

CRACKING THE MALE CODE: THE POLITICIZATION OF GENDER IN LATIN  
AMERICAN GUERRILLA LITERATURE

By

Brianne E. Orr

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## ABSTRACT

### CRACKING THE MALE CODE: THE POLITICIZATION OF GENDER IN LATIN AMERICAN GUERRILLA LITERATURE

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This doctoral dissertation explores how and why a new masculinity emerges in five rebel narratives that represent different phases in the history of Latin American revolutions: Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s *Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria* (1963), and *El diario del Che en Bolivia* (1968), Omar Cabezas’ *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* (1982), Gioconda Belli’s *El país bajo mi piel* (2003) and Subcomandante Marcos’ *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra* (2001).

By using theories by Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Elizabeth Grosz, who propose gender as a category in flux, this dissertation shows how a male code struggles to break with traditional *machista* praxis dominant in bourgeois societies. For Guevara and Cabezas, the mountain, the domain in which the rebels experience the ideological limits of the bourgeois self, becomes the geography for such a change to take place. For Marcos, it is a *Zapatista* territory; a peripheral zone in which peasants, indigenous and other marginalized citizens that the Mexican State has consistently ignored come together to construct a plan for a more inclusive democracy.

From these standpoints, I propose a “politics of gender” that combines gender and class as two complementary categories of analysis to evaluate the construction of Guevara’s model of a non-bourgeois masculinity. The dependence of the narratives on Cold War and post-Cold War rhetoric helps track the changes made to Che’s vision on

rebels and revolution, point out the visibility (or invisibility) of Che in other guerrilla narratives and address why and how Che's model changes and the effects such modifications have on his view of the relationship between man and the successful carrying out of the revolution.

Chapter one first provides a biographical analysis of Che that highlights qualities that come up during his childhood and adolescence that later appear in his model of the guerrilla rebel and second explores how others have "used," "read" and mythified Che by labeling him as a *machista*, a heroic *guerrillero*, and a Christ-like figure. Chapter two evaluates the construction of Che's new masculinity by analyzing three main issues: the guerrilla rebels' wavering between the dominant bourgeois male code and Che's model; the revision of bourgeois loci in the mountain, and Che's construction of a masculinity that embeds the feminine through a focus on the body. Chapter three traces how the Sandinista Revolution rewrites Che through an evaluation of Nicaraguan rebel Omar Cabezas' bildungsroman that was both written and published during the Cold War, and in which Cabezas traces his quest *to be like Che*.

Chapters four and five represent a shift in the trajectory of previous guerrilla narratives for Che either appears as a name or as a depoliticized figure but not as a model of the guerrilla rebel for the post-Cold War rebel to follow. In chapter four I evaluate what happens when gender becomes a form of doing politics and love replaces revolution as the core motivating force in Gioconda Belli's memoir. Chapter five examines Subcomandante Marcos as the final icon of the Latin American revolution that emerges in a post-Cold War period and explores how revolution and class are replaced by an identity politics that seeks to give a voice to those historically ignored by the government.