

DARMIGNY Marie
1°L
GRIFFAULT Lucie
1°S3

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

« The Motorcycle Diaries »

a story may even change the way you
look at the world

Gael García Bernal
Rodrigo de la Serna

The new film from
acclaimed director Walter Salles
and executive producer Robert Redford

Based on the memoirs of Ernesto "Che" Guevara
and Alberto Granado

R

DIARIOS DE MOTOCICLETA

SUMMARY

Introduction..... p3

I. An initiatory trip p6

I. 1. The political situation of the visited countries p7

I. 2. The life's changes of the narrator after his journey ... p10

II. A cultural journey p12

II. 1. Monuments and towns p13

II. 2. Culture and way of life of the inhabitants p18

Conclusion..... p20

Synthesis p21

Annexe..... p23



a real photograph of Ernesto Guevara's departure in 1952

« The motorcycle diaries » is Ernesto Guevara's diary. He had taken notes during his journey around Latin America in 1952 and wrote it one year later. He was 24 years old when he decided to discover his continent with his friend Alberto Granado. This book inspired a director, Walter Salles, who created the film "the motorcycle diaries" in 2003. He tried to keep and respect the author's feelings and his own description. Walter Salles had chosen an Argentinean, Gael Garcia Bernal to play Ernesto Guevara, and the role of Alberto Granado had been given to Rodrigo De La Serna, who was Argentinean too.

This is not a tale of heroic feats, but it is about two lives running parallel for a while. The plan was to travel 5000 miles in four months. The Goal was to explore a continent they had only known in books. The method was the improvisation.

They started their expedition with an old motorbike called the "Pederosa" which stands for vigorous. What begins like an adventure changes progressively. The confrontation with the social and political reality of some different countries like Argentina, Perú, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela, twists the perception that the two friends had about the world.

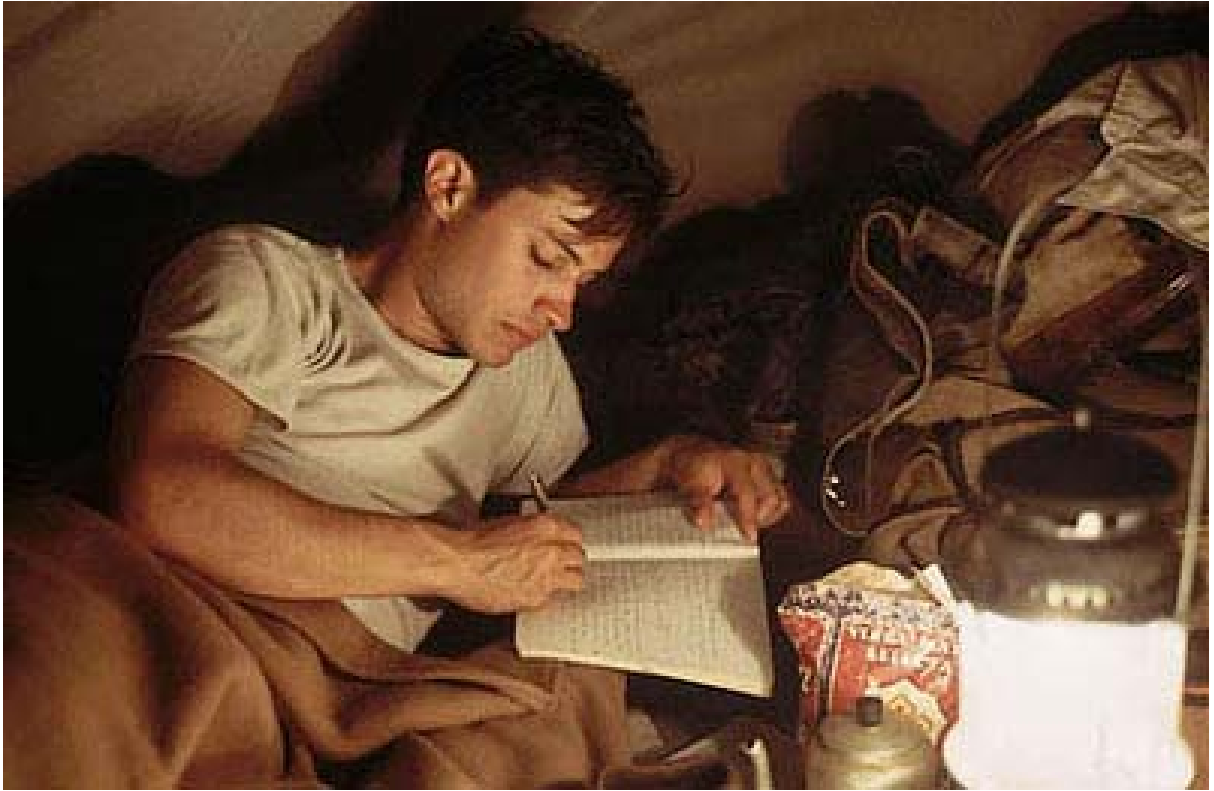


Their journey's itinerary
A map of South America taken from an encyclopedia

This experience that occurred during a critical moment of their life, will create some new vocations associated with a desire of social justice.

We will see how political ideas and art are represented in both the film and the book.

We will study the differences and the similarities through the way in which the political ideas and art are shown.



Gael Garcia Bernal playing Ernesto Guevara in the film "the Motorcycle diaries"



Ernesto Guevara in 1958

I- An initiatory trip



Rodrigo De La Serna and Gael García Bernal playing Alberto Granado and Ernesto Guevara in Chili in the film

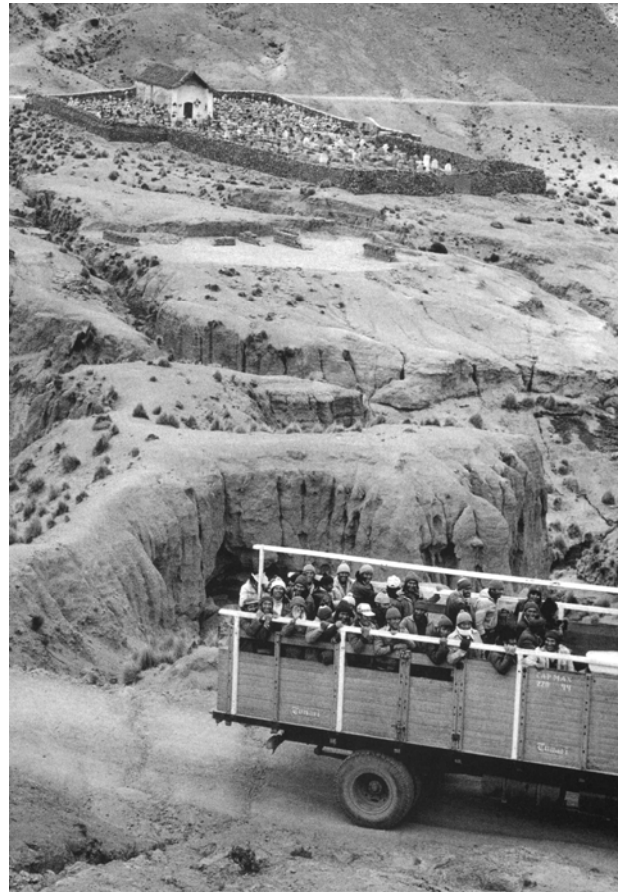
The story is divided into two parts in both the book and in the film. First, they laugh about their craziness whereas in the second part their story is more moving, as they discovered another world. At the beginning, one is amused by their innocence. Then one realizes how they are changing, especially Ernesto Guevara, who begins to understand human misery better.

1. The political situation of the visited countries

Ernesto Guevara and his companion Alberto Granado crossed many countries of Latin America: Argentina, Chile, Perú, Colombia, and Venezuela. Those countries were all under a more or less repressive dictatorship. The inhabitants' life was not easy. During his journey he met inhabitants who were victims of the country's political situation. Their situation triggered the feeling of injustice in Guevara's mind. That was the beginning of his fight for equality.

In the book, the political situation of each country is explained whereas in the film we deduce them thanks to the pictures. In his diary Ernesto Guevara had not developed as much on his native country. We just know Argentina was richer than the others and ruled by Peron. He was above all interested in foreigners' countries because the life that he had known in Argentina was comfortable.

The author had written a lot about the political situation of Chile. The political atmosphere was confusing since there were four candidates for the power; it was during the president's elections. Among them, Carlos Ibanez de Campo, an old soldier with a dictator tendency, seemed to be in charge. The second is Pedro Enrique Alfonso, who adhered to the popular socialist party. Then, there were Arturo Matte Larraín, who is the representer of the right wing, and the last one Salvador Allende, who had the communist votes. However their forces were reduced to 40 000 votes because the electors who had belonged to the communist party were deprived from voting. Ernesto Guevara wrote his book again after his journey, so he told us that Carlos Ibanez de Campo had won the election. Chile could have been a real industrial country because it has many resources but its main problem was that some American firms possessed all of its mines, and there are a lot in this country.



A photograph of a mine in Chile in 1980 by Sebastiao Salgado

Medicine is a real problem in this country, free hospitals are uncommon and they are very poor, they lacked medicines and rooms. Obviously there is a lack of hygiene; those problems are not reserved for the little towns of the countryside but for all the country, and even for the southern continent. Alberto Granado and Ernesto Guevara had worked in many leper hospitals; they worked in one in San Pablo in Perú, where ill people and doctors were separated by a river, the Amazon. The leprous people lived on one side of the river where they had to build their houses and opposite there were the doctors. This separation struck both companions because it really showed that they were discriminated against: they couldn't live together in a society. The doctors had to wear gloves to touch and cure the lepers. The two young doctors didn't respect this rule, as they regarded them as "normal" people. So there couldn't exist an injustice between the doctors and the patients. The time spent in this leper hospital was very crucial for them as much in the book and in the film. It was at the end of their trip, they spent ten days there and they had created links with the ill persons. Ernesto Guevara celebrated his birthday there. He made a speech which showed that he had reflected a lot since the beginning of their trip. They were not the young adventurers anymore in search of new landscapes. They had grown and we start to feel that Ernesto Guevara was becoming the Che.



Gael Garcia Bernal in Che Guevara's part with a leprous person in the hospital of San Pablo in the film

The social situation of Chilean inhabitants reflects all Latin America's situation except Argentina, which was a little wealthier. In the South, the population had low wages for their working condition. They lacked work protections and it created a flow of Chilean migration in Argentina. In the North they are better paid in the mines but life is more expensive. Throughout, the inhabitants were the victims of injustice; Ernesto Guevara was really shocked by their poverty: he met many people. In the film we felt this the most when he met two Chilean communist workers. Those two inhabitants were forced to leave their home because of their political communist ideas. In Ernesto's eyes we read about his need to change the world. This scene is the same as in the book: those two people are the representation of the proletariat in the world.

The political situation of the other countries is not described as much.

Concerning Perú, we know there are many tensions, and several political parties had developed. In July 2nd 1950, Manuel Arturo was elected as president. His government reinforced Perú's defense. He supported the cooperation with Brazil thanks to economic and cultural pacts.

When both friends arrived in Colombia, this country was undergoing a violent revolt called "la violencia" that began in July 1948 and was provoked by Jorge Eliecer Gaitan's assassination. His liberal party was becoming more and more popular and it was opposed to the national political union of the president Alberto Lleras Camargo. Thanks to this revolt, the government was rebalanced in favour of the liberals.

Ernesto Guevara and Alberto Granado did not spend a long time in Venezuela and we only know that the army had taken over the power since November 1948.

So far the political situation didn't interest Ernesto Guevara much. Above all he thought about the injustice between the inhabitants, and of their standard of living. He understood that in order to solve those problems you had to be a politician to be listened to.

In the book, Guevara wrote clearly what he thought. That is why we understand more clearly what the influence of this trip meant for his future political life.

At the beginning of his trip Guevara didn't expect to discover a Latin America ruled by poverty and injustice. His meeting with inhabitants created some new vocations in his mind. At that moment he understood the real situations in his continent and his political ideas were born. He was revolted and felt concerned by the problems taking place in his continent.

2.The changes of the narrator's life after his journey



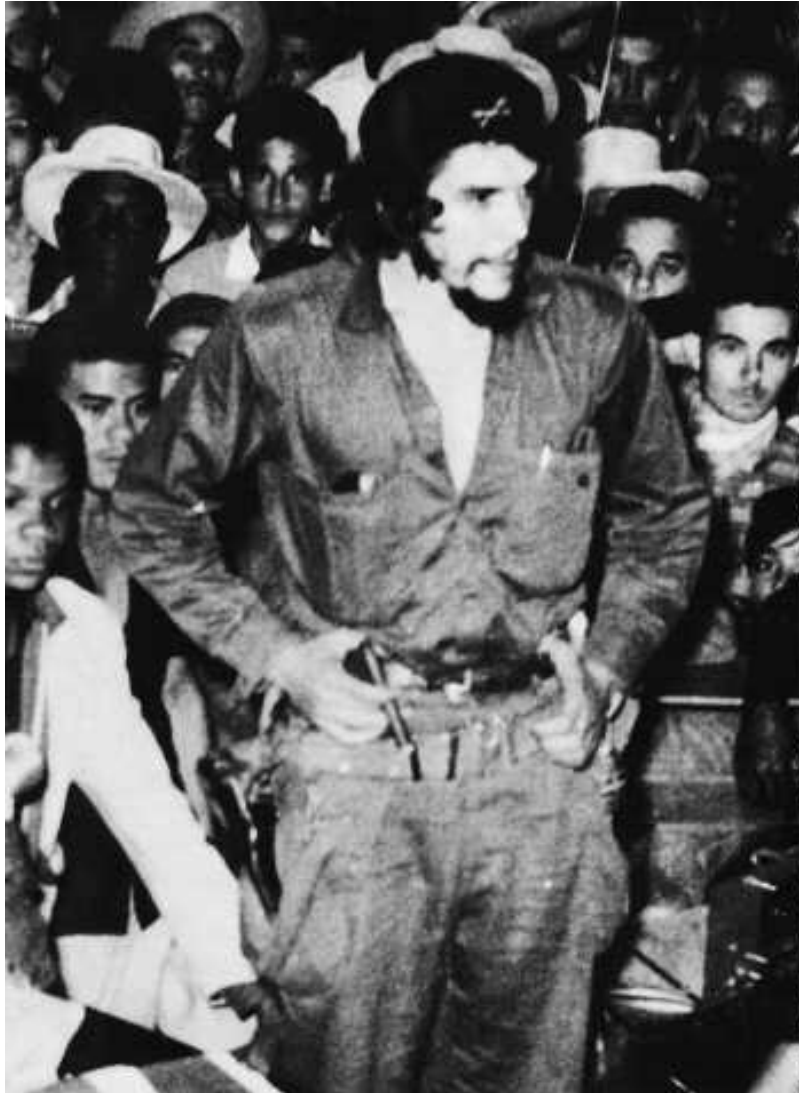
a picture about the film « the motorcycle diaries »

Che Guevara was born in 1928 from a well-off family but his affluence didn't prevent him from taking care of people in need. Before his trip he didn't know the economic and social persistent problems of his continent. The book and the film tell the story of Ernesto Guevara just before becoming the "Che", little by little we feel a change in his attitude and in this young man we see the grain of the man to be. Through his revolt against the world, we can imagine he would become one of the most important politicians of the 20th century. His will to change the world will lead him to become the famous revolutioner today who is known all around the world.

He was the Latin American revolutionary leader, who rejected both capitalism and orthodox Soviet communism.

Guevara's early tragic death in Bolivia in 1967, created a legend that still lives. He said that "the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love", but he also wrote influential works of the guerrilla warfare.

One year after his first trip in July 1953, Ernesto Guevara left his family again. Now he is no longer the student attracted by romanticism of the road and adventures. He had discovered misery, hunger and the impossibility to feed children for the lack of resources. But above all, he is interested in the political situation of the countries which he is crossing. The young doctor travelled round Latin America, and he joined with opponents of the dictator government. He already intervened in the politics: in the Bolivian revolution and the coup in Guatemala. In the end, in Mexico, his revolutionary fate would be confirmed. He stops writing his diary to go with Fidel Castro to the Cuban adventure and in the fight against the dictator Batista. He is henceforth the Che.



Che Guevara in Cuba in 1960

This trip opened his eyes about the inhabitants' situation and was crucial for the awakening of his social conscience. He wrote in his book "the person who wrote these notes died the day he stepped back on Argentina soil."

After a lot of violent interventions to obtain a Latin America based on equality, Guevara was admired by everybody. As he had obtained too much power, he was killed by a Bolivian soldier who was engaged by the CIA in 1967, but today we suppose that it was because Fidel Castro was jealous of him.

II-A cultural trip



Gael Garcia Bernal in the film

In the film, Che Guevara's ideas are not expressed because the director Walter Salles wanted to make a film which could be enjoyed by everybody even those who are not keen on Che Guevara's actions. Throughout this film, the audience discovers wonderful landscapes and different interesting cultures. Thanks to Ernesto Guevara's descriptions, we also imagine them in his diary. That's why we can say that both the film and the book are a kind of documentary.

1. monuments and towns



*Gael Garcia Bernal and Rodrigo De La Serna
playing the two companions who discovered Machu Picchu*

Throughout the whole film and book, we discover the countries with the two companions. In the book with long descriptions and in the film with beautiful overviews.

In Chile, we see Valparaiso situated on the coast, Ernesto Guevara qualified it like a picturesque town: a town with many colours and with a strange architecture. The picture we have in our mind through reading the book is the same except for one of the feelings of the author. He said that "they felt the misery wherever", in the film we didn't experience the poverty of this town in contrary, it looks rich.



the canyon of Colca in Perú

After having crossed Chile the two friends arrived in Perú. The famous town of Cuzco fascinated them. It is the longest description made by Ernesto Guevara. He felt something special about it. According to him, the word which best defined Cuzco is "evocation". There are four distinct forms of evocation: the Cuzco of the promised land when the first Incas settled there, the Cuzco of broken and destroyed temples, the touristic Cuzco with its coloured roofs, its church and its inhabitants wearing traditional clothes, and the last is the fortress town which through monuments and museums, show the bravery of the spanish warriors who conquered the area.

In the film, we discover this old town with a young guide. The visit is short but we see the most important monuments.



Cuzco with its cathedral today



The cathedral of Cuzco

The cathedral of Cuzco, they just walk near by it, it is situated in the town centre. It detains the famous bell, the Maria Angola, which is one of the biggest in the world. According to the tradition it contains 27 kilogrammes of gold .The church towers were destroyed by the earthquake of 1950 but they had just been rebuilt when Alberto and Ernesto visited Cuzco.

Strangely, the description of Cuzco in the book is more objective. For instance the inhabitants look poorer in the film. In the film Ernesto and Alberto spoke to inhabitants. They said that they didn't have any work and they never went to school. One of them didn't speak Spanish so it was difficult for them to feed their children and themselves. In the book this discussion doesn't exist so we just admire the beauty of Cuzco. However the size of this town is felt in both.



a street in Cuzco

In his book, Ernesto Guevara felt Cuzco as a dead town. This impression increased when they went to Machu Picchu. In the film they were alone on the hill and we felt the feeling provoked in the two minds enormously, there they dreamed of a country where justice and equality would be extinct for everybody. They congratulated the Incas on their defeats, the constructions were wonderful. This admiration for this dead civilisation is very important both in the book and in the film.

Whereas in the book, they played football with a group when they arrived at Machu Picchu even if they felt an important need to remake the world. This fact would have created an important contrast with the two friends' feelings in the film. The description made by Ernesto Guevara of this monument is moving but brief compared to the time consecrated for it in the film by Walter Salles.



Machu-Picchu in Perú



*Lima: the capital city of Perú
And its cathedral in the centre*

After one can see the capacity of old civilizations in order to build wonderful towns we discover Lima, Perú's capital, with a new architecture. Ernesto Guevara compared two civilizations, the one that built wonderful monuments: Cuzco and Macchu Picchu; and the other that built Lima. In the film, Walter Salles highlighted this point of view. He made a contrast between the two towns. Lima is situated on the Pacific coast. It is a beautiful town, which had buried its past behind new houses. In the film we don't see the town centre, which Ernesto Guevara qualified as the best place to see in Lima. In this centre, what struck Ernesto Guevara was the magnificent cathedral, so different from Cuzco's one. There "the art was stylized" as the author wrote and the riches of the Spanish colonies were everywhere. They put gold wherever they could. According to Ernesto Guevara, Lima is the perfect representation of a Perú which has never left the feudal system of the colony. In the film, we only see a leper hospital, and that the place is in order. Lima is a rich town but it doesn't evoke any feelings in the reader's mind not even in Ernesto Guevara's mind. In the book, the two companions visited many museums. They were very interested in the civilizations' story.

What is very surprising is that in the book, Lima doesn't represent an important moment. In the film we understand clearly that it is after the visit to Lima, that Ernesto is stunned by the civilizations and their art and he decided to defend them.

Colombia and Venezuela are not described very much in the diary and the director respects it. So we don't know anything about those two countries' architecture.

2. Culture and the way of life of the inhabitants

In the film as in the book, we can observe the same separation of their behaviour and the way in which the culture and the standards of living are expressed.



Peruvian women

In the beginning, they don't really try to discover the countries. They ride but they don't pay attention to the culture of the inhabitants. But little by little they try to speak with them and above all to acquire more information about their history and their living conditions.

Since pre-Columbian times Peruvians have been divided by nature. From the arid deserts of the coast, the Andean Sierra rises up to 19,700 feet. The highlands comprises around a quarter of Peru's territory. This mountain mass poses problems for the development and the integration into a single society.

In Chile there are three different ethnies which represent a small percentage of the total population. The most important one, because of its history, is the one which is called "the Mapuches" which means "people of the land". The Spanish named them the "Araucans". Today there are around 500 000 and most of them live between Concepcion and Temuco and also in the "poblaciones" of Santiago. Their life is austere and they don't have any political and economical power (without the culture of the land). Their only power is their history. Thanks to them a lot of monuments and cities were built.

All of those communities are ruled by inequality. They are so powerless regarding the subject of the politics and the economics. The problem Guevara wanted to solve when he became aware of it.



A chilean man

CONCLUSION



the book

the film

We can say that even if there are many differences between the literary version and the film, the director Walter Salles had well respected Ernesto Guevara's feelings and descriptions. He highlighted the important points to present the famous revolutionary, Che Guevara.

Walter Salles did not only make a success of one excellent initiatory film metaphor of the transformation of any teenager into a man who is in contact with new situations, he also managed to insufflate the humanism of the book workshop of Che and to make us feel what worked its political and ideological conscience. In this early episode of the revolutionary's life we perceive what motivated the Argentinian candidate doctor to take the weapons to the sides of the Cuban guerrillas, then to survey the world to make it stand up for one another and saved the oppressed people of all the countries.

Thanks to landscapes with wind you, a visceral interpretation of Gael García Bernal, a setting in scene close to the documentary, the meetings with non-actors people, "The Motorcycle diaries" moves and fascinates you.

Moreover, the shooting team had followed in the traces of the two men almost step by step, with the same anecdotes and the same reflexions, theirs arrived, a half-century later. No less than five years of work were necessary for Walter Salles to develop and concretize the film, while working in close cooperation with the true Alberto Granado who is still alive, and the descendants of Ernesto Guevara.