

Of Icons, of Myths, and of Internationalists¹

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“The revolution we wanted was not the revolution we helped to produce.”... As a new generation of activists begin to find their voices, Davis urged them [to] not only question the celebrated legacies of leaders like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Biko’s and even her own, but to devise a new language of struggle.

[Angela Davis at a Steve Biko Memorial event, South Africa, 2016](#)

Abstract

The iconisation and/or mythologisation of prominent ‘internationalists’ (the active individual bearers/promoters/subjects of international solidarity) is problematic. The iconisation/iconoclasm is revealed in the case of Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Nobel Peace Prize 1992), around whom a remarkable academic and political controversy arose. It revealed many of the problems that arise when when ‘the subaltern speaks’, and a new kind of international icon appears. But the Rigoberta books also reveal to us a contemporary kind of internationalist/internationalism. The problem of myths/mythologisation is revealed in a recent essay by Doug Ennaa Greene that defends/promotes such by Leftist social movements. Greene mentions such international/ist figures as the Peruvian, Jose Carlos Mariátegui and the Argentinian, Che Guevara. It is here argued, however, that we need to approach both such outstanding historical and contemporary internationalists free of iconisation and mythology, treating them as neither saints nor sinners but compañer@s.

¹ This paper draws in part from an older and much longer one (Waterman 1999). It makes limited reference to the more recent literature of or on social movement auto/biographies, including a recently compiled bibliography (Waterman, this issue) which should nonetheless be consulted by anyone interested in the subject.

Of icons and internationalists



Rigoberta Menchu with Rolando Moran/Ricardo Ramirez (1929-98), during peace negotiations, 1996, that ended decades of military repression and guerrilla warfare in Guatemala. If she represents one face of a contemporary internationalism, he represented, successively, two faces of the historical Communist one. We could do with a non-iconic, non-mythologising biography of him.²

Following her Nobel Peace Award in 1992, a controversy broke out around Rigoberta Menchú Tum. This concerned both her first book, *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (Menchú 1987) and her second one, *Crossing Borders* (Menchú 1998a).

I, Rigoberta Menchu (henceforth *I, RM*) contributed to making this indigenous Guatemalan woman activist an international icon, and provided perhaps the main stimulus for US/Western European solidarity movements to propose her for the Nobel Peace Prize. It was after this, and with her consequent international reputation, that Rigoberta became a major public figure, speaking to an indigenous, national and international audience on a range of peace, democracy, indigenous rights and related issues.

The controversy about the use/abuse of the Latin American *testimonio* had actually began earlier amongst anthropologists and other academics in the US (Chronicle of Higher Education 1999, Gugelberger 1996, Lancaster 1998).³ It

² I knew him as Ricardo Ramírez when we worked together as editors of *World Student News*, magazine of the International Union of Students in Communist Prague, in the later 1950s. At that time we were both international Communists. Ricardo, who had met Che Guevara earlier, during the US-backed coup against the leftist Arbenz government of Guatemala, later became part of the informal international *Guevarista* movement. For my own memories of Ricardo, see Waterman (2014: 'The Insurrectionary Guatemalan').

³ For a compressed summary of the issues, see Gugelberger 1998, which discusses the second book of Rigoberta precisely in terms of its differences with her first.

passed into the public sphere with the publication of a book on Menchú and *I, RM* by David Stoll (1998). This threw doubt on both the literal veracity of her first testimony and its claim to represent the whole indigenous Guatemalan community. Whilst, I think, treating Menchú with some respect, Stoll argued that the testimony was a product of the relationship between her, her community, the armed insurrectionary movement she then identified with, and the international peace and justice movement itself. Despite the *New York Times* press spin on the book, with Rigoberta as a 'tarnished laureate' (Rohter 1998) Stoll also publicly stated that he considered the Rigoberta phenomenon as having contributed to the peace process within Guatemala (Fernandez Garcia 1998).

This was, however, not the first controversy around *I, RM*, since, as Stoll records, there had been a long and complex series of disputes between Rigoberta and her Venezuelan/French interviewer/editor, Elizabeth Burgos Debray, concerning both the text and the income from *IRM*. Following the publication in English of Rigoberta's second book, *Crossing Borders* (Menchú 1998a, henceforth *CB*), another row blew up. The co-editors of this one accused the socialist Verso Books in London of intellectual theft in deliberately leaving their names not simply off the cover but out of the book as a whole.⁴ Verso, however, denied any intention to mislead or misuse, explaining the matter as due to their translation having been done from a manuscript which did not carry these names, and the following failure of the copyright holders to point out any shortcoming in the English draft supplied them for commentary. They also promised rectification (Verso 1998). The accusation of intellectual theft against Verso by Rigoberta's collaborators nonetheless suggests the sensitivity surrounding her books.

The controversy, more significantly, suggested what happens when the world's voiceless begin to find tongue, when for the first time 'the subaltern speaks'.⁵

⁴ The Spanish-language original of *Crossing Borders* (Menchú 1998b) has a very different appearance. Entitled, *Rigoberta Menchú: Granddaughter of the Mayas*, it indicates the two collaborators on its front cover. It also has preliminary statements by a Spanish leader of Amnesty International, of the Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano, and of one of the collaborators himself. In an acknowledgement, Rigoberta expresses her thanks to this man and his colleague. The copy I have seen was a *third* 1998 edition, which indicated, moreover, that the book had won a major Spanish prize for 'International Co-operation'. *CB* was thus reinforcing her iconic status within the framework of what is still called 'development aid'.

⁵ The reference here is to Spivak 1988, who suggested that s/he could not. As for the iconisation of the marginalised indigenous or outcaste third world woman, this did not begin with Rigoberta. Before her there was Domitila Barrios de Chungara (Barrios 1979), a woman of the indigenous mining communities in Bolivia. After her came Phoolan Devi, the Indian bandit leader, immortalised in what many consider to be the best Indian movie ever, *Bandit Queen*. There was, on its release, a considerable national and international controversy around this movie, with Phoolan Devi suggesting her story had been ripped off and distorted by the Indian-British production team responsible. Feminists crossed swords and theories, some stating that the movie was sexually exploitative, others that it showed an independent and empowered outcaste village woman wreaking vengeance on her higher-caste rapists in a manner available to her. Yes, they did use her. Yes it is a great movie. Or, if you prefer, the other way round.

These voices are neither innocent nor simple, nor can they be taken as *the* voice of a particular community or universe. Nor are they even *heard* without the mediation of comparatively wealthy, sophisticated or powerful Others, with their own already-developed skills, institutions and agendas - political, communicational or academic. Rigoberta was, over the years between her two books, partially formed by the 'international of goodwill' that both campaigned for and gave her the Nobel.

But this is not to disparage the international solidarity movements either, or even the funding agencies largely dependent on liberal-democratic states or capitalist corporations/foundations. It is rather to recognise a turning point in the history of international solidarity movements. For, as Stoll's book reveals (though this is not his intention), these have, over the last 20-30 years, operated largely on a one-way, top-down, North/West-to-South/East axis and direction.

This has been a 'substitution solidarity'⁶ in which the rich/powerful/free, left/democratic/liberal movements, in the North/West, have related to the poor/weak/oppressed in the South/East. As Stoll further reveals, these solidarity movements needed such icons. And the regional/national/local movements behind the icons-to-be needed the international solidarity movements. But this was also during a period totally dominated by North/South and East/West dichotomies. And that was before globalisation made us aware of the South in the North and the North in the South (Sousa Santos 1995) or that global problems, global identities and new global social movements existed (or could exist) across, despite of, and against these increasingly blurred frontiers (Pollack 1998).

Regardless of the critique and controversy, *Crossing Borders* provides a unique contribution to an understanding of the new internationalisms. This is largely due to the manner in which it illustrates, in practical, personal and eminently readable terms, recent academic writing on what is variously called 'global civil society', 'the new internationalisms', 'transnational advocacy networks', or the 'global solidarity and justice movement'. Rigoberta's *CB* must have reached thousands more readers than the writing of people like Stoll or myself. If these readers now look at her and her work as my colleagues look at me and mine, this can only contribute to creating the kind of public necessary for a self-reflective and self-critical global solidarity culture.

Rigoberta, the person, her testimonies, her iconic status, it seems to me, stand at another frontier crossing - between an old *internationalism* (a relation between nations, nationals, nationalities, nationalists, nationalisms) and the new more complex, more critical, more self-conscious global solidarities. If the case, finally, raises questions about the role and value of testimony in the

⁶ Rather than presenting 'international solidarity' as a simple and undifferentiated quality, I suggest the following types: Identity, Substitution, Complementarity, Reciprocity, Affinity, Restitution (Waterman 1998/2001:235-8).

creation of international or global community, perhaps it also argues for an end to iconisation in creating a contemporary solidarity.

For further discussion of Rigoberta, consider the response to the controversy of a veteran of Dutch solidarity with Latin America, Mario Coolen (as reported in *Trouw* 1998). Coolen received Rigoberta on her first visit to Europe in 1981, and recognises the extent to which she has become entrapped both in the fame of her Nobel Prize and in the building of her own 'development empire'. At the same time, however, he defends her work - but as creating a 'corporate personality representative of her people'. And he is suspicious of the motives of Stoll. Coolen accuses Stoll of undermining international support work for the Guatemalan *indígenas*, of creating the impression that things were not so bad for them in Guatemala, and of playing along with a familiar US strategy intended to undermine the participation of the *indígenas* in forthcoming elections. Rigoberta herself was reported, in the Guatemalan press, as insisting on the literal truth of *I, RM*.

The Uruguayan revolutionary, Eduardo Galeano, who died in 2015, defended Rigoberta the icon and bitterly attacked Stoll for reproducing US imperial and racist attitudes (Galeano 1999).

Arturo Taracena, a major actor in the creation of the first book, broke a 16-year silence to comment critically on the roles in the controversy played by both Elizabeth Burgos Debray and David Stoll. Taracena, a Guatemalan historian, one-time revolutionary, long-time friend of Rigoberta and co-ordinator of the campaign for her Nobel, said in part:

Rigoberta did not win the Prize ... only because of the book. It was because of her political organising, her leadership role and her political capacity. Rigoberta won the Nobel Prize for an entire trajectory. She was where she had to be at the right time. She was in the United Nations, in Geneva, she campaigned for human rights and for indigenous rights, not only in Guatemala, but throughout the Continent; she managed and maintained a leadership role at a global level. She came back to Guatemala, and she was captured. The Nobel wasn't given to her as a writer; besides, the book came out 10 years before she won the Prize. The Nobel Prize was a message to all of Latin America from Europe regarding the question of indigenous peoples and the construction of democracy and peace, but many people refuse to see that'. (Aceituno 1999).

Grandin and Goldman (1999) commented as follows:

perhaps Western readers expect only simplicity and naiveté from Indian women. And perhaps it was this expectation that Menchú skilfully used to publicise the wholesale slaughter being conducted by the Guatemalan military [...] Similar to what he accuses Menchú of doing, Stoll arranges and suppresses events to support his claims. Stoll would have us believe that if not for the

guerrillas, the military might not have become the most bloodthirsty killing machine in the hemisphere. Yet by reducing Guatemala's conflict to the back-and-forth sparring between the guerrillas and the military, Stoll wilfully - or ignorantly - misrepresents the history of Guatemalan political opposition and repression. It is unfortunate that at this moment, when truth commissions and exhumations are opening the secrets of the recent past to scrutiny, Stoll's work provides both these stereotypes with a scholarly patina.

Of myths and internationalists

Douglas Enaa Greene (2016) has written a wide-ranging, learned and challenging essay on the role of the [myth and revolution](#), an essay illustrated by that icon (see above) of revolutionary internationalism, Che Guevara. Greene's introductory paragraph embraces the Revolutionary Myth:

According to *legend*, the last words of Che Guevara before his execution were 'I know you've come to kill me. Shoot coward, you are only going to kill a man.' What Che meant here was that the cause of revolution would live on despite his death. *Whether or not the myth is true*, the meaning behind it has inspired revolutionaries throughout the world. In certain ways, *the myth surrounding Che Guevara has been just as important as the truth*. In fact, myths provide a crucial underpinning to how ideology and society is able to function. *Myths play a major role not only in society, but in radical political movements*, as was recognized by the French syndicalist Georges Sorel and the Peruvian communist Jose Carlos Mariátegui. *And despite the scientific pretensions of much of the left, myths also supply inspiration, passion and faith to militants in the course of struggle*. (My italics. PW)⁷

Now, I happen to have written on two of these revolutionary icons, Mariátegui (1894–1930) and Che (1928–1967), if not Sorel or others discussed by Greene. In the case of both Mariátegui and Che this was in relation to their internationalism. And in both cases I made an effort, precisely, to critique their own myth-making and/or others' mythologisation of their roles. I do not pretend to have captured these roles, but, I would like to hope to have helped to *de-mythologise* them.⁸

⁷ Che is still, 2016, a subject of Left admiration (and debate?). See [here](#).

⁸ For the non-mythical Che we can turn to the Congo disaster, which could be taken as prefiguring that in Bolivia where he died. His [Congo diaries](#) make for depressing reading. He describes this Cuban state-sponsored intervention in distant Africa as one of 'foreigners who went to risk their lives in an unknown land where people spoke a different language and were linked to them only by ties of proletarian internationalism'. That there were no proletarians at either end here is indicative of an internationalism existing only in the imagination of these foreigners. Che goes on to castigate the Cuban authorities, if not its *Lider Maximo*, Fidel, to whom he is writing):

I appreciate the role that myth has played 'not only in society, but in radical political movements'. But then there is the essential ambiguity of myth-making recognised by Greene himself. And, given the endless global variety of past, present - and hypothetical future - myths in 'radical political movements', I *can* 1) find a place for them within the 'global justice and solidarity movement' but *cannot* 2) see them as productive of the non-particularistic and dialogical universalism toward which I am oriented. I grew up with *Man Against Myth* by one-time Communist and US witch-hunt resister [Barrows Dunham](#). And I had myself to go through a prolonged struggle against Soviet (and other Marxist) icons and myth-making.⁹ Note what Greene says:

There is a dark side to myths, rituals and symbols that affects socialist and communist movements, just like religions, that needs to be recognised. The PCF (French Communist Party. PW] was said to be...the secular equivalent of the Catholic Church: with their own dogma, orthodoxies, saints, martyrs, heresies, and demons. [...] For example, in the Soviet Union, those who were deemed showing 'lack of faith'...were not just seen as a 'loyal opposition' but as traitors.

So it does seem to me that the only principle and effective appeal against such 'bad' myths is not a 'good' myth but an appeal to the Enlightenment principle of reason, stripped of its instrumental rationality and particularistic universalism, qualified by the practice of openness to and respectful dialogue with other civilisations/cosmologies.¹⁰ So how did I respond to my iconised and mythologised internationalists?

With a very heavy heart, I calculated that [his own on-ground efforts] would require \$5,000 a month. Now I learn that a sum 20 times higher is given to people who pass through [Cuba?] just once, so that they can live well in all the capitals of the African world, with no allowance for the fact that they receive free board and lodging and often their travel costs from the main progressive countries [in the Soviet bloc?]. Not a cent will reach a wretched front where the peasants suffer every misery you can imagine, including the rapaciousness of their own protectors; nor will anything get through to the poor devils stuck in Sudan. (Whisky and women are not on the list of expenses covered by friendly governments, and they cost a lot if you want quality.)

I am left wondering how Douglas Enaa Greene would turn this state-funded disaster into a heroic myth.

⁹ In relation to Marx himself, I note two opposing dispositions. One is that of the Marxism International Archive (MIA), which has an entry on '[Marx, Myths and Legends](#)' concerned to defend Marx from such. It includes the 'myth' about 'Marx's Illegitimate Son'. The second is that of Mary Gabriel, author of a biography of Marx and his family. This item is entitled '[Marx The Man Vs Marx The Myth](#)'. She argues that he did have an illegitimate son, who he quite disregarded. Whilst the MIA entry is interesting it is also predictable: Myths Bad, Marx Good. In so far as Gabriel presents a three-dimensional and contradictory Marx my sympathies lie with her presentation. In her [book](#), he seems rather closer to the contradictory and fallible *compañer@s* I know ... including myself.

¹⁰ Consider here the mythology preached and iconisation practiced by the [Nation of Islam](#). The great Malcolm X (later: el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz) eventually criticised both its idols and its

With Mariátegui (henceforth JCM), it was a matter of translating and publicising his essay on ‘Internationalism and Nationalism’ (1923), particularly for its unique and brilliant insight that ‘communication is the nervous system of internationalism and solidarity’. My critique (Waterman 2005: Part 3) was for this essay’s political-economic determinism, its assumption 1) that capitalist industrialisation was inevitably producing in the proletariat the privileged revolutionary subject and 2) that this proletariat was also the privileged bearer of internationalism.¹¹

In the case of Che (whose poster we had up at home for a decade or more) it was a matter of recognising his iconic status but arguing that he was more of a revolutionary nationalist (a serial-nationalist?), on the model of Giuseppe Garibaldi or Simón Bolívar, if with a distinct, 19th-20th century Marxist aspect. A book on Che, subtitled ‘Writings on Internationalism’ (Guevara 1989) reveals that this was a subject which he never theorised or conceptualised. (For my own brief take on Che, see *Appendix 1*). His famous call, at a state-sponsored conference of the Tricontinental for ‘two, three or many Vietnams’ is one from which the newest emancipatory global social movements would react with shock, if not with horror. Whilst Che would have been aware of the cost to the Vietnamese of that war, he would surely have reacted, with at least shock, to what a united Vietnam has become.

The point of both critiques was not to rubbish these heroic revolutionaries but to consider them historically and to see what we might learn from their lives today. But why does Greene, a mythologiser of the Russian Revolution and the early Soviet state, a convinced Communist of the Leninist tradition, feel the need for the revolutionary myth?¹²

mythology by shifting his identity from the Nation of Islam to Sunni Islam. Whilst the latter was combined with radical ideas of a more-modern and/or more Western cast, and whilst one can understand both sets of beliefs – and their spokesperson - as expressing the humiliation, frustration and opposition of US African-Americans to their oppression, neither seems at all adequate to overcoming the oppression/oppressors they reveal. Consider, on the other hand, this, from a commentary on the myth-making surrounding a Post-Soviet oligarch:

The truth is that in public life, and especially in politics, myths are harmful and dangerous. The struggle against them, however, must not be reduced merely to running down the heroes of the myths — the individuals concerned are least of all to blame. The challenge lies elsewhere, in understanding the real content of the processes that have taken on mythical forms, and also in understanding what really lies behind them. In line with this, the question of demythologizing social consciousness also takes on a pressing form. (Bulavka and Buzgalin 2016).

¹¹ This effort was for a workshop, was drafted in both Spanish and English, and whilst still somewhat drafty is available [here](#).

¹² Here I cannot resist recalling the final demonstration at a European Social Forum, 2002, in Florence, in which the ... err ... Vanguard Position? ... had been captured (no vote, no consultation) by the Socialist Workers Party (UK), chanting ‘One Solution, Revolution!’). To which my response (regrettably not verbalized at that time and place) was that they didn’t know the difference between a solution and a problem.

After a consideration of the the social role played by myth throughout history, and the academic literature on its various functions, he declares that

[E]ven though socialism is founded on materialistic and scientific principles, myths, symbols and rituals play key roles in teaching militants how to live, fight and die as comrades for the communist ideal.

In considering internationalists and internationalisms, I would be inclined to distinguish symbol and ritual from myth, and particularly from *mythologisation*. But, then, I am also more interested in seeing how internationalist militants live, fight and *survive*. And in how they construct their own utopias rather than devote themselves to a ‘communist ideal’ that seems to exist before they ‘play key roles’ in its realisation.

Perhaps Greene needs the myth of revolution because the reality of the Russian one that he presents, in primarily positive terms, is, he admits, today ‘in ruins’. ‘[B]ut’, he adds ‘a new socialist world will rise in its place, to serve the interests of a redeemed humanity’. He is, though only in his Conclusion, however, cognisant of

the dogmas and inquisitions that an embrace of myths can encourage in radical movements.

Oh!

If they are so ambiguous, should we not try to do without them? It seems that Greene’s embrace and recommendation of revolutionary myth-making is a necessary complement to his political-economic determinism, to the shortcomings of what we have to call ‘actually non-existing socialism’.

Whilst Greene happens to mention two of my historical internationalists, he does not address himself centrally to their internationalism. So let me return to the historical internationalists and the contemporary bearers of what I would call ‘global justice and solidarity’ (with ‘global’ meaning both universal and holistic).

Now, Mary Gabriel has written a unique biography of Marx (communist, exile, cosmopolitan, internationalist) and his family entitled *Love and Capital* (Gabriel 2011a) I thought – given its understanding and exposition of his work – it could as well have been called ‘Capital and Love’. In a journalistic piece on her own book she writes:

[A]t the start of the twentieth century, when Marx’s name finally gained the currency that eluded him during his own lifetime, the Karl Marx that emerged was nearly more myth than man. To some, he was a stern oracle whose words

could be manipulated to support repressive governments, justify massacres, and fight wars. To others, he personified political and social evil. These viewed him as anti-freedom, anti-religion, anti-family, and anti-progress.

To many others — those tens of millions without food or shelter, those children condemned to work long hours, those men and women exploited as the rich became richer — he was the beneficent father who offered the hope of a meal and a bed, and ultimately a brighter future. But all of those visions of Marx were muddled. They reflected more on the beliefs and aspirations of the person or party that conjured him up than on the Marx who lived from 1818 to 1883, devoting his life to the study of man's interaction with other men. (Gabriel 2011b).

I think we do such internationalists and ourselves a fatal disservice in iconising or mythologizing them. Or by adding - to a political-economic determinism - iconisation or mythologisation as the active, creative, imaginative, humanising, supplement. Iconisation is an invitation to iconoclasm or to *counter-iconisation* (Trotsky versus Stalin or Lenin, Mao versus Che, Che versus Fanon - or any other set of hypothetically competing icons). Mythologisation surely thrives at the expense of both a critical posture and effective strategy.

I prefer, in considering internationalist icons and myths, that we adopt the posture favoured by Gramsci, 'Pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will'.

In reference to the active or outstanding bearers of internationalism, I strongly suggest that we consider them as neither saints nor sinners but rather as *compañer@s* (an androgynous Spanish-language form that can mean friend, workmate, associate, sexual partner, or political comrade). A *compañer@* is, surely, someone one dialogues with, not someone either glorifies or lies about - or to. Today the Internet makes it increasingly possible to both talk about and sometimes even to those we admire. It is surely in the spirit of the above that we should consider study of the *new* internationalists.

In/conclusions

It seems - and with this thought we must bring these reflections to an end - that the creation of a new internationalism requires not so much the right ideology (in the sense of a pre-existing discourse backed by one or other kind of authority) but a particular kind of behaviour, a way of relating to other people, and to their ideas. And here we return to the necessity and possibility of a growing number of people and peoples (armed with information, disposed to tolerance and flexibility, culturally sensitive, equipped with technology, committed ethically) creating global solidarity communities of their own. In order to achieve this, I think we need to publicise internationalist (h)activists in such a light that the public response may be 'I admire her/him', but might be 'I should do that', 'I could do that' and (previously here unconsidered) 'I think I could enjoy doing that'.

Appendix

Che Guevara (1928-67) is not only the most famous revolutionary internationalist activist of this century but is also considered something of a theorist of internationalism. Yet, whilst he wrote extensively about Latin America, the Third World, imperialism, revolution and international economic, political and military relations, he seems to have rarely addressed himself to the concept of internationalism and, where he did so, tended to conflate 'ties of proletarian internationalism' with support for - evidently non-proletarian - 'wars of liberation'... Initially an adventurer, who travelled the sub-continent, Che, an Argentinean, was inspired by the bolivarista tradition, and threw himself into the struggle to defend the radical-nationalist Arbenz regime in Guatemala against a US-backed military coup (1953). He then became involved in the Cuban Revolution and was a leading figure in the new revolutionary government. Along the way he became a convinced Marxist-Leninist, though later critical of the Soviet variety. The combination of radical-nationalist bolivarismo and socialist Marxism-Leninism served well in contributing to the various *tercermundista* (thirdworldist) international(ist) projects produced in Cuba at this time. These ranged from the diplomatic, to the political-agitational, and, at the extreme, logistical/military/intelligence support to insurrectionary movements. Nor must we forget the cultural internationalism, of which the brilliant posters were just the best-known products. Che increasingly involved himself personally with such revolutionary movements, notably - and unsuccessfully - in the Congo (1965) and in Bolivia, where he met his death. Che, combining the youthful irreverence of the 1960s, the looks of a Dean or Brando and the aura of Jesus - was the outstanding international icon of the generation of 1968. Che was himself uneasy in the new Cuban state he had helped bring into existence and sought to contribute personally to a tricontinental insurrection. After his death, his tradition was continued by the Cuban party/state, in the person of Manuel 'Barba Roja' Pineira. Later Cuba became increasingly involved in military aid to Third World regimes, some of a distinctly repressive, militaristic and even imperial nature. Che as icon lives on, as could be witnessed in streets and shacks on the 30th anniversary of his death in Latin America, 1997. He has also been the subject of two major biographies, both of which throw light on his internationalism. He may be the last great representative of insurrectionary nationalist internationalism. Yet Che, as portable and reproducible icon, also points forward to the communications internationalisms of the present day, for which the audio and visual count as much as the written and spoken. He, too, combines (or exchanges) the roles of *agitator and agent*. (Waterman 1999).

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About the author

Born London, 1936, Peter Waterman worked twice for international Communist front organisations in Prague (for students in the 1950s, trade unions in the 1960s) before abandoning politics, journalism (and Communism) for academia. He became a Senior Lecturer at an institute of development studies in The Hague (1972-98), specialising on unions, labour and social movements, and (computer) communications in relation to such. He edited the *Newsletter of International Labour Studies* through the 1980s. He has lived in Czechoslovakia, Nigeria, South Africa and Peru, and been published in English, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, German and other languages. He spends three months a year in Lima with his wife, Virginia Vargas Valente, a Peruvian feminist writer and activist. He has played a significant role in continuing academic/political exchanges on 'social movement unionism' and 'the new internationalisms'.