

From panacea to crisis: grounds, objectives and results of the World Bank's market-assisted land reform in South Africa, Colombia, Guatemala and Brazil¹

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The article analyses the “market-assisted” land reform (MLRM) implemented in various countries throughout the 1990s as an important component of the World Bank's (WB) offensive directed at stimulating the creation of agrarian policies adjusted to the neoliberal parameters. The text analyses critically the theory and practice of the MLRM, showing that: a) what's under dispute is the legitimacy of the redistributive role of the State; b) the model created by the WB is antagonistic to any kind of redistributive agrarian reform; c) the results of the MLRM in South Africa, Guatemala, Colombia and Brazil reveal its failure in solving the problem of land access by the poor peasantry.

Keywords: agrarian reform, land market, State, World Bank, neoliberalism.

Introduction

Throughout the 1990s, an offensive by the World Bank (WB) aimed at stimulating the creation by the national governments of agrarian policies adjusted to the neoliberal parameters can be observed, especially in Latin America, Asia and the former socialist block. Five main reasons motivated it: a) the opportunity to depoliticize the addressing of the agrarian problem present in a great part of the southern countries once the end of Cold War, in its vision, had weakened the link between the struggle for agrarian reform and an ideal of broader social transformation; b) the need for liberalization of the land markets through the elimination of legal barriers to the purchase and sale and the lease of lands to attract private investment (national and international) and, therefore, increase the agrarian productivity; c) the need to respond to the agrarian conflicts and, in some cases, to the actions of pro-agrarian reform social movements, to guarantee the security of the land property regime; d) the need to create compensatory social programs in the countryside as an answer to the socially regressive effects of the structural adjustment policies, under which the rural land access mechanisms are included; e) the need to stimulate the total commoditization of rural lands in the former soviet block societies, in order to consolidate their transition to capitalism and accelerate their subordinate insertion in the financial globalization (Pereira, 2004 and 2005).

What does the current agrarian policy of the WB consist of? Basically, in four lines of action: a) stimulus to leasing relationships as a maximum priority; b) stimulus to purchase and sale of lands relationships; c) privatization and individualization of property rights in collective and state farms; d) privatization of public and communal lands. To implement them, the WB has been stimulating the change in agrarian legislations and increasing the liberation of loans to national governments to favor

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the setting of a new management apparatus, in order to create the legal and administrative conditions to the free market negotiation of land and the attraction of private capital to the countryside.³

At the same time, the WB has been articulating courses and workshops in several countries for the state bureaucracy directly responsible for the implementation of such policies in the rural area, as well as for “partner” non-government organizations rigorously selected, to effectively exert an *intellectual and moral direction* on the definition of the contemporary agrarian policy from the national States.

This article analyses, specifically, the “market-assisted” land reform model (MLRM), an important component of the WB’s strategy to maximize the purchase and sale relationships as a preferential mean of land access to the poor peasantry. Initiated under different shapes in 1994 in South Africa and Colombia and 1997 in Brazil and Guatemala, the MLRM has also inspired the creation of similar programs in Honduras, Mexico, Malawi and Zimbabwe, as well as it has politically reinforced existing programs in El Salvador and the Philippines.

To legitimate the MLRM, the WB implemented two simultaneous operations: on one hand, proceeded to a radical criticism of what it had itself called the “State-led” agrarian reform, based on the instrument of expropriation of rural properties that do not fulfill their social functions; on the other hand, it worked for the political and conceptual acceptance of the MLRM as a specific kind of redistributive agrarian reform. With this double movement, the WB continued to recognize the need for an agrarian reform to address the property of land concentration in highly unequal societies, but started to claim the datedness of the expropriative and redistributive action by the State. Therefore, the MLRM was anointed in the ultra-liberal post-Cold War context as the proper model of state action to the southern countries marked with severe agrarian problems and strong social tensions in the countryside, sharpened by the socially regressive effects caused by the structural adjustment policies (SAPRIN, 2002).

The text deals critically with the theory and practice of the MLRM. Initially, its grounds are synthesized. Afterwards, we proceed to the critics of the MLRM, showing that: a) what’s under dispute is the legitimacy of the State redistributive role; b) the WB model not only must not be confused with any kind of redistributive agrarian reform but is antagonistic to it; c) the results of the MLRM in South Africa, Guatemala, Colombia and Brazil reveal that the supposed advantages over the expropriative model are not confirmed.

1. The MLRM grounds

1.1 The critics to the “state-led” agrarian reform

The premise of the MLRM is the historical failure of what the WB’s economists call “State-led” agrarian reform, “expropriative” model or, simply, “traditional” agrarian reform model⁴. That is, the MLRM was created to substitute something that, according to the WB, has ceased to be viable or even desirable in the present capitalistic stage because: a) it’s political quarrelsome and the conditions for its execution are not replicable under “normal” democratic conditions, once that it contains a “confiscatory” dimension (when the compensation to the owners is inexistent or is fixed below market prices) against which, inevitably, big land owners revolt; b) it’s financially unsustainable when it

³ According to Suárez (2005), between 1990 and 2004 the WB has agreed on 45 loan operations with 32 countries on projects related to its agrarian policy. Counting finished and ongoing projects, we observe that the Latin America and Caribbean region corresponds to 33,3% of the total, East Europe and Central Asia, 26,6%, East Asia and Pacific region, 24,4%, Africa and Middle East, 13,4% and Southern Asia, 2,2%. We notice, too, that the WB has been significantly accelerating the approval of such projects: between 1990 and 1994, 3; from 1995 to 1999, 19, totalizing US\$700 million; from 2000 to 2004, 25, totalizing US\$1 billion in loans.

⁴ See World Bank (n/d and 2003), Binswanger (1995), Binswanger & Elgin (1989), Burki & Perry (1997), Deininger (2001, 2001a, 2000); Deininger & Binswanger (1999 and 1998), Deininger, Binswanger & Feder (2001), Deininger & Feder (2002).

compensates the former owners under market prices, which are distorted by economic and specific policies that elevate the land prices above the profitability of agricultural activity; c) is oriented to “substitute the markets” and not to stimulate them, resulting in a complex of legal restrictions that would have overlapped the functioning of leasing and sales and purchase land markets, complicating land access to potential more efficient owners and feeding encapsulated, frequently corrupt central bureaucracies seeking for their own self-reproduction; d) because it’s based on expropriation, it carries a coercive component that calls for judicial contestation that not only elevates the compensation of the former owners above market prices, but also slow down the settling and reform process, harming the potential beneficiaries; e) in practice, it’s a donation from the State, because the settled workers do not pay for the received land, what feeds the public debt; f) it’s guided by the logics of conflict, once only the rural properties which are object of occupation or social tensions are expropriated; g) when this doesn’t happen, it works as a model directed by offer, with the State having the role of selecting the land or the beneficiaries independently from real demand; historically, this process of selection hasn’t been commanded by technical criteria or necessity, but by political interference, what generated economic inefficiency, low competitiveness and not necessarily focused on the poorer peasantry portion; h) it didn’t solve the problem of land access to a great number of rural workers, situation that would be in the origins of land occupations, agrarian conflicts and rural violence; i) it establishes land acquisition without a previous planning of the productive activity to be conducted later; j) it didn’t create the conditions for the economic competitiveness of the reformed sector; k) it’s a centralized, State-owned and bureaucratic model that hinders social participation, transparency and the empowerment of beneficiaries and do not create the proper conditions for the needed synergies between private and public sectors; it also doesn’t allow the fluidity of markets and the necessary information to guide the economic agents, nor contemplates the socio-economical and cultural heterogeneity of the rural universe; l) generally speaking, it was restricted only to the distribution of land, giving low emphasis to the productive development of the settlers or the reformed sector; m) it doesn’t offer “exit options” to the inefficient rural producers, whether because its implementation was followed by restrictive measures to the functioning of leasing and purchase and sales markets or because it didn’t incorporate the question of non-agricultural labor; n) it’s part of the typical set of policies from the model of development by substitution of imports that penalizes the small farmers and the agricultural sector, protects inefficient economic sectors and does not respond to the imperatives of commercial liberalization; o) it didn’t solve the problem of rural poverty nor did it promote rural development.

To overcome the problems attributed to the so-called “State-led agrarian reform”, based on the expropriation of properties that don’t fulfill their social function, the WB created the MLRM. It is, therefore, a construction fully based on the critics and disqualification of another kind of agrarian action, considered nonviable and anachronistic at the current stage of capitalism.

1.2. The advantages of the MLRM according to the World Bank

According to the WB’s theorists, the main difference between the MLRM and the so-called “State-led agrarian reform” is that the first has a “negotiated” and “voluntary” character, while the second is “coercive” and “discretionary” because it is based on expropriation (Burki & Perry, 1997: 95). In essence, the MLRM is nothing more than a mere land purchase and sale relationship between private agents financed by the State, which provides a variable subsidy for investments in socio-productive infra-structure and private technical assistance services hiring. The less it is paid for the land (loan), the bigger the quantity available for investment and vice-versa. The sellers are paid in cash at market prices, while the buyers take the whole costs of land acquisition and transaction. The buyers can claim access to individual financing and/or through community associations, depending on the format of the programs.

Briefly⁵, for the WB, the MLRM is better than the so-called “State-led” agrarian reform because: a) it’s cheaper due to the land being acquired through bargain between voluntary buyers and sellers, over which no legal recourses that elevate the amount paid to the proprietor can be claimed; b) due to its voluntary, decentralized and “demand-led” character, it favors the participation and autonomy of the beneficiaries, stimulates creative actions to overcome difficulties and corresponds better to the needs of the local reality; c) it doesn’t generate conflict with the land owners, once it’s based on free market transaction between interested buyers and sellers; d) it stimulates cooperation, as the land acquisition and financing are made through community associations; e) it encourages the productive development of the peasants for it plans the activities before the land acquisition, provides grants for such aims and stimulates associative organization; f) it stimulates the creation and/or dynamization of land markets, a basic condition for the economic efficiency enhancement; g) it contributes for the formalization of property rights, as it, on one hand, only deals legally titled properties and, on the other hand, gives birth to new groups of proprietors; h) it stimulates the development of rural financial markets as the new proprietors, with safe titles, start to negotiate in land markets and to demand credit; i) it offers exit options to the less efficient farmers, allowing others (more efficient ones) to have access to land; j) it allows the simultaneous conduction of agricultural and non-agricultural activities, once the own farmers decide what kind of investment or activity they want to develop; k) it is a contractual relationship of purchase and sale, rationally and voluntarily agreed, whose breaking implies the loss of the land; l) for being decentralized and less bureaucratic, it’s quick and less susceptible to corruption; m) it’s more coherent with the imperatives of national economies liberalization, which presupposes fluidity of market relationships in all sectors; n) it’s connected to the broader process of “second generation” structural reforms, directed at the consolidation of adjustment policies through institutional change.

For the WB’s economists, the implementation of the MLRM presupposes the increase of market land offer, what, on its turn, depends on a series of pre-conditions and complementary actions. Six of them are considered indispensable: a) the “leveling of the game field”, i.e., the elimination of subsidies, fiscal exemptions and protective tariffs that privilege the big owners sector and, together with inflation, contribute to elevate the price of land above agricultural profitability; b) the end of legal restrictions that impede the free functioning of purchase and sale and leasing markets; c) some kind of taxation (not necessarily progressive) over land to stifle land speculation, preferentially through city level; d) the legal clarity of property and land usage rights, especially through its formalization and individualization (private titling); e) the creation or enhancement of the market information systems, in order to guide the economic agents about the prices and characteristics of the properties; f) the reduction of transactional costs through administrative and juridical simplification measures. Following all these steps, the historical opportunity to implement an “agrarian reform less harmful to the operation of markets” (Deininger & Binswanger, 1999: 267) would be opened. This is the basic premise of the MLRM: the creation of a new economic environment – “open” and “outward-oriented” – through neoliberal policies, in which are lessened the “distortions” that once elevated the land prices above agricultural profitability and restrained its offer through the market. The table below synthesizes the WB’s discourse in favor of the MLRM and against the “traditional” model of agrarian reform.

⁵ See Aiyar, Parker & van Zyl (1995 and 1995a), Binswanger (1995), Burki & Perry (1997), Deininger (2001, 2001a and 2000); Deininger & Binswanger (1999 and 1998), Binswanger & van Zyl (1995), Christiansen (1995), Christiansen & van den Brink (1994), van den Brink (2003), van Schalkwyk & van Zyl (1995), van Zyl, Kirsten & Binswanger (1995) and World Bank (n/d and 2003b).

Synthesis of the World Bank's arguments pro-MLRM

COMPARATION VARIABLES	EXPROPRIATIVE MODEL	"MARKET-ASSISTED" LAND REFORM MODEL
Method of acquisition of lands and indemnification to the former owners	Coercive, based on expropriation; payment with long-time public bonds, which may be below, on average or above market prices depending on the political forces correlation	Completely voluntary; payment in cash at market prices
Form of execution	Centralized and directed by the State bureaucracy; low grade of efficiency, participation, transparency and entrust	Decentralized and highly participatory; high degree of efficiency, transparency and entrust
Identification and selection of beneficiaries	Exclusively controlled by the State and subject to political pressures, corruption and administrative mistakes that jeopardize the latter agricultural efficiency	Self-selection, what guarantees the selection of the more efficient and apt to agricultural activity
Nature and rhythm	Politically and legally conflictive due to judicial appeals and, eventually, open resistance of owners; bureaucratic and slow; very vulnerable to corruption	Non-conflictive; less bureaucratic and quick; less or non-vulnerable to corruption
Premises for its fulfillment	Protectionist economic environment and inward oriented; prevalence of biased macro-economic policies against agriculture and subordinated to the imports substitution model	Open economic environment and outward oriented; neutral macro-economic policies or in favor of agriculture; creation of a leveled game field between the economic agents; prevalence of "second generation" structural reforms; significant fall of land prices
Kind of development created and modalities of technical assistance and credit	Precarious and slow productive development, generally with low profitability; production planning after land acquisition; State technical assistance services, centralized, irregular, highly precarious and/or inefficient; low credit offer and few investments	Quick productive development and high profitability; production planning before land acquisition; private technical assistance services, highly efficient and decentralized; increasing credit offer and investments
Exit options for the inefficient and incorporation of non-agricultural activities	No prevision	Systematic and broad
Payment for the land by the beneficiaries	No prevision due to the political nature of the model; consists of donation from the State	Foreseen, due to the contractual nature of the model; consists of market operation financed by the State, in which the beneficiaries take the whole cost of land acquisition
Credit offer for agricultural production	Insufficient; non-focused subsidies, normally captured by big and medium-sized owners	Sufficient; focused concession of grants
Cost of reform and land price	High	Low
Private sector participation	None, due to the State-directed character of the model	Foreseen in various stages and highly stimulated by the model
Kind of relationship with land markets	Substitution	Stimulus
Articulation with rural development and poverty alleviation strategies	Not articulated	Articulated
State role	Expropriate lands that do not fulfill their "social function", defined or not on current legislation	Provide a loan for land acquisition between private agents plus grants for productive investments

1.3. From the unrealizable to pragmatism

Such as it was initially conceived, the MLRM would be impossible. Its first version was elaborated still on the first half of the 1990s to be executed in post-apartheid South Africa. To the WB, it was necessary to face at that moment (1994-1995) the national agriculture crisis, understood as a combination of indebtedness by the big agricultural producers and the explosion of a social demand for land repressed for decades, a situation that was being worsened by the effects of commercial liberalization (van Zyl, Kirsten and Binswanger, 1995). It would be the role of the MLRM to act on the administration of the debt crisis of a significant part of the capitalist agricultural sector and, at the same time, answer the social demand for land.

According to this proposition, the opportunity to implement the MLRM would be set as the distance between the land price and its agricultural profitability was decreasing since 1984, due to the reduction of inflation and the withdrawal of some privileges given to the big commercial farming (van Schalkwyk & van Zyl, 1995: 204). Under such circumstances, as it created a land market, the implementation of the MLRM could help solving the debt crisis of the commercial sector (grains and livestock), alleviate the social and economic problems generated by the liberalization and generate thousands of jobs in the rural area (Binswanger & van Zyl, 1995: 254).

To the WB theorists, the fulfillment of the MLRM would only be possible if the South African government administrated the debt crisis of the commercial sector in a selective way, avoiding a “blanket debt relief” that benefited, indiscriminately, all segments. The scheme would be as follows: a) the “consolidated” commercial sector would follow untouched by changes or any initiative of financial assistance once it would already be “adjusted” to the dynamics of economic liberalization; b) the commercial sector considered to be “viable” under the new macroeconomic conditions but highly indebted could receive financial assistance, once it promoted its own productive restructuring; a part of the land actives under its control would be offered in the market; and the banking sector would be responsible both for the decision about which producers would receive financial assistance and for the revision of this segment’s debts; c) the commercial sector considered to be “impracticable” under the new conditions would leave the agricultural sector via “exit bonus” (e.g.: subsidized loans for the opening of new businesses) and would offer the totality of the lands under their property; d) the banking sector could help the increase of lands as it executed the debts of the “impracticable” sectors and participated on the financial restructuring of the “viable” segments; e) the State could increase the land offer selling public properties; f) as for the demand, a land market would be created by the provision of resources (loans and donations) to the farmers benefited by the MLRM; initially, the credit for land purchase and the grants for productive development would come from the government; with the process progress, the private sector (banks, in special) would be stimulated to finance patrimonial transactions as well (Binswanger & van Zyl, 1995: 255-7; Christiansen & van den Brink, 1994: 154-6; Aiyar, Parker & van Zyl, 1995 and 1995a).

It could be understood that the MLRM, in its original version, would demand a very firm governmental action to: a) deepen the structural adjustment of the national economy and, in special, the agricultural sector, in order to expose, without any state protection whatsoever, the so-called “inefficient” capitalist segment to the effects of commercial liberalization and subsidies and tax exemptions reductions; b) administrate the debt crisis of the agricultural commercial sector in a selective way, resisting political pressure in favor of the renegotiation of debts from the “impracticable” sectors, in order to restructure the patterns of production and property.

In this version, the MLRM was estimated to produce structural impacts – the government goal was to redistribute 30% of agricultural land in five years (from 1994 to 1999), what equals to almost 30 million ha (Deininger, 2001: 93). Associated with other actions, such as the liberalization of leasing relationships (van Zyl, 1995), the MLRM would give birth to a “new agriculture”, adapted to the radical opening of the domestic agriculture market. According to this new proposition, the land market would be the main redistributive mechanism (van Schalkwyk, 1995: 205).

The WB monitored the evolution of the South African condition since 1992, influencing the economic liberalization process, the new Constitution concept and the preparation of the national agrarian reform program (World Bank, 1997: 85; Tilley, 2002). Nevertheless this MLRM version never materialized in South Africa nor it did in any other country. As it all indicates, the WB directing board itself did not endorse it, once that no loan operation was conducted with the South African government for such aims.

Analyzing the WB documents through the second half of the 1990s, it's possible to observe that that original version was giving place to another, less orthodox and more limited to the theme of poverty alleviation and "land policies", under which the MLRM would be just *another option*, and not the main action (Burki & Perry, 1997: 97; Deininger & Binswanger, 1998 and 1999; Deininger, 1998 and 2001; World Bank, 2001, 2001a, 2002 and 2003). This change was doubtless related to the problems the implementation of the MLRM-related programs was facing in Colombia and South Africa since 1994 and, since 1997, in Brazil.

On this second version, the terms of the discussion around the MLRM start to have the following setting: a) the theme of "commercial sector debt crisis management" vanishes completely, despite the fact that the problem wasn't an exclusively South African phenomenon, in a way that the debate and effective dynamics of the MLRM-oriented programs start to occur *untied* to the agricultural capitalist sector's reality; b) the recurrent mention to the elimination of "political distortions" ("game field leveling") that affect the functioning of land markets proceed; c) the MLRM stops appearing as a central instrument of a national agriculture change strategy; d) consequently, disappears the expectation on the possible structural impacts its execution could provoke; e) the emphasis is increased on the association of the MLRM with the more restricted theme of rural poverty alleviation, in a way that the implemented programs start to insert themselves directly and explicitly in the row of compensatory policies to the socially regressive effects of the structural counter-reforms championed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the WB.

What's in common between both versions? At least, four main elements: a) the centrality of liberalization on the purchase and sales and leasing markets as a way for land redistribution from the less efficient to the more efficient producers; b) the systematic critics to the "expropriative" agrarian reform, considered impracticable, undesirable and anachronistic to the present days; c) the equivalence between the MLRM and redistributive agrarian reform, as if they were synonyms; d) the emphasis on the need for advance and deepening of the structural and institutional (counter-)reforms. In other words, even reduced to the condition of "another" instrument for rural poverty "alleviation", without any claims of structural change, the pro-MLRM discourse insists on its viability and applicability as opposed to the "State-led" agrarian reform.

2. Critics to the theory and practice of the MLRM

2.1. The contradiction between the MLRM and the redistributive agrarian reform

After all, is it valid to consider the MLRM a modality of redistributive agrarian reform? Is there any equivalence between one another? The answer is no, for the MLRM's principle is the voluntary purchase and sale of lands between private agents mediated by the State, plus a variable parcel of subsidies for socio-productive investments. On the other hand, the redistributive agrarian reform consists of a State action that, in a short period of time, redistributes to the poor peasantry a significant amount of private lands owned by a class of big proprietors. Its aim is to democratize the agrarian structure of a country and promote national development, what presupposes transforming the economic and political power relationships responsible for the land concentration reproduction. As a redistributive policy, it implies, above all, the punitive expropriation of private lands that do not fulfill their social function (El-Ghonemy, 2002: 1; Barraclough, 2001: 378-9). Besides that, as historical experience shows and contemporary peasant movements have been insistently reiterating (MST, 1996 and 2000; Via Campesina, 2002; CNOC, 2004; FIAN *et al.*, 2001; FMRA, 2004; Demarais, 2002;

Borras, 2004a), it must be followed by a set of complementary policies in the areas of infra-structure, education, health and transportation, as well as an agricultural policy that favors the peasantry based on the public offer of credit, technical assistance and market access. In other words, the agrarian reform has as its central objective redistributing land and guaranteeing the conditions for the social reproduction of the peasantry, attacking the power relationships on society that privilege big proprietors, which may be big corporations or banks, national and foreigners. It is only viable if it's compulsory, what demands the increase on the redistributive power of the State faced with the private monopoly of land, through the expropriation with compensation below market prices. As a national development policy, it demands the strengthening of the State role on the provision of essential goods and public services to the enhancement of the life conditions from the settled farmers and the good economic accomplishment of the reformed sector.

It's not difficult to notice that the presuppositions of the MLRM are different from those of the redistributive agrarian reform. On the first case, land is seen as a mere production factor, a purely economic asset, a commodity, negotiable as any other one. On the second case, land is considered to have a multidimensional character (political, economical and cultural), which is the reason why the control and property rights over it express, before anything else, power relationships between groups and social classes (El-Ghonemy, 2001; Barraclough, 2001; Borras Jr., 2004).

It's important to understand the redistributive reforms as a matter of degree (Borras Jr., 2004). Thus, two variables are fundamental to line off the intensity of land redistribution: the compensation to the owners and the payment by the beneficiaries. On the first case, the variation goes from zero (total expropriation) to a level below market parameter. On the second case, it goes from zero to a level below the costs of acquisition. The difference between the indemnification and market prices, on the first case, and the difference between the payment by the beneficiaries and the costs of acquisition, on the second, define the degree of redistribution. The payment for the expropriations through long range redeemable public bonds was the historically found way to make sure the process could gain scale, once the payment in cash at market prices would demand the allocation of resources at a single time in an impracticable magnitude to the public finances of any country.

There aren't, therefore, any similarities between the MLRM and redistributive agrarian reforms. Market transactions and marginal rural poverty "relief" actions have nothing to do with the redistribution of the wealth stock (on this case, land) gathered by a class or fractions of a class. It is also not similar at all with the democratization of political power. The voluntary and mercantile nature of the MLRM distinguishes it entirely from any agrarian reform policy, whose feasibility depend on the increase of the expropriative power of the State faced to private property, and not its reduction as the MLRM proposes (Barraclough, 2001; Mondragón, 2003; El-Ghonemy, 2002; Riedinger et al., 2000; Borras Jr., 2005 and 2004).

2.2. The inconsistency of the World Bank's critics to the "State-led" agrarian reform

It is necessary to notice that the object of the WB's critics is, actually, a caricature that doesn't exist as itself in the real world. The WB theorists operate a reasoning that departs from empirical analysis and lands on the idealization, building a "model" that concentrates in itself all the allegedly negative characteristics of the agrarian reform policies carried through the XX century in different societies. The WB's base of discourse is not an analysis of the *social and political struggle processes* that conditioned the accomplishment and development of the agrarian reforms, but rather the composition of a "model" to which an almost genetic responsibility for the alleged failure of the agrarian reforms carried in great parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia is attributed. This point is fundamental to understand the ideological operation that gives form to the MLRM construction: the critics to the "expropriative" model is made in an abstract, homogenizing and universalistic way, disjointed from the empirical analysis of the social struggles that defined the nature, degree, extension, rhythm, direction and even the reflux of agrarian reform policies, always very heterogenic among

themselves (Barraclough, 2001; Thiesenhusen, 1995; Wolf, 1984; Huizer, 2001; Borrás Jr., 2005 and 2004; Kay, 1999, 1999a, 1998 and 1995). An example of this caricatured character is the repetition of this same discourse to explain the Brazilian case: how can an agrarian reform “model” be considered “exhausted” or “failed” if it has never been taken very far ahead in a substantive scale? (Groppo, 2000).

Besides that, the core of the WB’s critics to the “State-led” agrarian reform doesn’t have any empirical consistency (Borrás Jr., 2005 and 2004). On the first place, the agrarian reform, where it occurred, was never “led by offer”, for it was always put forward, in a bigger or lesser degree, by the “demand” for land caused by the social struggle of the peasantry. Second, it’s not valid to attribute the alleged “failure” of the agrarian reforms to their centralized and coercive characters, once that there is a historical positive association between the redistribution degree, state arbitrariness and political-administrative centralization. Third, the slowness on the agrarian reform policies execution always tended to be bigger where the market mechanisms were privileged in opposition to the compulsory action from the State. Fourth, it’s not correct to attribute eventual over-indemnifications granted to the proprietors to the more or less State-controlled character of the agrarian reform, but rather to the corruption and, fundamentally, the minimizing of the expropriative power of the State, generally in an inverse proportion to the political and social power of the big land owners. Fifth, it’s false the idea that the corruption cases in agrarian reform processes are due to its “State-controlled” character, as if the corrupting agent per excellence wasn’t the “market”, i.e., the big owners interested on the over-evaluation of their lands. Sixth, it’s equally false to attribute to agrarian reform responsibilities that it doesn’t have – for example, solving the rural poverty problem -, once it isn’t (nor has it ever been) a panacea. An agrarian reform is a condition for poverty and inequalities reduction in the rural world, not a policy that, by itself, is able to reach such goals (Kay, 2002 and 1995).

Obviously, criticizing the WB’s critics doesn’t imply disregarding that the agrarian reform policies suffered – and still suffer, on the few countries where they are unstably being implemented, as in Brazil – from enormous flaws, caused by a series of reasons, among which, on one hand, the permanent veto of the dominant classes to any policy of a redistributive nature and, on the other hand, the neoliberal disruption of the public machine responsible for guaranteeing the necessary conditions to the economic and social development of rural settlements. However, what must remain clear is that the critics developed by the WB builds a caricature to dispute politically and ideologically – that’s the core question – what should be the role of the State on societies marked by severe agrarian problems on the current stage of capitalism. For the WB, any really redistributive policy – i.e., that hits the stock of wealth gathered by a minority and modifies the power relationships among groups and social classes – must be rejected.

2.3. The MLRM accomplishments in South Africa, Guatemala, Colombia and Brazil (1994-2005)

The theoretical and empirical inconsistency of the MLRM gets even clearer when we consider its concrete accomplishments in Colombia, South Africa, Guatemala and Brazil. The researches conducted so far show that the obtained results contradict the main directives of the MLRM and the expectations initially attributed to it by its proponents and local operators.

In the Colombian case, the MLRM execution had very different results from the ones that had been predicted: a) the program couldn’t reach a minimum scale, once that in the period from 1995 to 2001 only 12.974 families were financed, acquiring 180.211 ha, in a universe whose demand for land was estimated in 1989 to be of 262 thousand landless families and 613 thousand families with insufficient land for their living (Mondragón, 2003; Balcázar et al., 2003: 311); b) during all the execution years, the number of families requiring access to credit was much bigger than the number accepted, just as the demand was bigger than the land offer (Mondragón, 2003); c) the program fell on a very restricted segment of the land market, composed by medium-sized proprietor ruined by the commercial opening, and never big landowners, reason why the transactions were conducted outside the circuit of lands with better quality and location (Mondragón, 2003); d) a significant part of the

borrowers is overdue, revealing that even with the high subsidy rate given for the land purchase (70%), the beneficiaries cannot pay the installments (Mondragón, 2003; World Bank, 2003: 150); e) the prices paid for the land were set by the owners, due to the political weakness of the peasants (Fajardo, 2002: 15); f) the implementation of the program led to the overpricing of land, at least on the first two years, the best-known period (Deininger, 1998: 6); g) the agricultural production remained only on the families subsistence level (Borras Jr., 2003: 381-3).

The MLRM results in Guatemala (Garoz & Gauster, 2003; Tanaka & Wittman, 2004) are not very different: a) from 1996 to October 2001, only the purchase of 54.611 ha by a mere 9.874 families was financed, at a total cost of US\$ 42.821.787, in a universe whose demand for land is estimated to be between 316 thousand and 500 thousand families; b) what prevails is the offer of private land with low quality and bad location; c) the process of beneficiary selection and credit liberation is extremely slow and bureaucratized, varying, respectively, from 13 to 24 months and a half between 1998 and 2001; d) there are countless denunciations of illegality and finality diversion practiced in the process of beneficiary selection; e) the great majority of productive projects do not have commercial profitability, due to inadequate technical assistance services, lack of investment mechanisms and unfavorable production prices; f) the participation of beneficiaries in the process of decision and management of the program is very low, due to the lack of knowledge about its functioning rules, its excessively bureaucratized proceedings and the power asymmetry between the involved agents (buyers, sellers and State agents); g) it's very doubtful that the poorest peasants will have conditions to handle with the payment of lands acquired through this model (Molina, 2001: 21).

In the South African case, the results were very similar: a) between 1994 and 2002, only 1% of the land monopolized by the white elite was redistributed (Tilley, 2002: 1); b) between 1994 and 1999, the MLRM and the restitution program benefited only 60 thousand families, involving around 667.825 thousand ha, what represents 1,13% of the predicted goal (Tilley, 2002: 27); c) predominantly, the productive projects didn't leave the level of precarious subsistence (Deininger & May, 2000: 21-2); d) in countless cases, the lands were overpriced (El-Ghonemy, 2001: 121; Tilley, 2002: 4-16); e) predominantly, the worst lands in terms of agricultural quality and location were negotiated (Tilley, 2002: 5); f) the program access proceedings were highly bureaucratized, making impossible, from a practical point of view, any kind of "self-selection" of the beneficiaries and any "demand-directed" focus (Tilley, 2002: 29-31).

As for the Brazilian case – taking into account only the *Cédula da Terra*⁶ experience –, it is a bit distinct because the project goals were fulfilled, financing between July 1997 and December 2002 the purchase of rural properties and complementary investments to 15.267 families, at a total cost of R\$ 182.829.901 (US\$ 121.3 million) (World Bank, 2003a). However, related to its cousins in Colombia, Guatemala and South Africa, the differences end there. Boasted as a successful WB project, the *Cédula da Terra*, actually, didn't obtain such a good result because: a) the majority of purchased properties were abandoned or underused, due to droughts and livestock raising and traditional crops crisis (Buainain et al., 1999: 31); b) the social adhesion to the project was highly conditioned to the drought, the severe impoverishment and absolute lack of work perspectives by the rural workers and to the direction the State agents and local politicians imposed to the whole process – prioritizing the poorest –, in a way that the *Cédula da Terra* was considered by many rural workers as a kind of immediate "salvation path", a vision maximized by the "dream" of working and living land fed by those populations (Groppo et al., 1998; Buainain et al., 1999: 27; Buainain et al., 2003: 18; Sauer & Victor, 2002: 34-5); c) half of the communitarian associations were created exclusively to participate on the project, revealing a merely bureaucratic and instrumental proceeding, without any organizing

⁶ To be precise, besides the *Cédula da Terra*, the Cardoso government implemented three more programs oriented by the MLRM, all sequenced and enlarged – though with some modifications – by the Lula government, started in 2003. A detailed analysis of this subject may be found in Pereira (2004 and 2005a).

accumulation produced by a history of common struggles among their members (Buainain et al., 1999: 223); d) the resources directed to productive investments were consumed, on a great measure and number of cases, with daily survival defrayal, ending even before it could cover the minimum investment packages (Buainain et al., 2003: 100-1 and 150); e) as a proof of the total lack of transparency and accountability, still today (three years after the end of the project) very few is known about the payment of installments derived from the purchase of rural properties, for the data offered by the WB are insufficient and not reliable as they only cover 243 communitarian associations, when by the end of 2003 there were 609 of them (World Bank, 2003a: 16); f) the monetary income generation initiatives are far from being considered positive and a great number of the borrowers is still below or slightly above the poverty line, though now indebted; g) the cases considered to be positive reproduce a dependency situation to the commercial results of a single culture, benefited by agro-industries over which the workers have no influence whatsoever (Buainain et al., 2003: 157-70).

In all four cases (Colombia, Guatemala, South Africa and Brazil), the results empirically verified contradict the presuppositions of the MLRM and the expectations attributed to its implementation, once that: a) the prices paid for the land weren't cheap as it was previously thought, despite the payment in cash, and the bad quality of the lands acquired in a significant part of the cases only highlight this fact, making it possible to affirm that the programs constituted themselves in a prize to the owners that sold abandoned, bankrupt and bad localized properties through them; b) in none of the four countries a substantial amount of land was offered in the market by the big indebted landowners, despite the fall on the land prices, so that the predominant pattern of sellers appear to be constituted of medium-sized and even small landowners ruined by the commercial opening and the neoliberal policies; c) there are evidences that the execution of the programs provoked the increase on land prices in many places, though this effect hasn't been homogeneous; d) mostly, the productive projects are dominated by subsistence agriculture, and not by a highly-profitable commercial agriculture; e) in cases considered to be positive by the WB, there was the reproduction of the dependency on monoculture and the traditional technological model, economic impracticable to poor peasants and ecologically unsustainable; f) the amount given as a grant revealed itself insufficient to raise the agricultural production, reason why the peasants remain dependent of a substantive rural credit public policy; g) the formal private credit markets remain inaccessible to the peasants who joined the MLRM-oriented programs; h) there weren't any implementation of any serious form of rural land taxation nor systematic private titling, just as the process of land registry and record systems modernization and the measures to lower the transactional costs didn't advance much; i) an enormous social participation deficit occurred in various (and in some cases, in every) components and phases of the implemented programs; j) the beneficiaries had an unequal power when dealing with the landowners, fact that, by itself, demonstrates that the formulation of the MLRM doesn't take into account the real-world economic exploitation, political dominance and social prestige relationships inscribed on the land property monopoly in highly unequal countries; k) it was evident that the State agents are the ones who effectively handle all the purchase and sale of lands process, and not "voluntary and rational buyers and sellers", as the MLRM assumes; l) there wasn't in the communitarian associations any process of "self-selection" of the borrowers, for there was, in different ways, influence or guidance from external forces, like government agents, owners, local politicians, NGOs, etc.; m) in practice, the elaboration of viable productive projects didn't take place before the land acquisition, as the MLRM establishes, so that it didn't serve as a pre-condition to estate transactions; n) when it existed, technical assistance was precarious and irregular, making a lot more difficult the productive development of the financed families; o) nowhere was there an effective "leveled game field", that is, a substantial elimination of the state privileges granted to big landowners and agricultural producers; actually, there was only a change in the forms of concession of such privileges, due to the increase of political power of the big landowners, partly caused by the same neoliberal policies that strongly stimulated the return of these economies to the primary sector; p) there

wasn't transparency on the execution of the programs nor accountability of their results to the society, what highlights even more the total lack of social control and effective participation of the landless workers; q) in all countries there were countless denunciations of corruption and illicit favoring to big and medium-sized owners; r) in no case were offered conditions for the peasants to build and manage their own agro-industries; s) in all countries, such programs operated in a selective and punctual way, frequently to alleviate social tensions on the countryside or to answer landowners or local politicians interests, without any articulation with rural development and poverty reduction strategies; t) in a bigger or lesser scale, the proportion of indebted workers is very significant.

Such results demonstrate empirically that the conceptual validity of the MLRM and everything that seeks to fundament it are null. Its basic assumptions do not come true in the implemented programs, just as its alleged advantages do not materialize.

Directed at countries marked by severe agrarian problems and strong social tensions in the countryside, the MLRM-oriented programs really showed to the moment that they: a) do not contribute to democratize the agrarian structure, nor is it their objective, for they were only created to alleviate in a selective and punctual way the negative social effects caused by the structural adjustment policies; b) do not have the capacity to minimally answer the existing demand for land, because they lack the capacity to gain social scale due to the payment in cash at market prices; c) for the same reason are expensive, what condemns them to be programs of small socio-economical dimension, completely incapable of solving the existing agrarian problem magnitude; d) do not resemble in anything the redistributive agrarian reform programs, nor get any close to any notion of social justice.

On the other hand, it's necessary to keep in mind that, in political-ideological terms, the implementation of the MLRM brought significant gains to its base, because: a) it competed with the existing agrarian reform programs, already precariously executed, and even substituted them completely in some cases; b) it contributed to reinforce the dominant ideology that legitimizes the social rights commoditization; c) it served for the governments to contour the pro-agrarian reform pressure through the legitimization of the "pacific" and "negotiated" access to land and the disqualification of land occupations; d) it reinforced the neoliberal critics about the inefficiency and unfeasibility of the redistributive agrarian reform nowadays; e) it reiterated the prescription disseminated by the WB and the IMF about the fiscal unfeasibility of social policies with a structural and universal character. In all countries, in a bigger or lesser degree, such programs were implemented through state and parastate repression over the autonomous action of peasant social movements, especially land occupations. In other words, the stimulus to land market development took place through public and private coercion – as it has always occurred in the history of capitalism. Equally, in all cases, the MLRM was connected and subordinated to the implementation of the broader itinerary of structural (counter-) reforms, backed in a strict fiscal adjustment and on the defense of the international financial capital supremacy.

However, despite having generated such gains, the MLRM-oriented programs lost their strength in an international level, due to their own contradictions and internal inconsistencies, the precarious institutional arrangement set to manage it, its incapacity to solve the real problems of the peasantry and/or the opposition of the social movements. In the cases of South Africa, Guatemala and Colombia, such programs faced retrocession, complete halt or redefinition, remaining well below expectations initially projected by the WB. Only in Brazil do they remain with an expansion potential, due to the support of national trade union organizations that represent part of the peasantry⁷ (Pereira, 2004).

⁷ In 2000, the political unity of the social movements and trade union organizations against the implementation of the MLRM was broken when the main trade union confederation representing peasants (the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura, CONTAG) negotiated with the WB and the Cardoso government in 2000/2001 a program that allowed the continuation of the MLRM, made viable through a WB loan of € 436,4 million. The aim of this new program is to finance the purchase of land by 50 thousand families in 3 years, and

Anyway, the social conflict surrounding land appropriation and usage remains intense in all countries where such programs were implemented. The Brazilian case, exalted as the most successful by the WB is emblematic: the *Cédula da Terra* and related programs' legacy was incapable of containing the growing explosion of occupations and landless rural worker camps during the first two years of the Lula government, revealing the magnitude of the demand for land repressed during the second Cardoso government (1999-2002). We must just remember that, in October 2003, 171.288 families were camped all over the country (Sampaio *et al.*, 2003: 33).

It doesn't seem exaggerated to affirm that Brazil, today, is the main stage of the dispute over the continuity or not of the MLRM as an applicable proposal to the southern countries. It's still early to affirm if the MLRM-oriented programs will be fully executed in Brazil – giving birth to a new set of agrarian policies with a mixed character –, or will result in failure and demoralization for the WB and the government which implemented it. Anyway, what is at stake is not the future of one program or another, but a dispute over which should be the role of the State, in the neoliberal context, on highly unequal societies marked by a grave agrarian problem.

Conclusion

The present article sought to offer the reader a critical analysis of what has been, so far, the MLRM experimentation. Therefore, it took as a reference not only the WB discourse on its behalf, but also the results deriving from its implementation in South Africa, Colombia, Guatemala and Brazil.

The “State-led” agrarian reform, while object of the WB's critics, is a caricature that doesn't exist as such in the real world, reason why it doesn't serve as a reference for the renovation of studies about the social processes that determined the realization, development and further neoliberal disruption of the agrarian reform policies. In fact, the WB's critics to the “State-led” agrarian reform serve, fundamentally, as a political-ideological attack platform of the redistributive role of the State, in a historical period of intense concentration and centralization of capital, on one hand, and fragmentation and impoverishment of the labor world in the rural area, on the other. By definition, the schemes of subordinate integration to agro-industrial capital circuit do not benefit the great majority of the peasantry (Rubio, 2003; Teubal, 2001), as, matter of fact, implicitly recognizes the WB (2002: 14), when it proposes, on the limit, the “assisted migration” to the cities as a form of poverty alleviation on the countryside.

Increasingly, the up-to-datedness of the redistributive agrarian reform is coming back to the debate, as are the instruments to accomplish it and the new meanings it has been assuming, due to the persistent action of the peasant and indigenous social movements. The central message of this article is that, up to this moment, the WB's premises and agenda haven't contributed to the renewal of this discussion or to the formulation of public policies capable of reverting the severe economic and social state in which the majority of the peasantry lives, especially in Latin American, Asian and African countries.

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