



ARCHIE DAVIE'S A WORLD WITHOUT HUNGER: A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC INTELLECTUAL GEOGRAPHY OF JOSUE DE CASTRO

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Davies's *A World Without Hunger* offers a close examination of the life of the Brazilian physician, human geographer, diplomat, and practitioner, Josue de Castro. de Castro's life, Davies argues, offers invaluable guidance for radical approaches to challenge the politics of hunger, as well as many insights for rereading the multi-lingual historiography of radical geographical thought.

Davies places Castro "alongside" various radical histories and traditions. This is a concept used knowingly, as Davies explains,

I use the term alongside deliberately in order precisely to avoid subsuming Castro to a pre-established history of geography (critical, radical or otherwise) in which an end result of geography's disciplinary and contemporary manifestation is already known. (Davies, 2022, p. 202)

In so doing, he “want[s] to place Castro alongside existing histories...without insisting that he can be folded into them” (Davies, 2022, p. 58).

This historical geographical project will be carried out without aspirations for totality, completion, or canonisation. Thus, working alongside, Davies conducts a “biographical approach...that draw[s] out counter-hegemonic intellectual geographies of the international”. This includes by searching out what has been overlooked by and within institutional archives. The result is a complex and thoughtful examination of the life of Castro that does many things; among them, this book:

1. excavates Castro’s nuanced and changing conceptualisations of hunger and his practice in working to realise a world without hunger;
2. challenges the geopolitics of the histories of critical thought in geography;
3. offers insights on the possibilities for praxis in critical geography and prompts readers to rethink and reconsider who or what we take ‘public intellectuals’ to be.

First, Davies excavates Castro’s grounded, contingent, regionally rich, and changing conceptualisations of hunger and his practice and work to realise a world without hunger. Castro sought to demonstrate that hunger was a social rather than a natural condition. The struggle against hunger was always political; hunger was the result of choices, political, and deliberate. Davies explains that Castro understood that “how much people eat, and how much they need to eat, is intrinsically political at the national scale” (Davies, 2002, p. 116). Castro himself wrote that “the struggle against hunger is worth something only if it is formulated within the optic of the struggle against the phenomenon of under-development” (Davies, 2022, p. 208).

Rather than follow the intellectual development paradigm of the Cold War era, Castro sought to achieve what he referred to as the “collective emancipation of humanity”. Indeed, in his later years in particular he was highly critical of neo-colonial models of development, writing, “the economic degradation of underdeveloped countries [is] a pollution of their human environment, provoked by the economic abuses of the dominant zones of the world economy” (quoted in Davies, 2022, p. 108). Working against what he called out as the “conspiracy of silence” about the roots of hunger, Castro saw potentials in radical cooperation, solidarity, reciprocity. Davies argues that “Castro’s intellectual work can be seen at the root of an alternative tradition of critical development studies” (Davies, 2022, p. 114).

One of the strengths of the book is Davies's attention to Castro's changing, multi-faceted, and 'anti-dogmatic' (p. 219) intellectual practice. Noting that "Castro... was [initially] full of an almost utopian sense of [the FAO's] possibilities" (Davies, 2022, p. 115) only to be "profoundly disillusioned" by 1956 (p. 214) in the middle of his life. Following his subsequent work and activism in Recife/Brazil and Paris/France, "Castro's thought became more radical as he grew older" with Davies explaining that, "by the late 1960s, he is explicit that truly satiating the hunger of the oppressed would require a massive rupture of the existing order" (Davies, 2022, p. 194).

I was particularly interested in understanding Castro's praxis.

I appreciated, for example, the descriptions of Castro's teaching praxis and course outlines, particularly the scribbles and notes in the margins. Castro's "teaching emphasize[d] his support for younger scholars in experimenting with new, political approaches to human ecology" (Davies, 2022, p. 205). Alain Bué, one of Castro's teaching assistants in Paris, recalls that Castro "ask[ed] students to limit their diet to only 1600 calories per day and then attempt to write a dissertation for the seminar, or undertake physical work" (Davies, 2022, p. 206). We are offered such glimpses into how he grounded his pedagogical work on geographies of hunger in everyday, embodied experiences.

An example of his political praxis is Castro's role in the debates around a world food reserve as Chair of the council of the FAO. At the heart of the consideration was the question of the meaning of food: as either global commodity or global right (Davies, 2022, p. 115). The idea of a global food reserve was to counterbalance the devastating fallout related to food scarcity or even perceptions of scarcity within capitalist markets. Yet, Castro's aspirations for a world food reserve seemed doomed from the beginning, restricted as they were by the imperialist rise of the US and ongoing capitalist expansion, particularly in the form of global agrobusiness. The US, Canada and the UK moved swiftly to block radical action at the FAO.

A second intervention made by Davies's book is to challenge the geopolitics of the writing of history in critical geographical thought.

Throughout the book, Castro's participation in various collectives and different moments (or fragments) in his political and intellectual life are taken up to illustrate rich and unexamined archives of the history of political ecology. Davies argues that this is because "rigid linguistic boundaries in the history of geography need to be unsettled" (Davies, 2022, p. 222). Influenced by James Sidaway's arguments that

“Western geographical knowledge did not develop in a vacuum, away from prior non-western geographies [but that] It depended upon them” (Davies, 2022, p. 214), Davies reads Castro’s time in Stockholm in 1972 and in Paris from 1968 to 1973 as an illustration of the indistinct boundaries between North-South divides.

Davies argues:

Here we have a scholar from the South taking a Northern institution’s gaze and turning it on the tropics. North-South dividing lines are ultimately less than helpful: the historical geographies of knowledge are not reducible to such abstractions. (Davies, 2022, p. 214)

By now, dismissals of decolonial scholarship as presuming authenticity or fostering identity-based arguments—including along North-South divides—are widespread. However, coming from the tradition of anti-colonial praxis, postcolonial studies, and the political moment of so-called Third Worldism in the 1940s and 50s, decolonial scholars know to take seriously the interrelationships between differently situated knowledges, including the misappropriation of non-Western ideas, the reproduction of Eurocentrism via institutionalisation and formalised/western educational systems across the Global South. The ambitions of colonial education, after all, were to train indigenous elites. Castro’s experiences offer an important counterpoint to the colonial geopolitics of education, at once working ambitiously against the grain for more humanist, if not anti-capitalist than less capitalist-centric, food systems.

Yet, Castro’s multidisciplinary insights have been overlooked in disciplinary histories. What is more, they were deliberately dismissed or even appropriated by some of the European colleagues of his era, as Davies shows was likely the case with Yves Lacoste in Paris. This uneven (some might say exploitative) relationship demonstrates precisely the roles, functions, and reach of colonial logics and practices within the imperial university. The marginalisation and maligning of Castro’s work at the FAO—for example, some of the controversies following the publication of Castro’s book *The Geography of Hunger* in 1952 which Davies mentions, including “accusations that he was too political” (Davies 2022, p. 113), and his own political exile from Brazil, seem to evidence the power and reach of imperialism within intellectual work.

On the other hand, Davies does an excellent job of allowing for ambiguities and liminalities in his interpretations of Castro’s life and ideas; on the topic of nutrition, for

example, Davies notes that, “Castro was committed to a form of anticolonial humanism, but operated within hegemonic discourses of Western scientific calculation” (Davies, 2022, p. 117).

Finally, Davies offers insights on the possibilities for praxis in critical geography and prompts readers to rethink and reconsider what we take “public intellectual” work to be. Thinking with Edward Said, Davies sits with the question of “the public geographical intellectual through Castro’s work”, noting particularly Castro’s navigation of different kinds of intellectual commitments and responsibilities. Davies argues that the conduct of “public intellectual” work is “not contingent on the scale of audience” (Davies, 2022, p. 197), but rather that

intellectuals should seek to establish immanent connection[s] between intellectual work and political practice. [Castro’s practice] suggests less that intellectual work should be the preface to, threshold of, or guilty pleasure after the real work of political commitment. It doesn’t require the intellectual to stop writing and get on with real politics. (Davies, 2022, p. 197)

Davies’s book is a thought-provoking and rich read. It makes a valuable intervention in the radical histories of geographical thought and challenges us to reexamine political ecologies, critical praxis, and the possibilities of a world without hunger.

REFERENCES

DAVIES, Archie. *A World Without Hunger: Josué de Castro and the History of Geography*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022.