



Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys

By Ruth Behar

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Traveling Heavy is a deeply moving, unconventional memoir by the master storyteller and cultural anthropologist Ruth Behar. Through evocative stories, she portrays her life as an immigrant child and later, as an adult woman who loves to travel but is terrified of boarding a plane. With an open heart, she writes about her Yiddish-Sephardic-Cuban-American family, as well as the strangers who show her kindness as she makes her way through the world. Compassionate, curious, and unafraid to reveal her failings, Behar embraces the unexpected insights and adventures of travel, whether those be learning that she longed to become a mother after being accused of giving the evil eye to a baby in rural Mexico, or going on a zany pilgrimage to the Behar World Summit in the Spanish town of Béjar.

Behar calls herself an anthropologist who specializes in homesickness. Repeatedly returning to her homeland of Cuba, unwilling to utter her last goodbye, she is obsessed by the question of why we leave home to find home. For those of us who travel heavy with our own baggage, Behar is an indispensable guide, full of grace and hope, in the perpetual search for connection that defines our humanity.

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Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys By Ruth Behar Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1052159 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Duke University Press Books
- Published on: 2013-04-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.30" h x .90" w x 5.80" l, .95 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 248 pages

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

"You leave home to find home." University of Michigan anthropology professor Behar says she specializes in "homesickness" as she relates her own Jewish family immigration story to the universal search for roots. She was born in Cuba in the 1960s to an Ashkenazi mother and a Sephardic father; after the revolution, the family went to Israel; then, after a year, they left for New York. Her father resists her extended education and never speaks to her after she marries a non-Jew. The history behind her personal journey will grab readers as she travels back to Cuba, to Israel, to Poland, and also back to Spain, where Jews were driven out in 1492 and where now communication on the Internet brings descendants together in a reunion in the city of Bejar. All those intrigued by their ancestral story will be moved by the personal quest and also by how—with the help of computers as well as the kindness of strangers—the lost can find their way home. --Hazel Rochman

Review

"Ruth Behar takes us deep into geographies she has charted, transcending anthropological reportage and finding the poetry that is there not only in the places she has mapped but also in history. She has written an observant and surprisingly compassionate book, full of warmth. I enjoyed reading every page; it is full of wisdom and devastating sincerity."

(Nilo Cruz, author of *Anna in the Tropics*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama)

"Travelers are those who go elsewhere because they want to . . . Immigrants are those who go elsewhere because they have to.' Ruth Behar's own story is one of being both the reluctant immigrant and the enthusiastic traveler, and finally, perhaps to appease both legacies, 'an anthropologist who specializes in homesickness.' Behar admits Spanish is her mother tongue, and yet she is a master craftsperson in her father tongue, English. As always, her exquisite stories leave me astonished, amused, exhilarated, illuminated, and forever transformed."

(Sandra Cisneros, author of *The House on Mango Street*)

"*Traveling Heavy* speaks to issues—the impact of religion on social identity, the cultural and linguistic discomforts of immigration, the social tensions found in multicultural and multigenerational families, the texture of relations between parents and children—that define our humanity. What's more, Ruth Behar skillfully weaves these complex issues into a gripping story of personal challenge and growth. Her artful memoir is filled with grace."

(Paul Stoller, author of *The Power of the Between: An Anthropological Odyssey*)

"Ruth Behar graces us with her provocative and enchanting memoir of travel and self discovery: as a mother, as a writer, as an anthropologist, and as a child of exile and homecomings. *Traveling Heavy* is a memoir of wonder from one of the leading Latina artists of the U.S.A."

(Marjorie Agosin, author of *At the Threshold of Memory: New & Selected Poems*)

"A moving story of finding oneself through a lifetime of travel, this will be a terrific addition to memoir and Judaica collections."

(Olga Wise *Library Journal*)

"A heartfelt witness to the changing political and emotional landscape of the Cuban-American experience."

(*Kirkus Reviews*)

"All those intrigued by their ancestral story will be moved by the personal quest and also by how—with the help of computers as well as the kindness of strangers—the lost can find their way home."

(Hazel Rochman *Booklist*)

"*Traveling Heavy* is the product of a poetic mind, and the work itself can be regarded as prose poetry. Behar has not recovered from her 'interrupted childhood' in Havana, and it is this tragedy that makes her who she is, that shapes the ghosts she pursues, that has guided her steps as a subjective anthropologist; and that is able to offer the reader a smorgasbord of literary delights."

(Marion Fischel *The Jerusalem Post* 2014-03-16)

"So much of Ruth Behar's life story resonates with me. My mother is Cuban, and to paraphrase Winston Churchill, I may be half Cuban and half American, but there are so many times I feel completely Cuban. When I finally went to Cuba last fall, it was like returning to a place to which I had never been. I am the Cubana that Ruth Behar describes in her fascinating new memoir, *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in Between Journeys*, one that is part of an 'intensely diasporic people.'"

(Judy Bolton-Fasman *Boston Globe*)

"In writing, the distance between the world and the self collapses, and the latter becomes a medium through which the former can be understood; the world becomes a function of the self. Thus, writing becomes the solution to the search for identity. Like Kafka, Behar takes part in self-creation. Through the act of composing a memoir about her search, she writes t Add he lost homeland and the lost self into existence."

(Jane Shmidt *Bookslut*)

"Ruth Behar's latest work, *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys*, is a book filled with grace; it is anthropologically contoured text that has legs. It has breadth, for its compelling narratives will attract a diverse audience of readers who will pour through the pages, delighting in the poignant details underscored by Behar's life as a person who travels with burdens of past and present. It also has depth, for *Traveling Heavy* is a book that will remain open to the world, a work that will be savored for many years to come."

(Paul Stoller *Anthropological Research*)

"Cuban-American anthropologist Ruth Behar avoids the polarizing politics so typical of Cuban exiles to write an affecting memoir about how notions of home and displacement in relation to the Cuban revolution have shaped her life, and describes the experiences of finding her 'own' Cuba, a version of the island that differs from that of her parents and their generation of exiles. Behar's memoir will be of particular interest to Jewish readers, as she recounts her family's search for safety and home in Cuba and the changing identity of Cuba's own Jewish community over the years since the revolution."

(Julie Schwieter Collazo *The Guardian*)

"*Traveling Heavy* is an engaging read whether you're approaching it as a memoir of the influential storyteller and anthropologist Ruth Behar; a set of vignettes about belonging while living through hybridity as a Jewish Cuban American woman whose family emigrated from Spain and Poland; or a place-based ethnography teasing out the everydayness of moving through space . . . For academics, and for feminist geographers in particular, it is one of those books that makes you think about how space and place are implicated both in the way we journey through the world and the way we think about it. If you think about any of these things, *Traveling Heavy* is well worth the read."

(Pamela Moss *Gender, Place & Culture* 2016-12-28)

About the Author

Ruth Behar was born in Havana, Cuba. She and her family moved to New York City when she was five. In the years since, she has become an internationally acclaimed writer and the Victor Haim Perera Collegiate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan. She is the author of many books, including *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*; *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*; and *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. In addition to her work as an anthropologist, Behar is a poet, a fiction writer, and a documentary filmmaker. She wrote, directed, and produced *Adio Kerida* (Goodbye Dear Love), a film that has been shown at film festivals around the world. Behar has been honored with many prizes, including a MacArthur "Genius" Award.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alysha Johnson:

As people who live in the modest era should be revise about what going on or data even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era that is certainly always change and move forward. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know which you should start with. This *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys* is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, since this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Mark Clark:

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