

Kregg Hetherington, *Guerilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011. ISBN: 082235036X

Mere days after Kregg Hetherington's *Guerilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay* arrived in my mailbox, a bloody land conflict precipitated the accelerated impeachment of Fernando Lugo, Paraguay's only modern leftist president. Many commentators responded with sweeping assertions like "Paraguay hasn't yet arrived in the 21st century" (Time Magazine, Padgett). Hetherington interrupts this developmentalist temporality, still common in discussions of Paraguay, and joins a growing chorus of critical development theorists who are attentive to the contingencies of good governance practices and development expertise (e.g., Roy, Hart, Silvey and Rankin, Li).

Guerilla Auditors is a superb deep ethnography of development that excavates how land politics and the technologies of "good governance" collude to produce campesinos as firmly outside of proper democratic society in post-Stroessner Paraguay. It also traces the tenacity and political acuity with which campesinos negotiate the politics of documents and the slippages between two competing property regimes. Hetherington's ingenuity is to demonstrate how these battles are fought in the archives as well as through land occupations, general strikes and road blockades. For Hetherington, it's politics all the way down. The documents of development – land registries, eviction orders, Stroessner-era records of torture and violence – don't actually contain information, in the sense of unmediated representations of things as they are. Rather, they contain "radically contingent meanings actualized in the process of reading in a given context" (159). Campesino "guerrilla auditors" recognize this, and fight on the terrain of documentary representation. They also fight to hold open the small space within Agrarian Reform that enables campesinos to access land through their labor; an opening grounded in material, rather than abstract, property rights. On the other hand, "new democrats" – Hetherington's motley category folding together urban intellectuals, leftists turned neoliberal, NGO professionals, journalists and student activists – fail to recognize that their own commitment to a mono-scape of abstract property rights, with all land always already titled, is itself a political position.

The first chapter examines the social processes by which campesinos are denied autonomous politics. Historicizing the rise and decline of the Stroessner power bloc (1954 – 1989) and the tenuous democratic transition, Hetherington details how the Colorado party's rural patronage machine simultaneously interpolated campesinos as the future of the nation while also consolidating land ownership. "Three tales" of the transition demonstrate how campesinos are constituted as unfit for democratic practice. First, the astonishing discovery of the "archives of terror" in a suburban police station basement yields the largest collection of documents detailing systemic state violence in the Americas. While campesinos figure as victims within the terror archives, they are not constituted as part of its public. Second, popular representations of the "Marzo Paraguayo," protests (1999) portray campesino protesters as accidental protagonists. And thirdly, the rapacious soy industry epitomizing unrestrained free market logics, renders campesinos "absolutely extraneous" (64).

Chapters Two and Three, ("Ill-Gotten Land" and "Precarious Lots"), historicize processes of land consolidation, fire sales of public lands to elites, and today's contentious, populist politics in which campesinos take a "militant stance against national abandonment" (27). Although land concentration increased under Agrarian Reform, campesinos continue to use the statute to claim land based on their labor within a graduated system of recognized rights

(*mejoras, derecheras, títulos*). Instead of an abstraction, land rights for campesinos are “the end point of labor on the land and the starting point for the very possibility of public life” (105). Here property rights are consolidated through the production of “authoritative representation of those rights which can be recognized by others” and captured in documents (131). Campesinos are disadvantaged in an economy of material representations of labor and land-improvement: industrial soy farms tend to trump precarious campesino homes and wobbly rows of hand-planted crops as authoritative representations of rights. Yet within Agrarian Reform campesinos have some room to maneuver. When land is transferred to the jurisdiction of the Civil Code, campesino representations of land rights are banished under the glare of technocratic and transparent representations of abstract property rights.

In the chapter “Duplicitous Documents,” Hetherington shows how two generations of USAID and World Bank transparency projects in Paraguay are primarily marked by their persistent refusal to recognize that information is open to multiple interpretations and therefore, political. Rather than sites of representation, he argues, documents are “circumstantial sediments of power negotiated elsewhere” (177). As documents are material sites for contests between different interpretations of rights, Hetherington argues that developmental transparency projects are necessarily marked by “the desire for the document to disappear altogether” and primarily vested in controlling “who can interpret documents and how” (182). The final chapter, “Populist Transparency” charts the political disconnect between “new democrats” and campesinos, identifying transparency as one attempt to temporarily forge connections across the gulf. Transparency does not mitigate the need for political negotiation about which of many competing representations should be validated in a given situation – it is rather the name for such negotiations.

Hetherington’s skillful mix of theory, historical analysis and ethnographic data allows for analysis of what Gramsci would call the “relations of force” necessary to both understand the present and to work to build a more just future. As Anna Tsing notes on the back cover, this book “shows why ethnography matters.” In the context of the substantial contributions of this text, I would like to raise two issues and a quibble. First, the quibble: some of the book’s cornerstones are submerged in the footnotes, including rich historical and ethnographic detail, the book’s theoretical anchors, and consequently the author’s intellectual positionality. They are worth reading!

Secondly, there is the matter of political economy. Hetherington’s attention to the material practices of land conflicts is exquisite, but political economic forces only figure as a sort of backdrop. When they peak through, their relevance is striking. For example, across several registers industrial soy farming is expelling campesinos – sometimes through the archival negotiations, intimidation and violence that Hetherington details, but also through skyrocketing land prices and the relentless expansion of a capital (and chemical)-intensive model of export crop production. This process can be usefully analyzed as primitive accumulation, when primitive accumulation is understood as ongoing process in which capital continually aims to dismantle labor’s protections rather than as the inaugural event of capitalism in which labor is commodified (Polanyi, Bonefeld). Hetherington’s reading of Gramsci through Laclau and Mouffe allows for a particular kind of post-structuralist interpretation that overvalues the discursive, in this case the contests about meaning in documents, while underplaying the political economic forces that collude with the discursive to set the conditions of possibility for political struggle (see 326 n. 29). This is the danger of such a “soft Gramscianism” (Thomas).

Finally, the category of “new democrats” provides the reader with a glimpse of Hetherington’s ethnographic self-reflexivity as he confesses his own initial difficulty in seeing their politics and positionality. It also does important analytic work to construct the inside to campesino exclusion. But Hetherington doesn’t address what binds together this montley crew, or where the politically potent fissures might lie. Theorizing the later is just one of many important provocations instigated by “Guerilla Auditors.” Hetherington’s latest is necessary reading for students and scholars of development, Paraguay and Latin American populism alike.

Bibliography of related works:

- Bonefeld, W. “The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation: Commodity Fetishism and Social Constitution.” *The Commoner* 2 (2001): 1–15.
<http://www.rebelnet.gr/files/02bonefeld.pdf>
- Hart, Gillian. “Development Critiques in the 1990s: Culs De Sacand Promising Paths.” *Progress in Human Geography* 25.4 (2001): 649–658.
<http://phg.sagepub.com/content/25/4/649.full.pdf>
- Li, Tania Murray. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Duke University Press Books, 2007. Print.
<http://www.amazon.com/The-Will-Improve-Governmentality-Development/dp/0822340275>
- Padgett, Tim. “Paraguay: President’s Forced Exit Wasn’t a Coup, but Still Deserves Scorn | World | TIME.com.” *Time*.
<http://world.time.com/2012/06/27/paraguay-presidents-forced-exit-was-no-coup-but-still-deserves-scorn/>
- Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *Development Theory: Deconstructions/Reconstructions*. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009.
http://books.google.com.py/books?hl=es&lr=&id=djCr5_NHOjsC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Development+Theory:+Deconstructions/Reconstructions&ots=eG-QGRdgwq&sig=R7-e3xNtoVexMq9GkyVLA8two68
- Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. 2nd ed. Beacon Press, 2001.
<http://www.beacon.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1310>
- Roy, Ananya. *Poverty Capital: Microfinance and the Making of Development*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2010.
<http://www.amazon.com/Poverty-Capital-Microfinance-Making-Development/dp/0415876737>
- Silvey, Rachel, and Katharine Rankin. “Development Geography: Critical Development Studies and Political Geographic Imaginaries.” *Progress in Human Geography* 35.5 (2011): 696–704.
<http://phg.sagepub.com/content/35/5/696.short>
- Thomas, P. D. *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Vol. 24. Brill Academic Pub, 2009.
http://books.google.com.py/books?hl=es&lr=&id=Kc5f3Ybv6xMC&oi=fnd&pg=PR13&dq=The+Gramscian+Moment:+Philosophy,+Hegemony+and+Marxism&ots=XR_y2PHVRs&sig=wBGUoAY0GkRzIunFDNi7QOqWfz8#v=onepage&q=The%20Gramscian%20Moment%3A%20Philosophy%2C%20Hegemony%20and%20Marxism&f=false

Jennifer Tucker
University of California, Berkeley