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Josué Apolônio de Castro (1908-1973)

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In recent years, a vibrant international literature has called the attention of scholars to the life and work of Josué de Castro and his relevance to current debates on social and political ecology, liminal and subaltern geopolitics, critical development, ‘food security’, population geography, Malthusian and anti-Malthusian debates in the ‘Global South’, and Latin American radical geographies and geopoetics (Davies 2019a and b; Ferretti 2019 and 2020; Ibarra and Sánchez 2020; Carter 2019; Ziegler 2013; Buckley 2017; Chappel 2018). Famous during his lifetime thanks to the international success of his books and to his bright political and diplomatic career, Castro was later forgotten by many geographers, with notable exceptions such as Milton Santos and Manuel Correia de Andrade.

An exile in Paris after the 1964 military coup in Brazil, Castro never established his own academic ‘school’, although he had served as the Chair of Geography at the University of Rio de Janeiro for many years. A certain blindness of geography’s histories towards interdisciplinary contributions might also have contributed to Castro’s relative neglect within geography. As Santos wrote to Florestan Fernandes (IEB, MS-RS83-040, Santos to Fernandes, 21 May 1983), some geographers did not even recognise Castro as belonging to their discipline, given that he was first trained as a medical doctor and his work might be defined variously as sociology, anthropology, development studies, nutritional studies or just, more broadly, as political writing. Above all, perhaps, the military coup in Brazil and a deliberate process of amnesia in his home country undermined his legacy until recent times. In the last couple of decades, he has been recovered as a key figure in the history of the Brazilian left not only by academic geography, but by social movements such as the campaigns against hunger associated with the sociologist and activist, Betinho (Herbert de Souza), and indeed by Lula’s own government. Complementing the recent renewal of the ‘biographic turn’ in the history of geography (Baigent and Novaes 2019), this biobibliographical chapter aims at restabilising Castro’s position wholeheartedly within, though always testing the edges of, the discipline of geography.

In this paper we proceed thematically and (somewhat) chronologically. We begin by outlining Castro's path into geography, and the significance of his long connection with France and French geography. In the second section we turn backwards to assess the significance of his nutritional and medical practice to his geographical work, before proceeding to outline the social and political stakes of his major works. Finally, we outline Castro's international practice, and his life in exile.

1. Recife, Rio and French geography

Castro was born in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, in the Brazilian *Nordeste* (Northeast). His relatively humble family had migrated to the city from the *sertão* following the great drought of 1877. An abbreviation of *desertão* (big desert), the *sertão* designates the arid and 'wild' Brazilian hinterland (Barroso 1947; Silva 1950). In the Northeast, this area is affected by periodical and often devastating droughts. This geographical origin made an indelible mark on Castro's career, whose earliest aim was to find a solution to the famines that accompanied these droughts, through not only science and knowledge, but social and political action. The landscape of the Northeast remained part of Castro's geographical imagination and political projects long after he left the region in 1935 to move to Rio de Janeiro. He was based in Rio until 1964, working as an academic, a public servant, and then as a member of the Federal Parliament from 1955 to 1962.

Before 1929, he had also spent his university years studying medicine in Rio and Salvador, but it was in Recife that he started to practice medicine. His important early experiences in Recife were indirectly narrated in *Documentário do Nordeste* [Documentary of the Northeast] (1937). These quasi-autobiographical stories best capture Castro at work in this period. In 'Assistencia Social' [Social Assistance] a young doctor is sacked by the company that hired him because he diagnosed, in its workers, a sickness that nobody wanted to admit, and no medicine could heal: hunger. In another, 'O ciclo do caranguejo' [The Cycle of the Crab], Castro described the miserable life of the people who had migrated from the *sertão* to find refuge in the *mocambos*, informal settlements that *caboclos* (people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry) and Afro-descendants self-constructed with wood, waste and mud in the mangroves that occupied the shores of Recife's rivers, the Capibaribe and Beberibe. The continuation of this story became one of the most famous of Castro's books, the novel *Homens e Caraguejos* [Of Men and Crabs] (1967), in which the geographer fictionalized his youthful wanderings into a story

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of abortive revolution in Recife. It was these neighbourhoods, and his background in the *sertão*, that inspired Castro's interest in poverty and socio-spatial marginalisation.

Castro saw these neighbourhoods among the mangroves as his Sorbonne (Castro 1967). He recognized throughout his life the importance of these formative experiences and his identity as a Northeasterner. Castro's direct commitment to local affairs started from his early campaigns against the evictions of the *mocambos*, on which one can find abundant materials and press cuttings in his archives in Recife (eg CEHIBRA, 349). Castro's deep link with his land and its traditions are further revealed by his correspondence with his friend Luís da Câmara Cascudo (1898-1986). Based in Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), Cascudo was one of the most eminent scholars of popular traditions in the *Nordeste*, including African and indigenous legacies and the *literatura de cordel*, a typical form of popular poetry which also interested Castro (ICC, Cascudo correspondence).

Maria Yedda Leite Linhares argues that Castro's early studies on health and hunger were inserted 'in the context of the movement which was ongoing for the determination of a minimum wage and for the recognition of the workers' rights' (Linhares 2007, 21). We will return to these questions below, but here we begin by tracing Castro's relationship with the ideas and discipline of geography. With some progressive friends, Castro was among the initiators of the teaching of geography and social sciences at the University of Recife from 1933 to 1935. Among his first geographical writings is a study on the city of Recife, addressing the historical formation and the regional insertion of the Pernambucan capital on the estuaries of the Capibaribe and Beberibe, in a way that implicitly recalls Patrick Geddes's idea of the 'Valley Section'. Although the Scottish scholar was not referenced by Castro, he may well have assimilated some of his ideas indirectly from his readings of French scholars, which included the work of the anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus.

Castro was first appointed to the newly founded Rio de Janeiro *Universidade do Distrito Federal*, later *Universidade do Brasil*, in 1935, and became Chair of Geography in 1939. It was arguably there that Castro's French connection began. French university missions had participated in the foundation of the main Brazilian universities, in São Paulo from 1934 and in Rio from 1935. In these missions, geographers such as Pierre Deffontaines (1894-1978) and Pierre Monbeig (1907-1987), played prominent roles. In patriarchal histories of knowledge

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they are often still considered the ‘noble fathers’ of the discipline in Brazil. Deffontaines worked at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1934, where he was also one of the founders of the Association of Brazilian Geographers (AGB) and then in Rio from 1936 to 1938 (Ferretti 2014), while Monbeig taught geography at the USP from 1935. After he came back to France in the 1950s, Monbeig remained a major figure of Franco-Brazilian university cooperation until his retirement (Clout 2013).

Castro’s archives demonstrate that he was acquainted with both men from the 1930s (CEHIBRA 574, 582). In Rio, he also collaborated with another famous French scholar, progressive anthropologist Roger Bastide (1898-1974), who requested Castro’s help for his research on Afro-Brazilian communities. This included taking Bastide to Niterói to visit a *terreiro*, a site for the celebration of Afro-Brazilian religious rites (IMEC BST2 C1.01, Castro to Bastide, 7 September 1938), a subject on which Bastide also corresponded with Cascudo (IMEC, BST2). Castro’s early interest in French anthropology is confirmed by his correspondence with Brazilian novelist Mário Raul de Morais Andrade (1893-1945), stating Castro’s intention to travel to Paris to attend conferences of ethnologists (IEB, MA-C-CPL1908, Castro to Andrade, 7 April 1937). His French and international readings were doubtlessly among the main inspirations for Castro’s earliest and most famous works on the geographies of hunger, and his work on the intersections between diet and race (Castro, 1937). It was also thanks to this French connection that, after Castro was exiled by the military dictatorship in 1964, he decided to settle in Paris, where he counted on a certain number of scholarly and political friends and supporters.

Castro’s early experience at the University of Rio de Janeiro matched the progressive programme of its first President, Anísio Teixeira, to foster inclusiveness and social reforms through public education, although Teixeira was soon removed by the authorities, which considered his positions as too politically progressive (Machado 2000 and 2009). In these years, despite being in a comfortable academic chair well before his thirties, Castro started his restless work of connecting scholarship with social reform, which included ceaseless international networking. In the various versions of Castro’s CV in his archives, there are traces of his travels to give conferences and to perform official missions in Italy in 1939, in Argentina and Uruguay in 1942, in the United States in 1943, in Santo Domingo and Mexico in 1945, in

France and Switzerland in 1947, and later in Venezuela, the Soviet bloc and many other countries (CEHIBRA 164).

This internationalist attitude did not diminish Castro's insertion in a Northeastern political and cultural context. This was noticed by numerous authors including Pernambucan critical geographer Manuel Correia de Andrade (1922-2007), who stressed Castro's biographical belonging to the histories of his land, being himself 'a half-mulatto ... of very humble origin' (Andrade and Magno 2012, 545). For Andrade, as for Milton Santos (preface in Castro, 2001) Castro was a key founder of Brazilian critical geographies. Andrade saw Castro's political engagement as embedded in the traditions of their region, not only because he represented Pernambuco at the Federal Assembly, but also because, despite being 'a very utopian person' he had been 'a good politician in the lineage of Nabuco' (Andrade and Magno 2012, 550, 552). Joaquim Nabuco (1849-1910), an abolitionist and liberal politician who is considered one of the founders of the Brazilian Republic established in 1889, was a far cry from socialistic tendencies at that time.

Yet, Andrade claimed retrospectively that 'today Nabuco would be a leftist' (Andrade and Magno 2012, 552), a statement that shows the process of his 'inventing' of a progressive tradition as a background for his own critical geography, which required corraling figures such as Castro, whom Andrade defined, quite correctly, as 'unorthodox leftists' (Andrade and Magno 2012, 554). Andrade claimed that, to 'build the future' maintaining 'the capacity of formulating utopias' (Andrade 1997, 169) it was necessary to come back to the works of people like Castro, to be considered as inspiration for the expanding field of Brazilian critical geographies. Critical and politically engaged approaches started to have some success in Brazil from the 1978 AGB Congress of Fortaleza also thanks to the return of Santos from exile, and progressively gained scholarly attention in the following decades, also thanks to geographers like Andrade. For this latter, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had created the need for critical thinking to focus on the 'social' rather than on the 'political', hence the importance of rediscovering Castro's thinking. Like Santos's, Castro's works were also deemed instrumental in understanding the legacy of French geography as a conceptual toolbox that could serve new critical geographies, despite the widespread commonplace that classical *géographie humaine* was politically disengaged (Andrade 1997).

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Andrade called it ‘astonishing’ (Andrade 2002, 128) that Castro had been so long neglected among geographers. This was sometimes due to rigid ideas of disciplinary boundaries, but more often it occurred because scholars were uncomfortable in dealing with the prickly and nonconformist figure that Castro undoubtedly was. Castro’s political prickliness was connected to his early French readings and relations. While the ‘classical’ French School of Geography is still respected in Brazil (Silva 2016), Castro’s references did not lie uniquely in the context of the *Géographie humaine* of Paul Vidal de la Blache’s followers. Indeed, he read widely, including in the tradition of anarchist geography. He cited Reclus in his *Ensaio de Biologia Social* and in *Geografia da Fome*, as well as Kropotkin, two exceptional examples of nonconformist and anti-imperial European geographers. Some of Castro’s own French friends were nonconformist geographers, such as Deffontaine, who corresponded extensively with Castro on matters including the social problems of the *Nordeste*, and was an unorthodox figure within French geography, being a social geographer linked to progressive Catholicism, something which clashed with the general pretention of post-Vidalian geographers to avoid explicit political or theoretical engagements (Orain 2009).

Yet more significant was Castro’s collaboration with Max Sorre (1880-1962), another original figure of social geography, who prefaced the French edition of Castro’s *Geopolítica da fome*, that is *Géopolitique de la faim* (1952). Yet, Sorre was interested in Castro’s geographies of hunger well before that. In 1949, he wrote to Castro acknowledging receipt of the French edition of the Castro’s, book *Geografia da fome*, suggesting that Sorre was already aware of Castro’s early works published in Portuguese. In his letter, Sorre expressed quite clear views on the social and political relevance of these geographies, evoking a world that was ‘tirelessly asking geographers for their help’ (CEHIBRA, 581, Sorre to Castro, 14 December 1949). Significantly, Sorre explicitly agreed with Castro’s views on poverty, announcing that he was likewise addressing this matter in his forthcoming *Les fondements techniques* (1950), the second volume of his famous *Les fondements de la géographie humaine*. In his letter, Sorre anticipated some of the volume’s contents, including his contention that: ‘The geographical problem is diminished when it is only posed in terms of production and consumption. We have to pose it in terms of production and needs [considering that] a great part of humankind lives at the limit of under-alimentation, if not in state of permanent under-alimentation, and that an important fraction of the remainder lives in a state of food scarcity’ (CEHIBRA, 581). This letter, which Sorre concluded lamenting how difficult it was to be ‘a free man’ (CEHIBRA,

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581) in the conformist context of the Cold War, attests to the early international influence of Castro's works, whose reputation in progressive European milieus even preceded their translation into languages such as French and English.

The trajectory of the translation of Castro's works is complex and multi-faceted (Davies, 2019a). Here it is worth simply noting that the earliest French translations of Castro's *Géographie de la faim* (1949), *Géopolitique de la faim* (1952) and *Livre noir de la faim* (1961) were published by the *Editions ouvrières*, a publishing house that belonged to the circuit of *Economie et humanisme*, the journal founded by Jesuit social reformer Louis-Joseph Lebret, a friend of Castro and later a founding member of the CID (Contemporaine, FD 446, 14-01). A left-wing Dominican priest, Lebret had close ties with Brazil, where he undertook numerous missions, starting from a journey to Rio de Janeiro in 1947. There, he established relations with Castro and figures such as 'Dom Hélder Câmara' (Pontual, 2016, 26), another of Castro's friends and a leader of liberation theology who became the archbishop of Recife, where he helped radicals and other people persecuted by the military dictatorship (Davies 2019a). During that visit, Lebret had the occasion to publicly condemn the recent banning of the Brazilian Communist Party, an authoritarian act that was likewise critiqued by Castro (CEHIBRA, 1), making Dom Helder suspected of being 'communism's sympathizer' (Pontual, 2016, 35), leading the Vatican to impose his repatriation. He returned to Latin America in 1952, also thanks to the support of Castro, who was then the FAO Chair in Rome, to study regional development in the state of São Paulo (Pontual, 2016, 37). Their connection remained important for Castro's activities in exile.

2. Nutrition and the Geography of Hunger

Before turning to the content of Castro's major works, and his later life, it is worth going back to assess the significance of Castro's training and practice as a nutritionist and doctor. In the early 1930s, in Recife, Castro established a medical clinic, and quickly developed a focus on nutrition. This interest was, he later said, quite serendipitous, but it was vital to the rest of his intellectual and political life. His social scientific publishing on hunger and malnutrition began early, with his seminal work, *Condições de vida das classes operárias do Recife* (1932). There he recounts the economic condition of the poor in Recife. He accounts not only for the hunger

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of the unemployed, but shows that the basic wage, food availability, and cost of living guaranteed that the majority of the people of his hometown were destined to hunger and malnutrition. His early experience as a practicing nutritional clinician would later develop into the fully-fledged role that he played in establishing nutritional science as an academic discipline not only in Brazil, but in Latin America as a whole. For a sustained period in the 1940s, Castro's principal focus was as a working scientist in the field of nutrition. We can identify three vectors of the significance of his work in this area: research science, the institutionalization of knowledge, and the politics of public welfare.

Castro's basic scientific research included investigations of the nutritional benefits of various Northeastern and Brazilian endemic and wild foods. We could compare his work in this regard to that of Puerto Rican nutritionists of a slightly later period, who investigated the vitamin C content of acerola (Gonzalez, 2013). As for those Puerto Rican nutritional scientists, Castro's work made an important contribution to a body of scientific knowledge which was dominated by Northern scientists doing research in Northern conditions, or, when nutritional research was done in the global South, it was done with a colonial mindset and methodology. Castro can be seen as a key figure, therefore, in the decolonization of nutritional knowledge (Davies, 2019b).

Castro's second significant role here was in institutionalizing knowledge of nutrition. The fact that the Instituto Nutrição Josué de Castro (INJC) at the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro* still carries his name is far from incidental. We can compare Castro's historical role here with that of Pedro Escudero in Argentina. The two were in close contact throughout this period, and the Institute of Nutrition which bears Escudero's name in Argentina, and that in Rio de Janeiro, are a historical pair. Escudero conducted enormously extensive nutritional research (more so than Castro), yet they shared a sense of the political stakes of creating nutritional institutions at this moment of emerging industrial modernity in urban Latin America. For both men there were political stakes to making nutritional science into a stable scientific area of work.

The utopian visions that Escudero had for his own institute might speak, too, for the Rio de Janeiro institute:

The National Institute of Nutrition is not only a hospital (though we treat the sick), nor is it only a biological laboratory (though we study life), nor is it a centre of social studies (though we investigate society), nor an agency of social action (though we help the needy), nor a school (though we teach), nor a pulpit (though we preach). It is all these together. (Escudero 1959, cover)

As head of the institute, Castro attempted to take up a pedagogic role akin to other nutritional scientists (Bizzo and Lima 2010). Both the Argentine and Brazilian institutes published regular academic journals, the *Revista de Dietologia* in Buenos Aires, and the *Arquivos Brasileiros de Nutrição*, edited by Castro in Rio de Janeiro. In various editorials he called for a National Vitamin Campaign, (Castro 1944, vol. 1.2), analysed exploitative export agriculture (Castro 1946, vol. 2.2), demanded food education, (Castro 1947, vol. 3.4), and investment in school lunches (Castro 1948, vol. 5.3). This interest of Castro's in institutionalizing nutritional science also led to involvement in training courses for nutritionists, seeking to disseminate expertise. In 1947 the Institute of Nutrition began to give outreach courses, taught by Josué de Castro and his colleagues, to train doctors in nutrition (*Arquivos Brasileiros de Nutrição*, 1947, vol 3.4). We can see Castro's tendency towards enlightened technocracy in his work on public nutrition (on Latin American nutrition in the period see Natal 1982; Bezerra 2012). The question of his relationship with the state at this time, as a nutritional scientist, but also as an actor within the state (he was, after all, a kind of public servant), remains somewhat unresolved (Amorim, 2017, 2018). As with later interactions with the politics of Getúlio Vargas, Castro's pragmatism and his utopianism sat at times uncomfortably side-by-side.

This brings us to the third important dynamic of Castro's work as a nutritionist: the part that he played in making nutrition part of public debates, public policy, and the development of the Brazilian welfare state. Castro helped make nutrition not only an academic field that took place, but a contributor to, and mode of critique of, public policy (Andrade 1997; Magalhães 1997; Machado 2000). The nutritional science of the *Instituto* took place against a backdrop of hunger and struggles over the slow emergence of the Brazilian welfare state. It was not least through nutrition that Castro secured his place in the Brazilian left, helping establish progressive public institutions and policy platforms to combat malnutrition. His positions, and the unique political questions of food, nutrition and agriculture, meant that he became a kind of conduit between the urban labour and rural peasant movements. His campaigning on agrarian reform was tied

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to arguments over urban nutrition and school feeding, as well as to the movement for a minimum wage. If we can identify political allegiances by political enemies, then Castro's place in Brazilian political history is indubitable. During his nutritional campaigning and insistence on agrarian reform he became a favoured target of the anti-communist right, and of plantation elites. He began from investigations of protein and vitamin deficiency, infant mortality, metabolic diseases, and tuberculosis, but ended up with a critique of the inheritances of colonial power structures and the distribution of land in Brazil.

It is important to note that it took some time for Castro's nutritional critique to become fully integrated with his geographical sensibility (Davies, 2019b). In *Alimentação e Raça* (Castro 1936) he saw an energetic connection between food and human productivity, but it was only through the 1940s that he began to incorporate a more nuanced nutritional analysis with a geographical framework. Castro came to nutrition as it was emerging with the 'newer knowledge' of nutrition (Kamminga and Cummingham, 1995, McCollum, 1922). He was becoming a nutritional scientist as knowledge of vitamins was growing, and the field was shifting from a focus on quantifiable inputs to a more biopolitical understanding of the ways in which food was part of an open and complex interaction in which not only proteins and calories, but 'protective foods', vitamins and minerals were key parts of the body's needs, and their lack led to metabolic disease. Therefore, increasingly, for Castro hunger and its manifestations were not merely problems of quantity of food, but of quality, and of specific historical geographies. In 1937, in *Alimentação Brasileira à luz da Geografia Humana*, he noted that the study of food and hunger had 'roots' that were to be found 'deep in the fields of sociology and philosophy, with influences that spread far into the most varied corners of life' (Castro 1937, 17). It was this broad and open vision that led him to put his study of nutrition into concerted geographical terms.

Castro remained committed to working on nutritional problems beyond his time at the Instituto de Nutrição. Into the 1950s, as his book *The Black Book of Hunger* (1967), makes clear, Castro was worrying away at nutritional problems, and putting nutrition at the forefront of political projects. He sought, for instance, to establish a large scale intervention to combat protein deficiency in Latin America, and pursued interests in novel protein production (Castro, 1967), as well as being involved in various attempts to build food factories in the Northeast, and establish international networks of cooperation on nutritional projects, often through the

organization ASCOFAM, which he chaired (CEHIBRA, 26, 205, 223, 233). It was this longstanding work on nutrition, and Castro's deep political engagements, that led to the centrepieces of his intellectual output: *Geografia da Fome* (1946) and *Geopolítica da Fome* (1951). These books remain the crux of his legacy today.

3. Critical geopolitics, social justice and the Northeast

Castro's social and political sensitivity was inserted in a wider literature on poverty, insurgence and popular culture in the Northeastern *sertão*. In *Geografia da Fome* Castro paid tribute to Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909), the journalist and writer who documented the 1896-97 War of Canudos, and to the novelists Rachel de Queiroz (1910-2003) whose novel *O Quinze* contained an 'admirable documentation' (Castro 1984, 219), of the drought of 1915 which devastated the Northeast. Castro was a fan of realistic novels that he called 'intentional literature' (Castro 1957, 60). Alongside Queiroz, exponents of this literary genre were Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, Jorge de Lima and José Lins de Rego, among others, whom Castro appreciated for their social engagement in denouncing the evils of social and racial marginalisation in Brazil, the Northeast, and the *sertão*.

One of the reasons for the commercial success of Castro's books was arguably the author's talent as a writer. He was able to construct historical and environmental portraits of the Brazilian regions where he wished to denounce the phenomenon of hunger, especially his own *Nordeste*. This narrative took something like metaphysical accents in Castro's remarks on how dramas such as droughts, famines and child mortality had tragically impressed 'a sort of mark in the collective soul of Northeastern people' (Castro 1984, 309). At the same time, Castro engaged with Cunha's narration of the War of Canudos, a peasants' revolt which was led by mystic millenarian preacher Antônio Conselheiro and was crushed with incredible violence by the Brazilian army. For Castro, this story was proof of how hunger could shape Northeastern mentalities, that could include excesses of religious fanaticism. Another famous Northeastern social phenomenon, at that time, were the *Cangaceiros*, bandits who were feared but also admired by the Northeasterners as people who could 'defend the oppressed and ... feed the hungry by stealing the rich for distributing to the poor' (Castro 1984, 244). For Castro, these phenomena were the expression of material hunger, but also of a wider 'hunger for freedom'

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(1984, 239). In any case, for Castro, it was often during droughts, under the grip of hunger, that the Northeasterner ‘became a *Cangaceiro*’ (Castro 1984, 235).

More broadly, in *Geografia da Fome*, Castro discussed one of the central dynamics of his academic and political engagement in Brazil: the solution to the ‘Brazilian dilemma’ on whether the country needed ‘bread or steel’. Linking Castro to debates on underdevelopment and dependency at the time, this formula served to denounce the industrialist policies that were put in place by several governments, which benefited a minority of the population and were mainly concentrated in the southern regions of Brazil. For Castro, these policies constituted a sort of internal colonialism, a concept which is now largely addressed in Latin American debates on decoloniality (Porto-Gonçalves and Araújo-Quental 2012), and a situation that had to be challenged to fight poverty and hunger with more radical social measures including agrarian reform. In Castro’s view, land reform was indispensable to social justice.

The success of *Geografia da Fome* led Castro to conceive a much more ambitious project: to produce an intellectual map of world hunger. As Castro claimed explicitly in the Introduction to *Geopolítica da fome*, the experience of war had showed Europe the existence of hunger, something which had been considered as extraneous to the imperial core, uniquely affecting the ‘backward’ countries. Therefore, Castro discussed the globalisation of hunger, paralleling the famous 1949 declaration of US President Harry Truman denouncing a new global phenomenon called ‘underdevelopment’ (Sachs 1992). Yet, the intentions of the two men were opposed: on the one hand, Truman was fostering a neo-colonial policy targeting ‘development’ as a way to increase the political and economic power of the USA after the collapse of most European colonial empires, in the context of the incipient Cold War (Power 2019). On the other, Castro denounced hunger as an evil resulting from colonial policies and mechanisms of social and environmental exploitation such as monoculture, which prevented labourers from planting for self-consumption, and governments from planning sustainable economies. For Castro, and in general for the anti-Malthusian critics of development, hunger and famines are not natural flaws, but phenomena which are socially and politically engineered through neo-colonial policies and through dependence, and which often occur (paradoxically) in very productive areas. Castro’s anticolonial claims were accompanied by staunch anti-racist and anti-deterministic statements, countering European commonplaces that the South, that is the tropical area roughly corresponding to the colonised or formerly colonised ‘periphery’, was

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‘naturally’ backward due to the influx of climates on the alleged ‘laziness’ of their inhabitants (Ferretti 2019).

Castro’s intellectual engagements with social justice were matched and extended by long and deep political work, above all in relation to the politics of the Northeast and agrarian reform. He was involved in a crucial precursor to the still powerful *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), the Landless Worker’s Movement. This precursor was the Northeastern Peasant Leagues, which operated principally in the mid-late 1950s, and were a group of rural political organizations which sought to reappropriate and redistribute land from the plantations. They called for radical agrarian reform and used a potent tactic which the MST still deploy: land occupation. The most important figures in the Pernambucan manifestation of the Peasant Leagues were the lawyer and political Francisco Julião, and rural activists including Clodomir Morais dos Santos, Zé de Galileia and Elizabeth Teixeira. It would be inaccurate to place Castro at the centre of the Peasant Leagues as a political movement. However, he was an important ally and figurehead in a number of ways. He made practical contributions – his archive reveals his efforts to secure free train travel for League members from rural areas to Recife, and correspondence with Julião (CEHIBRA, 559) – but his most important intervention was more directly political, as a spokesperson. When the Peasant Leagues gathered in Recife to formalize their political demands, it was Josué de Castro who was the lead speaker. Francisco Julião even popularized and disseminated a *cordel* poem calling Castro the ‘prophet’ of the peasant leagues and agrarian reform.

Castro’s involvement with the peasant leagues has to be placed in the broader context of his political work of the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. In 1955 he was elected as a deputy for Pernambuco for the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* (PTB). He was involved in party politics, but also sought to maintain personal independence. A full analysis of his political trajectory is still outstanding (though see Amorim 2017, 2018), and further research remains to be done in this area. At a number of moments de Castro seemed on the edge of taking a more institutionalized position within structures of state power in Brazil, whether when he nearly became mayor of Recife in 1959 (CEHIBRA, 27), or when he was mooted to be Minister of Agriculture in 1960 (CEHIBRA, 34). In both cases, political machinations meant that he did not take on either role, but further research could cast greater light on the various dynamics at play in Brazilian politics in these moments.

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Nevertheless, while he was a legislator Castro put forward many political projects, largely in the areas of public health and agrarian reform (Archive of Câmara dos Deputados). He was President, for instance, of a cross-party Health Commission between 1955 and 1957, and pursued a number of legislative projects, including on the minimum wage and school meals. He intervened on many of the key issues of the day, such as on the founding of Brasília, and the inauguration of the new University of Brasília. Arguably the most significant area of activity in political terms in this period, however, continued to be his deep engagement with the regional politics of the Northeast, and the long and fraught negotiations over the establishment of SUDENE (Castro, 1965, Davies 2019a).

4. The International and the Exile

Alongside these Brazilian political engagements, however, Castro had been enthusiastically consolidating an international profile. This had begun in earnest with his work at the FAO in the 1940s, when he became a member of the FAO's international advisory group on nutrition. This engaged Castro in significant international scientific debates on nutritional minimums, and the role of international organizations in famines and world food policy. His status on the nutritional advisory council led to his engagement with the FAO expanding, and in 1952 he was elected as the Independent Chairman of the FAO's Executive Council. This oversight body had a somewhat ambiguous and contested role, but the Chairmanship had been held before de Castro by the influential figure of Viscount Stanley Bruce, an Australian who had played an important role in establishing food and malnutrition as an area of international institutional concern even before the Second World War, with his signal arguments about the need for a 'marriage of health and agriculture' at the League of Nations in the 1930s. Castro, therefore, stepped into illustrious shoes, and he sought to make the most of his status.

Castro involved himself in major debates over world food policy that had begun at the Hot Springs conference in the US, when the FAO had been conceived. These cut to the core of the debate over the new world order after WWII. John Boyd Orr had made it a central part of his efforts to make the FAO a powerful body, and though Orr had largely given up by the 1950s, Castro tried to get it back on the agenda. With his characteristic optimism he tried to make his

Chairmanship a campaigning platform. He managed to get a meeting with President Truman, and he took a central role in establishing support for the FAO's Global Campaign Against Hunger beyond the institution. Through a series of organizations Castro brought together religious activists like Abbé Pierre, with scientists and international figures such as Bertrand Russell to campaign for concerted international action against hunger. He saw this work as adjunct to his formal role at the FAO.

By the early 1960s, de Castro was exasperated with the FAO, and saw it in broad terms as a failure. Towards the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s he had a brief period as an influential diplomat for Brazil's interests, serving as ambassador to the UN from 1963-64. By 1964, however, it was to be his alliances in the Northeast, and on the domestic scene, which were to prove decisive. Though by 1964 the Peasant Leagues themselves were largely defunct, having succumbed to internal inconsistencies, and the rise of state and church-sponsored rural trade unions, what was more significant than their institutional existence was the rhetorical and political role they played in national politics. Following a number of victories for popular leftists in Pernambuco, and an unfolding crisis across the country, the Brazilian right, with the support of the United States, found it convenient to see the Peasant Leagues as an existential threat to the nation, and to capitalism (Castro 1966). The military coup of 1964 found Castro out of the country, in Geneva – a fact which Jean Ziegler argues 'saved his life' (2013). He was quickly put near the top of the list of figures whose political rights were stripped from them. He did not know it immediately, but Castro's long, complicated trajectory in Brazilian domestic politics was at an end.

Given the impossibility of working in Brazil, the only option for Castro was to continue his activities in exile. For continuing his endeavours, including the struggle against hunger that he always proudly claimed, Castro chose Paris, where he was accompanied by his wife Glauce and his daughters Ana Maria and Sônia, though his son Josué Fernando initially remained in Brazil. There, he worked with a number of associations and initiatives in the following nine years. The most important of these was the *Centre International pour le Développement* (CID), that he founded in the spring of 1964 with the help of a group of respected scholars and activists who accepted to sit in the Board of the co-founders, many of whom were among his life-long friends. Their list includes, among others, exponents of social Catholicism such as Abbé Pierre and Louis-Joseph Lebret, economists such as François Perroux and Raúl Prebisch,

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personalities of international cooperation such as Gunnar Myrdal and Michel Cépède, geographers such as Pierre Monbeig (*Contemporaine*, FD 446, 14/01). The project was sponsored by a number of Third Worldist leaders, including Senegalese President Léopold Senghor.

In Paris, Castro was watched by the French police, who collected a folder on his activities that survives at the Paris *Archives de la Préfecture de Police* (Folder 77w5005-641029) and even exchanged information with the Brazilian authorities on these subjects (Gomes 2016). Although the police classified Castro among eminent Leftists and noticed his appointment at the University of Paris 8 in Vincennes, which was considered as a refuge of radicals, they also accounted for the minimal concern that this peaceful Brazilian intellectual raised for French authorities in the troubled years around May 1968. The police officers saw Castro's initiatives as 'inoffensive', not least due to the increasing material difficulties that he encountered in establishing institutes like the CID. What emerges clearly from consulting the rich archives of the period 1964-1973, including the CID archives at the *Contemporaine* Library in Nanterre, Paris, and some of the folders of Castro's archive in Recife, is the general failure of the CID in matching the ambitious Castro's aim of transforming it in a global think-tank to advise governments of both the North and the South on matters of development. Castro's intermittent periods of ill-health in the 1950s and 1960s also frustrated his projects.

Due to economic problems and to the political isolation that nonconformists like Castro suffered during the Cold War world, at the time of Castro's sudden death in 1973, the CID had almost completely ceased its activities. The sources expose the increasing Castro's loneliness, which was accompanied by growing frustration at his marginalisation, and for the increasing feeling that his appeals were ignored by people in power. In the archive, one has a similar feeling reading the minutes of meetings of the CID or of other associations promoted by Castro, discussions which generally gathered a small number of quite close people, looking sometimes like semi-clandestine cenacles. This was arguably a frustrating experience for someone who used to speak at UN assemblies and to sell thousands of books. Andrade noted how Castro was already 56 when he was 'cassado' (Andrade and Magno, 2012, 556), so exile was especially disheartening for him, despite the optimism that he seemed to show in the earliest years.

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Yet, thanks to the support of French anti-colonialist geographer Jean Dresch (1905-1994), Castro was appointed as an Associate Professor of Geography at the Vincennes university (Contemporaine, FD 446, 18-04, Castro to Dresch, 14 October 1968), where he started a new intellectual adventure that brought him closer to radical milieus and can be seen as a significant late period in his work. In his preface to a book on world hunger, co-edited by J.C. Mouchel and Communist geographer Jean Suret-Canale (1921-2007), Castro discussed decolonisation as the ‘great social revolution of our days’ (Castro 1969a, 11) placing himself resolutely on the side of the ‘oppressed peoples’ (Castro 1969a, 16). Both as a professor at Vincennes and in his public activities in the late 1960s, Castro began to focus his attention not only on hunger, but on decolonization and disarmament. In innumerable speeches and interviews around the world he tied these projects together, arguing that the Great Powers had to disarm, and re-invest in food production to finally combat global hunger.

At Vincennes itself, Castro established an innovative geographical curriculum, working with young colleagues including Alain Bué and Magda Zanoni (Bué, 2009). His courses focussed on inequality, social justice, and human relations with the environment. He taught on underdevelopment, Latin American urbanism and, of course, the geography of hunger. His legacy as a pedagogue at Vincennes has been somewhat neglected, though the archive in Recife and at the university itself reveals an innovative approach to teaching what can be seen as an anti-colonial political ecology. In this period, he planned more large books, and major research projects, including on the Amazon and its changing ecology, but they were to remain unfulfilled.

Castro died on September 24th 1973, in Paris. His troubled relationship with the Brazilian state was to continue after his death, as his family struggled to repatriate his body. He is buried in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, his ideas continued to make their way through Latin American and worldwide critical scholarship. A leading figure of Brazilian critical geographies, Ruy Moreira, defined Castro’s work as a great inspiration for those who conceive geography as a powerful instrument to change the world (Moreira 2002). He has been credited, too, by Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves and Enrique Leff, as at the basis of a uniquely Latin American variant of the field of political ecology. More research remains to be done to fully understand the political and intellectual trajectories and legacies of this key figure of Brazilian 20th century geographical thought.

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Brief chronology

1908 Born in Recife

1929 Graduation in Medicine at the University of Rio de Janeiro

1933-1935 Professor of Geography and Vice-Principal of the College of Philosophy and Social Sciences at the University of Recife.

1935-1938 Professor of Anthropology at the University of the Federal District (Rio de Janeiro)

1939 Professor of Geography at the University of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)

1942-1944 President of the Brazilian Association of Nutrition

1946 Director of the Institute of Nutrition at the University of Brazil

1947 Member of the FAO Council

1951 Vice President of National Commission for Agrarian Policy

1952-1956 Chair of the FAO

1955 Elected Deputy for Pernambuco

1955 International Prize of Peace

1955 Officer of the *Légion d'Honneur*

1955-1962 Member of the Federal Brazilian Parliament

1957 President of the ASCOFAM (*Association Mondiale de Lutte Contre la Faim*)

1959 Re-elected Deputy for Pernambuco

1962 Brazil's Ambassador at the United Nations in Geneva

1963 Nomination for the Nobel Prize for Peace

1964 Cessation of political rights in Brazil and exile

1964 Foundation of the CID

1968 Associate Professor at the University of Paris 8 – Vincennes

1972 Participation at the Stockholm UN Conference on Human Development

1973 Death in Paris

Main associations (CEHIBRA, 164, 393)

Leader of the Pernambuco Government Commission for the Survey of the Conditions of the Working Class (1933)

Director of the Research and Culture Series at the Globo Publishing House

Member of the Brazilian Institute of Culture

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Member of the Medicine and Surgery Society of Rio de Janeiro
Member of the Brazilian Society of Social Medicine of Work
Member of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences
Member of the World Academy for Arts and Science, Stockholm
Corresponding Member of the Nutrition Foundation, New York
Member of the Brazilian Institute of Law, Medicine and Social Welfare
Honorary Member of the Brazilian Society of Military Medicine
Honorary member of the Brazilian Society of Biology
Member of the Interamerican Society of Anthropology and Geography
Member of the American Academy of Politics and Social Sciences
Member of the American Society of Public Health

Online sources

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