Panamá, the killing of strongman José Antonio Remón, who had been kingmaker and then president (1947-51; 1952-55), set off an official investigation unprecedented in scope, and later a series of trials and appeals. In Cuba, Fidel Castro's Rebel Army, which had already carried out revolutionary tribunals during the civil war, proceeded to arrest, try, and often execute the former officers of Fulgencio Batista.

The cases are different in almost every sense. In Panamá, the judicial proceedings were a way for a regime to regain its balance after the death of the strongman that had kept it cohesive. Panamanians, who were at first curious about the case and not unsympathetic towards the official investigation, slowly turned against the entire proceedings, taking the side of the defendants. The public grew ever more sophisticated about weighing evidence and comparing theories about the shooting. Everyone seemed to have an opinion about the conspiracy, and, through a variety of mediators – lawyers, photographers, legal pundits, and the families of the defendants – an intense, national legal debate took place. This debate touched not only on the question of what had happened on the night of the killing, but also about the validity of evidence, and the integrity of the interpretative procedures in question. And by the end of almost three years of trials, Panamanians celebrated the acquittal of the defendants, dancing in the streets. In Cuba, on the other hand, the July 26 Movement (M-26-7) needed to carry out justice quickly so as to prevent vigilantism, and to establish itself as the sole arbiter of legitimate violence. The voices of legal experts concerned for the rights of the defendants in what was now supposed to be a revolutionary democracy were drowned out by the public cry – *paredón!* – and by the new government's will to administer its justice quickly.

In comparing the Panamanian and Cuban experiences, I want to highlight two different ways in which images can mediate the public life of judicial processes. Both countries had vibrant media environments, which included multiple newspapers, radio and television stations, and which had suddenly been freed from the censorship that the Batista and Remón regimes had exercised on them. Yet the images of the trials in these countries could not be more different. In Panamá, alongside a discourse that focused on the examination of documents and testimony, images in the press showed the drama of the court itself, as well as specific pieces of evidence brought before it. In Cuba, photographs of mass graves and tortured bodies appeared alongside laconic descriptions of the revolutionary tribunals' work, but the images of the old regime's crimes were most often not connected to any specific discussion in court. Rather, they painted a larger picture – a narrative that divided Cuban history into the pre- and post-revolutionary periods.

With the material available to me, I can only suggest a few tentative answers to a set of questions about the histories of Cuba and Panamá. But although I could not contribute to the larger discussion about photography and its relation to power, this debate has informed my work. Half a century before the events I depict here, European police forces had already possessed huge collections of photographs. These images were used not only to identify suspects but also to substantiate a field of criminology that claimed to construct the image of a criminal man. And so while some scholars point to a collusion between the camera and the law, others argue for photography's apparent democratization of portraiture itself. Mass production of cameras, after all, made portraits affordable and brought photographic images to every home. Indeed, photographs throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century have also been used to shed light on historical events, at times even challenging government agencies and official narratives. And so the larger question remains – is photography an inherently democratic medium or a repressive one? The jury, it seems, is still out. Current use of smartphone cameras to hold police forces accountable will not decide the question, because, at the same time, we are witnessing an explosive expansion of the state's capacity to capture, store, and classify images and text, data and metadata.<sup>1</sup> And while the renewed urgency of this theme has informed my writing, I cannot here contribute much to the larger debate. I would only venture that, faced with the specter of an apparently novel mode of being – all captured, all the time – we should return to other image-eras, to see through the notion that images are either inherently democratic or essentially authoritarian.

Legal consciousness, all too often, is seen as a kind of literacy: it develops at a certain point, due to certain conditions, is perhaps refined with time, until it reaches maturity. But what if we were to consider legal consciousness to be a kind of sensibility and give up the whiggish belief in gradual improvement? Imagine that we would consider the ways in which certain problems and ideas circulate, gain social energy, excite segments of society, influence the shaping of history, and perhaps later solidify into “common sense,” or, alternatively, fade away, replaced by other sensibilities. What marks legal sensibilities as especially important, in any case, is that they “frame” all notions of justice and power, connecting, in the broadest sense, the sovereign's power to punish with, on the one hand, the sense of human justice, and on the other, truth itself.

In order to understand the role that images played in the development of opposing legal sensibilities in Cuba and Panamá, we need to appreciate them within their historical contexts. Indeed, analyzing an image, even within a given discourse and a larger context may not be enough. For, as the cases before us show, the photographs, sketches and comics that followed these legal dramas were read differently by different audiences. And, moreover, the same image,

which during one historical period created a certain emotional response, could later on nurture quite a different reaction in the same audience. And finally, after the dust settled on the legal dockets, it was often the same photographs which, reprinted and brought to light again within a new historical context, evoked still other meanings.

*Panamá: The Oligarchy on the Bench of the Accused*

Colonel José Antonio Remón's tenure as president ended a political instability that had lasted for five years. Chief of the country's only armed force, he became a kind of kingmaker after 1947, then ran a successful populist campaign and became president in 1952. His main achievement was in finally stabilizing the state apparatus – using a mix of coercion, cooption and patronage, he managed to solidify a powerful coalition, legislate, and ultimately improve the state's quotidian operation. Remón balanced the Panamanian budget after years of financial chaos, for example, and created the first income tax. By 1955, he had finalized the Remón-Eisenhower Treaty, which, while falling short of a complete overhaul of the neo-colonial system, was nonetheless seen in Panamá as a diplomatic victory. A strongman at the height of the McCarthy Era in the U.S., Remón repressed communists as well as right wing activists, and transformed the police into a National Guard, ensuring it military support under the Point IV Program. And while he was at no time considered an especially popular president, the economic growth that Panamá experienced throughout his presidency, coupled with the political stability of his regime, ensured Remón the respect of his countrymen, and a loyal political following within his own ranks.<sup>2</sup>

On the night of January 2, 1955, as he was sitting at the racetrack, Remón was ambushed and shot multiple times. That night, after Remón was pronounced dead in the hospital, Vice President José Ramón Guizado was sworn in as president. Seeing as the assassins had not been caught, the National Guard swept up a wide variety of suspects in the next two weeks – right wing followers of the populist Arnulfo Arias Madrid (*arnulfistas*), socialists, and any number of politically active individuals. Two weeks into the investigation, a black lawyer by the name of Rubén Miró admitted to the killing. Miró claimed that he had killed the president as part of a deal with then Vice President José Ramon Guizado, who had offered the lawyer the Ministry of Government and Justice. Immediately following Miró's testimony, an emergency session of the Asamblea Nacional took place, in which President Guizado was impeached. The assemblymen went further, however, deciding that, given that the crime was political, Guizado would be tried in the Assembly itself, which would be converted into a kind of tribunal.

Hence, the legal process would be divided: Rubén Miró and his co-conspirators would be prosecuted in the criminal justice system, while Guizado would be tried in the Assembly.

Naturally, this decision was questioned, not least by Guizado's new defense team; however, the Supreme Court, controlled by the governing coalition, authorized the process. A day before the trial in the Assembly could begin, however, Miró smuggled a letter from prison, retracting his earlier admission of guilt, and claiming that Chief of Police Bolívar Vallarino had coerced him into making it. The impeached President Guizado, Miró now asserted, was being framed. The trial started on the next day as planned, but with a growing public unease about its procedure. The Assembly's tribunal rules admitted neither Miró's retraction letter nor any evidence outside the official docket. Indeed, the Assembly would not allow examination of witnesses, but only a reading of the testimonies already compiled in the docket itself. Despite its sketchy case and growing public murmurs, however, the trial, which took place between March 21 and 29, 1955, went on as planned and was concluded by a secret Assembly vote. The ruling *Coalición Patriótica Nacional* (CPN), which José Antonio Remón had created, easily controlled the Assembly, and won a 45-8 vote. The impeached Guizado, convicted of masterminding the killing, was sentenced to ten years in prison, with a third taken off for unspecified attenuating circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

In the first months after the killing, media coverage, though at times sensationalist, stayed more or less in line with the official discourse. With a whodunit detective plot and any number of international conspiratorial options, it was enough simply to keep readers up-to-date on the latest discovery by the National Guard's detectives. The images appearing in the press followed more or less the official investigation too, with photographs of the main protagonists, or of the scene of the shooting. *La Hora* showed portraits of people on the street, who were asked of their opinion on the killing; *La Estrella de Panamá* had the new president, Francisco Arias Paredes, pose with his wife and kids for a family portrait.<sup>4</sup>

*La Estrella* echoed the official version when the National Guard claimed it had found the Schmeisser that Rubén Miró had used. An image of the gun lying on the newspapers in which it had apparently been wrapped appeared on top. Below it was an image of the Panamanian cadet, José Tejada, who had confessed to having sold Miró the weapon<sup>5</sup> [fig. 1]. Tejada, who is pictured pointing at the gun and looking at the camera, is apparently supposed to look like he is in the middle of a confession to his interrogators. But there is something off about the picture. Why does Tejada look so confident? He seems more like an instructor than a man who had just confessed to complicity in the murder of a president. The photograph was arranged by the police, and the newspapers did not question it. Readers did not know, however, that Guizado's defense team

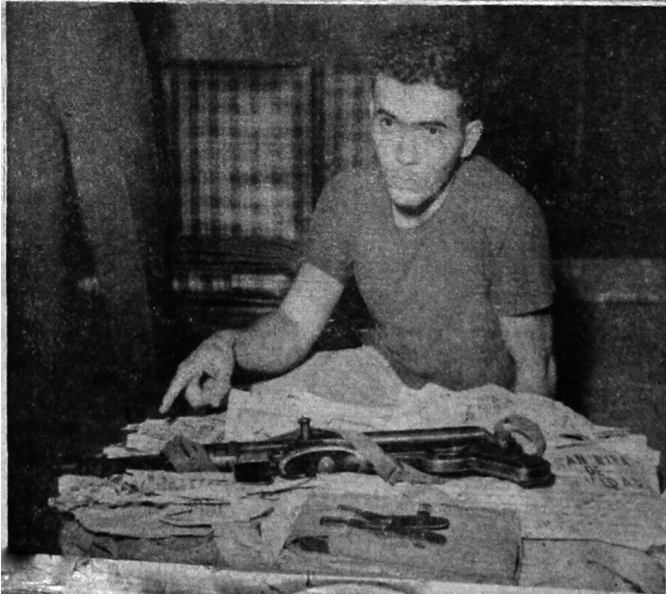


Fig. 1: Cadet José Tejada and the Schmeisser he admitted to have sold to Rubén Miró. (Courtesy of La Estrella de Panamá)

had asked for a copy of the picture supplied to the press. As a now-declassified CIA document shows, the defense wanted to enlarge the original so that it could see if the newspapers the weapon was claimed to have been found wrapped in happened to be from *after* Miró had been arrested. In this case, the defense was not able to achieve its aims. But in time, its lawyers managed to systematize this approach. They would demand a piece of evidence, and if refused, announce that the state was not following its own rules, and denying the standards of justice it claimed to adhere to.<sup>6</sup>

The trial in the Assembly allowed for the beginning of a more balanced discourse. Images of the trial show Guizado in impeccable suits, proclaiming his innocence dramatically. The press now began to mix its detective story with a framework of a radionovela, showing images, for example, of the upper-class ladies in the audience (captions informed readers who was who); of the lawyers making their arguments, and of evidence being shown in the Assembly-turned-court. Perhaps cracks were already forming in the official narrative, however. At one charged moment, a woman in the audience shouted, “*no condenden a un inocente!*” and threw a pile of newspapers on the heads of the honorable representatives.<sup>7</sup>

For the moment, the ruling coalition seemed to have gotten what it wanted. Its president, Ricardo Arias Espinosa, served the remainder of the term, and the CPN candidate won in the 1956 elections (by whatever means). During this period, Guizado's family and legal team, together with the family of Rodolfo St. Malo (accused of having mediated between the conspirators), pulled their considerable resources and launched a public campaign. Understanding that the judicial system itself was a dead end, they used legal measures to spell out the most obvious procedural outrages instead. An appeal to the Supreme Court in September 1955 highlighted the fact that Guizado was in prison as the intellectual author of a crime which had not been clarified in court. And while the appeal to the Supreme Court was thrown out, public sentiment shifted. The prestigious Colegio de Abogados, for example, suddenly announced that all the Supreme Court Justices lacked the necessary qualifications for the job and recommended that they be replaced.

In the next two years, and with the various defense lawyers increasingly making their arguments through the press, the coverage of the case became melodramatic. It would be hard to fault the press – key witnesses mysteriously died during this period, a few defendants publically accused the prosecution of coercion, and every new revelation of government corruption was now assumed to be connected with the killing. At the same time, on the second and third pages, the level of the legal arguments was gradually becoming deeper and more nuanced. Increasingly, specific images of forensic evidence were reproduced to go along with what was becoming a story about a possible framing of Guizado. Panamanians had to look at forensic details to be able to keep track of the arguments made and the analysis of the legal pundits.

The heightened awareness of the significance of specific pieces of evidence worked to the advantage of the prosecution in the first couple of months after the murder, because it allowed for the official narrative to gain credibility in the eyes of the public. For example, in the cartoon narrative that appeared in *La Hora*, the truth according to the official investigation as it was known in January 1955 is explained to the common readers [fig. 2]. The images show Rubén Miró, accused of having killed the president, in various frames: he buys the machine gun from Tejada in one, meets Rodolfo de Saint Malo in another, and in a third he ambushes and shoots two rounds at the president. This type of “scene-to-scene” sequence, involves large leaps in time and space from one frame to another.<sup>8</sup> Of course, a scene-to-scene sequence is useful because it can condense a complex plot into a few frames. But in this case, there is a more important advantage. Readers are expected a high degree of closure in this form of narrative – they need to imagine what happens in the ‘gutter’ (between the frames) in order to establish a full sense of the story. Conveniently, in this case, readers are called



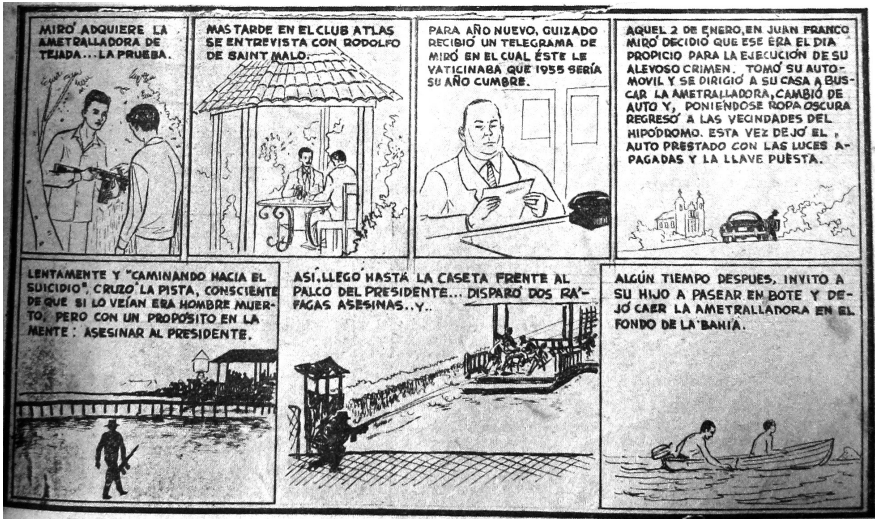


Fig. 2: The comics on the front page of *La Hora* summarized the Prosecution's theory of the assassination in the week following Miró's forced confession.

to imagine those facts most crucial to the prosecution's case, and to rely on narrative bits, like the New Year's telegram Miró had sent Guizado, which are circumstantial at best. In other ways too, this cartoon is evocative: the faces of Tejada, Rodolfo de Saint Malo and Vice President Guizado are drawn, but the assassin, Miró, is shown either with his side or back to the reader, or shaded, under the cover of the night. In the background, as Miró is shown leaving the car, we see the outline of a Church.<sup>9</sup> Miró's black silhouette is shown exiting the car from the passenger seat on the right, rather than from the left, as though he is moving away from the Church, and towards a space of immorality. In short, the cartoon narrative already assumes a certain familiarity with some of the defendants, as well as with the scene of the crime, a familiarity it reinforces as it places them in narrative form. At the same time, it sketches versions of images which had appeared in the press, like those of the racetrack, alongside others, which did not exist, like that of Guizado holding a telegram from Miró. And most importantly, it joins visual and textual pieces into a larger, meaningful narrative.

The longer the trial dragged, and the more twists and turns the plot took, the more familiar Panamanians became with the protagonists and their images. If at first, the public at large had no special feelings for Rubén Miró, and would not have recognized his image, by the end of the trial, his particular characteristics, face, and background were well known. The public gradually became aware of a host of forensic questions. The image of the president's shirt, for example, was reproduced in the newspapers, as were the sketches of his autopsy<sup>10</sup> [Fig. 3].



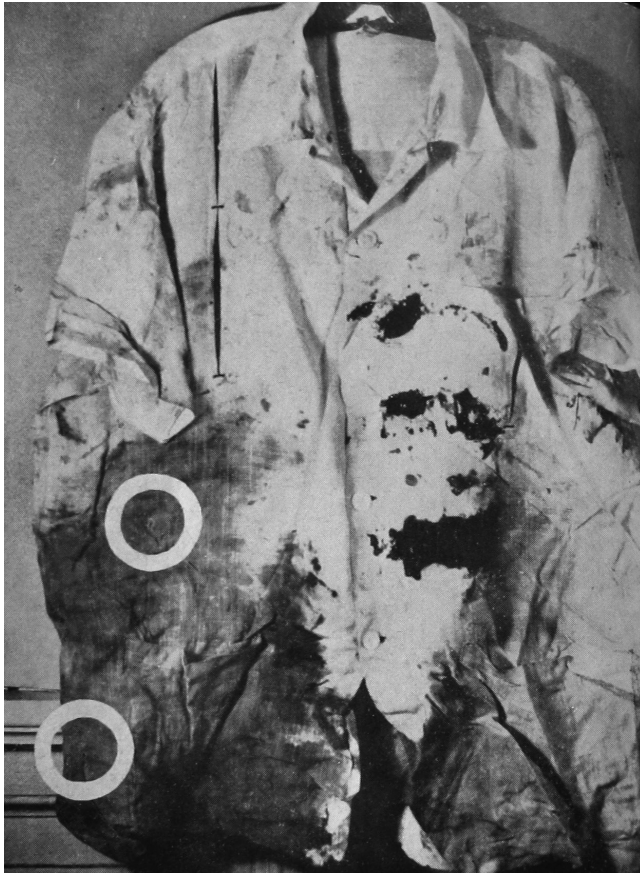


Fig. 3: Official image of President Remón’s guyabera shirt, with bullet holes circled.

The white circles around the tiny entry holes in the shirt serve to concentrate the reader’s focus away from the stains of blood, the place in which the eye would perhaps have naturally landed. It would be hard to imagine a reader forgetting, having seen this image, that it was two bullets which entered Remón’s body. Multiple photos in the press ensured that readers associated the Schmeisser with the holes circled even if such an association was hardly based on solid evidence.

Once the notion that the entire case was rigged looked realistic, the broad familiarity with the forensic evidence began to work against the judicial system as a whole. Take the report that New York ballistic expert Shelley Braverman submitted to the court in October 1957, for example. Detective Braverman argued that the Schmeisser he had examined was actually a composite of two

weapons, which could have been assembled at any point – before or after the assassination.<sup>11</sup> It furthermore established that two bullets collected near the dead president were not from any of the arms accounted for by the police (the Schmeisser and the arms used by Remón’s bodyguards); that the bullet that had killed another man on the scene, the athlete Danilo Sousa, was likewise dissimilar to any of those collected. The ballistic expert claimed that at least three other arms, which had not been accounted for, were used at the racetrack, and that of the two bullets that penetrated Remón’s body, he had been shown only one. These observations, as well as the numerous other holes the defense had shown in the prosecution’s case, now gained a social energy normally unimaginable. Now, it was not only the legal pundits or law students who had an opinion about the case – everyone did. The regime’s engineering of the case was now turned into a story about injustice and deceit, one that became linked in the popular mind with the essential injustices of the oligarchic arrangement as a whole. But it was familiarity with the early images – those that the regime itself had used to gain credibility – that gave the outrage concreteness and an effective idiom.

The trial of Rubén Miró, Rodolfo de Saint Malo, Federico Hyams, José Tejada, Luis Hernández, Camilo González and Teresa Castro began on October 21, 1957. The different defendants had different lawyers, who made different claims about the faults of the procedure and different theories about who had actually killed Remón. But they all built on the tactic that Guizado and St. Malo’s lawyers had developed earlier, appealing not only to the jury, but to public opinion as a whole. To this day it is impossible to say who actually killed Remón. Earlier accusations about a communist conspiracy or a plot by mysterious Antillean workers were by 1957 discarded, but there were still at least three plausible groups of conspirators. First, it was possible that Miró really had killed Remón, with or without a larger conspiracy of *arnulfistas* backing him.<sup>12</sup> Many suspected, on the other hand, that narcotics traffickers with connections in government and in the National Guard had done the job, in response to a clampdown by Remón in the preceding months. And finally, there were still others who suspected U.S. involvement, either in collusion with one of these groups, or as an official CIA hit.<sup>13</sup> What the defense managed to do, however, was to make any of these theories seem more likely than the official version. Moreover, the defendants’ lawyers convinced the jury and the nation that the government’s case was not flawed but rather corrupted, a conspiracy to frame innocents for the crime of a cabal of powerful, shameless men.

On the last days of the trial, the U.S. embassy reported that “so thoroughly engrossed had the entire nation become in the proceedings of the long delayed Miró trial [...] that virtually all non-essential government services and many private business enterprises had come to a standstill.”<sup>14</sup> On December 6, 1957,

the jury reached its verdict: the accused were not guilty. Following the release, the public went into a carnivalesque celebration, that according to some reports, lasted throughout the night.

*Cuba: procesos revolucionarios*

Revolutionary tribunals and summary executions followed the Revolution from its early days in the *Sierra Maestra*. In 1957, Dr. Humberto Sorí Marín, serving as the Movement's Advocate General, wrote a legal code that was to cover the territories under the control of the guerrillas.<sup>15</sup> And indeed, some tribunals assumed an official air, with officers serving as judges, and the troops sitting between the trees to hear peasants' testimonies. In the case of an officer who had accidentally shot and killed his own soldier while trying to enforce revolutionary discipline, Fidel, facing the prospects of full-scale mutiny, allowed for a general vote among the troops at the conclusion of the trial. Other times, summary executions followed a short conversation with a person accused of banditry or treason.<sup>16</sup> Generally, the demands of the revolutionary war were prioritized over judicial procedure in these early proceedings.

At the moment of its triumph in January 1959, the Revolution enjoyed overwhelming popular support. But without a large military-civic force on which he could rely, Fidel needed to steer the revolutionary process and to establish a new rule of law. His M-26-7 had a few thousand people at most, of which many had joined in the final months and were thus unreliable. Moreover, any of the factions that had fought against Batista could potentially return to arms again. Indeed, as the case of Sorí Marín would prove, people from Fidel's inner circle were equally liable to turn against him once it became clear that the Revolution was committed to communism, rather than to liberal democracy.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, public anger over Batista's crimes threatened to explode at any moment. In a few cases, citizens caught Batistianos or *chivatos* (snitches or collaborators) and executed them in the street. At the fall of the Machado regime in 1933, no serious attempt was made to account for the dictatorship's crimes, and as a consequence, small gangs of armed citizens hunted down the regime's goons. The revolutionary leadership wanted to avoid a repeat of the situation that had led to months of violent disorder, and allowed for the development of armed bands. Moreover, the violent undoing of authority at the fall of the Batista regime was celebrated. Smashing parking meters that had been owned by relatives of Batista was at once a rebellion against the old regime and a new patriotic way of asserting one's citizenship. Images on television and the printed press celebrated such acts, increasing the danger that they would become generalized,



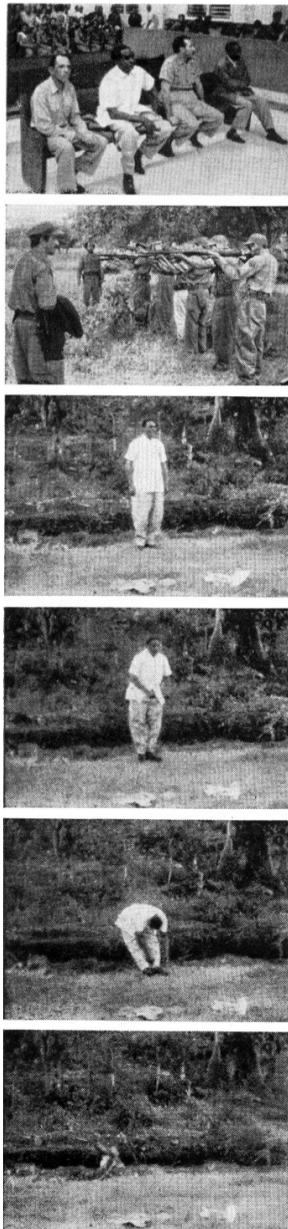
Fig. 4: Aristidies Diaz, a member of one of Rolando Masferrer's "Los Tigres" paramilitary units, awaiting execution before a revolutionary firing squad in Manzanillo on January 12, 1959. In the background, the bodies of others in his unit. (Courtesy of AP Images)

and would even be turned against the new regime in the future. The power of the revolutionaries depended to a large degree on their ability to use the force inherent on these grounds without being swept away by it.

Thus, the tribunals need to be understood as part of a complex and largely successful process, at the end of which the Revolution managed to establish a monopoly over violence. Within the first two weeks, the M-26-7 managed to disarm the *Directorio Revolucionario* of its newly seized weapons, to mobilize the citizenry to help capture and deliver *Batistianos*, and to capture virtually anyone associated with the old regime who had escaped and could pose a threat. Generally, Fidel was incredibly successful at maneuvering within this power vacuum, managing to channel public anger and gain overwhelming support for the process of transition as a whole, and to establish his Rebel Army as the sole guardian of the new order.<sup>18</sup>

In the first days of January, it became known that executions were beginning to take place in Las Villas and Oriente, and other provinces were beginning to





Canal 12, Escuela de Television  
 DESPAIGNE'S TRIAL & EXECUTION  
 "Kill them, kill them," cried the crowd.

Fig. 5: *Time Magazine* used Cuban Canal 12 television footage as stills

form tribunals too. The executions of 71 of Senator Rolando Masferrer's paramilitaries in Santiago on January 12 was not only photographed but also filmed and given to Cuba's Canal 12 and to American CBS reporters.<sup>19</sup> On the same day, an AP photographer caught another of Masferrer's men taking his last vows from a priest before being executed<sup>20</sup> [Fig. 4]. Behind the man were lying the bodies of those shot before him. To Cubans who had just emerged from the terror of the last two years of the war, these executions were well deserved. They often followed public trials in which the accused confessed to horrendous murders and implicated fellow officers of other crimes. Indeed, as Lillian Guerra reminds us, "so great was the demand for 'revolutionary justice' across the island that the rendering of acquittals and light sentences sparked rioting and violent protest in more than [one] case."<sup>21</sup>

But the international media began to disseminate images of mass graves too, and criticism followed immediately. It is not, as is sometimes hinted, that all U.S. sources criticized the tribunals, or even that a coherent narrative emerged about the new regime so early. Quite the contrary, enthusiastic descriptions of Fidel and his *barbudos* could be found in different U.S. media outlets. It was not only *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* that reported evenly about the tribunals, but also outlets like the *Christian Science Monitor*; furthermore, the *Afro American* was decidedly in favor of the executions, and Ed Sullivan did not ask Fidel about them in his interview on January 11.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps most U.S. news organs reported on the trials critically, but they were also quick to point to the crimes committed by Batista's men. It is true, however, that the criticism in *Time Magazine* and other venues fueled the hypocritical condemnations in the U.S. Congress. Some international diplomats

voiced criticism too – most of them cautiously. And the U.S. State Department, meanwhile, maneuvered carefully, pretending that the U.S. had nothing to do with the Batista repression, and at the same time pressuring Castro to moderate the tribunals [fig. 5].

Even the cover story of *Time Magazine* on January 26 was not completely hostile, as some revolutionaries claimed. Although it portrayed Fidel as “egotistic, impulsive, immature, disorganized,” it seemed also to gloat in telling of the leader’s triumphs. The article opened with a vivid description of the executions in Santiago, but it described the Batista regime’s cruelty and corruption in equally vivid detail, and it expressed hope that the executions would soon pass. The text was bracketed between images, however. On the left hand, a series of photographs was organized from top to bottom, like a film roll, but with the narrative logic of comics. The first three frames in the sequence depict the defendants in the courtroom, the execution squad, and Despaigne’s last moment. This scene-to-scene format demands a good measure of closure from the reader, and perhaps also suggests the speed at which the judicial process proceeded. The third to sixth images, by contrast, are moment-to-moment transitions, in which one or two seconds of movement are broken into four frames. All of these images were in fact cuts from a *Canal 12* newsreel, selected by *Time*.<sup>23</sup> The article makes the subtly ironic comment that Despaigne “got a three-hour reprieve at the request of cameramen, who wanted the light of a full dawn,” as though the only factor that might slow the rebels’ speedy executions was the need to make a cruel spectacle of them. *Time Magazine* is of course deeply hypocritical here, exploiting in the most sensational manner precisely the sensational coverage it pretends to be above. Indeed, the cartoon image on the right-hand side of the page takes this sensationalism to a new extreme, framing, as it were, the sequence on the left side in an even meaner light.

The Cuban public and the Revolutionary leadership were outraged by the international criticism. *Bohemia* and *Revolución* echoed the sentiment seen on placards and voiced by Fidel himself, that after years of repression, with thousands jailed, tortured, driven into exile or murdered in dictatorships across the Caribbean, it was amazing that Americans would suddenly decide to criticize human rights abuses now that the murderers were facing justice. What was more incredible was that, as Cubans knew all too well, it was the U.S. that had armed and trained Batista’s forces. And the CIA-orchestrated Operation Success, which had dislodged the progressive democracy of Jacobo Arbenz five years earlier in Guatemala, and which was arming the brutal counterrevolutionary repression there, stood as a reference point obvious to all but the Americans. As Chase argues, “the struggle over the meaning of the trials thus began to stand



in more broadly for the fraught relations between Cuba and the United States, and between the United States and Latin America."<sup>24</sup>

To counter international criticism, Fidel launched "Operation Truth," inviting international reporters to witness the trials and the Cuban public's support for them. First, an enormous rally took place on January 21<sup>st</sup>, in which anywhere from 500,000 to a million Cubans showed their support for the tribunals. (In the heat of the rally, Fidel asked for a show of hands – who was in support of the tribunals? The *Líder máximo* would later develop the idea that this was direct democracy.) Next, the 12-hour trial of Jesús Sosa Blanco took place in a stadium, in front of hundreds of reporters and some 17,000 spectators. (Two others, Lieut. Col. Ricardo Luis Grau and Capt. Pedro Morejon, were brought to the stadium too, but their trials were delayed. A crowd attempted to grab the two as they were being taken out of the stadium.)<sup>25</sup> More than forty witnesses testified against Sosa Blanco, mostly peasants from Oriente Province, where the captain had operated. Antonio Rafael Colón, a soldier who had served under Sosa Blanco, testified that the officer had burnt down 200 houses in Mayarí, and shot a group of 19 people point blank. Not able to take the cruelties, the soldier joined the rebels.<sup>26</sup> The peasants, for their part, claimed they had had no connection to the guerrillas. In general, the trial added to the effort, ongoing throughout the war in the Sierra Maestra, to posit the rural population as victim to a corrupt, cruel and negligent dictatorship.

The trials in the Havana Stadium brought the opposition in the way Cuban and U.S. audiences were reading the images to their logical conclusion. Cubans seemed unanimous in their support, but the spectacle caused such harsh international condemnation that Fidel, in Venezuela during the trial, announced that the tribunals would no longer be televised.<sup>27</sup> The trials were far from over, however, and some would still cause a great deal of excitement. In mid-February, 45 pilots, air gunners and mechanics were brought before a revolutionary tribunal in Santiago, to account for some 600 aerial attacks on the region during the war. Heading the three judges was Comandante Félix Pena, a man with impeccable revolutionary credentials. Even though, when he had met some of the pilots after conquering their air base, Fidel had assured them that they would not stand trial, Castro now announced that the defendants were "the worst criminals of the Batista regime."<sup>28</sup> The trial, which lasted for three weeks, was conducted under conditions more favorable to the aviators than many of the other tribunals. Still, the defense could hardly meet with its clients, and was not permitted to view key pieces of evidence; a witness testifying in the defendants' favor was himself detained; the mechanics who had been brought to Santiago as witnesses were suddenly converted into defendants; the defendants were accused of "genocide," without such a legal category appearing in the legal code that had been signed in

the Sierra Maestra, under which the tribunal was functioning. Incredibly, given that Fidel had already declared the aviators guilty, the revolutionary judges acquitted them. No one was released, however, and Fidel denounced the acquittal on television that night. Five days later, a Supreme Military Tribunal reversed the decision of the lower court, acquitting two of the aviators, but sentencing the rest to periods of between 2 and 30 years in prison.<sup>29</sup> The decision to put the aviators on trial again for the same offense – double jeopardy – was criticized by the national bar association as well as by a number of other professional organizations, but it did not cause any major commotion.<sup>30</sup> A short time later, Comandante Pena, who had headed the tribunal, was found dead in his car, his death declared a case of suicide.<sup>31</sup>

The Cuban press reported on the revolutionary tribunals, of course, but the choice of the images that would go with these reports is remarkable. The conservative *Diario de la Marina* showed no images at all. (But in truth, it rarely used images of any kind, perhaps considering photography unfit for its educated readership). The communist official organ, *Noticias de Hoy*, reported on the tribunals daily, but it hardly ever reported the proceedings themselves. The communist PSP was, after all, in a complicated situation in the first months after the triumph of the Revolution. It had maintained a marriage of convenience with Batista in the strongman's early years; then turned against him, but still condemned Fidel's "methods," and did not join the fighting until 1958, even then, never committing itself fully. In the tumult that followed Batista's flight, Che Guevara confiscated the archive of the Buró de Represión de Actividades Comunistas (BRAC), and "ordered the distribution of its contents to the PSP militants themselves."<sup>32</sup> This allowed the communists to purge the collection of sensitive information on PSP activists, including their cooperation with the Batista regime, and to publish photocopies of BRAC documents on the pages of *Hoy*. The published facsimiles of the documents showed a number of themes: SIM operations against the PSP; U.S. aid and influence on Batistiano military intelligence; Batista corruption; and other news organs' complicity with the regime. Photos of PSP activists who had been tortured, imprisoned or murdered, depicted the human, heroic side to the communist fight, exaggerated the Party's role in the anti-Batista struggle, and pointed at the savagery of the Batistianos on trial.

The tribunals took center stage in the more popular *Bohemia* and *Revolución* newspapers, on the other hand. The two newspapers were instrumental in shaping not only public notions of the trials themselves, but with them, the view of the novelty of the Revolution. Carlos Franqui, the editor of *Revolución*, understood the danger that the images of the executions posed. *Revolución* reported on the tribunals, but focused on extensive descriptions of the crimes, rather than lingering on the evidence linking specific defendants to specific crimes. Like

*Bohemia*, *Revolución* sensed the hunger among Cuban readers for information on everything that had been censored until January 1959. The Cuban public knew, after all, that Batista and his henchmen were corrupt, and that they were conducting a dirty war. Information about these crimes, which had been censored, was now revealed every day, and utilized to support the larger narrative of the Revolution. Thus, next to modest coverage of the trials, there were large pictures of mass graves of Batista's victims, and photos of corpses showing signs of murder. These images were not tied to a specific offender. Indeed, the tribunals proceeded with a speed that made it difficult to imagine even creating full dockets on most of those standing trial, much less to publish the evidence. So *Bohemia* and *Revolución* focused on creating out of the rapid succession of trials and accusations, a narrative about the immorality of the Batista regime.<sup>33</sup>

The narrative was not monolithic. There were, in the first months of 1959, 16 daily newspapers in Cuba, as well as radio and television channels. Nonetheless, by the end of January, the leading newspapers were already creating a more or less coherent revolutionary discourse around the tribunals. *Bohemia*, *Hoy* and *Revolución*, which hardly bothered to discuss the specific merits of any particular case against those standing trial, were not under the dictates of the official line – they were creating it. Under the heading “The Tiger in His Cage,” for example, *Revolución* displayed an image of a black man behind bars. Without naming the man, the newspaper used his nickname, The Tiger, and described him simply as “ayudante del capitán Aguabella.” The paper made no specific accusations, but the caption nonetheless asserted that the man had terrorized the Colón neighborhood, and that his place was behind bars.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the manner in which the trials were staged already suggested culpability. News organs could describe the trial in the stadium in critical tones, as almost all the international news organs did. But if they chose to depict the crowd, they were forced to remark on its unanimous hate for the defendants; and if they wanted an image of Sosa Blanco, they had to show him handcuffed: the image was of a guilty man, universally despised by an outraged Cuban people.

The surprising fact is how few images of forensic evidence actually appeared throughout the months of the revolutionary tribunals. In part, this is of course because some time had passed since the crimes had been committed, and it would have been difficult to find such evidence. There was sporadic use of documents, however, and in any case, few images of them in the press. There was no attempt to sketch the crime and the scene, as took place in Panamá, or to photograph the scene of the crime – hardly possible in Cuba, given the speed at which the tribunals were taking place. The testimony of the victims was crucial in the Cuban cases, on the other hand, and it was shown on TV, having an incredibly powerful effect. The testimony also allowed revolutionary news organs to focus



Fig. 6: "Exclusive...! North American Press Needs to be Honest and Say the Truth." *Revolución* rates the U.S. media on its coverage of the tribunals.

their attention on the victims – peasants from *Oriente*, for example – who, if not for the trials, would not have likely appeared in the spotlight. Now it was possible for *Revolución* to put together a much fuller indictment. Its front page, on January 19, 1959, ran stories about Batistiano union leader Eusebio Mujal’s confiscated properties, as well as the Church support for the executions; a first installment in a series about the Gramma appeared too.<sup>35</sup> The central image on the front page was that of a jubilant Batista, with large dollar signs printed on his nose and cheek. Page three was divided between descriptions of the ongoing trials and three large images of symbolic burial processions for the victims of the war, enacted in the town of Güines. The story on page thirteen was of the American coverage of the trials – “LA PRENSA NORTEAMERICANA TIENE QUE SER HONESTA Y DECIR LA VERDAD!”<sup>36</sup> It showed images of newspapers in the U.S., giving a generous appraisal to reporters like Herbert Mathews and Andrew St. George, while severely criticizing others [fig. 6]. Page 18 was devoted to more trials, and more stories of the horrors of the Batista regime; and page 19 was entirely taken up by images of exhumed graves of the victims. The last page showed poverty – two homeless people in one photo, an elderly man in the street, starving children. Captions described how money under Batista went to corrupt officials and to arm the repression, while ordinary Cubans were impoverished by unemployment. The headline read: “These Too are Crimes of the Tyrant.”<sup>37</sup> [Fig. 7]



Fig. 7: “These Too Are Crimes of the Tyrant.” *Revolución* connected corruption to extreme poverty, suggesting that death from malnutrition was a crime that Batista henchmen needed to account for.

### *Image, Authority and History*

Why the difference? Why did Panamanian newspapers delve into the details of the legal cases before them, while the Cubans widened the scope of the accusations, avoiding more solid legal cases against those standing trial? And what roles did photographs and other images play within these historical processes? There are, of course, a number of obvious answers. First, Cuba was in the midst of a revolution, and one that had triumphed after surviving a gruesome dirty war. Batista’s officers did not kill 20,000 people as the Revolution claimed, but the repression in Havana, Santiago and Oriente Province was harsh indeed.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the Revolution purged all ranks of government within the first weeks of January, sacking *botelleros*, and daily disclosing stories of corruption in the press. As Jon Lee Anderson explains, “Thirty-six of the forty Supreme

Court judges were dismissed and the newly appointed judges then purged the lower ranks of the judiciary: some 20 percent of the bench were in consequence dismissed for collaboration with the old regime.<sup>39</sup> Most Cubans thus came to associate the entire apparatus of government and law with corruption, ineptitude and barbarous violence. No wonder then, that Cubans had neither an appetite to resume the parliamentary game, nor any desire to delve into legal-procedural questions.

The Panamanian trials went on for three years, and although they involved a number of separate judicial processes, they all revolved around one single episode, with a set of characters that could gradually become household names.<sup>40</sup> While doubts about Miró's culpability remained to the end, the notion that the trial was being rigged in order to protect those in government who were the real benefactors of the killing gradually became more significant, until, by 1957, it was the central fact of the affair. As the American Embassy reported to Washington, "Panamanian Justice is itself, in a sense, on trial."<sup>41</sup> The tables had turned, and now Miró and his supposed accomplices were transformed into heroes, who were standing against a corrupt system, and in so doing, they represented the nation as a whole. People lined up in the streets to cheer Miró as he was taken to the trial, a level of public identification that would have been impossible in Cuba even if the public had been convinced that, say, the aviators were being framed.

Perhaps I can also suggest a number of less obvious differences between the two cases. It is true that both countries were under a neo-colonial relationship with the U.S., which influenced their societies, politics, economies and cultures in numerous ways. In some senses, the parallels are remarkable. But in Panama City and Colón, which were separated from the Canal Zone by only a street, at least three judicial apparatuses intersected and often clashed. Remón had reformed the Panamanian police and rebranded it a National Guard, but for most purposes, it was still a normal police force. Across the "Fourth of July Avenue," the Canal Zone had its own police force, which served a judicial system that was fully autonomous. Finally, the U.S. military had its own judicial system and military police.<sup>42</sup> Panamanian kids in the Post War Era grabbing mangoes from trees in the Canal Zone had to race back to their side of the street. Arriving back, they could stand on their side and make fun of the Zonian policemen who were not allowed to arrest them. Living in a space in which various legal regimes intersected, Panamanians became knowledgeable about international law, and could articulate criticism of the politico-legal amalgam that was governing them. This plebian expertise took center stage during moments of crisis: when treaties with the U.S. were being negotiated, or when it was felt that the U.S. had violated the neo-colonial order it had itself imposed. Shortly after the Guizado trial, for example, two U.S. soldiers were accused of brutal assault



and rape of two Panamanian sisters. One sister was openly mocked while she testified in the Canal Zone trial, at the end of which the all-white jury convicted one of the men of battery instead of rape, and the soldier was handed a 30-day sentence and a \$100 fine.<sup>43</sup> In protest, the second sister refused to testify in the trial of the other soldier who had participated in the rape. The judge requested that Panamanian Chief of Police Bolívar Vallarino intervene, but the latter refused, understanding that the Panamanian public would not tolerate such an intervention. In other words, Panamanians were aware of the political nature of the law, and were experienced in critiquing judicial decisions by appealing to the specific interpretative errors or transgressions that the judicial authority made.

Both Cuban and Panamanian institutions had been shaped by North American expertise, and both societies had been deeply influenced by the culture of the United States. In Cuba, however, with the radical assertion of Cuban nationalism after the triumph of the Revolution, there was arguably also a reevaluation of North American knowledge. Thus, for example, when asked about the necessity of the American military advisers, Fidel Castro pointed out that they had not helped Batista's military. Indeed, the overall sense was that Castro's *barbudos* in their *olivo verde* uniforms were an antithesis to the Latin American military model that the U.S. had armed, trained and financed. After the rebel victory, it was now time to do justice the revolutionary way – quick, and to the point. In Panamá, one would perhaps have expected precisely the same attitude, given the nationalist sentiment which was gaining force in the 1950s. But when Cuban criminologist Israel Castellanos, and the New York detective, Braverman, reported on the grave distortions they had seen in the Panamanian investigation, their words mattered not only because they were considered experts in their respective countries, but also because they were international observers of the Panamanian process.<sup>44</sup> The forensic report that Braverman submitted, which was published in the press alongside photographs taken by the U.S. 470<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Unit's agents, was not viewed as an imposition of a foreign knowledge. Rather, it was seen as scientific, international knowledge, which had been invited by the government, only to be rejected when the results did not fit the regime's plan – further proof that justice was not forthcoming.

I would argue, however, that at a deeper level, Panamanians had come to expect a legal standard, which, given the corruption of their judicial system, was a fantasy. Proximity to the U.S. judicial system operating next door, with its kangaroo courts and systemic injustice, makes it hard to believe that these Panamanian expectations from their own system could have been nurtured by reality across the street, in the Canal Zone. Panamanians were hungry consumers of U.S. culture, however. Could watching *Dagnet* in the cinemas inform how Panamanians viewed the pictures of the courtroom? Could reading *Dick Tracy*

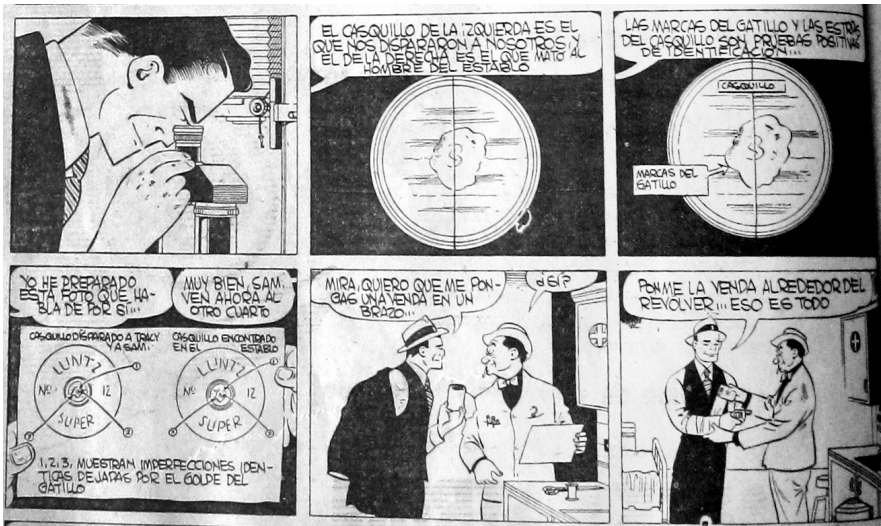


Fig. 8: *Dick Tracy* and other cartoons from the U.S. appeared daily in Panamanian newspapers in the 1950s (Courtesy of *La Estrella de Panamá*).

in translation have given these readers some of their forensic knowledge? I am of course not saying that Panamanians could not differentiate between the fictional story in the cartoons on the fourth page and the depiction of the trials on the first. But could those cartoons have nurtured their ideas about what faithful detective work ought to be like? [Fig. 8]. Cuba had one of the most developed culture industries in Latin America, and Cubans were influenced by U.S. culture too. Would not they too have been influenced by North American depictions of the criminal justice system? It is, of course, impossible to say. Perhaps the profound tumult of the first revolutionary months and the effect of its intense cultural machine dislodged just these notions.

Through successive crises in its first decade of revolution – from the censorship of the documentary, *P.M.* in 1961, to the Padilla Affair of 1971 – the Cuban public sphere became increasingly narrow. In Panamá, a military dictatorship toppled the quasi-democratic regime in 1968, and until the U.S. invasion of 1989, government censorship was formidable. It is seductive, therefore, to enter the debate about images and authority through this lens, and to show, once again, how any number of images were retouched to erase a person fallen out of favor, or to garner popular support for a campaign or an official government position. [Fig. 9]<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the Remón Affair could be seen as a perfect example of a colossal failure to control a crucial public spectacle, which had tremendous costs for the regime. And so, alternatively, we could balance Orwellian analyses

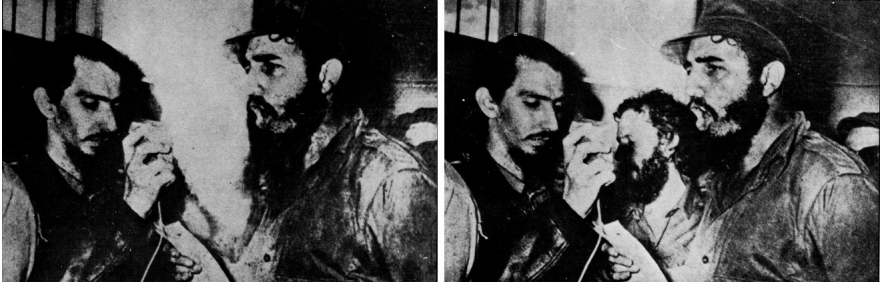


Fig. 9: Carlos Franqui, who had edited *Revolución* and *Radio Rebelde* and had fought alongside Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra, was removed from Cuban pictures after breaking with the Revolution.

of photographs by looking for counter-narratives, or ways in which subjects resist the official narrative.

I would suggest, however, that we go beyond the notion that the photograph, and with it, any other kind of image, is either inherently democratic, or, in its essence, a useful governmental tool. Of course we need to think about a variety of agents, inserting competing images into the public sphere, in cases in which censorship allows for that. But we also need to consider the connection between these images and the frameworks audiences use to contextualize and understand them.

Susan Sontag notes: “Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, photographs have been connected from the very beginning with the notion of evidence, commonly, without a careful consideration of the complexity of the relation between reality and photographic depiction of it. John Tagg is correct when he writes that when the photograph is employed as a legal record, it is “an image produced according to certain institutionalized formal rules and technical procedures which define legitimate manipulations and permissible distortions in such a way that, in certain contexts, more or less skilled and suitably trained and validated interpreters may draw inferences from them, on the basis of historically established conventions. It is only in this institutional framework that otherwise disputable meanings carry weight and can be enforced.”<sup>47</sup> True, and I would add that “formal rules” and “legitimate manipulations” sometimes change in a day or two, and that official interpretations of images may turn against officials more quickly than they cared to imagine.

From the moment the photograph began to be used as evidence, it was read in two complementing ways. On the one hand, the image was read for clues about the past. Simultaneously, the photograph enhanced the image of

the judicial process as a scientific investigation yielding empirical truths. The more the processes of taking, classifying and deciphering photographs were streamlined, the more this second image was enhanced. And notwithstanding important local differences in procedure, the more these processes were regularized, the more international they became. Moreover, the more acceptable they became – as techniques and technologies, rather than as aesthetic preferences or systems enabling regimes to exercise control – the more the equivalence between the use of these procedures and judicial truth itself was reinforced. Detective Albert Lamb, working as Chief Inspector of the Panamanian police (1919-1925), created a bureau of identification using Bertillon's anthropogenic system and the Henry Classification System, developed in France and British India, respectively. Lamb, a U.S. citizen working for the Panamanian government, was praised for bringing the *Policia Nacional* up to date. In Cuba, Israel Castellanos had created, among other things, a three-volume album in which pictures of female delinquents were offered alongside voluminous statistics on the offenders.<sup>48</sup> No one questioned the origin of these techniques or their political meanings. But we must not forget a third way in which the photograph was involved in the judicial process: as evidence to reject specific claims made by the state, as it prosecutes a person; or, as in the cases before us, to dispute the validity of the entire judicial process. Newspaper stories of criminal cases used photographs in a variety of ways, from the sensational photo of the crime scene and the reproduced mug shot, to the photo of the courtroom and the evidence. And so in the Panamanian judicial proceedings, the public could accuse the regime of corruption precisely because it had earlier accepted the notion that the correct application of procedure, including the creation and reading of texts and images, was the only guarantee of truth.

The Cuban and Panamanian examples need therefore be seen as opposite, or at least alternative trajectories, in a number of senses. While it was certainly not the case in 1959, by the mid-60s the Cuban Revolutionary State had created an imposing internal-security network, which relied as much on grassroots cooperation as on effective management of that information. But at the same time, it nurtured public apathy about precisely those procedures that could validate judicial truth claims. In Panamá, notwithstanding occasional reforms (usually at the behest of American experts) the investigative apparatus remained weak and disorganized until Manuel Noriega's term as head of the G2 military intelligence in the 1970s. Nonetheless, it was in Panamá that the general public developed its careful attention to forensic detail, and this, I argue, was precisely a way to counter official truth claims. Photographs, and more broadly, visual imagery, were key elements in these developments.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most remarkable difference between the two countries is what remained in the memories of Panamanians and Cubans after these trials. In Panamá, the Remón Affair is still revived now and then as a mystery, a journalistic story standing in for a serious history of the post-*remonato*. But Panamanians seemed to want to forget the case almost as soon as the celebration of the acquittal ended. Within a few months, a period of intense and repeated crises began, in a number of which, the government lost control of its main cities. The challenges came from different quarters – students, workers, peasants in the United Fruit Company plantations up north – but there was a new radical undertone that seemed to unite them. The regime as a whole was now being challenged, rather than a particular government policy. The images remembered from this period are those of these uprisings – the flags the students planted on the Canal Zone lawns during Operación Soberanía, for example. The other images, the reproduction of evidence at the trial, the photo of the bloody scene at the race-track, and the trial itself, were all but forgotten. It is an open question, however, whether those first images, and the theatre of the absurd in which the Panamanian regime had enacted its own degradation for three years, had not – at least socially and culturally – made possible the rebellions. And it is even harder to tell if those images and *Bohemia's* coverage of the Panamanian trials generally, had informed Fidel's decision to send 82 Rebel Army soldiers on a boat to the coast of Panamá in March of 1959.

In Cuba, by contrast, the trials became part of the Revolution's narrative, the dividing line between what is and what had been. In the televised trials of the captured soldiers of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, Cubans were once again offered a chance to revisit the crimes of those Batistiano henchmen who had now returned as CIA-sponsored invaders. In the 1960s and onwards, this is what was left of those images of the revolutionary tribunals – a pastiche, which gradually “framed” the entire class that had ruled Cuba until 1959.

## Notes

- 1 To be sure, part of the novelty of this expansion in state capacity lies in the ability to mine and utilize data, including images, generated by private citizens for their own uses. After the revelations of whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013, the debate on these capabilities has expanded considerably, both in the scope of the concerns debated, and in the number of people and institutions raising them. Citizens' use of cellphone cameras to document police transgression, as happened in the cases of the killing of Eric Garner in New York and Tamir Rice in Cleveland in 2014, has been lauded by civil rights organizations and

some media outlets. Many in the U.S. began demanding that the police itself should start using wearable body-mounted cameras. See, for example, <https://www.aclu.org/police-body-mounted-cameras-right-policies-place-win-all> (Accessed, June 18, 2015.) However, the negative reactions to early releases of the Google Glass, which contains a small camera, hints that people are as queasy about “grassroots surveillance” as they are of an Orwellian state. On the other hand, civil rights groups, bloggers and reporters are combining publically available images and data to question state agencies and official narratives ever more effectively. See, for example: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/world/middleeast/video-analysis-of-fatal-west-bank-shooting-said-to-implicate-israeli-officer.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/world/middleeast/video-analysis-of-fatal-west-bank-shooting-said-to-implicate-israeli-officer.html?_r=0) (Accessed June 23, 2015.)

- 2 The only comprehensive examination of the *remonato* is unfortunately a book written by a contemporary. The work benefited greatly from interviews with key actors, but was very much a product of its time. Larry LaRae Pippin, *The Remón Era: An Analysis of a Decade of Events in Panama, 1947-1957* (Stanford, CA: Institute of Hispanic American and Luso-Brazilian Studies, Stanford University, 1964).
- 3 José Ramón Guizado, *El extraño asesinato del presidente Remón* (Barcelona: Editorial Linomonograph, 1964); Pippin, *The Remón Era*; Carlos A. Vaccaro, *El proceso Guizado o un error judicial de procedimiento* (Colón, República de Panamá: Imprenta Atlántida, 1958); José Vicente Romeu, *Del caso Remón-Guizado* (Panamá, República de Panamá: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Editorial Mariano Arosemena, 2000). No complete copy of the trial docket remains today, but between the Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá in Parque Omar and the Biblioteca de la Asamblea Nacional, four of the six volumes can be found. F. Alvarado Jr., et al., *Sumarias para averiguar quién o quienes son los responsables por los hechos ocurridos el día dos de enero de este año (1955) en el Hipódromo de Juan Franco, a cuya consecuencia murió el Ex-Presidente de la República, Coronel José Antonio Remón Cantera, José M. Peralta, Danilo Sousa y Antonio Anguizola* (Panamá, RP: Comisión Investigadora, 1955).
- 4 “El pueblo opine.” *La Hora*, January 7, 1955. “La familia presidencial.” *La Estrella de Panamá*, January 19, 1955. During Remón’s presidency, newspapers were under pressure, although not fully under censorship. This situation unraveled during the first two months after his death. *La Hora*, which was owned by Remón’s enemy, Harmodio Arias Madrid, began to question the official line during the trial in the Assembly, in February 1955. *La Nación*, owned by Remón’s closest allies, kept to the official line all three years, while still reporting many of the accusations against it. Together with the television, Panamá had a more or less varied media, if owned and heavily influenced by the wealthy. Its radio stations were younger, and more open to rebellious student politics.
- 5 *La Estrella*, Feb 4, 1955.
- 6 See declassified CIA Report, “Difficulties in Defense of Former President Jose Ramon Guizado,” Date of Info, 27-8, 1955. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/89801/DOC\\_0001319586.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0001319586.pdf) (Accessed July 26, 2015). The photos appeared in various newspapers. See “La Ametralladora Encontrada en la Vieja Residencia del Dr. Miró.” *La Estrella de Panamá*, February 4, 1955. See declassified CIA memorandum, February 27, 1955.
- 7 “El Defensor Escobar Refuta las Pruebas de los Acusadores.” *La Estrella de Panamá*, March 27, 1955.
- 8 An explanation of this terminology with an insightful discussion on formal methods common in comics can be found in Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 1st HarperPerennial ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), pp. 70–74.



- 9 While the recently built Santuario Nacional del Corazón de María could possibly have been visible in the presumed location that the frame is alluding to, the Church drawn is the historic Catedral Metropolitana. The latter, located in the *casco antiguo*, would have been impossible to see from the area of the racetrack, but its outlines were more recognizable, and hence easier to associate with the Church.
- 10 Reprinted in Guizado, *El extraño asesinato*, p. 276.
- 11 Braverman's ballistic report was reproduced in full in *El Día*. It contradicted the prosecution's case on various grounds, claiming, among other things that, aside from the arms used by Remón's bodyguards, at least three other guns were used at the night of the killing in the racetrack. The prosecution had it that Rubén Miró worked alone, but that he was helped by his codefendants, who supplied him the gun, drove him to the scene, and so on. "Informe completo de Braverman." *El Día*, Monday, October 28, 1957, p. 8.
- 12 This is the most likely scenario. Evidence gathered by U.S. military intelligence agents shows that Miró was conspiring to kill Remón in 1954, and that the Arnulfista Party Directorate was considering the issue. There is evidence too, that the *arnulfistas* had at least the sympathy of Saturino Flores, second in command of the National Guard. See report by Ramon M. Velez-Rodríguez, 470th MI, January 12, 1955, File No. X8731026, Box 490, Records of the Army Staff, Record Group 319, National Archives at College Park, MD (NACP). Cited in Ezer Vierba, "The Committee's Report: Punishment, Power and Subject in 20th Century Panama," unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2013, p. 356.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 354–6. There is evidence linking American Marvin Lipstein, who was apprehended on the night of the shooting, to Lucky Luciano. And there are other pieces of evidence that make the mafia theory quite plausible, whether or not the conspiracy was coordinated with Miró. It is unlikely that the CIA was directly involved in the assassination, but the evidence is contradictory. According to one testimony, a CIA subcontractor flew the hit men onboard a United Fruit Company plane, borrowed for the mission, and flew them out the next day.
- 14 Embassy to State, November 14, 1957 (Doc. 719.00/11-1457. Desp. 283), 1955-1959 Central Decimal File 719.00/1-355 to 719.00/3-2659, Box 2987, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, NACP.
- 15 For Andrew St. George's pictures of the more official tribunals in the Sierra Maestra, see Folders 16, 20, and 36 of Series I, Box 1, Cuban Revolution Collection (MS 650). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Folder 32 in the same series shows an image of a peasant left tied to a tree all night as punishment. By contrast, Jon Lee Anderson depicts Che Guevara's order to execute René Cuervo, given from Che's hammock, after a short conversation with the man. Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, First revised ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2010), p. 266.
- 16 On Sorí Marín's code, see Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Vol. VI, Cuba 1958-1960, Glennon, John P., Ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 21. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS195860v06> (Accessed July 23, 2015). For a good overview of the dilemmas involved in the trials at in the Sierra, see Anderson, pp. 265–273 .
- 17 While in the first months, Fidel could still rely on his own officers, the July 26 Movement was made up of different ideological currents, and its allies during the revolutionary war were more heterogeneous still. With disciplined cadres and the largest party infrastructure, allying with the communist PSP would have provided advantages in the war and after it. But even in April 1958, Fidel could not get his own Llano militants to agree to cooperate with the PSP on a national strike, a problem that doomed the strike in advance. In the

first months after his triumph, Fidel could ill-afford to alienate the centrists within his movement anymore than to confirm U.S. suspicions about communism. What is more, the PSP was thoroughly discredited for its passivity during the war. There was therefore no “auxiliary” group that could be called on to help stabilize the nascent Revolution. Fidel’s response was to temporarily use the existing police units, purging them of their worst offenders in the meantime; to arm citizen militias; to disarm the Directorio and integrate its members into other structures; and to quickly create a powerful political police.

- 18 The best treatment of the revolutionary tribunals is Michelle Chase, “The Trials: Violence and Justice in the Aftermath of the Cuban Revolution,” in Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (eds.), *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America’s Long Cold War*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 163-195.
- 19 Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*, Envisioning Cuba (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 46–7.
- 20 Senator Rolando Masferrer’s paramilitary force, Los Tigres, was notorious for its cruelty and arbitrary violence. Masferrer himself escaped to Miami aboard a yacht, and later joined various CIA efforts to fight the Revolution.
- 21 Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, p. 47.
- 22 Ed Sullivan’s interview with Fidel Castro is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjpnfDwWd7Y> (Accessed July 26, 2015). For newspapers in English in the months of January and February, 1959, I have looked at articles in the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Hartford Courant*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Afro American*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time Magazine*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. I have accessed all of them through ProQuest and EBSCOhost searches. The Cuban newspapers I have consulted are microfilmed copies of the PSP’s *Noticias de Hoy*; the July 26 Movement’s official organ, *Revolución*; as well as the conservative *Diario de la Marina*. I have also used some articles in *Bohemia*.
- 23 Although *Canal 12* was soon dismantled, the original newsreel, or a very close version of it, is available on the *British Pathé* Youtube channel: <https://youtube/HtfEv5kAeyE>. (I could not access this. Miriam
- 24 Chase, “The Trials,” p. 180.
- 25 R. Hart Phillips, “Batista Major Condemned in Havana Stadium Trial.” *New York Times*, January 24, 1959.
- 26 “Batista Man Baited by 15,000 in Havana ‘Colosseum’ Trial.” *Toronto Globe and Mail*, January 23, 1959. There is some variation in the number of people reported to have attended the trial – anywhere between 15,000 to 18,000.
- 27 “The Scolding Hero.” *Time* 73: 5 (February 2, 1959), p. 30. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed August 6, 2015).
- 28 “Castro Takes Over.” *Time* 73: 8 (February 23, 1959), p. 39.
- 29 “Batista Airmen’s Acquittal Upset.” *Baltimore Sun*, March 9, 1959, p. 4.
- 30 It is not clear, on the other hand, if the initial decision to acquit the aviators was met with any authentic protest, or if the protest in Santiago was a small affair of PSP activists in the city. For the latter claim, see the testimony in International Commission of Jurists, *El Imperio de La Ley En Cuba* (Ginebra: Comisión intencional de juristas, 1962), p. 203.

- 31 On the mysterious suicide, see *ibid.*, pp. 203–4. Samuel Farber lists Comandante Pena as a real suicide, adopting the view that it and similar cases suggest “the applicability of French sociologist Émile Durkheim’s analysis of ‘altruistic’ suicide and its strong association with the spirit of renunciation and abnegation often found in institutions such as armies.” Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 45.
- 32 Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, p. 78.
- 33 For Guerra’s insightful discussion of *Bohemia*’s role in shaping the revolutionary narrative, see *ibid.*, pp. 42–4.
- 34 “El Tigre en su jaula,” *Revolución*, January 17, 1959, p. 6.
- 35 *Revolución*, January 19, 1955.
- 36 Vicente Cubillas, Jr., “La prensa norteamericana tiene que ser honesta y decir la verdad,” *Revolución*, January 19, 1955, p. 13.
- 37 Santiago Cardosa Arias, “Estos también son crímenes del Tirano,” *Revolución*, January 19, 1955, p. 20. Discussing the development of this discourse, Guerra points out that the Cuban press “dramatized the plight of Cuba’s poor with images of white, often blond Cubans [...] despite the disproportionate representation of blacks and mulattoes among the most impoverished sectors. Ostensibly, editors sought the support of editors whose racism might otherwise lead them to reject expensive government programs of ‘uplift’ that ‘favored’ blacks.” Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, p. 155.
- 38 Guerra estimates 3,000–4,000 dead, but it is impossible to know. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 39 Anderson, *Che Guevara*, p. 266.
- 40 Panamá is also a much smaller country, and Panama City much smaller than Havana. Politicians like Guizado and top ranking officers like Bolívar Vallarino and Saturino Flores were household names before the killing too. Other protagonists, like Rubén Miró, would have been known within a certain social circle, but not the general population.
- 41 R. Austin Acly, Councilor of the U.S. Embassy in Panamá to State Department, September 30, 1955. File 719.00/9-3055, page 5, Central Decimal File 1955-59, Record of the Dept. of State, RG 59, NACP. Cited in Vierba, “The Committee’s Report,” p. xvi.
- 42 In fact, the picture was still more complex. The Zone was fully segregated, and its judicial system treated the civilian Antillean workers much like African Americans were treated under the Jim Crow South. Many Antillean workers, meanwhile, worked in the Zone but lived in poor neighborhoods on the Panamanian side of the border, traveling back and forth every day. U.S. MPs, on the other hand, regularly patrolled the red light districts of Panama City and Colón together with Panamanian police, and arrested brawling off-duty American soldiers. Those soldiers could well have been Puerto-Ricans, who comprised about a third of all U.S. soldiers stationed in Panamá during the Postwar Era. The best discussion of these complexities is found in Michael E. Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 128–137.
- 44 The Cuban criminologist, Israel Castellanos, had been invited by then-president Guizado to aid in the investigation. Not receiving the cooperation he had hoped for by the National Guard, he left within a couple of weeks. His revelations about the National Guard’s interference in the investigation appeared in *Bohemia*, and were instantly reproduced by the Panamanian press. *Bohemia*’s reporter in Panamá, Armando Cruz Cobos, was later deported. Another in-depth article *Bohemia* published in August 1955, which claimed that the real motive of the assassination was Remón’s clampdown on the narcotic’s trade,

- was instantly reproduced in Panamá. The U.S. Embassy reported: “To a public, at this point willing to believe almost anything about the case, it came as a sensation. In three hours, 10,000 copies were sold, and *El Día*, which reprinted the full text, was completely sold out.” Robert B. Memminger, Chargé d’Affaires, U.S. Embassy in Panamá to State Department, August 22, 1955, p. 3; Central Decimal File 719.00/8-2255, Record of the Dept. of State, RG 59, NACP.
- 45 Franqui gradually distanced himself from the revolutionary leadership, eventually defecting in 1968, after Fidel endorsed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The photo appeared on the cover of his memoir. Carlos Franqui, *Retrato de familia con Fidel*, 1a ed edition (Barcelona; Caracas: Seix Barral, 1981). The version here was downloaded from Hany Farid, “Photo Tampering throughout History,” *FOURANDSIX*, 2007. <http://www.fourandsix.com/photo-tampering-history/?currentPage=2> (Accessed August 3, 2015)
- 46 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1990), p. 7. She writes however, that “industrialization of camera technology only carried out a promise inherent in photography from its very beginning: to democratize all experiences by translating them into images.” *Ibid.* For an elaborate and deep consideration of this issue, see Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (1986), pp. 3–64. Sekula’s emphasis is, however, not the camera, but “a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of ‘intelligence.’” *Ibid.*, p. 16. This emphasis is undoubtedly necessary, especially if we are to understand that police forces would soon find themselves with vast collections of images (of bodies or body parts), and with no way of navigating them. To make these images useful, there had to be ways to reduce them into simpler symbolic representations, to organize them logically, to find ways to retrieve them quickly and compare them to forensic evidence or to an actual person detained. Alphonse Bertillon’s anthropometric system and the Henry Classification System were the most important developments towards that end in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 47 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. 2–3. This is not to endorse Tagg’s overall argument, which exaggerates the degree to which photography, and even the documentary as a genre, enhanced states’ capabilities for social control.
- 48 Israel Castellanos, *La delincuencia femenina en Cuba* (Habana: Imprenta “Ojeda,” 1929). See also Alejandra Bronfman, “The Allure of Technology: Photographs, Statistics and the Elusive Female Criminal in 1930s Cuba,” *Gender & History*, 19: 1 (April 1, 2007), pp. 60–77.

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