SUBVERSIVE SUBSISTENCE: PARAGUAY’S THREAT OF RURAL INSECURITY AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF CAMPESINO RESISTANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

In Paraguay’s rural northeast, small-scale farmers, called campesinos, are targeted by the military as sympathizers for El ejército del pueblo paraguayo (EPP), an alleged terrorist group comprising only 15 - 80 members nationwide. Since 2013, President Cartes’ administration has used a threat of rural insecurity to militarize campesino settlements that are peacefully resisting displacement from foreign agroindustry. This thesis considers perspectives from campesinos both living in the countryside and imprisoned in the national penitentiary to examine effects of increased militarization. Testimonies demonstrate that a discourse of rural terrorism serves as a legitimizing mechanism to criminalize and eliminate campesino movements as obstacles to agroindustrial expansion.

1. INTRODUCTION

“When the rich steal, it’s a scandal. When the poor steal, it’s violence. It’s insecurity.”

-Campesino leader in Tacumbú prison, 2015

Taking a break from writing field notes, I step onto the porch of the obispado\(^1\) to watch
the sunset, which casts an orange glow over Concepción. The city is sleepy and quiet, save for
the sound of motorcycles and scooters making their way down Concepción’s distinctive
cobblestone roads, and the occasional Roman candle firecrackers in the distance that are
somehow a hallmark of every Paraguayan city. If it were not for the unmarked trucks of the
Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta (Combined Task Force) patrolling the streets every few minutes, each
brimming with at least seven soldiers wearing full-battle regalia and armed with semi-automatic
weapons, one might never know that Paraguay is in a state of exception (\textit{estado de excepción}),
and that only a few kilometers outside of the city, down the unpaved and muddy roads of
campesino\(^2\) settlements, a war rages against guerrilla insurgency. The abundance of Brazilian
banks, soybean and cattle-ranching headquarters, however, offer a different story about
Concepción and other cities in Paraguay’s rural northeast; one that is ruled by foreign capital,
and whose state agents, many of which are stationed on the very \textit{estancias}\(^3\) and genetically-
modified fields that threaten the livelihoods of campesinos, serve as shepherds to a legacy of
privatization, displacement, and violence.

This thesis examines the impact that a national discourse of terrorism in Paraguay’s
countryside has on rural campesino communities resisting displacement from foreign

\(^1\) Bishopric
\(^2\) The direct translation of \textit{campesino} is “peasant”, though the latter term often carries negative connotations. I have chosen to use the Spanish form in this work as it is how the communities I work with identify themselves.
\(^3\) Estates
agroindustrial expansion. Using testimonies from campesinos living amidst increasing militarization, I argue that a discourse of terrorism and insecurity in Paraguay’s countryside serves as a legitimizing mechanism of the state to further criminalize, displace, and ultimately disarticulate campesino movements who are peacefully resisting globalized agroindustry.

One of Horacio Cartes’ first presidential orders following the 2013 elections introduced a major modification to Article 288 of Ley 1337/99, Paraguay’s law of internal defense, allowing for executive control of the military without the declaration of a state of emergency. Justified officially as a strictly preventative measure to protect citizens from guerrilla groups like Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo (henceforth EPP), this estado de excepción has allowed the Cartes administration to increase its military presence in the northeastern departments of Concepción, Amambay, Canindeyú, and San Pedro (Winer & Melfi, 2014:14).

A key provision of this modification allows a significant portion of the annual budget to be used for the creation of a special task force, la Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta (henceforth FTC), which combines the military, national police (FOPE), and national anti-drug agency (SENAD). While the FTC’s official responsibilities are to locate and eliminate rural guerrilla groups, they have had little success in extinguishing the EPP, whose total national membership was tallied at between fifteen to eighty individuals as of 2014. Further, national NGO’s and international human rights groups have documented that an unprecedented number of people who are targeted as logistical support of the EPP by the military task force are often criminalized and prosecuted without any evidence linking them to these groups (Cáceres & Valiente, 2014; Simon, 2015). It is worth noting that almost all of those targeted by the FTC are campesino community members and leaders, many of which belong to the most well-organized and influential campesino

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4 The Paraguayan People’s Army
organizations who are vocally opposed to foreign agroindustrial expansion in the countryside, primarily genetically-modified soybean production by transnational conglomerates and wealthy Brazilian farmers.

Criticisms of Ley 1337/99’s ratification, which many have deemed unconstitutional, question the motivations of the Paraguayan government and view this increase in military power as a novel attempt from the state to extinguish ongoing rural land-conflicts between campesinos, agro-industrial conglomerates, and Brazilian soy barons (Garmendia, 2015).

The criminalization of campesinos to dispossess them from their land is a well-documented process in Paraguay (Sánchez, 2012). Global market pressures on Asunción’s urban oligarchic elites to industrialize and commodify the rural countryside for export agriculture has long been a trait of Paraguay’s modernization period, and has ushered in a national discourse common in many Latin American countries: that campesinos are backward and persistent thorns in the side of so-called “Third World” development (Ibid; Hetherington, 2014; Vasquéz-León & González Aguilera, p. 40). Thus, over the last fifty years, Paraguay’s land reform policy has prioritized foreign agro-industrial expansion and wealthy Brazilian soy barons, while directly and covertly criminalizing agricultura familiar. Campesinos who are resisting displacement by foreign agroindustry in conflict zones of the EPP and ACA however, are not simply criminalized as anachronistic threats to modernization, but the alleged presence of domestic guerrilla groups in the region has linked terrorism with peaceful resistance.

State and corporate violence against Paraguayan campesinos, compounded by processes of criminalization, is likewise not a recent phenomenon. Since the beginning of the soy boom in the early 1990s, at least 115 campesino movement leaders and members opposed to monoculture

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5 In response to growing trends of monoculture crop and livestock production for export, campesinos often use the term agricultura familiar (family agriculture) to describe their form of livelihood production, which includes both minifundia subsistence farming and cash crops to be sold locally.
soy production have been assassinated or “disappeared” (Castillo et al, 2014, p. 6). The climax of this violence is often attributed to a 2012 incident in the district of Curuguaty, when 300 armed police illegally engaged in the removal of campesinos from a plot of land, resulting in the death of eleven campesinos and six officers (Winer & Melfi, 2014, p. 12). Now emblematically referred to as the “Curuguaty Massacre”, this watershed moment served as a catalyst for the 2012 parliamentary coup that ousted left-of-center president Fernando Lugo, interrupting Paraguay’s brief opening of its political system as part of a process of transitional democracy that started at the end of the Stroessner regime and confirming for many Paraguayans the magnitude at which agribusinesses have infiltrated political spaces (Hetherington, 2014; Szucs, 2013, p. 410-12).

In order to examine the impact of an increased military presence for Paraguay’s rural population, this work seeks to address the following question: What are the effects of a threat of insecurity in Paraguay’s countryside for campesinos who are peacefully resisting displacement from globalized agroindustry? This relates to three broader questions: how is this narrative of insecurity produced; what are its implications; and how are violence and power intimately linked with processes of criminalization of campesinos?

As I discuss in later chapters, a framework of political ecology is useful to understand the construction of narratives of terrorism and criminality against campesinos as a mechanism of the Paraguayan state to dispossess campesinos from their land and make way for encroaching foreign agroindustry. The perspectives provided by understanding these social processes as intimately connected to land and the environment is an important lens for discussing the criminalization of Paraguayan campesinos as it allows an entry point toward viewing local issues of land-tenure within a broader network of global and capitalist interests.
Methodology

This work is based on three and a half months in the field, comprised of two trips to Paraguay in June and July of 2015 and 2016. In total, I conducted forty-five semi-structured interviews with campesinos, journalists, current and ex-politicians, government bureaucrats, academics, and activists who are involved in the issue of rural militarization and hold stake in Paraguayan agroindustry. Interviews ranged between thirty to ninety minutes in length.

In order to document the effects of increased militarization as a result of the presence of rural terrorism, I conducted interviews with campesino community members and leaders from the departments of Canindeyú, Caaguazú, Concepción, and San Pedro, each of which have been identified by the military as hotbeds of guerrilla terrorism since the appearance of the EPP in 2008. Interviewees in each community were identified utilizing a snowball sampling method. Additionally, I spent time interviewing campesinos from these communities who are imprisoned in Tacumbú, Paraguay’s national penitentiary, for allegedly providing logistical support to the EPP. Interviews with campesino community members and leaders were largely informal, allowing participants to lead the conversation to themes that they felt were relevant and were comfortable speaking about. Initial questions in these interviews focused on obtaining campesinos’ personal testimony of these events, including opinions about why they were targeted by the FTC, and the impacts that their persecution has had on their organizing efforts for peacefully resisting displacement from foreign agroindustrial expansion.

To gain an alternate perspective of the allegations of human rights abuses committed by the FTC against campesinos, I also interviewed politicians who were either actively or previously involved in producing legislation concerning Paraguayan national security and the EPP. While excerpts from these interviews are not cited in this thesis, the perspectives from
these conversations help contextualize the logic of the agroindustry-friendly Colorado Party and illuminate the disconnect between campesino communities and the policy level on the issue of rural militarization and terrorism. I also wrote formal letters directed to the current minister of defense and minister of the interior, though despite being thoroughly vetted by each’s secretaries, neither responded to my request for an interview.

Recent interventions in political ecology assert that because ecological systems (and all systems, for that matter) are embedded and therefore subject to political and economic forces, the research produced around these systems must abandon all false pretenses of neutrality, and explicitly align the scholarship for a stated cause (Peet & Watts, 1996). To produce scholarship from a position of impartiality would be an inaccurate description of reality that implicitly endorses the hegemonic forces of domination. In keeping with this theme, it is important to note that a significant portion of my time in the field focuses on narratives opposing the model of agro-industrial production, militarization of the countryside, and the criminalization of campesinos. An example of this is my participation in manifestations for the trial proceedings of the Curuguaty Massacre, where 11 campesinos were tried and ultimately condemned to 35 years in prison for the death of five police officers in the violent land removal. Although my observations from these events are inextricably rooted within a particular political slant, this method draws from Heynen and Van Sant’s (2015) vision of political ecologies of activism, wherein a researcher’s field experiences are enriched by participation in direct action politics, as it offers a lens for “understanding both the state from the outside as well as praxis more generally” (p. 169). By focusing participant observation on resistance movements, this work thus seeks to challenge official narratives of criminality and terrorism in peaceful campesino communities.
To protect the identities of participants in this research, the names of most interview subjects have been replaced with pseudonyms or, where necessary, are simply referred to as campesino community members or leaders. The names of public officials and those that have explicitly requested that I reveal their identities have not been changed.

Organization

This work has been divided into seven chapters. Following this introduction, I provide a brief background on the history of agroindustrial expansion in Paraguay and the subsequent rise in rural violence against campesinos, highlighting important political and social moments in constructing campesinos as criminals and trespassers on their own land. From this point, the differing accounts of the emergence of guerrilla uprisings in Paraguay’s countryside are examined, which some have argued is tied to a growing national resentment of foreign agro-industrial expansion. Finally, this chapter discusses the Paraguayan state’s response to a growing narrative of terrorism through the modification of Ley 1337/99 in 2013.

In chapter three, I present a literature review to help outline a framework for political ecology in its relationship to violence and power in Paraguay. Drawing from Scott’s (1998) idea of the legibility of capitalism and Polanyi’s (1944) “fictitious commodities” I interface important moments in Paraguay’s history of land conflict with recent interventions in political ecology concerning processes of criminalization, displacement, and violence, to examine how peaceful resistance has evolved first from a criminal act to one of terrorist subversion. While there are myriad types of violence that can be linked to Paraguay’s land conflict, I will focus primarily on Galtung’s (2002) understanding of structural violence as historically and systemically entrenched

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6 This work does not attempt to provide an in-depth examination of the roots of the armed guerrilla groups themselves, which has been a hotly debated subject for which there are multiple conflicting narratives. Rather, I deal specifically with the way their presence is utilized as a political mechanism to legitimize state intervention. For a detailed discussion of the EPP and ACA, see Hugo Pereira’s work: El EPP, Defensa Reaccionaria de un Modelo de Desarrollo Desigual y Excluyente.
socioeconomic inequality, which sets the stage for legitimizing direct-political violence (Bourgois, 2001, p. 3) by the Paraguayan state against campesinos.

In chapter four, I examine the way a narrative of insecurity is deployed against the most organized and influential campesino organizations and leaders, intersecting peaceful resistance with guerrilla terrorism. I discuss field experiences with campesino communities located in so-called “conflict zones” in Concepción, San Pedro, and Caaguazú who have been wrongly persecuted for their alleged participation in guerrilla terrorism.

Chapter five explores the effect that increased militarization as a result of a narrative of rural insecurity has had on campesino resistance to displacement and halting agroindustrial expansion, which has contributed to a disarticulation of resistance both locally and at a national level. This section highlights how the presence of the FTC in rural communities has created a culture of fear for campesinos who previously participated in political organizing, in which community members are converted into surveillance mechanisms and state-sponsored violence is routinized as a part of daily life (Taussig, 1984). Further, the testimonies in this chapter suggest that not only does a narrative of insecurity disarticulate campesinos directly affected by increased militarization, it also disciplines any person or entity that attempts to challenge this narrative of campesinos as terrorists; even academics, politicians, journalists, and outside observers.

Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the modification of Ley 1337/99 from a program evaluation perspective, in which the theory that increased military presence reduces guerrilla insurgency is called into question. The lack of success on the part of the Paraguayan state in extinguishing guerrilla terrorism has pushed the current narrative of insecurity to its limits, in which doubts over the EPP and new spaces of campesino resistance emerge as a result.
Chapter 7 synthesizes the arguments made in this thesis and suggests that the discourse of rural terrorism serves as a legitimizing mechanism to criminalize and violently eliminate campesino movements as obstacles to agroindustrial expansion.
2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAND CONFLICT, CRIMINALIZATION, AND RURAL TERRORISM IN PARAGUAY

Conflicts over issues of land-tenure are complex and rampant in Paraguay. To understand how a small, so-called guerrilla group in the eastern countryside has become synonymous with the non-violent campesino movement for land reform, it is necessary to first contextualize how the country’s long history of land privatization has been accompanied by criminalization and violent dispossession of its large rural population. In this chapter, I trace Paraguay’s history of unequal access to land, and discuss how the entrance of transnational agroindustry has contributed to a legacy of criminalization of agricultura familiar, and ultimately, how peaceful resistance from displacement has been linked to terrorist subversion.

From Subsistence to Enclosure (1800s – 1950s)

Although not always a landlocked country, Paraguay has long relied on an agrarian economy, with its national culture of subsistence farming dating back to the dictatorship of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia in 1814. In efforts to break free as a satellite of Spain after Paraguay’s independence in 1811, De Francia sought to change the country’s dependence on foreign powers by imprisoning or exiling the colonial elite, introducing reform policies that nationalized half of the country’s arable land, and encouraging campesinos to work in minifundios to produce sustenance for distribution throughout the country (Dangl, 2014). This nation-building project of subsistence farming lasted for almost six decades until De Francia’s death in 1840, and is often lauded by campesino movements for establishing agricultura familiar as a cornerstone of the Paraguayan way of life.
It was not until the War of the Triple Alliance in 1864, mounted by Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay\textsuperscript{7} over access to the Rio de la Plata river basin, that this model of production was forced to change. Paraguay’s defeat in the war resulted in the loss of almost half of the country’s territory, including its access to the ocean. Further, by the end of the war in 1870, between 90-95\% of the male Paraguayan population had been killed (Farwell, 2001), and the previously thriving social structure of subsistence farming had been decimated (Ross, 2014).

In a process resembling Klein’s (2007) descriptions of disaster capitalism, the privatization of Paraguay’s state-owned lands began almost immediately in the post-war period. Supposedly as a measure to stabilize the weakened economy after the war, the government began to sell land which was nationalized by the state during the dictatorship of De Francia to large industries with investments in foreign capital (Pereira, 2015, p. 5). In 1883, the first law officiating the privatization of lands was passed by the legislature, giving the Paraguayan government executive power to sell off land owned by the state. While this law stipulated that the lands preferably be sold to the people who were currently occupying them, the immediate and steep rent hikes accompanying the law’s implementation, coupled with an extremely short debt-payment period prevented many small-scale campesino farmers from purchasing the land they had lived on for generations (Pastore, 1972, p. 213).

The intent to privatize land away from small-scale producers was made even more evident in 1885, when the legislature passed another law allowing the complete denationalization of state-owned lands whether campesinos were living on them or not. Between 1870 and 1914, it is estimated that more than twenty-six million hectares of land were sold to private companies in

\textsuperscript{7} Revisionist histories suggest that the British Empire influenced Brazil’s participation in this war, as Brazil was a satellite for cotton production for the United Kingdom. There is still a debate as to whether this influence was political, economic, or both. See Chiavenato, J. J. (1982). Genocídio americano: A guerra do Paraguai (14a. ed.). São Paulo, Brasil: Brasiliense.
this way (Benitez Almeida & Orúe Pozzo, 2016, p. 5). This rapid privatization of state-owned lands accelerated the displacement of many campesino communities, while others found themselves bifurcated and fenced-in between large private estates.

The social conditions created by the expropriation of state lands at the turn of the twentieth century to private corporations caused tensions to swell between peasant farmers and the state in the proceeding decades, and campesinos grew increasingly resistant to forced displacements, the proceedings of which would frequently result in violence (Pastore, 1972, p. 389). By 1944, the dictatorship of Higinio Morínigo reacted to this popular resistance by introducing a decree that deemed campesinos who refused to vacate their lands as trespassers subject to criminal prosecution (p. 390). Up until this point, campesinos who chose not to vacate their land had some semblance of protection from a 1918 homesteading law which assured the equal redistribution of land titles for peasant farmers that were actively cultivating the land. This decree thus introduced a legal validity to the criminalization of the Paraguayan peasantry and of the small-scale agrarian model of agricultura familiar, from which violent displacement—marked by the burning of crops, raping of women, and assassination of peasant leaders—was legitimized by law (Ibid).

**Stroessner Years (1954-1970s)**

Often under the guise of populism, land-reform policies in the past fifty years have, without exception, always favored Brazilian agricultural barons, foreign agroindustrial conglomerates, and Paraguay’s small wealthy elite over its large campesino population (Galeano, 2003; Elgert, 2016, p. 550). To this, the authoritarian dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, commencing in 1954, served to accelerate the privatization of lands through policies that favored political cronyism under the pretense of redistribution.
Perhaps the biggest example of this process was the creation of the *Instituto de Bienestar Rural* (IBR), a government program introduced in 1963 for the official purpose of enacting campesino demands for land reform, who were increasingly participating in political action under the protection of the Catholic church through *Las Ligas Agrarias*\(^8\) (Kleinpenning & Zoomers, 1988; Pereira, 2015, p. 6). From the time in which the IBR was established until the end of Stroessner’s regime in 1989, 150,000 displaced campesino families were relocated to state-owned lands that were left-over from the widespread privatization which occurred at the turn of the twentieth century (Diaz, 2014).

Despite the seemingly populist action of redistributing land titles to thousands of campesinos, however, the titles granted to campesinos by the IBR were on unmaintained and largely uncultivatable lands (Vásquez-León, 2017; 21). The upending of campesino communities through this relocation, and the individualized “engineering style” structure of the IBR’s land plots, served to disarticulate peasant farmer’s sense of community organization (p. 22). Further, between 1967 and 1977 the IBR simultaneously sold large swaths of Paraguay’s eastern countryside to the richest allies of the Stroessner administration for prices that fell well below their market value (Elgert, 2016, p. 550). It was a common practice of the new owners of these lands, many of whom were prominent military leaders and political elites of the right-wing Colorado Party, to then resell them at higher prices to Brazilian agricultural companies who soon would begin to mechanize the region with large-scale agricultural production for export (Nickson, 2005).

Referred to by many campesinos as *las tierras malhabidas*—meaning literally “ill-gotten lands”—this redistribution marks the beginning of a new era of conflict between the Paraguayan

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8 The Christian Agrarian Leagues were a rural church-based movement to provide organizing spaces safe from government repression for campesinos fighting for land reform.
state and campesinos, who were exponentially displaced by this process of bureaucratic appropriation (Pereira, 2015: p.16; Castillo et al, 2014). The Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (CVJ), which was created in 2008 as a step toward officially recognizing the abuses of the dictatorship, discovered that at least 6,700,000 hectares of arable land were usurped in this way during Stroessner’s regime (Comisión de Verdad y Justicia, 2008). Further, during the democratization period between 1989 and 2003⁹, an additional 980,000 hectares were transferred to the State’s hands through process of adjudication (Lajtman, 2014, p. 22). In total, las tierras malhabidas represent more than one fifth of Paraguay’s total territory, and approximately 33% of its arable land (Castillo et al, 2014, p. 16; Pereira, 2015, p. 6).

Rise of mechanized agriculture and campesino resistance (1970s – 1980s)

Beginning in the 1970s, Brazilian immigration to Paraguay’s eastern countryside rose sharply in response to the massive sale of lands in the eastern countryside, the full market price of which was still much lower in comparison to the price per hectare of arable land in Brazil. The Paraguayan government actively encouraged Brazilians to immigrate to Paraguay throughout this period, as there existed a perception that they would bring knowledge of modernized agricultural techniques and “often had access to capital and credit” (Menegotto, 2004, p. 41; Vásquez-León, 2017, p. 21). To this end, many Brazilians who immigrated to Paraguay during this time were wealthy agroindustry owners who brought highly mechanized agricultural practices to the region, most notably the production of genetically modified soybeans for export (Fogel, 1989). The price of land was also driven up as a result of this mass migration, rising in value per hectare by almost 20 times between 1973 and 1994 (Kohlhepp, 1999).

Most commonly referred to as a portmanteau of the two nationalisms, *brasiguayos* currently make up a significant portion of the Paraguayan population and are juggernauts in the agroindustrial sector. As of 2014, it is estimated that 500,000 Brazilians live in Paraguay’s eastern region, the equivalent of approximately 10% of the country’s total population, and control more than 50% of the nation’s agroindustrial corporations (Glausser, 2009, p. 56; Blanc, 2014, p. 2).

The rise of foreign mechanized agroindustry accelerated displacement of rural subsistence communities, and campesinos increasingly turned to political organization in order to resist violent land removal. By the early 1980s, campesinos began organizing massive actions to reoccupy unused private lands slated for agroindustrial development as a method of applying pressure against the export-agriculture dependent government (Fogel, 1989, p. 70).

In response to these land reoccupations, which are still largely used as a peaceful political recourse by campesino organizations, the Paraguayan state reacted with greater repression during land removals, oftentimes involving private paramilitary forces hired by the Stroessner regime (Fogel, 1989). Campesinos who were reoccupying lands were also frequently criminalized as communist sympathizers, and by 1976, the Colorado Party published a manual that described peasant organizers and the Christian Agrarian Leagues as a guerrilla organization.

**Paraguay’s Soy Boom**

The official end of authoritarianism with the fall of Alfredo Stroessner’s regime in 1989 did not steep the repressive practices of violent displacement in Paraguay’s countryside. On the

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10 While wealthy Brasiguayos are often highlighted in scholarship examining the impacts of agroindustrial production in Paraguay, recent literature suggests that there is more nuance to the Brasiguayo identity in terms of class and power dynamics contingent on respective socioeconomic standings within the country. See Blanc, J. (2014). *Enclaves of inequality: Brasiguaios and the transformation of the Brazil-Paraguay borderlands*. The Journal of Peasant Studies.

contrary, the spread of genetically modified soy into the country’s eastern region from Brazil served to accelerate land removals and violence against the campesino population that were initiated during the dictatorship. Beginning in the 1990s as a result of a sharp increase in the price of cattle-feed in the global market, transgenic soybeans quickly became a lucrative export crop for large-scale brasiguayo farmers, Paraguay’s affluent elite, and international conglomerates such as Cargill, Bunge, and Monsanto (Glausser, 2009). The highly-mechanized production of GMO soy required very little manual labor, and thus campesinos could not even work for agroindustrial conglomerates that displaced them from their land, as is the case in other historical processes of dispossession.

The expansion of globalized monoculture soybean production, which occupies more than 80% of all cultivatable lands, has contributed to significant displacement and out-migration of small scale farmers, who flee to Paraguay’s capital or Argentina in search of work (Dangl, 2014; Guereña, 2013; Vásquez-León, 2017b, p. 62). As of 2014, at least 100,000 campesinos have been displaced from their homes by. The use of pesticides and fumigation of the genetically modified soy plants also accelerates this displacement as it contaminates water supplies and poisons the air for many miles, aggravating health risks for rural campesino communities living near these farms (Gray, 2011).

Currently, soybean production makes up 40% of Paraguay’s exports and 10% of its GDP, which grew by 15% in 2010, the second fastest GDP growth in the world (Guereña, 2013; Hobbs, 2012). For a relatively small country of approximately seven million inhabitants,

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12 Emerging research has begun to challenge these numbers, suggesting that many more campesinos have been displaced by soy production. A recent study suggests that up to 900,000 rural communities have been forced to migrate to urban areas, creating a misery belt along the outskirts of Asunción. See Riquelme, Q., Vera, E. (2013). *La otra cara de la soja: El impacto del agronegocio en la agricultura familiar y la producción de alimentos*. Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE). Asunción.
Paraguay is currently one of the largest exporters of soy in the world economy, behind economic giants like the United States, Brazil, and Argentina (USDA, 2015, p. 28).

Paraguay’s transformation into a “Soy Republic” parallels both historically and geographically with a rise of violence in the countryside, enacted by private hired sicarios\textsuperscript{13} of Brazilian soy barons and state-land removals (Castillo et al, 2014). Since the fall of the Stroessner dictatorship in 1989, at least 115 campesino leaders have been assassinated, and even more have been “disappeared” (p. 6). As I discuss further in the proceeding chapters, this violence is legitimized by the media and state who view campesinos as backward criminals that pose a threat to the country’s modernization (Hetherington, 2013, p. 82; Tamara, 2014).

As campesino organizations reacted to the onslaught of violent displacement spurred by encroaching agroindustry in the 1990s, Paraguayan laws likewise shifted to target peaceful resistance of campesinos and protect the interest of agroindustrial barons, though such changes were often made under the pretense of improving rural security (Lourdes, 2010). The most notable shift occurred when two landmark articles were introduced that increased the punitive measures for land reoccupations. The first was Article 19 of the 1992 Paraguayan constitution, which allowed people to be held in preventative imprisonment “only when it is indispensable for the diligence of the trial”\textsuperscript{14}. While the text of this law was relatively innocuous, the vague language allowed for a continued criminalization of the peasantry under the supposedly democratic government of Andrés Rodriguez, who was a member of Stroessner’s Colorado Party (Hanratty & Meditz, 1988).

The second measure, Article 142, was introduced to Paraguay’s legal code in 1997 making the invasion of private property a criminally punishable act:

\textsuperscript{13} Hitmen
\textsuperscript{14} Own translation. See: http://jme.gov.py/transito/leyes/1992.html
“He who individually or in concert with other people and without the consent of
the owner enters with violence or secrecy to a private property and installs
himself on it, shall be punished with up to two years in prison or fine”

The semantics of this latter measure speak clearly to the state’s view of campesinos, who
already perceived the peasantry as inherently violent and clandestine, even prior to the
emergence of the EPP. Many rural communities saw these articles as a pretext to strategically
target campesinos who were organizing politically and to deter others from resisting land
removal to make way for agroindustrial expansion. To this, between 1990 and 2005, 357 land
removals were carried out and 7,296 arrests were made against campesino communities using the
legal guidelines set by Articles 19 and 142, and the militaristic strategies utilized by the state
would frequently escalate to violence (Peroni, 2010, p. 10).

The epitome of this violence is often attributed to the 2012 Curuguaty Massacre, when
three hundred heavily-armed police officers ambushed the campesino community of Marina
Kué, resulting in the death of eleven campesinos and five police officers. In the eastern
department of Canindeyú, Marina Kué sits on the Campos Morumbí estate owned by the family
of the wealthy landowner Blas Riquelme, who rent the land to Brazilian agroindustries that
produce genetically modified soybeans (Castillo et al, 2014, p. 24). Despite the settlement being
occupied by only sixty people, including women and children, and whose only weapons were
crude homemade rifles used for hunting, campesino leaders of Marina Kué were charged and
convicted of ambushing the police and initiating the bloodshed. None of the police officers were
charged in this violent land removal, despite an international team of investigators discovering
strong evidence of state repression, including the fact that several of the campesinos who were

15 Own translation. See: http://www.oas.org/dil/esp/codigo_penal_paraguay.pdf
16 Loosely translated from Guaraní, kué (sometimes written cué) means “no longer”, and is a common suffix used in
naming campesino communities that are reoccupying tierra malhabida.
killed were shot in the back of the head at point blank range (Arnoso et al, 2015, p. 141). One week after the massacre, center-left President Fernando Lugo was ousted from office by process of parliamentary coup mounted by the Colorado Party for allegedly inciting violence through his political platform of moderate land reform (CODEHUPY, 2012).

**Emergence of the Paraguayan People’s Army**

By 2008, 76% of the entire Paraguayan territory had been slated for monoculture agroindustry and cattle-ranching, and tensions between the state and campesinos continued to mount when the Paraguayan People’s Army (EPP) first surfaced in Concepción, the country’s rural department with the most unequal distribution of land and the highest concentration of agroindustrial production17 (Riquelme and Vera, 2013, p. 35; Pereira, 2015, p. 18). On the night of March 12 of that year, a Brazilian-owned estancia in the community of Kurusu de Hierro was vandalized by seven or eight men, lighting a genetically modified soy field on fire and destroying a tractor used to harvest its seeds. A small pamphlet was left at the scene that read “The Paraguayan People’s Army, Commander Germán Aguayo. Land for Paraguayan campesinos. Those who kill the people with pesticides will pay in this way” (Colmán, 2011, p. 2, own translation).

Although the official authors of this pamphlet and fire remain unknown, the owner of the burned estancia’s report to the police accused community members from Kurusu de Hierro as the perpetrators in this attack (Pereira, 2015, p. 18). The community members in Kurusu de Hierro rejected this accusation, and instead blamed the Brazilian estancia owner for the fire, insisting that the action was used to scapegoat them to support the common stereotype that campesinos

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17 A 2013 study by Servicio Paz y Justicia Paraguay (SERPAJ PY) discovered that in the department of Concepción with over 200,000 rural inhabitants, .25% of the population owns more than 77% of the department’s 1,800,000 hectares of arable land. See [http://www.serpajpy.org.py/?p=1237](http://www.serpajpy.org.py/?p=1237)
are destructive to the natural environment (Ibid). What is certain is that with this act of conflagration a narrative of terrorism was reintroduced in the Paraguayan campo.

A few days after the incident, the district attorney’s office from the township of Horqueta made a declaration about the EPP based on the pamphlet that was recovered on the estancia, stating that the guerrilla group could be related to campesino organizations interested in accessing lands controlled by Brazilian agroindustrial business owners (Pereira, 2014, p 14).

In the years immediately following the initial appearance of the EPP, a series of high-profile kidnappings, thefts, and vandalisms were attributed to the guerrilla group, which Lugo’s government deemed as a Marxist-Leninist organization hiding in heavily wooded areas, particularly within campesino communities (Pereira, 2015, p. 9; Lajtman Bereicoa, 2014). This intersection of peasant settlements as guerrilla hotbeds opened a pathway for military and police raids to be carried-out indiscriminately in these communities, giving rise to the criminalization of various campesino leaders and organizations who were influential in the peaceful movement against foreign agroindustry (Pereira, 2015).

When campesino leaders were inevitably killed in the course of these witch-hunts, their deaths were often described by the state and media as a settling of scores between feuding factions of the EPP (ABC Color, 2014). In one particular instance in 2009, a campesino leader from Hugua Ñandu who spoke strongly against transgenic agroindustry was killed in his home, shortly after the Paraguayan government began an initiative to eliminate rural terrorism by deploying almost a thousand armed police and military officials to search for the group consisting of no more than twenty so-called guerrilla fighters nationwide (Castillo et al, 2014; p. 11).
After Lugo’s ousting in 2012 and the threat to increased taxation on agroindustrial imports was over, a national campaign of militarization and surveillance of campesino communities was implemented under the pretext of addressing the apparent problem of rural insecurity. With the Colorado Party back in power, newly elected president Horacio Cartes signed a decree in 2013 that modified Paraguay’s law of internal defense, Ley 1337. While the ratification was proposed as a method of addressing guerrilla insurgency in the countryside, the official goals of the measure are fundamentally vague, and are explained on a short, three-page document released to the public in 2013. Translated from Spanish, the stated purpose of the law is broad and sweeping: “For which the elements of combat from the nation’s armed forces are made available in operations for internal defense in the departments of Concepción, San Pedro, and Amambay”\(^\text{18}\).

The 2013 modification of Law 1337/99 placed Paraguay under a “state of exception”, which allows the President central control over the military and less transparency to the public in order to defend national security. While the Paraguayan constitution stipulates that a state of exception should last no longer than six months, the current state of exception has now been in place for four and a half years (Winer & Melfi, 2015, p. 6).

Though vague, there are seven articles on the last section of the three-page decree that attempt to outline the program’s functions. Of particular importance in the current work are articles two and three, which appoint a Paraguayan Brigadier general to head a new government department called “Internal Defense Operations”, and the creation of a joint task force combining the military, the national police (FOPE), and the national anti-drug organization (SENAD) to eliminate terrorist cells in key departments in Paraguay’s rural northeast.

\(^{18}\) Own translation. See [http://www.presidencia.gov.py/archivos/documentos/presidencia-9664befae514a7fe1b79d0e5a0ee9e37200901d8380ba4d694b6b48069705a43.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gov.py/archivos/documentos/presidencia-9664befae514a7fe1b79d0e5a0ee9e37200901d8380ba4d694b6b48069705a43.pdf)
While there is still scant literature assessing the effectiveness of Ley 5036/13 from a program evaluation approach, much work in this area has been done to indict the thesis that increased state presence through militarization leads to pacification of guerrilla insurgency. Serpaj PY, a Paraguayan NGO published a 60-page report in 2015 examining the impacts of Ley 5036/13 in which the program’s theory is put into question (Mendonça, 2015). The report discovers that the increased militarization promulgated by the FTC has seen a rise in human rights abuses against alleged terrorist sympathizers who are later found to be completely innocent (Ibid).

Conclusion

The historical construction of campesinos as criminals is directly tied to Paraguay’s long legacy of land privatization, which was initiated after the Triple Alliance War and deepened throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, periods which saw the introduction of provisions that sharply increased the legal repercussions for resisting land dispossession and legitimized violent displacement. Stroessner’s dictatorship added to this narrative of criminality notions of guerrilla insurgency for campesinos participating in land reoccupations of “tierras malhabidas” through semantic coding as communists. The surge of mechanized agriculture and genetically modified soy production between the 1970s and 1990s accelerated displacement, and aggravated relationships between the Paraguayan peasantry, agroindustrial conglomerates, and the state. By the time the EPP emerged in 2008, the highly unequal distribution of land and negative social classification of the campesinado allowed the presence of guerrilla insurgency to be easily linked to rural subsistence farmers, a narrative which has since been used by the FTC as a pretext to militarize campesino settlements and accelerate violent displacement. In the following chapter, a framework of political ecology is implemented to describe how the media and State participate to
construct a discourse of rural insecurity and further criminalize campesino movements and leaders.
3. TOWARD A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

As globalization and neoliberal reform policies continue to infiltrate Paraguay’s countryside in pursuit of the accumulation of capital, violent conflict is played out between campesinos, the State, and agroindustrial conglomerates over access to, and ownership of, land and natural resources. Scholarship in political ecology presents new opportunities to understand these violent conflicts over land and the natural environment by prioritizing the dialectical relationships between social means of production and nature, such that environmental conflicts are viewed through the lens of power relations that occur in society as part of the complex interplay between local and global political, historical, and economic realities.

In this chapter, I interface emerging research in the field of political ecology with the historical processes of criminalization of campesino movements in Paraguay, and discuss how multiple types of violence, particularly structural and direct-political, are useful lenses to understand the construction of non-violent campesinos with legitimate demands as terrorists. The framework discussed in this chapter is helpful for understanding the discursive presence of domestic terrorist groups in Paraguay’s countryside as an iteration of a longstanding attempt to remove campesinos as obstacles to the expansion of foreign agroindustry. Further, I explore how this linkage between a discourse of an internal enemy to the Paraguayan state and nonviolent resistance is used to legitimize violence against innocent campesinos who are peacefully resisting displacement from transgenic soy production.

Political ecology and Paraguay

While there is no single definition for political ecology, it can broadly be understood as a discursive field combining theoretical frameworks that draw from disciplines in both the social and natural sciences, in order to comprehend the often complex and conflicting relationship
between local, regional and global socio-environmental realities (Robbins, 2011). Contrary to an apolitical ecology, a political ecology is one that views natural systems as power-laden, rather than politically inert (p. 13). In this framework, ecology, political economy, and sociology, to name a few, are put into conversation with one another to explain how developing social discourses such as economic policy affect the environment, and vice versa (Mitchell, 2002).

With 80% of all arable land legally belonging to only the top 3% of the population, Paraguayan campesinos make up 60% of the country’s population and are the poorest subsistence farming communities in all of the Southern Cone (Dangl, 2013; Garmendia, 2015). The spread of genetically-modified soy monoculture into the land-locked country from Brazil during the early 1990s has greatly accelerated this conflict (Abramson, 2009; Dangl, 2013; Girauod, 2014), and despite the increasing rate of human rights violations occurring around agroindustrial production, official narratives from the Paraguayan state and media rarely make this link.

A relatively recent example of this disconnect can be found in the effects of the 2015 El Niño hurricane, when Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay experienced the worst flooding from the hurricane in over 50 years (Greenpeace Argentina, 2015). It is estimated that over 100,000 people in Paraguay were displaced from the flooding, which disproportionately affected landless campesinos living in Asunción’s misery belt. A study conducted by Greenpeace Argentina (2015) associated the cause of the extreme flooding to the deforestation of nearly two million hectares of forest since 2007 to make room for monoculture soy production. The dense forests of the Chaco would normally serve as a natural hydrological regulator that would absorb the water and prevent excess runoff, but heavy deforestation has left the bare ground oversaturated and prone to flooding (Ibid).
Despite Greenpeace’s findings, the Paraguayan media has largely ignored the connection between deforestation for soy production and the devastation caused by the 2015 El Niño-related floods. In preparing for this work, I asked an environmental scientist in Asunción, where I might be able to find national Paraguayan news articles linking these two themes, to which she laughed. “Soy is like god over here. No one will do anything against it, nor would they dream of it. It’s complete ṇembotavy"¹⁹, she said. Indeed, in most of my research searching for the negative impacts of deforestations related to soy production on the El Niño floods, the only news articles I could find discussing both Paraguay’s soy industry and the effects of the hurricane lauded the impact that the heavy rains would have on future yields of the cash crop. One article from MercoPress, titled “Record Soy and Corn Crops Forecasted in South America due to El Niño”, exemplifies this dynamic particularly well, and was published amidst thousands of displaced campesinos fleeing their flooded homes (MercoPress, 2015).

A traditional ecological assessment of the El Niño floods leaves unaddressed the social motivations for deforestation, which is rooted in Paraguay’s embeddedness as a satellite of the globalized economy, in which transnational businesses and the country’s elite profit from the resources of the nation at the expense of the Paraguayan poor and the environment. Similarly, a strictly political economy approach may not bring the ecological impacts of deforestation into question by foregrounding the social means of production over the environment. Combining themes from each thus allows a dialectical perspective of the complex impacts of capitalist relations on society and the natural environment, such that soy production can be viewed as adversely affecting both. In this way, political ecology allows us to ask the question: environmental impacts for whom?

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¹⁹ A common guaraní phrase meaning to “play dumb”
In *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi (1946) implements the idea of “fictitious commodities” to suggest that the most dangerous manifestation of the capitalist model of accumulation, the so-called “free market”, relies on the commodification of objects that are otherwise not considered commodities (p. 145). Fictitious commodities are understood here as those that are not created for the sole purpose of sale on the market, yet are assigned quantifiable value under the capitalist project. Recent political ecology scholars have furthered this idea in their descriptions of “legibility”, wherein natural objects are made legible under the lens of capitalism by process of translation (Robertson, 2006).

In order to assign monetary value to fictitious commodities like land and other natural resources thus requires a process of ontological translation that is advanced through various facets of society, though political ecology concerns itself in particular with the way that legibility can be achieved through scientific innovation. As natural resources are not created in any empirical sense, the idea that natural objects can be subjected to sale on the market becomes almost nonsensical, and the natural sciences assume an important role in completing this process of legibility (Mitchell, 2002, p. 83; Scott, 1998, p. 13-14).

Kloppenburg (2005) posits that the history of plant breeding has always been a colonial extractivist project, in which biotechnology is understood as the latest manifestation in the commodification of nature (p. 39). To this, the author contends that the potential for biotechnology research has falsely been lauded as a public good that stands to benefit the whole of humanity, similar to the way that the green revolution was conceptualized in the 1930s (p. 4). To problematize this, Kloppenburg points to the limited advances that scientific research has seen since the inception of biotechnology for public issues like food scarcity (p. 227). Because
biotechnology has increasingly operated within the realms of capitalism, the former cannot be expected to produce viable solutions for the latter (Ibid).

The proliferation of genetically modified soy in Paraguay resonates particularly well with the political ecology framework of biotechnology put forth by Kloppenburg. The penetration of capitalism into soybeans through genetic modification has moved the means of agricultural production outside of campesino farmlands and into research labs, where large-scale private conglomerate interests prevail over local human rights’ claims in guiding scientific advances. To this, the scientific perfection of Monsanto’s patented Roundup Ready crop has exponentially increased the profits for Brazilian soy farmers in Paraguay, allowing them to freely use herbicide without risking damage to their products. At the same time, revelatory findings concerning the adverse effects of constant fumigation of campesino communities living nearby these GMO soy fields are consistently ignored and overshadowed in the national discourse (Gray, 2011). This is perhaps similar to the way prospects of larger GMO soy yields from El Niño overshadow the devastating impacts of displacement for marginalized sectors of society.

Another key component of Kloppenburg’s argument is the way commodification of nature is supported and accelerated through government policies that promote these projects as working toward a public good. In a 2013 case study of land conflict for small-scale farmers in Papua New Guinea, Allen follows this line of thinking from the perspective of regulation policies that define who has access to natural resources, and who does not (p. 154). Like Polanyi’s “fictitious commodities”, according to Allen, land is transformed into a “governable space” in democratic Papua New Guinea which the state assumes legitimate power over its entitlements, and the implementation of regulation policies become the agents that interface with complex fields of power that stem from the country’s colonial history (p. 160).
In a similar vein, Hetherington (2014) reveals that in Paraguay, state regulations surrounding monoculture soy production have consistently worked to advance the interests of multinational conglomerates (p. 57). In 2012, when the expansion of the soy industry was briefly throttled by center-left president Fernando Lugo’s land reform policies that introduced a moderate tax to agroindustrial imports, the pro-soy industry Colorado party oversaw the mounting of a soy advocacy group, the Union of Productive Businesses (UGP), to frame Lugo as obstructing the country’s development and stage a parliamentary coup to remove him from the presidency (p. 58-9).

**Violence**

Peluso and Watts (2004) understand the environment as an arena of contested entitlements in which conflicts and claims over property, assets, and labor are played out (p. 6)\(^20\). To this, land in Paraguay can be understood as belonging to at least two opposing worldviews (Giraudo, p. 2, 2014). Campesinos view land as a source of livelihood, which they use to produce food either for subsistence, or as cash crops. Stakeholders in the transgenic soy industry, however, such as wealthy brasiguayos or large agro-industrial conglomerates like Monsanto and Cargill, treat land as a commodity that can be enclosed for the accumulation of capital. Thus, in keeping with Peluso and Watts (2004) thinking, land and the natural environment serves as an arena where violent conflicts between these differing worldviews are played out.

While there are myriad types of violences that emerge in Paraguay’s conflicts over land, two particular forms will be discussed in the current work. The first is Galtung’s (1990)

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\(^{20}\) This theory provided a counter-argument to an emerging global discourse consisting of Malthusian understandings of environmental conflicts, in which scarcer resources directly contributes to a weaker state (Ibid). This view was problematic for two immediate reasons; first, because resources tend to be scarcer in countries and regions associated with the so-called “Global South” or the “Third World”; this reductive analysis reinforced the notion that these places were inherently prone to violence. Second, because scarce resources are inevitable, the violence emerging from scarcity must also be unavoidable under this treatise.
description of structural violence, which is understood as historically entrenched socioeconomic inequality, and the second is direct-political (Bourgois, 2001) which can be characterized as violence carried-out by the state and agroindustrial complex against campesinos, such as displacement, torture, assassinations, surveillance, and fear.

While distinct, both types of violence are intertwined. As structural violence stems from economic and social inequality, the passage of time normalizes these inequalities and contributes to an internalization of both the affected group and within the broader social discourse, providing a legitimacy for direct violence. Expanding on the framework laid out by Peluso and Watts, Bohle & Fünfgeld (2007) blend political ecology with livelihood research to help explain the legitimization of state-violence against small-fishing communities in Eastern Sri Lanka, who resist losing access to fisheries by globalized businesses (p. 684). Stemming from Galtung’s (2003) understanding of structural violence (p. 3), they argue that the legacy of historically entrenched violence from the decades-long civil war must be understood as a manifestation of deep-seated inequality for extremely marginalized sectors of the island (Bohle & Fünfgeld, 2007, p. 673). Thus, direct political violence stems from Sri Lanka’s historical memory connecting resistance movements within rural communities as a source for terrorists of the state, which can be called upon to produce a legitimizing narrative to displace small-fishing communities in the name of capitalist expansion (p. 684).

Similarly, in the context of Paraguay, the country’s long history of socioeconomic inequality that has violently dispossessed campesinos from their land gave rise to social conditions and norms which permitted their legal and social classification as criminals and guerrilla sympathizers, which in turn serves to legitimize direct-political violence against them.
To this latter point, key to the process of legibility is not only “translating” objects so that they are legible under the lens of capitalism, but also translating other conflicting worldviews as illegible. As Mitchell (2002) discusses in his book, discourse plays a hegemonic role in occulting the worldviews that lie outside of the planes of capitalism (p. 82). Under capitalism, plants are viewed as crops, forests as timber, and cows as cattle; land is viewed as a resource to be exploited for profit (Ibid).

Likewise, the construction of Paraguayan campesinos as terrorists can be understood as another discursive process of translating conflicting worldviews into a narrative that is legible under the capitalist lens. As Peluso and Watts (2004) write: “Violence enacted around particular forms of resource extraction and production requires cultural processes of coding the ‘other’ as demonic, savage, and the legitimate subject of violence” (p. 31)

This discursive translation is accomplished in large part by the Paraguayan national media, which is almost entirely owned by politicians in the agro-business friendly Colorado Party (Ayala, 2015). In this vein, much of the scholarship analyzing the rise of agro-industry in Paraguay also documents the powerful role that framing in the national media has played in delegitimizing rural communities’ struggles over livelihoods in the national discourse, in which claims from campesino leaders protesting the unchecked introduction of genetically modified monoculture are often disregarded as being irrational and anti-modern (Hetherington, 2013, p. 82).

In a discourse analysis examining the representation of campesinos in La Nación, one of Paraguay’s national newspapers which was purchased in 2015 by Horacio Cartes’ family, Benitez Almeida & Orue Pozzo (2016) discovered that the Paraguayan peasantry is most often described using the words “trespasser” or “criminal” (p. 12). Further, the newspaper only refers
to them as campesinos when insinuating some sort of connection to the EPP. Sánchez (2010) adds to this phenomenon, suggesting that: “The campesino becomes an adjective specifically for the insurgent, and is used in a particular context that is linked with criminality and illegality (for the violation of property rights), carrying an inherent negativity; ‘campesino’ becomes its own semantic operation” (p. 15, own translation).

In this way, political ecology helps inform how the institutional and social construction of campesinos as terrorists represents the state’s attempt to legitimize their removal as obstacles of the soy industry’s expansion. As I explain in the proceeding chapters, the construction of campesinos as criminals has been applied in a calculated and systematic manner to the most influential campesino organizations and leaders that has resulted in a disarticulation of the campesino movement at a national level.

Conclusion

Political ecology is not a complete departure from political economy, but rather a re-prioritization of the dynamics between society and nature in a way that Marxist underpinnings leave relatively incomplete. By refocusing the analytical lens on local interactions in the environment in the form of land disputes, displacement, criminalization, or violence, broader repertoires of capitalist relations can be understood in the way that they interface with other means of social production.

In Paraguay, where soy production currently accounts for 40% of the country’s exports and 10% of its overall GDP, the political interests in agro-industrial expansion are staunchly apparent (USDA, 2015). Political ecology provides explanatory power in demonstrating conflicts over land as a contestation of power relations, where the Paraguayan state constructs campesinos

21 In one particular instance, an article on page 4 of the print newspaper on 6/16/15, the author writes “campesinos hide in the mountains”, referring to members of the guerrilla group.
as terrorists for the purpose of eliminating them as obstacles to the accumulation of capital.

Further, it shows us how the construction of these narratives of criminality results in the legitimization of violence against campesinos who are peacefully defending their livelihoods. This violence, which is systematically carried out on the most influential campesino organizations and leaders, in turn serves to disarticulate and stagnate the campesino movement at a national level, and leaves them more vulnerable to displacement.

Where apolitical ecologies may view these occurrences as isolated incidents, the political ecology approach I have outlined here works to build a conceptualization of these processes from the bottom-up, in which instances of violence are not seen as isolated, but rather as belonging to a larger web of relations in the superstructure of capitalist production.
4. RESISTANCE AS TERRORISM

“Campesino dirigentes are criminalized in order to remove them from their land”

-Dr. Gustavo Bonzi, former Concepción departmental judge, 2015

How does the discursive presence of rural terrorism affect historically criminalized campesino communities living in alleged hotbeds of the EPP? Using ethnographic data collected from semi-structured interviews in Paraguay in 2015 and 2016, this chapter explores the various ways in which campesino resistance to the expansion of agroindustrial production is characterized as terrorism.

I begin by discussing the repressive processes implemented by the Paraguayan state, particularly since the creation of the combined task force (FTC) in 2013, in which a state of exception has allowed for constitutional rights to be repudiated for campesino communities suspected of aiding the EPP. From here, I introduce testimonies with leaders and families from campesino communities in Concepción, Caaguazú, and imprisoned campesino leaders in the national penitentiary of Tacumbú who have been displaced, jailed, and killed under the pretense of guerrilla terrorism. In presenting these localized testimonies, my goal is to provide an alternate account to the state and national media’s narrative which insists that terrorism is widespread in Paraguay’s northeastern countryside, and examine the implications of this national discourse of rural insecurity for local communities who are peacefully resisting displacement. Juxtaposing these two perspectives brings into focus the conflict of worldviews between the state and campesinos, in which the former must classify the latter’s as violent and criminal to legitimize intervention and displacement.
Ideological Repression

Paraguay’s current state of exception to eliminate guerrilla insurgency has permitted the negation of basic rights, such as presumed innocence, due process, and freedom of speech. While freedom of speech is protected by the Paraguayan constitution, campesinos are frequently the subject of criminal persecution based on their political beliefs. A recent example of this can be found in the 2016 verdict of the trial against the six campesinos in the Curuguaty Massacre, when Ruben Villalba, the campesino leader of Marina Kue, was given an additional five years on a 35-year life sentence for having a “radicalized ideology” (Última Hora, 2016). This criminalization of ideological dissidence is contextualized particularly well by ex-president Fernando Lugo, who I spoke with at a rally in Asunción protesting the trial’s verdict:

The judicial system in Paraguay is a tool of the right-winged political regime that does not see real crimes, and the fight for social justice is seen as an antagonism. Anyone who dares to protest here is taken as a criminal (2016, own translation).

Since the appearance of the EPP in 2008, a common practice of the Paraguayan state has followed three general processes in criminalizing campesinos as terrorists which will be further discussed throughout this chapter. First, campesino leaders or communities, often those with a high amount of political influence against the project of agroindustrial expansion, are targeted as members of the EPP using vague evidence relating to political ideology. Then, the suspected persons are apprehended by the police or military, usually by forced entry resulting in violence, and placed in preventative imprisonment. Finally, the person is charged with an exorbitant sentence and subsequently offered a plea deal of “accelerated processing”, in which they are granted release in exchange for signing a document admitting that they are guilty of providing
“logistical support” for the EPP. Logistical support is broadly defined by the state as providing assistance to the furtherance of terrorism and as such the evidence that is used to support these claims is usually arbitrary, and is often linked to the political ideology held by the person in question.

To demonstrate this process, I begin this discussion in the community of Arroyito, a well-organized and politically-active campesino settlement in the northeastern department of Concepción founded after the fall of Stroessner in 1989. Arroyito is known for maintaining the structure of agricultura familiar, while also working collectively to produce small cash crops, such as mbaysyvo\textsuperscript{22} which is sold for motor oil production (E’a, 2017). Surrounding the campesino community, which is a coalition of several smaller settlements totaling around 7,000 hectares of land, are large soy fields and cattle-ranching estates owned by Brazilian tycoons. Many of the campesino leaders from Arroyito are vocally opposed to the rapid expansion of agroindustry, and work closely with the diocese of Concepción to advocate for sustaining small-holder farming at a departmental level. As it is only a few kilometers from the community of Kuruzú de Hierro, the alleged birthplace of the EPP, Arroyito has been deemed as a hotbed of the guerrilla group since it first appeared in 2008. To this, many of the campesino leaders who are the most outspokenly opposed to agroindustrial production have been targeted as members of the EPP.

In 2008, fourteen campesino leaders and members from Arroyito were arrested for their alleged collaboration with the EPP in kidnapping a large-scale brasiguayo cattle-rancher in the Northeastern department of Concepción. After assessing the case, Dr. Gustavo Bonzi, the department judge of Concepción in charge of the case, decided to drop the charges against the

\textsuperscript{22} Guaraní for ricinis communis, a castor-oil shrub
campesinos for a lack of evidence connecting them to the kidnapping. In my interview with Dr. Bonzi, he informed me that the charges brought against the campesinos by the Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta were broad and unempirical, and presented no direct evidence linking any of the fourteen community members to the crime (Martens et al, 2015).

One of the fourteen implicated in the kidnapping was Calixto, a 72 year-old campesino leader who was charged with feeding the EPP. After the police ransacked his house and found no evidence connecting him to the crime, Calixto was charged with providing food for the guerrilla army because of a few bundles of corn that were found in the back of his work truck. According to Calixto, his daughter and grandson helped produce this corn on his meager 10 hectares of land to sell at the local market. During an interview at his house, in which he sat with his walker that he uses to work the field, I asked Calixto why he believed that he had been targeted as providing logistical support for the EPP:

I have always been a campesino dirigente (leader). When we have meetings, I always denounce the injustice in our country. And they [the state] didn’t like that; they wanted to control me, that’s how they are over here. Once when I was at a manifestation in Asunción, I gave a speech about all of the injustice that there is over here. I said that we as campesinos need to be revolutionaries and confront this injustice. Parts of that speech were published in the newspaper, and so they knew all about this. When I was in jail they used that speech as evidence against me, they pulled out the newspaper and everything. (2015, own translation)
This testimony exemplifies the intentionality of the state in suppressing any ideology that opposes agroindustrial production. To the judicial system, speaking out against injustice and implementing the term “revolutionary” is a weapon that can be used against campesinos to label them as terrorists.

After releasing the campesinos for a lack of evidence connecting them to the kidnapping of the Brazilian cattle rancher, Dr. Bonzi was fired from his position as Concepción’s departmental judge and replaced, and the fourteen were re-implicated in the kidnapping. Eventually, when no further evidence could be produced and CODEHUPY, a coalition of pro bono lawyers demanding their release began to draw unwanted attention to the case, the campesinos were released on the condition that they sign an accelerated processing plea deal admitting their involvement with the EPP in the kidnapping. Calixto was the last to be released, spending over a year in prison before finally signing the agreement, unwilling to accept this false accusation of terrorism in exchange for his freedom. The fourteen campesinos, all of whom maintain their innocence, were listed in a 2015 report from the FTC that described them as detained logistical support of the EPP (Cacace et al, 2015).

While Arroyito was the clear target in Caso de los 14, the case had outward implications that affected surrounding campesino organizations as well. Three of the campesino leaders that were arrested in conjunction with the kidnapping also headed an influential campesino organization called the Organización Campesina del Norte (Campesino Organization of the North, or OCN). The OCN was one of the first campesino organizations to be established after the fall of the Stroessner dictatorship in 1989, and oversaw many of the negotiations for campesino and indigenous land rights in the Northeastern departments of Concepción, San Pedro, and Amambay (Pereira, p. 14, 2014). Further, the organization runs a community radio
station called Radio OCN in Jopará to inform surrounding communities of current issues, and is used to quickly mobilize constituents for political demonstrations.

In 2009 Concepción’s district attorney’s office implicated the OCN with charges of housing the EPP, and after these accusations were projected in the national media, many campesinos who would frequently rely on the OCN for organizational support were afraid to reach out to them out of fear of also being accused of collaborating with the guerrilla group. As I explain in chapter five, this fear of association contributes to a larger disarticulation of the campesino movement.

The only pieces of evidence brought against the OCN were a room with four bunk beds and a picture of Che Guevara hanging on the organization’s wall, which were said to prove that they were “guerrilla sympathizers” and had the capacity to house the EPP (Cáceres & Valiente, 2014). Thus, twenty-five years after the fall of the anti-communist dictatorship of Stroessner, socialism is still being used to incriminate the Paraguayan peasantry as enemies of the state. Campesino organizers with the OCN explain that their organization was targeted because it served as a beacon of resistance to maintain subsistence agriculture in a region that is increasingly being enclosed for agroindustrial production:

* Agricultura familiar still exists in this region, and we believe that it is thanks to our organization that this structure has been maintained. Our radio reaches all of the districts of Concepción, and we advocate to cultivate in a diversified manner, to keep the soil healthy. Even though we are poor, we are able to maintain ourselves from the land. We eat from the earth, and Concepción*

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23 A colloquial language combining Guaraní and some words in Spanish. Jopará is the lingua franca of most rural Paraguayans.
identifies with this; with campesino agriculture. We believe that this is why we were persecuted (2016, own translation).

In Paraguay’s rural department with the most unequal distribution of land, the revenue produced from Concepción’s exports generate approximately $240 million USD per year (Pereira, 2015). The OCN’s voice in the northeastern department as a strong advocate for agroecological sovereignty in the form of subsistence farming thus represents the antithesis of the agroindustrial model, which relies on large-scale mechanized production and ranching methods that inject cattle with dangerous hormones. Further, this latter model contributes to rapid soil degradation, and must continuously expand the privatization of land in order to maintain its productivity. This testimony helps draw attention to the conflicting worldviews between the agroindustrial state and the peasantry, who must be coded as the “other” in order to legitimize their persecution (Peluso & Watts, 2004).

The criminalization of ideology was particularly apparent for Sofía and Luciano Mendoza, two sibling members of the OCN that were targeted as providing logistical support for the EPP. In 2009, when Luciano was home on vacation from studying agroecology in Venezuela, the police ransacked the Mendoza’s house at four in the morning and took Sofía to prison in Asunción, where she would not be released until signing the abbreviated processing agreement over six months later. During the forceful entry, the police took books and CD’s from the house.
that were later used as evidence to support the narrative that Sofía was a guerrilla sympathizer. After she was released through accelerated processing, Sofía fled to Brazil out of fear that the charges would be brought against the fourteen campesinos for a third time.

Luciano had been heavily involved in community organizing efforts for land reform and campesino agricultural sovereignty in Concepción through the OCN, and received a grant from the international peasant right’s organization La Vía Campesina to study at a university in Venezuela in 2006. I was able to speak with Luciano in 2016, when he had finally returned home after spending almost 6 years in Venezuela in exile. He explained that the books and CD’s did not belong to Sofía, but rather to him, as he had brought them back from Venezuela during his vacation. The Mendoza’s are a family of nine—sharing two small bedrooms for the entire family—and Luciano had been in the room with Sofía the night of her apprehension in 2009:

They looked at everything in the room, and they took the books and CD’s. For them the argument is the leftist books. Some freedom of speech, right? So, on these CD’s were pictures I had taken with Fernando Lugo, with President Nicolas Maduro, and with Chavez. And they took these CD’s and started to publish them in the newspapers, with titles like “International Connection with the EPP Meets with Fernando Lugo”, and “Chavez’s Government Finances the Guerrilla Army in Paraguay”. And I was supposed to be that connection (2016).

The criminalization of Luciano tied in to a growing anti-Lugo discourse which was used to foment conspiratorial connections to the EPP. Further, this testimony demonstrates the usage of the Chavez government to ascribe socialist sentiments to the Lugo administration, despite the
latter’s politically centrist record. Although Luciano was not formally implicated in the case of
the fourteen, the media’s accusations left a lasting effect on him, permanently branding Luciano
as a guerrilla insurgent despite the lack of any evidence connecting him to the group. While the
incident happened almost eight years ago and Lugo has since been ousted from office, typing
Luciano’s real name into a search engine still returns numerous unsubstantiated hit-pieces using
the photo of him standing with ex-president Lugo.

In many cases, the sensationalist and corporate national media are the first to promulgate
the speculations of suspected guerrilla activity within a particular community, which then results
in judicial or military action. Sidepar 3000\(^{24}\), a campesino community that borders the
departments of San Pedro and Caaguazú that also has strong political organizing roots dating
back to the end of Stroessner’s rule, suffered from this type of accusation in 2011, when
dirigentes were accused in the newspaper Última Hora of harboring an EPP training camp in the
small forested area of the settlement\(^{25}\). According to the press, this association was originally
made from the testimony of a former member of the EPP, who stated that members of the
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had been providing tactical weapons training
in Sidepar, though these claims and the EPP’s associations with the FARC have since been
thoroughly discredited\(^{26}\).

One of the leaders accused by the media was Fermín Andrés, an original founder of
Sidepar. The extended torture that Fermín received as a political prisoner during the dictatorship
for his organizing work with the Christian Agrarian Leagues has left him with a severe limp, and

\(^{24}\) Sidepar stands for “Siderúrgica Paraguay”, which is the name of the defunct metallurgy industry that used to own
the land that the community currently sits on. The name was taken after campesino organizers reoccupied the land
after the fall of Stroessner.

verdadera historia. Fascículo 8. Última Hora.

he rests his leg on a chair as we share tereré and discuss the accusations from 2011. He explains that for a few months before the article was published, Fermín and other campesino dirigentes from Sidepar had been holding weekly organizing meetings to discuss how to support a local political candidate who promised to pressure the National Office for Housing and Habitat (SENAVITAT) to construct new houses for their impoverished rural community. When the article was published in Última Hora about the supposed guerrilla training camp in Sidepar, Fermín and his colleagues were accused by name of being recruiters and spokespeople for the EPP.

Although other news organizations wrote follow-up articles denouncing the false claims that were made by Última Hora, Fermín says that the discourse of insecurity remained as a blemish within the community of Sidepar 3000:

> They [the media] take your picture—I don’t know where they get your picture from, but they put it on the internet for the whole world to see. So that they see you as a criminal. And that stays that way. I can barely walk from my disability, and I’m trying to produce food for my country, and they labeled me as a criminal (2015, clarification added).

Similar to Luciano’s case, Fermin’s testimony displays how the narrative of terrorism circulated by the media serves to stigmatize the credibility of campesinos who are attempting to organize politically. After the accusations emerged in the press, the police conducted a raid on Fermín’s house, tearing up the tile floor in his living room which his sons had saved for years to construct for him. The police would later inform Fermín that they had evidence that he was an
arms dealer for the EPP, and they tore up his house in search of hundreds of automatic weapons, none of which were ever found.

**Militarization and violence**

The utilization of political ideology as evidence for guerrilla insurgency legitimizes the Paraguayan state to militarize campesino settlements, and when campesinos are coerced into accepting accelerated processing plea deals, state intervention is further codified with falsely inflated numbers of the EPP. Since the creation of the combined task force (FTC) in 2013 violent conflict as a result of this militarization has increased sharply, with home invasions often resulting in repression on the part of the task force. While the state of exception has allowed allegations of human rights abuses to go largely unacknowledged by the state, some organizations have begun to systematize irregularities in abuses and deaths resulting from interventions in the search of supposed guerrilla insurgents. A 2015 report by Serpaj PY documents various instances of assault, torture, and asphyxiation; tactics used by the Combined Task Force as part of their efforts in capturing the EPP (Simon, 2015).

In one example from an interview with two imprisoned community leaders in Tacumbú who were apprehended by the FTC in the department of San Pedro in 2015, the task force broke down the two men’s doors in the middle of the night and violently ransacked their house. One of the men’s wife was struck in the face with the butt of an automatic rifle, and their daughter was thrown to the ground.

In many cases, the connection between the incentives for increased militarization and agroindustrial interests are extremely blatant. A few kilometers outside of the community of Kuruzu de Hierro, the FTC has established a military base directly on a Brazilian cattle-rancher’s
land. A community member from Kurusu de Hierro explains that this demonstrates the allegiance between the state and agroindustry:

And the cattle rancher Linstron gave them land [the FTC] for their barracks. What motive does a Brazilian cattle-rancher have for giving them land to build a base? It’s because the base is not for our protection. It was for Linstron’s cows. It wasn’t to protect the people, it was to protect the enemy of the people (2016, own translation, clarification added).

**False Positives**

Oftentimes, the violent procedures used by the FTC will result in the death of innocent campesinos. In order to avoid public scrutiny, some community members told me that the Combined Task Force would claim that the person was a terrorist by dressing the body with military clothing or weapons. One warm summer evening in Kuruzu de Hierro, Agustín Lezcano left his family to go fishing at a nearby stream. He was carrying only a handmade fishing rod and a small machete, and was shirtless because of the heat. Within thirty minutes of his departure his wife, Adriana, heard distant machine gun fire from their home, where she had decided to stay and wait for her son who was returning from Asunción after six months away.

In my conversation with her, Adriana told me that she and her family stayed awake for the rest of the night waiting for Agustín, though he never returned. The next morning, Adriana’s neighbor informed her that her husband had been assassinated by the FTC. According to the television report where her neighbor heard the news, Agustín was targeted by the FTC as a member of the EPP, and was killed after allegedly opening fire on the soldiers who attempted to apprehend him. Adriana refutes this story, instead believing that her husband was killed by
mistake and now the military task force is attempting to cover it up. She explains how the FTC dressed her assassinated husband to make him appear as a member of the guerrilla group:

They don’t want to admit that they made a mistake, so they said that he was a member of the EPP. And they dressed him as though he was a member of the group. They put a military uniform on his dead body, and a rifle in his hands. And all he had with him was a stick, a fish hook, and a machete. But that wasn’t shown in the evidence (2016).

After Agustín was assassinated, the FTC took his body to the district of Horqueta coronor’s office, where an autopsy was conducted. According to the autopsy report—which has never been released to the public—pieces of grass were allegedly found in his stomach, serving as evidence that he had been hiding in the forest (Serpaj PY, 2015). When Agustín’s family was finally able to return his body to their home, he was brought from the coroner’s office completely naked, with none of his original last effects nor the ones that were planted by the FTC. “The only thing he was wearing were the two bullets that they killed him with, one in his head, and the other in his abdomen”, Adriana said to me.

After the case of the fourteen, Concepción’s district attorney used the admissions of guilt to establish two military bases to surveil terrorist activity in Arroyito, one of which was placed directly within the campesino community. Since the creation of the bases in 2009, the military has carried out myriad home-invasions in search of the EPP, which frequently escalates to violence against campesinos (Cáceres & Valiente, 2014). In one particularly egregious occurrence in 2012, a deaf and mute seventeen-year-old boy was crossing the main road to visit the general store and was fatally shot by the military, somehow mistaking him for a member of
the guerrilla group. After the shooting, the military placed an automatic rifle on the boy’s body to make him appear as a member of the EPP.

The discursive connection in the media between the EPP and campesino resistance to displacement also allows the state to normalize violence against campesinos from sicarios hired by brasiguayo soy barons and proponents of agroindustrial expansion, describing these deaths as a settling of the scores between conflicting factions of the guerrilla group (Lajtman, 2014, p. 120). The Regional Campesino Organization of Concepción (OCRC) provides an example of this process in August in 2013, when one of the campesino dirigentes was assassinated as he was leaving work. Because the OCRC is on the highway between Arroyito and Horqueta, one of the supposed conflict zones, the media insisted that Lorenzo’s assassination was a revenge killing from the EPP or drug cartels.

Conclusion

National non-governmental organizations like CODEHUPY and Base IS have publicly criticized the Paraguayan state for using the label of EPP to target influential campesino communities in the movement for peasant rights (Castillo, 2014, p. 5), though the legal and discursive impunity of the state and its agents protects them from prosecution. Legibility helps us to understand these processes of framing the fourteen community members as criminals as a larger development of silencing organized resistance movements against Paraguay’s agroindustrial complex. Further, constructing them as the EPP reflects Peluso and Watts’ (2004) idea of translating the other as savage, and thus legitimizes violence against them.

The impacts of the processes of associating peaceful campesino resistance with terrorism described in this chapter are at least threefold: it serves to legitimize the Combined Task Force as a successful entity in curbing guerrilla insurgency in the national media and broader social
discourse, reinforces the narrative of campesinos as terrorists through coercive admission of guilt, and as a result, greatly inflates the actual number of members of the guerrilla group (Cacace et al, 2014). These processes allow the replication and expansion of militarization within campesino communities, fueling displacement, and as I discuss in the next chapter, creating a culture of fear and surveillance that serves to disarticulate campesino efforts to resist agroindustrial expansion. In short, the state of exception is a hegemonic sustainable model of structural and direct-political violence against the Paraguayan peasantry.
5. INSECURITY FOR WHOM?

“We are in between two modes of production: the agroindustrial model, and campesino agriculture. Somehow the state has to create conflicts to be able to displace campesino communities and guarantee the installation of the agroindustrial model in the territory. It’s not simply about militarizing our communities. It’s about creating societal anxiety. It’s about creating fear.”

Campesino leader in Kurusu de Hierro, 2016

The militarization of campesino settlements in alleged EPP hotbeds has created a culture of fear within campesino communities, who are increasingly afraid of being imprisoned, tortured, or killed by state agents who have the authority to classify political activists as terrorist insurgents, or by hired sicarios who have the impunity to not be investigated. The result of this is a chilling effect on community members’ ability and willingness to organize politically, extrapolating outward and serving to further disarticulate the campesino movement at a national level. This chapter introduces testimonies from campesino communities in Concepción living amidst increased militarization to demonstrate how the discourse of insecurity has served to fragment a sense of community in influential settlements who speak out against agroindustrial expansion and advocate for land reform.

Disarticulation of Resistance

In Culture of Terror, Space of Death, Taussig (1984) describes the creation of a culture of fear through both “silence and myth in which the fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious flourishes by means of rumor and fantasy woven in a dense web of magical realism” (p. 469). Similarly, the increase in violence and criminalization as a result of increased militarization in a country in which facts are manufactured, manipulated, or silenced by the state
and media, fear plays a central role in forming worldviews of campesinos who live in these communities.

An initial way in which the narrative of terrorism has contributed to diminishing campesino resistance is by instilling fear in the communities and people who are followers or live nearby the targets of criminalization. Since the persecution of the OCN in 2009 from the alleged connection with the kidnapping of a Brazilian landowner in Arroyito, the organization’s reach has decreased tremendously. Prior to the accusations, the OCN had almost 900 members as part of their cooperative, and since 2009 these numbers have reduced to under 200. One former member of the OCN who lives in a community outside of Horqueta described their reason for leaving the organization in the following way:

Who wouldn’t be scared? The fear that we have is such that where before we had hope that by speaking-out and resisting that we could change something, we had to abandon that. We had to, because they’ll put you in prison, they’ll condemn you for an unfathomable crime that you didn’t commit (2015).

This testimony demonstrates the effectiveness of targeting the OCN as a method of stifling the organization’s efforts to promote agricultura familiar in the region. The result of the persecution of the OCN, and other instrumental voices in the Paraguayan peasant movement, is a disciplining of followers of the movement to not speak-out, lest they want to be subjected to a similar treatment.

Similarly, returning to the case of Agustín Lezcano who was killed in 2015 and posthumously dressed by the FTC to appear as though he was a member of the EPP, Agustín’s brothers are afraid to associate with the family out of fear that they will somehow be accused of
collaborating with the guerrilla group. The Lezcano family’s neighbor explained how this leads to abandonment within the community:

They don’t want to be seen as Agustín’s brother, because he’s been painted as a member of the EPP. So the brothers, in order to avoid problems with the police, they just don’t come. She [Agustín’s wife, Adriana] is left here alone, completely abandoned because the fear doesn’t permit others to visit her. Even though they are poor and they don’t bring her anything, she could at least use their company (2016, clarification added).

In many communities suffering criminalization, this fear has served to further accelerate displacement. During conversations with community members in Arroyito, many explained that the environment of desperation created by increased militarization in the community leaves people with the choice of either living in fear or fleeing to the capital of Asunción (2015).

**Surveillance**

During the Stroessner regime, the Colorado Party would frequently pay civilians to spy within their communities and provide information to the government about communist dissent (Americas Watch Committee, 1986, p. 20). These informants were called *pyragüe*, meaning “silent footed ones” in Guaraní, and this common practice had the benefit of converting community members into agents of the state, while also disarticulating a sense of agency for staging resistance against the dictatorship by creating a panopticism for Stroessner’s authoritarian project (Foucault, 1995). While it is no longer an explicit practice of the Paraguayan government to recruit community members as spies, many people in my research
used the word *pyragüe* to describe the fear created by militarization and a discourse of insecurity in their communities.

One of the ways in which *pyragüe* are created is through the Ministry of Interior’s offering of monetary rewards for providing information about suspected terrorist activity from the EPP (Cáceres y Valiente, 2015, p. 27). Just outside of Horqueta, along the international highway that connects the city of Concepción to Brazil, there is an official FTC billboard displaying the faces and names of the alleged leaders of the EPP. The announcement, which utilizes the full names of some campesino organizers who have been completely exonerated from suspicion of collusion with the guerrilla group, advertises a cash reward of one billion Guaranies\(^{27}\) for providing information to the task force, the equivalent of approximately $180,000 USD. In a country where a third of the rural population lives below the extreme poverty line, this exorbitant reward is understandably tempting for many Paraguayans (Guereña, 2013). That the department of Concepción has one of the most unequal distributions of land in the entire country

\[^{27}\text{In my research, I could find no record of the FTC paying-out anywhere near this amount. Conversely, many participants told me that the FTC would frequently shirk reward payments altogether after being provided with information.}\]
also speaks to the allure of serving as an informant for the FTC in exchange for a cash reward (Pereira, 2015, p. 30).

As, by the state’s own account, the EPP is a small group of no more than fifty members nationwide, the information provided by community members hoping to receive a cash reward is frequently false, which leads to the persecution of innocent people and further legitimizes state intervention in campesino communities through military action. In 2011, FOPE’s office in Concepción allegedly received a phone-call describing an EPP encampment in the community of Naranjaty, a campesino settlement in the district of Horqueta. As a response to this information, FOPE initiated a raid in Naranjaty at five in the morning on November 21st, sending two helicopters filled with camouflaged officers to the community, each armed with automatic weapons. The helicopters hovered above the house of an eighty-year old resident of the settlement, Elcira Duarte, and all eighteen of the officers jumped onto the tin roof of the structure in what witnesses described as a military exercise. Duarte is a survivor of torture and persecution from Stroessner’s regime, and is currently the secretary of a local organization called “Victims of the Dictatorship”, which heavily denounces the rapid militarization of Concepción and publicly draws connections between the persecution of communism and the current pursuit of guerrilla terrorism.

On the morning of the raid, Duarte was taking care of her eleven-year-old granddaughter, and when FOPE officials began to pound on her door, Duarte understandably found herself in a state of terror and refused to answer. This prompted the officials to kick down the door as well as the entire front wall of her home, and violently tear through her belongings. Although no evidence was found supporting the allegation that Duarte was harboring a camp for the EPP, the Ministry of the Interior offered no monetary support in compensating her for the damages caused
to her house by the FOPE raid, which were estimated at around eleven million Guaranies—almost $2,000 USD (Cáceres y Valiente, 2015, p. 28). “A great example of our justice system,” she said, “the cost of pursuing judicial action would greatly surpass the cost of repairing my house”.

This sense of surveillance is also amplified by the culture of terror, in which stories of surveillance and violence permeate the consciousness of individuals within the community, making it almost impossible to distinguish paranoia from reality. During an interview with one campesino activist from San Pedro, she explained to me that after speaking out against her brothers’ unjust imprisonment on a local radio station, she believes she was stalked by people who wanted to stop her from making public denouncements against the state:

   People came to my house and threatened me to stop speaking out.

   One woman, who was pretending to be a salesperson, wanted to come into my house, and she kept insisting. I thought it was strange, and then later we realized that the same woman had gone to my sister’s house a week earlier. Ever since then we noticed that our phone calls had an echo, and I think that they’re listening to our conversations. I know it sounds crazy, but they probably know that you and I are talking right now. They’re always listening (2016).

This activist’s suspicions of having her phone tapped speak to the effect that surveillance has on a psychological level. Whether or not our phone calls were actually being monitored is thus rendered irrelevant, as the panopticism created by the culture of terror is a reality without the state having to actively maintain it.
In a similar vein, many people noted that the constant presence of military officials has a psychosomatic impact on them, particularly when there is a military procedure. As the following testimony from a community member in Arroyito demonstrates, the violent presence of the FTC within their community creates psychological distresses that resemble symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder:

The presence of the military creates anxiety not just for the adults but also for the children. There have been lots of military raids where the kids have been present, and those traumas stick with them. There are kids who can’t even see uniformed military officers because of the terrible memories that it brings them. Another child cannot stand to hear the sound of a helicopter, because to him that signifies terror (2015).

**Routinization of Terror**

*Alberto, a dirigente with the OCRC lives about 100 meters from his mother and father’s house in the district of Arroyito. On the walls of his living room are pictures of Che Guevara and Evo Morales; I would later ask why he felt so brazen to have pictures of socialist figures when others had been criminalized by the FTC for less, to which he responded by saying “we have nothing to hide here. I am a revolutionary, not a guerrilla.” At sunset as we were drinking tereré and listening to the radio, we heard news of a kidnapping of a Brazilian land-owner about 20 KM away along the same road on the opposite side of the highway. “Now the racket is going to start”, Alberto said, referring to the FTC’s helicopters that fly overhead so close to the ground that they scare the livestock, and the occasional sound of high-powered rifles in the distance. “Aren’t you scared that the FTC will come to your homes when something like this happens?”*
asked Alberto. “No,” he answered, starting to chuckle. “Everything is mostly calm here, but if you hear FOOM FOOM FOOM FOOM make sure to do this”, Edilberto crouches for cover after imitating the sound of machine gun fire.

-Excerpt from field journal, 2016

The “routinization” of militarization and violence is a common theme in Paraguay’s Northeast, and speaks to the extent that state-sponsored terror has become part of daily life for rural communities. In Sidepar 3000, the settlement in Caaguazú which was accused of being a terrorist hotbed in 2010, many people describe the presence of the military in the settlement as commonplace. During my stay in Sidepar 3000 in 2015, my friend José apparently unconcernedly recounted to me stories about the military frequently interrogating him at gunpoint when he returns home from school in the district of Curuguaty. This all-encompassing presence was further solidified for me during a soccer game between Sidepar 3000 and a neighboring campesino settlement, when FOPE and military officers came to monitor the match dressed in tactical gear and carrying their automatic weapons. One campesino leader explained how militarization has become increasingly quotidian within the community:

Now people are getting used to it [the military presence]; it’s being normalized. And it’s ironic, because it’s obvious that the state is using the EPP to get rich. The police, the military, the judicial system—they’re all trying to find the group and they’re getting
tons of plat$^\text{28}\text{a}$.

But what are they doing in our community?

Nothing. All they’re doing is taking our daughters. They sweet-talk them, they get them pregnant, and then they leave (2015, clarification added).

The first portion of this campesino dirigente’s testimony points to the economic benefit of a discourse of insecurity, a point which will be further elaborated in the next chapter. Further, in the absence of direct violence, this testimony demonstrates that the presence of the military reasserts power dynamics, exemplified here as the sexual exploitation of women, in which symbolic violence is likewise accepted as a normal part of life.

**Outward replications of criminalization and fear**

The discourse of rural insecurity not only weakens ties in campesino communities, but also has outward implications for any group or person that attempts to push back against the narrative that associates the Paraguayan peasantry with terrorism. In their book *Disciplinamiento Judicial*, Martens et al (2015) suggest that after Dr. Bonzi was fired from his position as the departmental judge of Concepción in the case of the fourteen campesinos from Arroyito charged with kidnapping a Brazilian landowner, the disciplinary action had a chilling effect on state officials throughout the department and country who would normally challenge unfair cases of criminalization of campesinos (p. 84). Similar to the disciplining of members of the OCN, the dismissal of the judge sent a message that those who did not comply with the state’s directives would suffer a similar fate (p. 89).

In other cases, the label of “terrorist” has also been deployed against auxiliary organizations and people advocating for campesino rights and against the abuses committed by

\[^{28}\text{a}\text{Money}\]
the state. To this, Pa’i Pablito\textsuperscript{29} and Benjamin Valiente, two pastors who have been most vocal against the criminalization of peasant communities in Concepción, have also been targeted as aiding the EPP. In 2015, after the FTC raided an alleged encampment of the guerrilla group, the military discovered a copy of the pastors’ book, \textit{Relatos que parecen cuentos} (2015), which documents first-hand testimonies of seven residents in the community of Arroyito who suffered abuses as a result of the discourse of insecurity in the countryside. Shortly after a picture of the encampment was released in the media, the district attorney of Concepción, Joel Cazal, gave a public announcement declaring that the book was a manual for guerrilla insurgency, and threatened to charge the pastors as providing logistical support to the EPP (Rojas Martínez, 2015).

Supporters of campesino resistance to militarization and displacement have also been threatened with violence, though the media and official narratives have yet to acknowledge the connection, and will often attribute these threats to drug cartels. On one of our long car rides in which I would accompany with Pa’i Pablito to visit different settlements in Concepción, he explained that he is afraid to answer his cell-phone, because he frequently receives death threats. When I briefly visited him during my return visit to Paraguay in 2016, Pablito told me that he had just received one of these calls, where an unknown person said, “I just called to say that someone told me that Pa’i Pablito can eat whatever he wants, because he’s not going to live another day”. Pablito had recently changed to a restrictive diet because of a diabetes diagnosis, and this particular phone call scared him more than the others because it meant that the aggressors knew intimate details about his life.

\textsuperscript{29} Pa’i is the Guaraní word for priest
Conclusion

Increased militarization as a result of a discourse of rural insecurity contributes to a culture of terror for communities living in alleged hotbeds of the EPP, and this fear extrapolates outward in an attempt to criminalize any parties involved in the movement against agroindustrial expansion and the criminalization of the Paraguayan peasantry. The testimonies from this chapter reveal the paradoxical irony of Paraguay’s campaign to end rural insecurity, in which an increased state presence has served to compound anxieties for rural communities rather than assuage them. As one campesino leader said to me: “Of course there is insecurity in Arroyito. There is insecurity of health, insecurity of food, and insecurity of land. And we are much more afraid of the Combined Task Force than we are of the EPP” (2015).
6. PARAGUAY’S PERMANENT STATE OF EXCEPTION AND THE BREAKING POINT OF THE EPP

“Para nosotros el EPP son los Empresarios y Políticos Patoteros”

Campesino dirigente in Arroyito, 2015

As Paraguay’s state of exception approaches five years, questions over the State’s capacity to extinguish guerrilla terrorism in the rural northeast continue to mount (Pereira, 2015, p. 26). It has become increasingly difficult for the political sphere to ignore massive protests and public complaints of human rights abuses committed by the FTC against rural populations, and the virtual extermination of all guerrilla members listed on Paraguay’s national terrorist watch list threatens the legitimacy of the Colorado Party’s campaign (Cacace et al, 2014).

This final chapter provides a discussion around the limits of a discourse of insecurity, wherein a lack of official transparency and coherence on the part of the state and media, coupled with increasing human rights abuses carried-out in pursuit of terrorists, have contributed to dissonant narratives concerning the fight against guerrilla terrorism. While the state and media driven narrative of rural insecurity has served to disarticulate and violently displace the Paraguayan peasantry, these ruptures in discourse have the potential for novel opportunities of collective action in the campesino movement for agrarian reform and stemming monoculture agroindustrial expansion.

**Cartes’ law of internal defense: A program evaluation approach**

Since the creation of the Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta in 2013, irregularities in the operations of the task force have called into question their effectiveness as an entity with the official purpose of extinguishing the EPP. Following the reasoning set by the presidential decree Ley 5036/13, which modified Paraguay’s law of internal defense, the economic and staffing

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30 “For us the EPP are the thuggish business magnates and politicians”. I chose to leave this phrase in Spanish, as it loses its acroynmic value when translated to English.
resources allocated for the creation of the FTC should have led to a reduction of terrorist activity, and eventually the elimination of guerrilla insurgency in the countryside. While 5036/13 did not provide details about the specific processes that would be implemented to accomplish these goals, a logic model following the administration’s official hypothesis for the anti-terrorist program’s success could be represented in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Funding from the FOPE, SENAD, and military</td>
<td>• Militarize and surveil communities suspected of terrorist activities</td>
<td>• Rise in number of people detained for crimes relating to terrorism</td>
<td>• Reduction in terrorist activity in the countryside</td>
<td>• Elimination of terrorist groups in Paraguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staffing from military, FOPE, and SENAD</td>
<td>• Detain, question, and imprison community members suspected of terrorist activities</td>
<td>• Rise in prosecutions for terrorism</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Deterrence of further terrorist activity in the countryside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Investigate leads relating to kidnappings and other crimes attributed to terrorist groups</td>
<td>• Rise in deaths of alleged supporters of terrorist groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Greater national safety as a result of the program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Logic Model for Ley 5036/13

A central theory underpinning the structure and outputs of this program is that an increased military presence in these departments will lead to a decrease and ultimately disappearance of guerrilla terrorism in Paraguay. This theory is based on a belief system harking back to the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessnor, in which hard-handed military action against leftist organizations—often manifesting in state violence—was lauded as an important cornerstone of maintaining order and keeping communism at bay. As an example of this belief system, in 2015 a politician from Paraguay’s senate made national headlines when she called for “bombing the entire north in order to finally end with this cancer [the EPP], even if innocent people must die” (La Nación, 2015).

31 As the doctrine and official operating procedures of the FTC have never been made available to the public, the activities and processes listed here are those empirically observable since the task force’s creation in 2013.
As the testimonies in chapters four and five demonstrate, Ley 5036/13 compounds historical processes of criminalization of campesinos by consolidating state power to violently displace and disarticulate campesinos, while simultaneously clearing the path for foreign agro-industrial capital. Further, the goals of increasing national security and eliminating guerrilla groups have also not been attained, as social insecurity is still prevalent and acts of terrorism are still attributed to the guerrilla group.

According to a document released by the FTC in 2014 to showcase the progress of the task force, eleven people have been killed, nineteen detained and condemned, and thirty-six are wanted by the Combined Task Force for alleged collaboration in guerrilla terrorism since 2013 (Cacace et al, 2014). There are two points of importance that need to be elaborated from this point. First, the massive budget of the FTC—which has never been released to the public—is particularly exorbitant for a net success rate of only 66 apprehensions. In 2015, Senator Pedro Arturo Santacruz of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) requested an internal audit of the Combined Task Force’s finances as part of a larger campaign to denounce the modification of Ley 1337 and the subsequent multi-year state of exception. The result of this request revealed that the FTC does not have a budget which clearly tracks all of the expenses of the task force, and its finances were thus dispersed through the three national agencies that comprise the FTC. From the rough estimates that were able to be discerned as money slated for the official purpose of combatting rural terrorism by FOPE, SENAD, and the military, the campaign headed by Senator Santacruz estimates that between 2014-2015, the FTC has spent more than 389 trillion Guaranies, approximately $70 million USD.

Second, as I discussed in chapter four, these official numbers provided by the FTC misclassify innocent campesinos as members of the EPP, a procedure which has been legitimized
through the coercive method of accelerated processing. To this, the case of the fourteen in Arroyito, who were pressured into admitting guilt in the kidnapping of a Brazilian landowner despite a complete lack of evidence connecting them to the incident, are included in the FTC’s report as successful detentions of members comprising logistical support for the guerrilla army. Contrary to the apparent focus of the modification of the law of internal defense, the continued criminalization of innocent campesino communities combined with the immense operating costs of the FTC as a result of Ley 5036/13 further points to the State’s interest in maintaining the existence of guerrilla groups in the eastern countryside.

**Declining popular support of la Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta**

The current administration’s failure to address the issue of rural insecurity has contributed to diminishing support of the FTC, despite the media and state’s attempts to inflame narratives of terrorism in the country’s northeastern departments. Even the media, which historically has provided unrelenting and explicit support of Cartes and his combined task force, has been more critical of the FTC’s inability to end guerrilla terrorism recently. In 2016, *Última Hora* published an online survey asking readers to answer the question “do you think that the FTC is responsible for the chaos in the North?”, in response to which 68% of readers answered “yes”. The result of this survey poll exemplifies both a burgeoning social discontent with the Combined Task Force, as well as deteriorating acceptance of official narratives that attribute rural insecurity to the EPP.

Legal and political pressure from a lack of results from the FTC have also begun to fracture loyalties within the Colorado Party. In May of 2017, the Paraguayan senate approved the creation of a commission to investigate the combined task force’s lack of results in eliminating
guerrilla insurgency, as well as the accompanying allegations of human rights abuses (ABC Color, 2015).

**Shifting discourses about rural terrorism**

Attempts to associate all forms of delinquency in the countryside with guerrilla terrorism has contributed to myriad and conflicting narratives about the EPP. A 2015 study by the Paraguayan Institute of Comparative Studies in Penal and Social Sciences (INECIP) discovered that crimes committed by drug cartels in Paraguay’s northeastern region are frequently misreported by officials and the media as a settling of the scores between factions of the EPP (Martens et al, 2015, p. 4). These crimes are often violent, involving brutal assassinations that are ultimately attributed to the guerrilla group, and by extension, to campesinos. By using the EPP as a Marxist scapegoat, the state can neglect investigation into narcotrafficking—a business which, similar to the agroindustrial project, relies on the collusion of state officials and requires the commodification of vast expanses of arable land.

The shifting discourses around the EPP have caused many to question the official narrative that the Paraguayan People’s Army is a guerrilla group. To this, Periera (2015) suggests that while the state describes the Paraguayan People’s Army as a leftist organization that supports land reform, the thesis that they are a guerrilla group fighting for the ideals of the campesino movement is contradictory to the empirical effect that the EPP has had on the countryside since it first appeared in 2008. That the group’s presence has only contributed to increased militarization and violent displacement of the Paraguayan peasantry suggests that EPP is a paramilitary group rather than a guerrilla organization, as it has only served to maintain the status quo and advance the interests of the agroindustrial state (Pereira, 2015, p. 30).
7. CONCLUSION

This thesis attempts to connect Paraguay’s discourse of rural terrorism from the emergence of the EPP in 2008 to the country’s long history of criminalizing campesinos resisting the expansion of foreign agroindustry. While the treatise of the state, which has been obscured by a lack of transparency from the Combined Task Force since 2013, insists that *Ley 5036/13* is a decree to combat rural terrorism, the testimonies presented in this work demonstrate that the increased militarization of campesino settlements as a result of a narrative of insecurity in the countryside has led to further violence, imprisonment, and displacement of innocent campesino community members and leaders under the pretense of eliminating guerrilla insurgency. The continued existence of rural guerrilla groups also challenges the official theory of the Colorado Party that increased militarization leads to a more secure state.

The logic of capitalism prioritizes agroindustry as a primordial and benevolent source of development for the Paraguayan state, in which other worldviews threatening accumulation through enclosure are seen as contradictory to common sense. In this way, the rapid expansion of agroindustrial production into the country, primarily through genetically-modified soy production beginning in the 1990s, is viewed by the national media and the state as an essential process in Paraguay’s modernization project and its ability to participate in the global economy, in which inflamed issues of land tenure and displacement are inevitable components of rural development that can eventually be remedied under the invisible hand of the free market. The campesino movement, which asserts an alternate paradigm to the dominant agroindustrial model in which land and the natural environment are seen as central to sustenance rather than as commodities, must thus be coded as clandestine and anti-modern trespassers on their own land in order to legitimate their removal as wicked obstacles to the accumulation of capital.
To this, the discursive presence of an armed guerrilla group in Paraguay’s northeastern departments with alleged Marxist underpinnings for agrarian reform allow an entry point to reclassify nonviolent resistance to the expansion of agroindustry in the countryside as an act of radicalism, rather than an assertion of one’s democratic rights. The rise of the EPP thus has shifted the discourse from one which historically describes campesinos as criminals to a much more heinous narrative of campesinos as terrorists; rural resistance has been reframed as national insecurity and subsistence farming is now a subversive act.

The legitimization of violence and militarization within campesino communities under the pretense of maintaining rural security has created a culture of terror in which structural and direct violence is routinized, a process that is not new in a country with the longest military dictatorship in Latin America. The numerous cases of abuse elaborated in this work such as torture, harassment, surveillance, detention, and assassination of campesinos serves to stagnate the movement for land reform out of fear of further retribution. Further, the usage of a cash rewards system by the FTC converts community members into state informants and fragments a sense of community in rural settlements.

By centering the testimonies of campesinos who have been falsely targeted as logistical support of the EPP, this work serves to challenge the official narrative of rural terrorism which leaves out local perspectives of those directly affected by increased militarization. While the ethnographic methods used in this project offer firsthand perceptions of violence and criminalization against rural populations who resist displacement, more work needs to be done in this area in order to quantitatively systematize the use of state repression as a mechanism for disarticulating the campesino movement. To this, the current investigation of the FTC’s behavior
as a military force will hopefully further illuminate their role as custodians of the agroindustrial state.

The continued existence of the EPP and simultaneous persecution of innocent campesino activists points to the failure of the current administration’s approach in ending rural terrorism. If the state’s intent is truly to eliminate guerrilla insurgency in the countryside, these testimonies reveal that the current campaign of militarism is not a viable solution. As one campesino leader said to me, “violence cannot be resolved with more violence”. The violent repression of campesino communities does not address the root causes contributing to insecurity, rather, as the current work suggests, a discourse of terrorism further aggravates social conditions for communities living on the margins. In turn, reallocating the FTC’s budget for social programs that stem displacement and support rural populations’ economic and political participation could be seen as an alternative approach to address rural insecurity from the bottom-up.
References


