

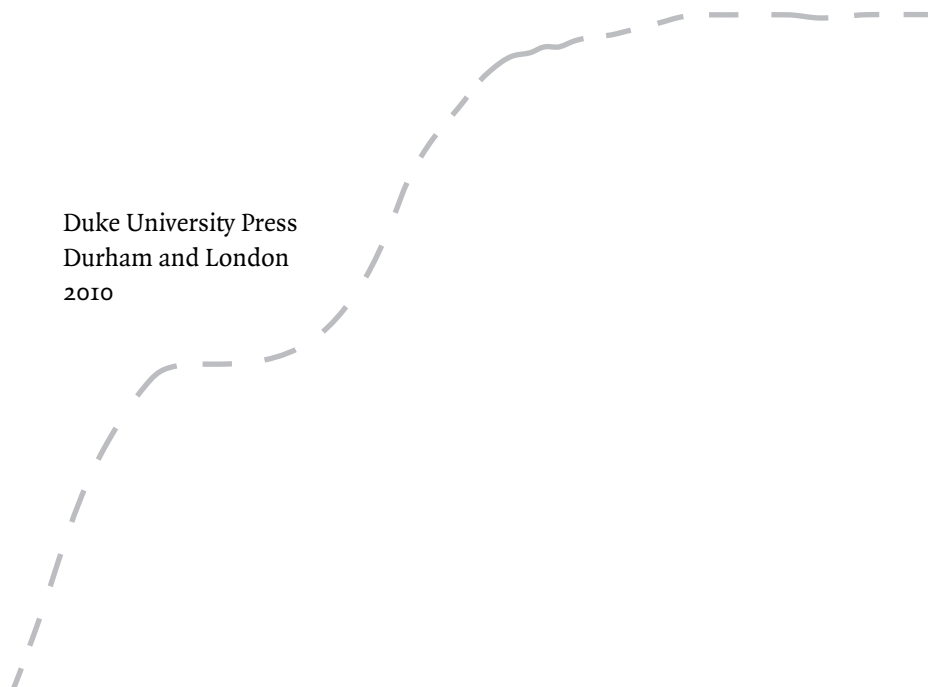
Che's Travels

The Making of a Revolutionary
in 1950s Latin America



Paulo Drinot, editor

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Introduction

For better or worse, justly or unjustly, Ernesto “Che” Guevara has come to represent the history of twentieth-century Latin America in a way that no other historical figure has done. There are good, objective reasons for this, not least his participation in the Cuban Revolution, arguably the single most important, and pivotal, process in twentieth-century Latin American history; a process that radically redefined Latin America’s role in the global political theatre. But there are also other, more subjective reasons, reasons that historians and social scientists would be foolish to ignore. Che, it must be said, was an attractive man. His allure derived partly from his good looks but equally, and perhaps primarily, from the fact that he appeared to lead the sort of life that many men, and some women, secretly or avowedly wished to lead themselves. Either because they, too, believed passionately in revolution as the means of achieving social justice or, more likely, because they associated the man with adventure and a break from convention, many in Latin America and throughout the world came to identify with Che, or the idea of Che. Irrespective of the ways in which the Cuban Revolution sought to claim Che as its primary symbol, in the half century that saw the rise of the global media, Che quickly became a global political phenomenon and a cultural artifact that seemed to condense both the very spirit of revolution (in both a social and an individual sense) and the history and culture of Latin America and the way that region came to be understood in a broader global context.

Che’s enduring appeal was confirmed recently by the critical and box office success of Walter Salles’s film, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, released in 2004. Based on the diaries written by Guevara and his traveling companion, Alberto Granado, during their journey across South America in the early 1950s, the film revived general interest in

Guevara's life and, particularly, in his prerevolutionary experience.¹ Yet perhaps surprisingly scholarship has largely ignored not only this period in Guevara's life but also the entire crucial decade for Latin America. The present volume seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring the Latin America that Guevara encountered on his travels across the continent prior to boarding the *Granma* in late November 1956 on his way to Cuba and, more important, to the revolutionary pantheon. The contributors to this volume explore how Guevara's Latin American travels *produced* Che and how Che simultaneously *produced* Latin America through his travelogues. They do so by using Guevara's travels and, particularly, his travel writings as a window both into the societies that he encountered at that particular historical juncture and into the impact that the experience of those societies had on him. But the contributors also consider how Latin America has *reproduced* Che by examining the various roles assigned to him and the claims made on him by various actors. The chapters in this book thus focus on three interconnected themes: (1) the societies that Che encountered and experienced during his travels across the continent in the early 1950s; (2) Che's representations of those societies in his travelogues and other writings; and (3) Che's broader legacy for the societies he experienced. Each contributor places different weight on each of these themes, reflecting both individual interests and the nature of the documentary material engaged (Che, as we will see, had a lot more to say about Guatemala or Peru than about Colombia or Venezuela).

As various contributors to this volume remark, in some ways the man of the period covered by his early travel writings was little more than a young, petulant, and not very insightful Argentine of no great historical interest other than that he was to turn from the moth of Ernesto Guevara into the butterfly of Che. Yet as a number of historians have shown, relatively "unimportant" or "ordinary" historical figures may prove to be "extraordinary" conduits through which to understand complex historical processes.² Of course, unlike Carlo Ginzburg's late medieval peasant miller Menocchio or Miguel Barnet's runaway slave Esteban Montejo, it is not necessary to rescue Guevara from, *pace* E. P. Thompson, the enormous condescension of posterity.³ But even during its unimportant and ordinary phase, Guevara's life story presents a unique opportunity to reflect on Latin

America in the 1950s and beyond, as well as on Che as political phenomenon and cultural artifact. It is the relative uniqueness of Guevara's diaries of his travels from Argentina to Mexico, and more generally his "self-musealization," that makes them and him so compelling.⁴ There may certainly exist many more such diaries telling of the incredible regional mobility of Latin Americans in the middle decades of the twentieth century. But so far few if any historians have sought to uncover them, let alone make them centerpieces of historical study. Given Guevara's subsequent historical trajectory, a closer examination of his youthful experience that moves beyond the purely biographical seems eminently worthwhile.

By approaching Guevara's early travels as a conduit to historical study, the current volume provides a critical perspective and a fresh interpretative framework on a broad range of themes central to the history of Latin America and the region's global relations. In particular, the volume makes an original incursion into the recent and ongoing scholarly reassessment of Latin America's experience of the Cold War. Various historians, political scientists, and literary theorists have sought to complicate our understanding of this key period by considering how the Cold War was not experienced merely at the level of "high" politics, international relations, or diplomacy but also as "the politicization and internationalization of everyday life and familiar encounters."⁵ As the chapters in this volume illustrate, Guevara experienced the Cold War *from below*, as part of everyday life and of familiar encounters (in Chile and Guatemala most notably), before he became one of its principal actors *from above*. Through the conduit of his travels and his travelogues, and through the counterpoint between the travelogues and a number of other historical sources, this volume provides a fresh and provocative perspective on Latin America's experience of the Cold War and the interplay of nationalism and anti-imperialism in a crucial but largely underresearched decade. It does so from the unusual perspective offered by the writings of a young and at times juvenile Argentine man who was transformed by his experience of Latin America and who, although he could not have imagined it when he first kick-started his travel companion's Norton 500 motorcycle in 1951, would in time transform Latin America.

While this volume seeks to contribute to a broader reassessment of how global processes shaped Latin America in the 1950s as a

region, it also pays careful attention to the distinct national realities of Latin America and considers how Guevara experienced and understood them. What emerges is a more complex, less heroic, but perhaps more interesting picture of a young Guevara, one that overcomes simplistic hagiographic or demonizing narratives. The young man traveled through a number of countries undergoing profound change as a consequence of the interplay of local and global forces. In Argentina, he encountered the “populist” corporatism of the Perón years; in Peru and Venezuela, the authoritarian regimes of Manuel Odría and Marcos Pérez Jiménez; in Bolivia and Guatemala, social revolutions. With the notable exception of Guatemala, Guevara showed little concern with the politics of the countries he visited. He viewed the wildly diverse Latin America of his travels through young, inquisitive, but ultimately provincial Argentine eyes. His travels awakened in him noble sentiments of pan-Americanism, but he also traded on being Argentine to sponge off the police and the locals (particularly the women). His indignation at the racism and discrimination suffered by Peru’s Indians provoked paternalistic and essentializing sentiments. His poorly articulated but strong sense of social justice sat alongside a predilection for scatological schoolboy humor. His penchant for improvisation was continuously checked by the discipline that his asthma imposed on his life.

Che Guevara as a Subject of Historical Inquiry

Despite Che’s global iconic status and singular importance to twentieth-century Latin American and global history, there is surprisingly little scholarship on him, as opposed to publications, of which there are plenty. We can broadly divide the literature on Guevara into three categories: the hagiographical, the biographical, and the autobiographical (which includes Guevara’s two diaries from his youth, published in English as the *Motorcycle Diaries* and *Back on the Road*, as well as his *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, *The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo*, and the *Bolivian Diary*, and a number of speeches and writings collected in various compilations).⁶ There are also several banal myth-busters that seek to present Guevara, and by extension the Latin American “new” Left, as the source of all Latin America’s ills.⁷ In addition, there are some jour-

nalistic reconstructions of Che's early travels and even a graphic "biography" of his life.⁸ Relatively few scholarly studies exist that seek to analyze Guevara as a historical subject. The three major biographies by Jon Lee Anderson, Jorge Castañeda, and Paco Ignacio Taibo II, all published in 1997, provide useful and insightful overviews of Guevara's life on which the studies in this volume draw a fair amount. Most scholarly analyses, however, focus on Guevara's revolutionary thought and strategy, including his supposedly anti-dogmatic Marxism and his contributions to revolutionary theory and strategy (and, in some cases, economics).⁹ More recently, the image or iconography of Che and its use and manipulation have received considerable attention.¹⁰ The growing interest in Che's image, perhaps a reflection of the ways in which Che, like many other topics of scholarly inquiry, has been subjected to a cultural turn, is reflected in the success of a major exhibition on Che's iconography, held at London's Victoria and Albert Museum.¹¹

Through the exploration of the volume's three central themes, the present volume seeks to make a timely and significant contribution to both the historiography of Latin America and the literature on Guevara. As regards the first theme, the societies that Guevara encountered and experienced during travels in the early 1950s, there is very uneven coverage of this decade in the historiography of Latin America. Countries like Argentina (Peronism), Bolivia (the revolution of 1952), and Guatemala (the coup of 1954) are well served because of the important social and political events and processes that occurred in the period, but others, such as Chile, Peru, and Mexico, have received only sporadic coverage. There exist, moreover, no multicountry studies of this period to match those published in the past few decades on the 1930s and 1940s.¹² This book therefore proves unique in providing a multicountry perspective on a decade that, certainly in the cases of Peru or Mexico, historians have only recently begun to examine. Bringing together specialists from across Latin America, each leg of Guevara's journey is analyzed in new depth to explore the distinctive societies, histories, politics, and cultures he encountered.

As regards the second theme, how Guevara represented the societies he experienced in the early 1950s in his travelogues and other writings, most analyses of Guevara's writings have focused on his Cuban and Bolivian diaries. When not depressingly hagiographical,

these studies have tended to emphasize the lessons that can be drawn from Guevara's guerrilla campaigns and personality in terms of either the pursuit of guerrilla warfare in other contexts (such as in the case of the work of Régis Debray and his *Revolution in the Revolution*) or the emergence of a new (revolutionary) man for others to emulate (such as in the case of the pronouncements and writings on Che of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, Argentine author Julio Cortázar, and others).¹³ Few scholars have examined seriously and critically what Guevara had to say about Latin America.¹⁴ And yet, as the various chapters in this book clearly demonstrate, the travelogues he produced in the early 1950s contain a wealth of information that can be analyzed to get a sense of how Guevara understood and represented the societies he encountered and how his experience of these societies shaped his worldview. In its essays the present book moves beyond the traditional narratives on Guevara and offers an interpretation of his formative years based on a careful analysis of his ideas and impressions of Latin America, which challenges hagiographical accounts and complicates our understanding of the man. A broad range of factors (his social background, his pursuit of adventure, his intellectual interests) shaped his idea of Latin America, and they predisposed him to see certain things in a particular way and some things not at all.

Finally, as regards the third theme, Guevara's broader legacy for the societies he experienced in the early 1950s, it is surprising that given the ubiquity of Che's image in Latin America (on mudguards and T-shirts, for example), few scholars have sought to systematically study his legacy in the region.¹⁵ Most available analyses of Guevara's legacy are uncritically celebratory in tone.¹⁶ Few scholars, and particularly few historians, have given serious attention to how Che is remembered or memorialized and the uses to which his memory has been put, both by those who claim to follow his example and by those who see him as the source of Latin America's ills. And yet this living legacy is key to understanding how people relate to both the revolutionary and the counterrevolutionary projects that have shaped and continue to shape Latin America. The various guerrilla movements that arose in the region between the 1960s and the 1980s in various ways found inspiration in Guevara's revolutionary example and in his ideas about the revolutionary *foco*. Today, Che remains a key political referent for political projects in Venezuela

and Bolivia but also for various groups involved in struggles for inclusionary citizenship and social justice, from indigenous activists in Guatemala to *piqueteros* in Argentina, from students in Mexico City to *cocaleros* in the Bolivian Yungas. But Che has also been “indigenized” as a cultural artifact throughout the region—appropriated as a cultural and, in some cases, religious symbol by myriad Latin Americans who associate Che with values and aspirations key to their self-definition. By examining seriously, and critically, Che’s legacy in the various countries that he visited in the early 1950s, the contributors to this volume seek to further complicate our understanding of the various ways in which the man, as both political phenomenon and cultural artifact, has shaped and continues to shape Latin America.

A Word on Sources

All the contributors to this volume have to some degree based their essays on Guevara’s writings. Two travelogues, *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Back on the Road*, form a connecting thread that links all contributions. Additional texts are used: most important, the travelogue written by Granado, Guevara’s travel companion during the first trip, but also the memoirs of those who knew Guevara intimately, such as his father, Ernesto Guevara Lynch, his first wife, Hilda Gadea, and his friends and traveling companions from the second trip, Calica Ferrer and Ricardo Rojo.¹⁷ In some ways, Guevara’s travelogues should be seen as part of a long tradition of travel writing in Latin America, to which historians and other scholars are increasingly paying attention.¹⁸ The publishing success of Guevara’s travelogues, and indeed the box office success of Salles’s film, of course primarily derives from Che’s iconic status. But the diaries, and the experience of travel they narrate, are in themselves compelling. As Casey Blanton notes, “the travel narrative is a compelling and seductive form of story telling. Its reader is swept along the surface of the text by the pure forward motion of the journey while being initiated into strange and often dangerous new territory.”¹⁹ But the diaries also compel because they appear to take us on a journey of discovery of their author, a journey “where the hero is seen as one who travels on a path of self-improvement and integration, doing battle with ‘others’ who are unresolved parts of himself

or herself.”²⁰ This seductive quality of travel writing, heightened in this case by the iconic nature of the travelogue’s author, can help occlude that Guevara’s prose, like “all travel writing, as a process of inscription and appropriation, spins webs of colonizing power.”²¹ Put more simply, travelogues are not only narratives about travel but also narratives about, and constitutive of, power. Like, say, the authorized version of Captain Cook’s travels, Guevara’s travel writing is “a composite, fractured and spatialized construction.”²²

The use of Guevara’s travel diaries as historical sources thus presents a number of problems to the historian. Yet these problems do not differ significantly from the challenges that all sources present. True, both Guevara and others, including the Cuban authorities, have reworked these texts for reasons of either self-fashioning or political benefit. Guevara explicitly notes his own “doctoring” of the evidence in *The Motorcycle Diaries*: “The person who wrote these notes passed away the moment his feet touched Argentine soil. The person who *reorganizes and polishes* them, me, is no longer, at least I’m not the person I once was.”²³ But historians are well aware that all texts are doctored in one way or another. That Guevara’s travelogues have been “reorganized” and “polished” in no way undermines their utility as historical sources. Even if “original” versions of these travelogues existed, historians would still have to approach them in much the same way that the contributors to this volume explore the versions available to them (i.e., fully aware that they are textual constructions of truth rather than truth itself). Differences between versions could provide useful hooks on which to hang discussions about, say, what either Guevara or the Cuban authorities believed should and should not be included in the diaries and what such an inclusion or omission tells us, for example, about how the Cuban government sought to construct or control the image of its most important icon. But the current volume does not seek to engage in these discussions. Instead, the contributors approach the diaries as cultural artifacts, and Guevara’s life story itself as a cultural production, that can be usefully studied to provide a scholarly evaluation of the ways in which Guevara “produced” the Latin America he encountered in the 1950s and, in turn, of the ways in which the Latin America of the 1950s, and of later decades, “produced” and “re-produced” Che.

Chapter Structure

The book's structure follows Guevara's itineraries during his two journeys as narrated in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Argentina-Chile-Peru-Colombia-Venezuela) and *Back on the Road* (Argentina-Bolivia-Peru-Guatemala-Mexico). Of course, Guevara visited several other countries during these two journeys, including the United States in the first trip and Ecuador and all the other Central American countries in the second. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include chapters on these other countries. The choice of the countries that Guevara visited as the basis for each chapter is neither inevitable nor unproblematic. It has the advantage of revealing local nuances that only national-level case studies, which draw on the contributors' country-focused expertise, can provide. In addition to focusing to different degrees on each of the volume's central themes, the authors have drawn on various methods and theoretical perspectives. Several have chosen to examine Guevara's travel narratives in counterpoint to those of other contemporary travelers. Others have turned to testimony and oral histories to examine the ways in which Che is memorialized. These choices reflect each author's methodological preferences and theoretical proclivities, as well as the particular nature of their personal expertise. They point to, and demonstrate, the diverse and productive interpretative and analytical roads that different scholars have chosen to take as they follow Guevara on his travels from Argentina to Mexico.

We begin, then, in Argentina, where, as Eduardo Elena shows, Guevara's experience of travel, which had begun far earlier than 1951, needs to be understood in the broader context of two key developments in mid-twentieth-century Argentina: the emergence of mass tourism and the rise of nationalism. Both developments shaped and were shaped by the advent of Peronism. Guevara sought to distance himself from the tourist masses, consciously opting for a practice of travel that marked him as a nontourist. This option, Elena suggests, reflected a distinctive position vis-à-vis the nationalism that Peronism sought to champion. Like other Argentines of his social class, including members of his own family, Guevara was skeptical of Juan Perón. However, he recognized more readily than most that Peronism brought real material and symbolic benefits to



Map 1. Ernesto Guevara's first journey as recounted in *The Motorcycle Diaries*.



the Argentine poor. But in choosing to travel beyond the borders of his native country, Guevara tacitly rejected Perón's narrow nationalism in favor of a more expansive notion that reflected an embrace of pan-Americanism as the basis of his awakening anti-imperialism. In considering his legacy in the Argentine context, Elena suggestively argues that it is possible to discern in Guevara's favored approach to seeing the world elements of his political ideology and praxis, one marked by the gradual replacement of curiosity by increasingly fixed convictions as the impetus for travel.

Patience A. Schell examines Guevara's experience of travel in Chile in counterpoint to the experiences of a number of European and U.S. travelers. Schell shows how Guevara and Granado reproduced in their observations a series of tropes common in much of the travel writing on Chile. Themes such as the beauty of Chilean women, the generosity of Chile's inhabitants, and the bounty of the country's natural resources shaped the two Argentines' travel accounts much in the same way as those of a German tourist, a British car enthusiast, a *National Geographic* reporter, and a Maryknoll nun. But these tropes, which Chileans seem to have been generally proud of, Schell argues, obscured the changes that Chilean society was experiencing and that, for the most part, these travelers paid little attention to. Thus Chile's beautiful women were not only increasingly active in the workplace but also in the political sphere. The generosity of Chile's population was all the more remarkable given the acute difficulties faced by the Chilean economy in the 1950s, difficulties disproportionately affecting the country's poor. Indeed, the semblance of natural bounty that so many travelers commented on hid the highly unequal distribution of land that left an increasing number of Chileans trying to make a living in the slums of Santiago. Ironically, though Guevara seems to have at best glimpsed some of the developments, they were at the root of the tensions that would shape Chile's turn, first, to socialism and, then, to brutal dictatorship in the 1970s, processes in which Guevara played a key role as a source of inspiration for some and as a symbol of ungodly communism for others.

As Schell notes, Guevara differed from other travelers in one respect: he was greatly interested in Chile's indigenous peoples. This interest, as the essay by Paulo Drinot shows, also proves central to Guevara's observations on Peru, the only country that Guevara

visited twice during his two journeys across the continent. Like Schell, Drinot examines Guevara's observations of the country in counterpoint to those of other travelers. Guevara had little to say about the political situation in the country, and his diaries do not tell us much about Odría's dictatorship or the situation faced by political parties such as the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA, a populist party) or the Peruvian Communist Party. In contrast, Guevara wrote extensively about Peru's indigenous peoples and what he perceived as their wretched existence. Drinot argues that although Guevara wrote sympathetically about the indigenous, he reproduced racist views that essentialized the Indian. Guevara's understanding of the indigenous, and indeed of Peruvian society more broadly, Drinot shows, was shaped by his reading of *indigenista* authors. This predisposed him to view Andean society in ways that made it difficult for him to perceive how the indigenous challenged the subordinate roles assigned to them by Peruvian society to make claims for citizenship. Like Guevara, Drinot argues, those Peruvians who sought to emulate his revolutionary example in the 1960s had a limited understanding of the various forces shaping Peruvian society. Not surprisingly, their attempts to apply Guevara's model of revolution proved costly failures. In some ways the revolutionary project of the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), although overtly non-Guevarist, was better able to exploit the tensions at the heart of Peruvian society. However, its brutality and the harsh reaction from the Peruvian armed forces that it engendered produced some seventy thousand victims and did nothing to address the exclusion and poverty that had stirred Guevara's empathy toward Peru's indigenous peoples.

In contrast to Chile and Peru, Guevara spent little time in Colombia, and he recorded few of his impressions of the country in his diaries. But as Malcolm Deas shows, Guevara had a deep impact on Colombia, an impact that in some ways remains in evidence today and to a greater extent than in any other Latin American country. Deas notes that Guevara arrived in Colombia during the country's most repressive phase of the twentieth century—the military government of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla—and in a broader context of acute sectarian guerrilla violence with deep roots in Colombian history. Deas argues that the Colombian guerrillas of the 1950s were not of the Guevarist kind. Though in some ways agrarian by virtue of

their composition, they pursued a political struggle mirroring the broader one at the heart of Colombian society, not a social struggle for land. The influence of the Cuban Revolution and of Guevara's own revolutionary example and thinking would change this, giving a new life to older guerrillas and bringing into existence a whole new group of revolutionaries. As a consequence, Guevara's legacy has endured far longer in Colombia than in most other countries he visited in the 1950s.

Guevara also spent little time in Venezuela. As various contributors to the volume remark, he was far more enthused by the rural than the urban Latin America he encountered, and this may account for the brevity of his commentary on the cities he visited. Guevara's narrative of the few days he spent in Caracas nevertheless prove revealing. As Judith Ewell notes, Guevara largely made disparaging comments about the city's urban poor, and here as in Peru, his impressions were shaped by racialized assumptions. Guevara seems to have largely misread or failed to see the changes afoot in Caracas, particularly those that, at least partially, resulted from the country's increasing "Americanization," itself a consequence of the country's oil wealth. Venezuela, the destination of his first trip, was also that of Guevara's second. He never made it there the second time, but he did meet Rómulo Betancourt, deposed by Pérez Jiménez in 1948, in Costa Rica, along with a number of other political exiles. The two men differed greatly and seem to have thought little of each other, but the meeting, Ewell argues, proved important for Guevara's political development. It confirmed his negative views of a group of reformist political leaders, including Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, José Figueres, and Víctor Paz Estenssoro, and of the political projects he associated with them, particularly with regard to the role that those projects gave to the United States in Latin America. Finally, Ewell considers Guevara's impact on Venezuela, both direct and indirect. He played an active role in the formation of Venezuelan guerrilla movements in the 1960s, although these, like many others, proved unsuccessful. Che's indirect influence has proved more enduring. He remains a powerful spiritual and political symbol in Venezuela, as evidenced by his incorporation into the pantheon of spirits in the religion of María Lionza and into the pantheon of heroes that constitute the genealogy of Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian revolution.

Bolivia was the first country that Guevara visited during his second journey. It was also, of course, the country to which he returned in a fatal mission to ignite a continental *foco* in the late 1960s. Ann Zulawski discusses the genealogy of the revolutionary situation that Guevara encountered during the few weeks he spent in the country in 1953. By the time of his arrival in La Paz, Guevara appears to have acquired a greater interest in the politics of the countries he visited (although his main motivation for travel remained a thirst for adventure). As Zulawski discusses, Guevara made a series of perceptive comments about the tensions at the heart of the revolutionary project that had brought the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) to power. These tensions resulted from the uneasy alliance of peasants, miners, and middle-class reformists who had come together to end the oligarchic order but who pursued different and in some cases antagonistic interests. Zulawski contrasts Guevara's pithy observations on the MNR leadership to his limited engagement with the miners and particularly the indigenous peasantry, which he continued to view in largely simplistic and essentializing terms. In contrast to other contemporary travelers studied by Zulawski, such as Lilo Linke, a German woman who lived in Ecuador and traveled in the region, and Alicia Ortiz, an Argentine literary essayist and travel writer, Guevara seems to have found little time to discuss the changes in Bolivia with those people that his emergent social conscience made him identify with. Had he done so, Zulawski suggests, he might well have gained a better understanding of the revolutionary and, indeed, counterrevolutionary forces that were beginning to shape the country and that would shape the outcome of his revolutionary venture in the late 1960s. Still, despite or, rather, because of his death there, Che has acquired a powerful presence in Bolivia, where some revere him as a folk saint, while others, including President Evo Morales, embrace him as a symbol of social justice.

As in Bolivia, Guevara encountered a social revolution in Guatemala, though the latter was in the process of unraveling. Cindy Forster discusses the ways in which Guevara's experience of the last few months of Guatemala's "time of freedom" shaped his understanding, and later his practice and theorization, of revolution. Central to this development was Guevara's interaction in Guatemala with a broad group of political exiles, including his first wife, the Peruvian Hilda Gadea, and people attracted to Guatemala by the

revolutionary changes that the government of Jacobo Arbenz had initiated, such as the U.S. academic Harold White. These connections exposed Guevara to Marxism. But equally, and perhaps more central to his political development, was the experience of the CIA-backed coup of 1954. As Forster shows, Guevara drew a number of conclusions from this experience regarding the reasons for the demise of the Guatemalan revolution, and these conclusions would shape the ways in which he would approach revolution in Cuba and elsewhere. Forster argues that although Guevara, much as in Peru and Bolivia, reproduced racist views of Guatemala's indigenous peoples, he nevertheless expressed respect for Indian culture; by the 1960s his views on race had begun to change, making the concept play a key role in his thinking on the revolutionary context in Guatemala. This explains, Forster suggests, the extent to which the Guatemalan guerrillas of the 1970s and 1980s, and particularly the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, embraced Che as a chief source of inspiration. It also explains the Argentine's enduring relevance to the struggles of the country's indigenous population to resist and reverse their historical marginalization.

Mexico was, in a sense, where Guevara's travel adventure ended and where Che's journey began. As is well known, Guevara's meeting with Fidel and Raúl Castro in Mexico set in motion the series of events that would result in the Cuban Revolution, which in turn radically altered Latin America's role in the Cold War and in the broader global political theatre. Eric Zolov frames Guevara's transformative experience in Mexico in the context of dramatic postwar changes in Mexico's revolutionary process but also in that of Mexico's place in the cultural revolution of the 1950s. Miguel Alemán's so-called counterrevolution had moved Mexico away from *cardenista* revolutionary policy and into the sphere of U.S. economic and political influence and the logic of the Cold War. But at the same time, 1950s Mexico was a key site of an emerging counterculture to which bohemians such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg came to escape their own society's restrictions. In many ways, Zolov suggests, Guevara, like Kerouac and Ginsberg, was a bohemian guided in his travels by a spirit of adventure and a desire to engage the Other. His encounter with the Castro brothers, Zolov shows, gave a new direction to his spirit of adventure and transformed the carefree bohemian into a heroic revolutionary. During the early 1960s, when Mex-

ico's own revolutionary heroes were discredited by association with an increasingly authoritarian regime, Che symbolized an emergent new Left in the country. Yet the experience of Tlatelolco (the student massacre of 1968) and a desire among the young to reclaim Mexico's revolutionary heroes led to the revaluation of national figures such as Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos, and especially Emiliano Zapata. Still, Che remains for many Mexicans and, indeed, for many Latin Americans, a powerful symbol of international solidarity and of the struggle for social justice.

We thus begin in late 1951, as Ernesto Guevara is preparing to set off on his voyage of adventure and self-discovery. This first journey from Argentina to Venezuela and (via Miami) back to Argentina, and the later journey of 1953, from Argentina to Mexico and then Cuba, were experiences of travel that shaped in profound ways not only Guevara's life but, eventually and indirectly, the lives of all Latin Americans and the very course of world history in the second half of the twentieth century. Guevara's legacy is examined in this book largely in its Latin American context. But it is clearly a global legacy, one at once banal and profound: it is at once a T-shirt practically devoid of meaning and a radical political vision polarizing the world and resonating on every continent in particular ways. Guevara's revolutionary ideals and goals may no longer have the purchase they once had, but the man and his legacy continue to influence in multiple ways how people across the world understand and imagine their self-fashioning as individuals and their collective past and future. This book demonstrates the important role that Guevara's travels in the 1950s had in determining his view of the world and his later revolutionary trajectory and practice. But it also, and perhaps primarily, draws our attention to and begins to answer how and why Che's travels in Latin America shaped the history of the world.

Notes

I am grateful to Jelke Boesten, Laurence Brown, Patience Schell, Eric Zolov, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this introduction.

1 It remains to be seen whether the release in 2008 of Steven Soderbergh's two films, *Che Part 1* and *Che Part 2*, or *The Argentine* and *Guerrilla*, based on Guevara's Cuban and Bolivian diaries, will create a similar

revival of interest in Guevara's life and revolutionary experience in the 1960s.

2 See Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London: Harper Collins, 2007).

3 See Esteban Montejo, *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, ed. Miguel Barnet, trans. Jocasta Innes (New York: Pantheon, 1968).

4 On "self-musealization," see Andreas Huyssen, "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia," *Public Culture* 12:1 (2000), 21–38.

5 Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 17; see also Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Marcos Cueto, *Cold War, Deadly Fevers: Malaria Eradication in Mexico, 1955–1975* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); and, especially, Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

6 Several biographies, of differing quality, were published to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of Guevara's death. See, in particular, Jon Lee Anderson, *Che: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove, 1997); Jorge G. Castañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara*, trans. Marina Castañeda (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997); Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Guevara, Also Known as Che*, trans. Martin Roberts (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997). A recent addition to the biographical corpus is Horacio López Das Eiras, *Ernestito Guevara: Antes de ser el Che* (Córdoba, Argentina: Ediciones del Boulevard, 2006).

7 Alvaro Vargas Llosa, *The Che Guevara Myth and the Future of Liberty* (Oakland, Calif.: Independent Institute, 2006); Humberto Fontova, *Exposing the Real Che Guevara and the Useful Idiots Who Idealize Him* (New York: Sentinel, 2007).

8 Patrick Symmes, *Chasing Che: A Freewheeling Adventure through the Wide Open Spaces of South America on the Trail of Che Guevara* (London: Robinson, 2000); Spain Rodriguez, *Che: A Graphic Biography*, ed. Paul Buhle (London: Verso, 2008).

9 The most interesting study in this vein is Paul Dosal, *Comandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956–1967* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), but see also Michael Lowy, *La pensée de Che Guevara* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970); Che Guevara,

Guerrilla Warfare: With an Introduction and Case Studies by Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies Jr. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Carlos Tablada Pérez, *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism* (New York: Pathfinder, 1989); Matt D. Childs, "An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27:3 (1995), 593–624. See, also, Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); and Mike Gonzalez, *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution* (London: Bookmark Books, 2004). For a recent study that considers Che's role in Cuba's economic restructuring following the revolution, see Helen Yaffe, *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

10 David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, 1997); Paulo Drinot, "La imagen del Che," *Márgenes* (Peru), no. 16 (1998), 281–85; Paul Dosal, "San Ernesto de la Higuera; The Resurrection of Che Guevara," *Death, Dismemberment, and Memory: Body Politics in Latin America*, ed. Lyman L. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 317–340. Ariana Hernández-Regnant, "Copyrighting Che: Art and Authorship under Cuban Late Socialism," *Public Culture* 16:1 (2004), 1–29; Phyllis Pasariello, "Desperately Seeking Something: Che Guevara as Secular Saint," *The Making of Saints: Contesting Sacred Ground*, ed. James F. Hopgood (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 75–89. See also the chapter on Guevara, which includes a discussion of the *Motorcycle Diaries* in its textual and filmed versions, in Erik Kristofer Ching, Christina Buckley, and Angélica Lozano-Alonso, *Reframing Latin America: A Cultural Theory Reading of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 237–68.

11 Tricia Ziff, *Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon* (London: V&A Publications, 2006).

12 See, for example, Rosemary Thorp, ed., *Latin America in the 1930s: The Role of the Periphery in World Crisis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984); Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, eds., *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944–1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

13 Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution*, trans. Bobbye Ortiz (New York: MR Press, 1967). On Sartre and Cortázar's views on Che, see Paulo Drinot, "La imagen del Che," *Márgenes* (Peru), no. 16 (1998), 281–85.

14 An important exception is Ricardo Piglia's brilliant essay, "Ernesto Guevara: The Last Reader," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 17:3 (2008), 261–77.

- 15 A notable exception is Juan Ignacio Siles del Valle's *La guerrilla del Che y la narrativa boliviana* (1996) quoted in Richard Harris, "Reflections on Che Guevara's Legacy," *Latin American Perspectives* 25:4 (1998), 19–32.
- 16 See James Petras, "Latin America: Thirty Years after Che," *Monthly Review* 49:5 (1997), 8–21; Gordon H. McCormick, "Che Guevara: The Legacy of a Revolutionary Man," *World Policy Journal* 14:4 (1997–98), 63–79.
- 17 Alberto Granado, *Traveling with Che Guevara: The Making of a Revolutionary*, trans. Lucía Álvarez de Toledo (New York: Newmarket Press, 2004); Ernesto Guevara Lynch, *Mi hijo el Che* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1984); Hilda Gadea, *Ernesto: A Memoir of Che Guevara*, trans. Carmen Molina and Walter I. Bradbury (London: W. H. Allen, 1973); Carlos "Calica" Ferrer, *De Ernesto al Che: El segundo viaje de Guevara por Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2005); Ricardo Rojo, *My Friend Che*, trans. Julian Casart (New York: Grove, 1968).
- 18 See, for example, Ingrid E. Fey and Karen Racine, eds., *Strange Pilgrimages: Exile, Travel, and National Identity in Latin America, 1800–1900s* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000); and Jürgen Buchenau, ed. and trans., *Mexico Otherwise: Modern Mexico in the Eyes of Foreign Observers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).
- 19 Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 21 James S. Duncan and Derek Gregory, eds., *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (London, Routledge, 1999), 3.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 23 Ernesto Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries: A Journey Around South America*, trans. Alexandra Keeble (London: Harper Perennial, 1995), 32; emphasis added.

Point of Departure

Travel and Nationalism in Ernesto Guevara's Argentina

The story of Che Guevara is one of a series of personal transformations—from asthmatic youth to medical student, and then to wanderer, guerrillero, revolutionary leader, and, finally, martyr. The fundamental role played by travel throughout these changes is widely acknowledged.¹ In fact, the one constant in Guevara's short life was its unsettled nature: he never remained long in one place during his youth, and he moved from country to country as an adult, embarking on one voyage or mission after another. In the standard account of his life story, it is the 1951–52 journey across South America that marked Guevara's political awakening as he was pulled away from his familiar life in Argentina and exposed to a continent of brutal extremes. This trip—recounted in Guevara's private journal and published after his death (and more recently in English as *The Motorcycle Diaries*)—has thus attracted great attention from biographers, commentators, and filmmakers. For all the insights provided by these works, however, they usually consider this voyage in isolation, as an assertion of willful independence. Such an interpretation hardly seems surprising, given that Guevara's self-presentation encourages this view, and it would later feed into the cult of heroism of El Che. But one is left with a distorted picture of an individual moving freely through a static landscape, as if he were the only historical actor in motion during this time and place. As a consequence, we fail to see Guevara's position within the broader social field of his homeland Argentina and the rest of Latin America, a region whose population was increasingly on the move in the post-Second World War era.

This essay aims to situate Guevara the traveler in the historical context of 1950s Argentina. In particular, it examines his early journeys from the vantage of two major contemporary trends: mid-twentieth-century mass migration and tourism; and the nationalist politics of the Peronist era (1943–55). This approach is premised on the assumption that to understand this particular traveler, one must examine his point of departure—in other words, the possibilities open to him at this moment and the conditions that he reacted against. Guevara came of age in a time marked by the regular movement of people across Argentina, from rural residents relocating to urban areas to short-term leisure travel. His decision to traverse vast expanses of his home country and Latin America can be seen in sharper relief by investigating these social displacements and cultural trends that accompanied them. This essay considers these historical subjects primarily through Guevara's earliest travel writings. During the journeys of his youth in Argentina, Guevara formulated his travel method—as reflected in his choice of itinerary, modes of transportation, and contact with the physical landscape and its inhabitants. *Method* is perhaps too rigorous a term to describe these wanderings, but it serves the useful purpose of grouping together his habits and preferences as a traveler, all of which reveal much about postwar Argentina and Guevara's place within it.

This type of historical analysis runs the danger of being reductive, that is, of explaining individual thought and action as the automatic outcome of structural pressures, political forces, and abstract social categories. To be sure, a measure of “sociologizing” may be welcome in this case, if only to counteract the inevitable mythologizing of El Che. But as we shall see, one of the distinguishing features of Guevara's early travels was, in fact, their anticonformist character. His ambitious trek across South America, on a minimal budget and just shy of earning his medical degree, clearly bucked convention. At the most obvious level, he pursued a self-conscious goal to evade acceptable practices of tourism. Although Guevara's rebellion was not yet aimed at fomenting revolution, his travels offered a gesture of rejection against prevailing class norms, cultural expectations, and the political trends of the 1950s. In contesting certain features of this milieu, however, Guevara continued to cling to others, and his travel writings reflect earlier paradigms of exploration and affinities with contemporary nationalist perspectives.

In keeping with the objectives of this volume, the essay also departs from a purely biographical analysis by reconsidering the history of postwar Argentina from the vantage of Guevara's travel accounts. The pages that follow will consider which central historical developments in his homeland Guevara saw (and which ones he did not see). Principal among these was the eruption of Peronism as the nation's largest political force. Discussions of Guevara's youth have tended to revolve around his somewhat perplexing distance from the partisan convulsions of Peronist rule. Nevertheless, a closer look at Guevara's travel writings reveals the inroads made by Peronist politics into everyday life across the national territory. Juan and Eva Perón's government accelerated ongoing social trends, such as urbanization, rural migration, and popular tourism (partly through state-sponsored programs). Despite his best efforts the young Guevara found it impossible to extricate himself fully from Peronism, even after he left behind his country's borders.

The essay begins by considering Guevara's place in the history of migration and travel in mid-twentieth-century Argentina. It then probes Peronist-era trends that shaped the parameter of his travels (such as the nationalist fascination with rural spaces). It concludes with a brief discussion of Guevara's return to Argentina as El Che, the embodiment of revolutionary action. There are a number of obstacles to examining Guevara and his travels in this manner. One relies by necessity on a critical reading of Guevara's own writings, yet they reflect the priorities of a youth seeking adventure in foreign lands, rather than meditations on his homeland. While Guevara and his companion Alberto Granado devoted more than a month to crisscrossing southern Argentina, the journals that comprise *The Motorcycle Diaries* are devoted primarily to their experiences elsewhere. In addition, these travel writings have a complicated provenance, which makes it difficult to address the scope of subsequent revisions and editing.² With an awareness of these interpretive dilemmas, the current essay draws on the *Diaries* and a range of other materials: additional Guevara writings, Peronist-era political and cultural sources, and secondary biographical works. What emerges from this analysis is a better appreciation for the historical significance of Guevara's choices as a traveler, including how his earliest journeys within Argentina blazed the trail for encounters elsewhere in Latin America.