Lekcije iz liderstva: Kubanska revolucija i stvaranje mita zvanog *Če Gevara* Verica Savić,^{1*} Marine Milad²

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Apstrakt: Ideje i pojmovi koji omogućavaju analizu geneze i puta Ernesta "Če" Gevara kao ikone prvenstveno su postavili Panofski, Martin Kemp i Bart. Prvi razume ikonologiju kao značenja određene slike u odnosu na različite socijalne, istorijske i geografske kontekste onoga ko je posmatra. Po Martinu Kempu, ikonu možemo definisati kao pojavu koja je dosegla izvanredan stepen prepoznatljivosti i rasprostranjenosti, koja je je zadobila raznovrsne i brojne konotacije kroz različite epohe i kulture, transcendirajući svoja originalna značenja i funkcije. Koncepti denotacije i konotacije, naročito onako kako ih je Bart razvio, predstavljaju važnu alatku u otkrivanju značenja koju je lik Če Gevara vremenom dobijao.

Cilj analize savremenih mitologija je prema Bartu pokazati da je ono što se predstavlja kao "prirodno" zapravo jedan od mogućih "pogleda" na stvari u skladu sa određenom ideološkom predstavom sveta, koja je proizvod specifičnih istorijskih okolnosti. Dobro je poznato da ikona kao što je lik Če Gevara može imati različita značenja za različite osobe u različitim epohama. U nastavku ovog teksta, istraživaće se trag svih značenja koja je lik Ernesta Gevara zadobio u različitim kontekstima i kako bi se videlo kako ta značenja nisu nešto "prirodno" već predstavljaju kreaciju konkretnih ljudskih aktera, čiji je interes bio da pošalju konkretne poruke, da stvore određeni imidž kako bi legitimisali svoje političke i verske aktivnosti, ili da ga apsorbuju u vrednosti i stavove konzumističke kulture u cilju sticanja dobiti.

Keywords: Mit, ikona, Če Gevara, liderstvo

Leadership lessons: The Cuban Revolution and the Creation of a Myth called *Che Guevara*

Abstract: Ideas and concepts that enable us to analyze the genesis and path of Ernest "Che Guevara" as icons were primarily set by Panofsky, Martin Kemp and Bart. The first understands iconology as the meaning of a certain image in relation to the different social, historical and geographical contexts of the observer. According to Martin Kemp, the icon can be defined as a phenomenon that has reached an extraordinary degree of recognizability and prevalence, which has acquired diverse and numerous connotations through different epochs and cultures, transcending its original meanings and functions. The concepts of denotation and connotation, especially as Bart developed them, represent an important tool in discovering the meaning that the character of Che Guevara gained over time.

Keywords: myth, iconic, Che Guevara, leadership

1. Introduction

Ernesto Guevara became famous for his participation in the Cuban Revolution, which he joined as a member of the guerrillas commanded by Fidel Castro, which aimed to overthrow the hated dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1956-1959). In that war, Guevara became *Che*, he received the rank of a commander. Even then, revolutionaries understood the importance that images had and their meanings for the revolution. So, they were called to give interviews and to be photographed for the most read and most prestigious world magazines of that time: *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Life*, *Le Monde*, *Corriere della Sera*. The CBS documentary celebrated the rebels, calling them Robin Hoods from Sierra Maestra, a mountain range where Castro, Raul, *Che* and other rebels set up camps and from where they

managed the war against the dictatorship (Sebreli, 2010: 73). It is important to remember that in the beginning, until its triumph, the revolution had significant support, both domestic and international.

Under the Batista dictatorship, 80 percent of the best land was owned by American companies, and Cuba was a center for sex tourism of North Americans, as well as for the activities and realization of the mafia interests of this nation. Batista's government was characterized by corruption and brutal methods in dealing with the opposition. The revolution was initially nationalistic, popular and radical, and Fidel and the "July 26 Movement" had the sympathy and support of the American media. Fidel himself said in one of his tours of the United States that the revolution was against any form of totalitarianism be it fascism, Peronism or Communism. The leader of the revolution did what was in his power to distance his movement from communism, trying to get military aid from the United States, even after the triumph over the dictatorship. (Anderson 2007: 384-390).

2. The figure of Che turning into an icon of revolution

Understanding this context is very important to understand the figure of Che, his actions and the tragic end. First, because Guevara made a paradigm out of his experience in the Cuban guerrilla that was important for everything that was called the Third World at that time. The fact that 82 rebels who arrived in Cuba from Mexico on the yacht "Granma" defeated the superior military apparatus was the result of a complex set of circumstances. One of them was the dominance of the United States and Batista's dependence on that hegemony, which enabled Castro and the Cuban rebels to invoke the national feelings of the population. Second, the "guahiros" (guajiro-Cuban peasant) of the Sierra Maestra were brutally exploited poor peasants, oppressed by the dictatorship. This led to the guerrillas swimming among them like fish in water, to use Mao's metaphor to explain the relationship between the guerrillas and the people. At the same time, the "July 26 Movement" had a large network of contacts and support in large cities.

All this, together with the favor of the people, especially by other Latin American countries, but even by the United States, which did not suspect that Fidel was a Marxist, were the main objective factors that led the rebels to defeat the superior professional military force. But Che concluded from his experience in the Cuban guerrilla that a well-trained guerrilla, with physically and mentally strong and prepared soldiers, could start a revolution even when there are no objective conditions, since the guerrilla itself can create them. (Guevara, 1961: 3-4).

Another factor that contributed to turning Guevara into an icon of revolution during his lifetime was his travels on which he represented the new revolution in Europe, Africa and Asia. Che was received with great sympathy, thanks to the reforms carried out by the revolutionary government. Cuba was a political, social and cultural paradigm in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in Third World countries. Cuba was seen as a nation waging a just war to defend its sovereignty and against U.S. hegemony.

In addition, reforms have been implemented that have favored marginalized groups such as poor peasants and wage earners, who have now been given land or jobs in cooperatives and state collectives. Education and health have become free and accessible to all. These victories contributed to turning the revolution into the desired model, worthy of being emulated by much of the Latin American left of the time. After the Revolution, Guevara was at one time (from January to November 1959) the supreme commander and judge of *La Cabana*, police and associates of the repressive apparatus, journalists and entrepreneurs associated with the dictatorial government were convicted and executed. This part of Guevara's life, which came to light in new biographies, showed the other side of his personality, creating other meanings in relation to his character, at least for those in the middle, who are between those who want to uncompromisingly maintain the myth of Che and those who have always considered him a villain, and that the Cuban community has fled to the United States and much of the proponents of neoliberalism. Che's more serious biographers agree on the dark side of Che.

The Calvinist and Jacobin zeal in Che in different ways when it comes to executions. From a psychological point of view, can be cited the comment of one of Che's childhood friends, who said that Che had one sublime side and one evil side. Guevara witnessed how the CIA and the United Fruit Company, together with the military leadership of Guatemala, planned and carried out a coup in 1954 that overthrew the government of Jacobo Arbenz, who tried to implement agrarian reform that would affect the interests of landowners and American companies. This experience convinced him that, when

it came to defending the revolution, there was no room for mercy and that any weakness was dangerous (O'Donnell, 2010: 107-109).

Regardless of the combination of various reasons, countless testimonies clearly show that the executions of people who were within the category of "dangerous or probably dangerous to the revolution", which he personally carried out or ordered, did not present him with any ethical dilemmas. After a period of command over La Cabana, Guevara was appointed director of the National Bank and minister of industry. From a fierce supporter of the USSR, Che became its critic for several reasons. One of them was his belief in the need for a hard model of a centralized economy and moral incentives that would be superior to material ones. He was critical of Lenin's New Economic Policy (which allowed certain private companies and farmers to keep part of their surplus to use it for further commercialization) and of post-Stalinist attempts by Russia and other communist countries to approve certain market mechanisms to increase production of some products.

In addition, Che was deeply disappointed with the USSR because of Khrushchev's behavior during the 1962 missile crisis. As is well known, Khrushchev negotiated with Kennedy behind the backs of the Cuban government. In addition, Guevara believed that the international relations of the USSR and other communist countries were based more on economic interests than on solidarity with Third World countries. He openly criticized communist countries for buying raw materials from Cuba and other developing countries at market prices, and selling machines and technology at high prices. In that way, those countries became accomplices in the imperialist exploitation of the Third World. Finally, Che believed that communist countries should not sell weapons to countries fighting for independence from colonialism or imperialism, but that they should give them away (Giraldo, 2012: 30:40). Che's participation in the events in Congo, and especially in the defeated Bolivian guerrilla, was the subject of intense debate. There is no doubt that Che's ideas regarding the economy were not shared by the main officials of the Communist Party of Cuba, so Fidel began to listen to the opinions of expert economists. In addition, the open criticism that Guevara addressed to the USSR put Cuba in a conflict situation.

However, it can be said that the decisive factor was played by the different roles and characters of Fidel and Che. The first was a realistic politician, interested in personal survival as well as the survival of the revolution. He knew that after the reforms, expropriation and break with the United States, they could not afford something similar with the USSR. He was completely convinced that the solution to the world's problems was behind the Iron Curtain. He fervently believed in a quasi-apocalyptic vision of the struggle between evil - represented as American imperialism and European colonialism) and the good - Third World revolutionaries and their allies, the USSR, the Soviet bloc and China (Anderson, 2007: 533-540).

3. The image of Che transforming from a dangerous revolutionary to a saint and an object of consumerism

It should be remembered that the historical and ideological context in which Ernesto Guevara became Che was the context of the Cold War and the bloc conflict. In that context, Guevara believed that the model for solving the problems of Latin America and the Third World lay in the model of the USSR and China. His Marxism was not a renewed version of this theory and ideology, as was the case with Gramsci or Benjamin but an orthodox and pure version of his Leninist and Stalinist variant with Maoist connotations in mind. Guevara unequivocally accepted the dictatorship of the proletariat as Lenin understood it, and despite formal criticism of communist countries, did not question the main features of the system created in the countries of the so-called communist bloc, but emphasized their economic and technological successes.

In November 1966, Che secretly entered Bolivia and a few months later began a guerrilla war with Cuban and Bolivian guerrillas in the southeast. The goal was to launch an armed struggle in Bolivia that would extend to Peru and its homeland of Argentina. This struggle for the freedom of Latin America would force the United States to intervene, so the conflict would grow into a conflict between the Latin American peoples and the imperialism of the United States. There would be an international conflict, as in the case of Vietnam, which put pressure on the USSR and China to support the liberation struggle against imperialism (Anderson, 2007: 645).

The difference between Guevara's plans and Bolivian reality was huge. The Bolivian government managed, through propaganda, to convince the local population of the region where the guerrilla war was fought that the guerrillas were communist occupiers whose goal was to take away their land. Elsewhere, the Bolivian Communist Party did not support the guerrillas. Only a small number of members remained and fought alongside Che and Cuban soldiers. The cause of the behavior of Bolivian communists, as well as other communist parties on the Latin American continent, lay in the policy of peaceful coexistence of the USSR, which did not support the armed struggle in Latin America (Giraldo, 2012: 28:44).

As previously stated, Castro was economically, politically and militarily dependent on the USSR and could not publicly reject the official policy of peaceful coexistence of the communist government and openly support Guevara who became a persona non grata for the leadership of the Kremlin and communist parties. As a result, Guevara and his people did not receive the support of either the Bolivian Communists or the local population. At the same time, communication and support from large cities, another important factor for guerrilla success, was weak or non-existent (O'Donnell, 2010: 89).

However, when the Americans discovered that Guevara was in Bolivia, they sent instructors of special units and modern weapons for the Bolivian army that was fighting guerrillas. In a short time, a small group of guerrillas was surrounded and attacked by well-trained and equipped soldiers. It was a completely unequal struggle in which at its very end (October 1967) on the one hand there were 17 guerrillas and on the other 2000 well-armed and fed soldiers. In the last battle near Quebrada del Yuro, Guevara was captured, transferred to the nearby town of La Higuera and shot the next day.

The guerrilla war in Bolivia denied Guevara's idea of using the Cuban experience as a model, at least his version of that experience. It was obvious that a group of experienced and well-trained guerrillas could not replace the lack of popular support, support from big cities and international support, and especially the lack of military support of the USSR or China, which was absolutely necessary in Bolivia. From a social, political and military point of view, the Bolivian experience was a complete debacle, culminating in an epic in which a small group of starving and wounded guerrillas clashed with a much superior army.

However, as Jorge Castañeda, a top Mexican academic and politician, pointed out, these same Bolivian soldiers contributed to the rise of Che to the pedestal of an immortal icon. (Castañeda, 1997). The confidentiality mark was removed from many photographs of the captured or executed Che only 30 years after the creation of the myth (Giraldo, 2012: 9:50). This is also the case with the Figure 1 seen below. Che Guevara is sick, tired, wounded, dirty, torn, worried and defeated, when he is escorted by Bolivian soldiers and a CIA agent in the uniform of a Bolivian commander.

Figure 1.

These and other photographs of Che were not available to his followers and admirers in the 1960s and 1970s immediately after his execution.

For all those who are familiar with the Christian tradition, the photo of the dead Che (Figure 2) Guevara in the hospital could not but be interpreted within the framework of the most powerful and widespread mythology of the Western world – Christ.

Figure 2

The blissful and calm face of the dead with open eyes and a calm look, makes the soldiers who take photos with him, touching his wounds and sharing his personal belongings (pipes, Rolex watches), they actually look like primitive fools, like the Roman soldiers who surrounded the cross. This is the background of the religious meaning and interpretation of the character of Che Guevara, who was created among the peasants and the poor people of the area where he fought and where he was executed.

These meanings are further reinforced in the works of Latin American artists and poets like San Salvador poet Roque Dalton, creator of artistic and academic narrative that connects Che to Jesus Christ. Photographs of the lifeless body of the assassinated Guevara alarmed the spirits and ignited the imagination of hundreds of thousands of admirers of revolutionaries, especially in the Western world. One effect of the wave of outrage over Guevara's execution and the abuse of his corpse was the mass printing of another photograph, even more significant in the creation and spread of the myth of Che. It is an image that appears on millions of posters, placards and murals. We are talking about a photo (Figure 3) by Cuban photographer Alberto Diaz Korda.

Figure 3

Before the revolution, Korda was a photographer of social events and fashion. After the triumph of the Revolution, he became a photographer of revolutionary fashion. This photo is probably the most famous and most widespread of the last century.

4. Photo - symbol of protests and political activities, deciphered from another side

This photo is the symbol that the generations of the 60s and 70s of the last century wore as a symbol of their protests and political activities. A random photo taken seven years before his violent death. Guevara is seen in a black leather jacket with a zipper and black straps on the shoulders. A beret with a

star representing his rank of commander. Long hair and beard. A sad, but at the same time determined look. Analyzing the meaning of the image in more detail, it can be noticed that the leather jacket does not correspond to the usual appearance of Che; more often he was in uniform, which was the clothing of all the leaders of the revolution; nor was the beret something that revolutionaries often used, their favorite hats. The jacket and beret are signs of Che's careless elegance. The beret is associated with some military uniforms and special units, but it is also a symbol of French bohemianism. The Red Star was used by Russian and Chinese communists. Long hair in men was associated with rebellion, and was at odds with the ideal image of a man represented with short hair, and in the 1960s was associated with hippie, anti-authoritarian, anti-war, anti-materialist and liberal culture.

It can be concluded that this photograph by Corda emphasizes the connotative chain associated with Che's character, which goes from revolutionary to careless elegance, recalling the paradoxical combination of a modest military uniform and a Rolex watch, through a bohemian and a rebellious young man. Another very important aspect should be added. Many people who knew Che spoke about his charisma and magnetic attraction that sprang from his penetrating and seductive gaze (Anderson, 2007: 537). The photograph taken by Korda at one historical moment, best described these features, expressing them in a unique visual way, incredibly convincing. Korda's photo became known around the world due to the Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.

This Italian magnate and leftist was involved in the release of Régis Debray. During his visit to Cuba, Feltrinelli received, without any compensation, two copies of Korda's photo as a personal gift. He made a poster of them, which he sold in 2 million copies within 6 months after Che's death. In addition, Feltrinelli published Che's diary from Bolivia with a famous photo on the front page, which quickly became a bestseller. Korda was not mentioned when publishing the poster or the diary (Martin Kemp, 2012: 183). The Italian publisher and tycoon was initially associated with the Communist Party of Italy and later with the ultra-left, which advocated armed struggle. Feltrinelli represented the "Italian way" that celebrated Korda's photography, although this in turn received no economic benefit.

5. Che's face - turning into a world icon - gaining huge profits

There was another "Irish way" which also significantly contributed to turning Che's face into a world icon. Jim Fitzpatrick, an Irish Marxist, made a poster of Korda's photo (Figure 4), using some of the techniques used to paint cultural icons, such as what Andy Warhol did from Marilyn Monroe's paintings. With Fitzpatrick's approval, the poster began to be used by students, turning it into an icon of the '68 rebellion and protest.

The version of Che's character that Fitzpatrick processed became so widespread that it began to appear on various useful items, from T-shirts to backpacks, cans, cigars, and even condoms. As a historical paradox, the icon of the anti-capitalist revolution brought huge profits to North American companies such as the Burlington Coat Factory, which, despite protests from the Cuban community, continued to sell T-shirts with Che's face, which was even used in commercials. Moreover, fashion has taken on new negative connotations of the character, and one online company "Shirtcity" sells T-shirts with ironic and comic depictions of this revolutionary.

Figure 4

6. The image and its paradoxical meanings - conclusion

In its original Latin American context, Che's image is closely linked to the Cuban revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, with all its anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist meanings. As a revolutionary icon, Che was and remained for some members of that generation associated with the positive achievements of the Cuban Revolution. The same goes for the insurgency and the re-examination of the social system, which were the central values of the '68 generation. In the context of the critique of capitalist societies and Western colonialism, Che was and remained for individuals a figure who built the meaning of his existence in the fight against the aforementioned phenomena. His courage, generosity, courage, consistency and self-discipline were and remain fascinating. Just like his egalitarianism and honesty. In a sense, Guevara is an illustration of the gospel maxim that says "lose your life to save it."

However, the parallels drawn between the person of Jesus and Che are not sustainable. As it is already mentioned, Guevara was a crusader of the revolution, its triumph and defense justified all means, including the use of weapons and the execution of suspicious persons or opponents of the revolutionary project, and even the sacrifice of an entire nation: Cuban during the missile crisis. Guevara's last project, the armed struggle in Bolivia, was a great failure.

However, the incompetence in the communication of the Bolivian army, and on the opposite side the ability of Che's supporters in Europe, significantly contributed to the creation of the myth. Pictures of Che in torn clothes, humiliated and captured were not published until several decades later; as well as those cruel ones on which he lies dirty and bloody after being executed associating immediately the image of the dead Che and the whole set scenario with Christian mythology.

On the other hand, the Italian publisher and tycoon celebrated Korda's photo around the world, selling millions of posters. It is not a photo of the defeated, dirty and humiliated Che, but one in which Korda portrays him as brave, sad, rebellious and defiant. A photo edited by Fitzpatrick similar to images of cultural icons such as Marilyn Monroe made by Andy Warhol was created afterwards. These posters made Guevara an icon of the '68 generation in Europe and the United States, as well as young Latin American revolutionaries in the late '60s and '70s. New studies have linked new meanings to Che's painting.

This is, for example, a fact that has to do with his Leninist, Stalinist and Maoist beliefs. Guevara sharply criticized Lenin's New Economic Policy, which introduced some of the capitalist mechanisms to start the communist economy. His conception of a strictly collectivist economy was closer to Stalinist collectivism of the late '20s and early '30s. His personal and political asceticism resulted in contempt and disrespect for the material needs of ordinary people. Guevara also publicly emphasized that he was an admirer of Stalin.

The works of writers, poets, singers and cinematographers made Che an immortal icon of Latin American and world culture. Consumer culture has long exploited the meanings of the character of Che Guevara (protest, rebellion, courage) in order to increase sales of clothing and various items. In recent years, consumer culture has exploited even the negative, ie ironic meanings of Che's character. It can be concluded that Guevara became a true icon that over time gained a large number of different meanings in politics, art and consumer culture.

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