Land Use Policy 100 (2021) 104909

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Land Use Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/landusepol

The World Bank and market-assisted land reform in Colombia, Brazil, and Guatemala

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
World Bank
Neoliberal land policy
Land markets
Rural poverty
Peasant movements
Agrarian question

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the implantation of market-assisted land reform (MALR) in Colombia, Brazil, and Guatemala, in the period 1994–2008. Disseminated by the World Bank (WB), MALR was conceived as an alternative model to redistributive agrarian reforms, based on the expropriation of private lands by the state. After contextualizing it in the more general process of the updating of the neoliberal political program, the article discusses the agrarian agenda of the WB and its lines of action, amongst which was MALR. It also shows the political and economic objectives which guided its implementation and analyzes the results of MALR. The article discusses the differences between the theory and practice of MALR, arguing that its experimentation revealed structural limits as a public policy for combating rural poverty. While the WB worked with agendas and the definition of the type of agrarian policy suitable for economic and institutional neoliberalization, the governments of client states used MALR as an instrument to undermine popular struggles for the democratization of agrarian structure in highly unequal societies, propagating the idea of access to land 'without conflict.' In the three countries, MALR was implemented through a partnership between the WB and national governments against the agendas of the majority of peasant organizations.

> The Bank will assist with redistributive land reform in countries with unequal distribution of land. The Bank helped South Africa over 1992–94 to design a redistributive land reform program, which relies on voluntary and negotiated transactions between buyers and sellers, while providing grants to the landless poor to enable them to purchase land. This approach, called 'negotiated' or 'market-assisted' land reform, is also being piloted in Colombia, Brazil, and Guatemala. All three countries are preparing projects for land reform with Bank assistance.
> World Bank, *Rural Development: from Vision to Action – a Sector Strategy* (1997, 85).

1. Introduction

This article analyzes the implementation of market-assisted land reform (MALR)[2] in three Latin American countries: Colombia, Brazil, and Guatemala. Disseminated by the World Bank (WB)[3], MALR was one of the central components of its neoliberalization agenda for agrarian policies and social relations in the countryside. Aimed at countries with a high concentration of landholding and significant social tensions in the rural environment, its aim was to replace redistributive agrarian reform, based on expropriation, with relations based on the buying and selling of land by private agents funded by the state. Implanted in different formats, it began in 1994 in Colombia and soon reached South Africa, Brazil, and Guatemala. In a few years, countries as distinct as Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, Malawi, and Philippines had experiences associated with it.

In order to legitimate MALR, the WB carried out a dual operation. On the one hand, it condemned what it called state-led land reform, based on the instrument of expropriation. On the other, it exalted MALR so that it would be politically and conceptually accepted as a new type of land reform, stripped of all the supposed defects of previous experiences and coherent with neoliberalization. With this dual movement, at the same time that it continued to recognize the need for agrarian reforms to deconcentrate landholding in highly unequal societies, the WB came to deny the actuality of expropriation and redistributional state action. MALR was thus exalted as the adequate

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[2] This is the official nomenclature, though in the literature it also appears as "market-based" or "market-friendly" land reform.

[3] The World Bank (WB) designates the organization made up of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.104909
Received 31 May 2019; Received in revised form 15 May 2020; Accepted 5 July 2020
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model of agrarian policy for countries in the global south which combined socially regressive economic adjustments, high indices of concentration of landholding and rural poverty, as well as significant social conflicts in the countryside.

In the international debate about the theme, three perspectives stood out. The first, defended by WB intellectuals (e.g., Deininger and Binswanger, 1999; Deininger, 2001; WB, 2003a), highlighted the potentialities of MALR, attributing the problems observed in its implantation to technical and institutional factors – in other words, the model was supposedly good, the problem was its bad implementation by governments. The second perspective, advocated by external consultants and employees of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture (FAO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the WB itself (e.g., De Janvry and Sadoulet, 2001; Banerjee, 1999; Jaramillo, 1998; Burki and Perry, 1997; Molina, 2001), gambled on the experimentation of MALR, making, however, partial criticisms of this model, highlighting its elevated social cost and consequently its incapacity to achieve social scale. A third perspective, led by academics, activists, and *La Vía Campesina* (e.g., Borras, 2003; CGRA, 2004; Sauer, 2003; Pereira, 2007; Courville et al., 2006;. Lahiff, 2007; Granovsky-Larsen, 2017), emphasized the theoretical and political connection of MALR with the neoliberalization preached by the WB and pointed to the structural limits of the new model.

What is original about this paper consists of the comparative overview of three Latin American experiences, previously only analyzed in isolation. Moreover, the focus adopted here privileges the political dimension of the implantation of MALR in a specific historical and regional context, marked by the irruption of rural social struggles as protagonists of the criticism of the neoliberalization processes underway in Latin America (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001). This text also offers a analysis about the relationship between the World Bank and its 'client' states, showing that not only did MALR have different 'readings' within the WB itself, but also highlighting the unequal translation which governments made of MALR, in function of specific social contexts.

Constructing the self-image of the politically neutral institution, the Bank continually explored the synergy between funding, technical assistance to governments, economic research, and the coordination of multilateral initiatives, with the aim of expanding its influence and institutionalizing global political agendas to be assumed by client states. In this sense, despite the technical façade, the Bank always worked in the interface between the political, economic, and intellectual fields, due to its singular condition as a lender, policy maker, and inducer of ideas and prescriptions about what should be done in questions of capitalist development. For this reason, the Bank is approached here as a political, intellectual, and financial actor (see Wade, 2002; Harrison, 2004; Goldman, 2005; Woods, 2006; Moore, 2007; Williams, 2008; Babb, 2009; Bayliss et al. 2011).

The relationship between the Bank and client states varied immensely, according to a series of factors and circumstances. Something important to highlight is that what is involved is a *relationship* and not a mere imposition. To understand better it is necessary to question four aspects. First, national states are not homogenous entities, but are structures of power through which, in a determined territory, relations between economic, political, and social agents, unequal in power, wealth, and prestige, are institutionalized. It means that the relationship of the Bank with the state also involves and implies social groups and classes, since it is the dispute and agreements of power between them which creates state policy. From this results the second aspect, related to the fact that the relationship of the Bank with states is not limited to state agencies, but also involves civil society organizations and private corporations. In third place, it is necessary to take into account that states have very asymmetrical conditions of negotiation, depending on the size of their economies and their level of external dependency. Finally, it should remember that the Bank is a social actor in the middle of an extensive network of relations of public, private, non-governmental, philanthropic, business, and financial agents which dispute the directions, means, and the meanings of development at a national and global scale. These agents interact with the Bank in the sense of adapting, negotiating, and spreading the ideas and prescriptions of the institutions, translating them in accordance with their own interests and priorities.

Initially, the article analyzes the neoliberal agrarian agenda. Afterwards, the WB's agrarian policy agenda is summarized and the theoretical assumptions and political rationality of a specific component of this agenda, MALR, are analyzed, assessing its performance between 1994 and 2008 in the three Latin American countries which were most important in relation to its implementation. The work is based on official documents and national and local empirical research, some funded by the WB itself, and dialogues with a large and diverse literature. The approach emphasizes the political dimension of social processes.

The selection of the three cases is justified for three reasons: *a)* Latin America is the region with the most MALR experiences; *b)* in this region the three countries selected were those which most stood out in the implementation of MALR and were used by the World Bank as references to diffuse the model; *c)* among these countries, MALR had great political and symbolic importance in the set of national agrarian policies.

In turn, the chronological focus (1994–2008) is justified because: *a)* MALR began in Colombia (1994), spreading to Brazil (1997) and Guatemala (1998); *b)* in 2008 the principal MALR project funded by the World Bank underway in Brazil ended, but the Brazilian government decided to continue the experience without the assistance of the institution, as did the government in Guatemala (in Colombia, the project had ended in 2003); *c)* it is the period for which the most information and official is available, and it is also the period in which the experiences were the most politically and socially significant in the region.

2. Neoliberal agrarian agenda

In general terms, between 1980 and 1989 the WB's structural adjustment programs had the aim of controlling inflation and the return to economic growth of indebted countries, through monetary stabilization plans based on the contraction of internal consumption and drastic fiscal adjustment, combined with a unilateral commercial opening and financial deregulation. From 1989–1994, with the end of the Cold War, the adjustment came to embrace the *en masse* privatization of public companies, also extending neoliberalization to the Eastern Europe. What was "reformed" in the middle of the 1990s varied from country to country due to a series of factors, but the agenda was the same.

However, the Neo-Zapatist insurgency in January 1994 and above all the Mexican financial crisis at the end of the same year shook the confidence of the planners of liberalization. At the same time, in various Latin American countries, the socially regressive effects of the economic adjustment gained more visibility and some governments began to suffer sharp falls in popularity. Given this, between 1994 and 1997, the WB reassessed not the merit but the content and the form of the implantation of the neoliberal agenda. In particular, the WB came to advocate the implementation of "second generation" reforms, in order to consolidate the established macroeconomic canons and deepen the ongoing process, extending it to new areas (see Naím, 1994; Burki and Perry, 1997, 1998; WB, 1997a). This updating of the dominant agenda then established some strategic priorities as the "state reform" and the liberalization of labor, credit, and land markets, through constitutional changes and the restructuring of institutions.

First was the 'reform of the state,' understood in general terms as the combination of ten measures: *a)* insulation of state agencies responsible for economic policy from the pressures of Congress, popular struggles, or even the protectionist demands of business groups linked to the internal market; *b)* demolition of labor rights of public servants; *c)* administrative reform of the state, through the adoption of new technologies and administrative models imported from the private sector, such as competition between state employees and agencies for resources and the principle of wage equality; *d)* selective administrative decentralization; *e)* creation of public-private partnerships for the definition and administration of public policies, directly interweaving business groups, private foundations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the state; *f)* charging of 'consumers' of public services; *g)* reorganization of school systems, through administrative decentralization, the adoption of standards of remuneration for productivity, and competition for the raising of public and private resources; *h)* extension and conclusion of the privatization of companies and public banks; *i)* reform of social security, increasing contribution time, and reducing the average value of pensions; *j)* judicial security for property rights.

The second strategic priority was the 'fight against extreme poverty,' through the creation of relief programs focused on misery, preferentially where social tensions could contribute to political opposition to the adjustment. This returned to the focused policy agenda inaugurated by the Robert McNamara administration between 1968 and 1981 (see Ayres, 1983; Kapur et al., 1997; Oya, 2011; Pereira, 2016; Sharma, 2017), however, now under new conditions of economic liberalization. NGOs and voluntary associations fulfilled the role of organizing and disciplining the 'poor' and their demands, in order to legitimate the reduction of the democratic debate and popular sovereignty in decisions about economic policy through the increase of 'social participation' in areas and activities that were securely controlled (Gill, 2002; Cammack, 2004; Craig and Porter, 2006).

The third strategic priority consisted of propelling the liberalization of labor markets, credit, and land — until then considered generally unreformed —, through constitutional changes and the restructuring of national institutions.

Why did the WB return to an engagement in agrarian themes at the beginning of the 1990s? For the WB, the end of the Cold War had removed the ideological dimension from the problems associated with the concentration of landholding (Deininger and Binswanger, 1999, 248), allowing these questions to receive "technical" and "pragmatic" treatment.

Furthermore, the macroeconomic adjustment seemed to create new opportunities. According to WB economists, the combination of various measures (contention of inflation, commercial opening, deregulation of the economy, and the end of subsidies to large landowners) would eliminate the speculative use of land. It would thus be possible to break away from past experience and implement "market-friendly" land reform (Deininger and Binswanger, 1999).

Another reason was to prevent increased agrarian conflicts, which could not only contribute to judicial insecurity and private divestment, but also break the legitimacy of governments and even of states (WB, 2003a). Some cases were particularly sensitive for the WB at the beginning of the 1990s, such as South Africa. In fact, the concern with the political stability of the post-apartheid country was decisive for the elaboration of MALR:

> Based on international experience, South Africa seems to have two options: rapid and massive redistribution of land to black and colored groups, which would involve substantial resettlement from the homelands onto land now in the commercial sector; or decades of peasant insurrection, possibly civil war, combined with capital flight and economic decline (…) Substantive and rapid market-assisted land reform and resettlement is the greatest if not the only hope for peaceful development in South Africa (Binswanger and Deininger, 1993, 1466; 1468).

Another reason too was related to the "social costs" of neoliberal policies. In the search for instruments to alleviate misery in the countryside, the WB began to emphasize the distribution of land as a cheaper means to achieve this in some situations.

Lastly, the WB (1997b) was involved with the transition of Eastern societies to neoliberal capitalism. De-collectivization and de-statization of the structure of landholding figured among the conditions demanded by the WB in exchange for loans.

In general terms, the WB's agrarian program had as its general objective the full conversion of rural lands into merchandise. For this, it prioritized three lines of action: *a)* eliminating all legal restrictions on the free sale of land; *b)* accelerating the privatization of public, communal, and collective land; *c)* eliminating the informality of property and possession rights. To make this program feasible, the WB propelled the reconfiguration of the state, prioritizing the municipalization of land policy, public-private partnerships to implement rural public policies, private land titles, and the creation of mechanisms of prevention and the mediation of rural conflicts (WB, 2003a, 2004). All of this constituted a package of measures baptized as "land management".

According to the WB (2003a), these actions could reduce transaction costs and make land markets more dynamic, favoring the replacement of rural producers considered less efficient with others who were more efficient. With the overcoming of the informality, the land could be given as a guarantee for bank loans (De Soto, 2000), resulting in the attraction of private capital to the rural economy.

3. MALR: assumptions and rationality

The book organized by Van Zyl et al. (1995) summarizes the WB's proposal. Based on New Institutional Economics, the authors stated that the concentration of land ownership, production standards, and inequality of income and wealth in the rural economy had to be seen as problems linked to the functioning of "land markets" and "institutions". This focus advocated that market "imperfections" and the "distortions" provoked by "wrong" macroeconomic and sectorial policies (e.g., protectionism, subsidized directed credit, tax exemptions, administered exchange, etc.) inhibited the allocation of land of less efficient producers to more efficient ones. With "correct" pro-market macroeconomic policies, new rules of the game, and an "open" and "competitive" economic environment, everything would change.

Based on these assumptions, the WB's intellectuals made a radical critique of which they called state-led land reform, or the expropriationist model. According to them, this model had become inadequate and anachronistic, since it was politically conflictual and unenforceable in democratic conditions, due to its confiscatory dimension (when landholders' property was expropriated without compensation or property was expropriated with compensation below market prices) against which landlords mobilized. Furthermore, it was financially unsustainable when the former landholders were compensated at market prices, since the latter were distorted by developmentalist policies which raised land prices above the profitability created by agricultural activity. It was also a model structured by the logic of conflicts, since only expropriated rural properties were the object of land occupations or social tensions. Moreover, this model was aimed at "replacing markets", and not making them more dynamic, resulting in a complex of legal restrictions which overlapped with the functioning of land markets. By being restricted just to the redistribution of land, this model also discouraged productivity of the reformed sector. As it was centralized, statist, bureaucratic, and paternalist, it discouraged social participation, transparency, and the empowerment of beneficiaries. Finally, it neither reduced or eliminated rural poverty, nor promoted rural development.

The basic principal of MALR is willing sellers/willing buyers. In other words, those who want to sell and those who want to buy. For this reason, while the "traditional model" was labelled as "coercive" and "discretionary", MALR was exalted as "voluntary", "negotiated", and, above all, "pacific" (e.g., Burki and Perry, 1997, 95). In general terms, MALR consisted of a relationship of buying and selling land between private agents funded by the state, which provided a variable subsidy for private agents' socio-productive infrastructure and the hiring of private technical assistance services. The lower the price paid for the land (loan), the greater the donated (not reimbursable) amount available for investment, and vice-versa. Sellers were paid in advance in money at market prices, while buyers assumed the costs of acquiring the land. Furthermore, buyers had to organize community associations to request funding.

According to the WB, MALR was more efficient than the expropriation model because: *a)* it cost less, since land was acquired through mercantile bargaining between voluntary buyers and sellers; *b)* it had a voluntary nature, was decentralized, and "demand driven", which favored participation and the autonomy of beneficiaries; *c)* it was politically feasible, since voluntary transactions did not penalize landowners; *d)* cooperation was encouraged since the acquisition of land would occur through communitarian associations; *e)* the productive development of peasants was stimulated, since it was assumed that activities would be planned before the acquisition of land, with grants being provided for this purpose and to stimulate associationism; *f)* land markets would be dynamized, the basic requirement for the improvement of economic efficiency; *g)* it would contribute to the formalization of property rights, to the extent that only legally titled property were transacted; *h)* it was decentralized and not very bureaucratic.

For the WB, the success of MALR presupposed an increase in the mercantile offer of land, which in turn depended on a series of preconditions and complementary actions: monetary stabilization and the elimination of privileges (subsidies, fiscal exemptions, and protective tariffs) which favored landlords and contributed to raising land prices above their agricultural profitability; the end of legal restrictions on the sale of land; some type of land taxation to reduce land sub-utilization and speculation; private landholding programs to formalize possession and property rights; the improvement of market information systems; the reduction of transaction costs through administrative de-bureaucratization.

MALR was initially drafted in the first half of the 1990s to be applied to post-apartheid South Africa (see Aiyar et al., 1995a, 1995b; Christiansen and van den Brink, 1994). In 1994, around 86 per cent of all land cultivated and 68 per cent of the total surface of this country was in the hands of approximately 60,000 landholders (Lahiff, 2007, 8). For the WB, at that moment (1994 – 95) it was necessary to confront the crisis of the national agricultural sector, understood as the combination of indebtment on the part of large rural producers with the potential increase in the struggle for land, repressed for decades.

MALR was responsible for managing the indebtment crisis of a specific segment of agricultural sector and, at the same time, responding to social pressure. The condition for implementing it consisting of the reduction of the distance between the price of land and its agricultural profitability in function of the fall of inflation and the removal of subsidies and protectionist tariffs granted to commercial agriculture. For the WB, MALR could only be implemented if the South African government administered the indebtment crisis of commercial agriculture in a selective manner, avoiding assistance operations for all debtors (Aiyar et al., 1995a, 1995b; Van Zyl et al., 1995). According to the proposed scheme, the segment considered "unviable" under the new economic conditions should leave the agricultural sector through a "departure bonus" (e.g., subsidized loans to open new businesses), offering their lands in the market. In turn, the state would grant loans for the purchase of land to poor farmers and also subsidies for their productive development. With the advance of the process, the private sector would be encouraged to finance the purchase of rural property.

It was estimated that MALR would provoke structural impacts: under the influence of the WB, the target established by the government was to redistribute 30 per cent of agricultural lands, around 30 million hectares, between 1994 and 1999 (Deininger, 2001). Associated with other actions, such as the liberalization of leasing relations, MALR would transform South African agriculture. By helping in the management of the indebtment crisis of one part of the agricultural sector, it would alleviate the social tensions associated with economic liberalization and would favor the creation of thousands of jobs in the countryside (Binswanger and van Zyl, 1995).

Between 1993 and 1996, the agrarian program of the African National Congress (ANC) moved from leftwing nationalism to neoliberalism and introduced the principle of "willing buyers/sellers" into the discourse of agrarian reform. This focus was absent in 1992, when expropriation and non-mercantile mechanisms were advocated, and did not appear in the program through which the ANC reached power in 1994 (Lahiff, 2007; Driver, 2007). After this, MALR – and particularly the principle referred to above – became the center of national agrarian policy.

Ultimately, the original version of MALR never left the drawing board. What the WB put into practice was a limited and pragmatic version. This does not mean that the WB proposed one thing and governments did something else, whether due to internal problems (Deininger, 1998), or the ‘idealized’ nature of the original proposal (Borras, 2003). My argument is that the WB’s own proposal was the subject of distinct ‘readings’ within the institution. While the proponents of MALR (Zyl, Kirsten, and Binswanger 1995) highlighted its potential to structurally modify South African agriculture (once combined with other actions), the WB Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the institution’s most orthodox area of rural economics (e.g. Burki and Perry, 1997; WB, 1997b, 2002) abandoned any pretension of structural change, reducing MALR to the focused relief of rural poverty, but maintained the principle of willing sellers/buyers.

4. Colombia

MALR was implemented through Law 160, enacted in 1994. Connected to the ongoing economic adjustment and the reinforcement of productive specialization, the new law had the central purpose of adapting the rural sector to the commercial opening and globalization, propelling the transformation of the landholding system through the land markets (Fajardo, 2014).

The drafting of Law 160 was preceded by a FAO study (1994), which warned about the existence of "imperfect" land markets, whose characteristics were high informality, the asymmetry of information, the segmentation of transactions, and the existence of vast areas of land subject to distinct forms of control (economic, political, or military, linked to leftwing guerrillas or rightwing paramilitaries).

Official discourse estimated that a new type of agrarian reform would reduce the concentration of landholding and land prices, making Colombian agro-exports more competitive. At the same time, the possibility of access to land through commercial transactions attracted the interest of landless peasants, reducing the social influence of guerillas, trade unions, and social movements in the countryside, which demanded a redistributive agrarian reform.

Commencing in 1994, MALR had as a financial target the purchase of land by 75,000 families in four years. However, at the end of 1997, only 17,058 had been funded (Höllinger, 1999, 162). For the WB, there were important flaws in the implantation of the new model.

First, Law 160 had a subsidy considered to be very high (around 70 per cent of the total cost of the land) and could reach a maximum quantity of US $21,000, with the aggravating fact that this subsidy was only for the purchase of the land, leaving aside the productive investments. The remaining 30 per cent necessary for the purchase of the property had to come from the buyers’ own resources. For Deininger (1999), the elevated subsidy had stimulated collusion between sellers and buyers and led to the overvaluation of transactions, to such an extent that the price of land purchased via MALR had been *higher* that the price paid via expropriation.

Second, there was a need to lower the income ceiling to enter the program by one third in order to focus it on the poorest (Deininger, 1999).

Third, the implementation of MALR had initially been very centralized, under the control of the *Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma*

Agraria (INCORA – Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform). For the WB, the result was a low level of operative decentralization, social participation, and the involvement of the private sector in the provision of services and the concession of credit (Deininger, 1999).

According to the WB, the connection with INCORA was one of the reasons for the "resistance" which MALR had encountered within the state (Deininger, 1999). This situation had placed the WB in a difficult situation, since the implantation of MALR depended on resources managed by a bureaucracy described as inefficient and corporatist. Moreover, the productive projects had not been drafted before the acquisition of land, reflecting the absence of autonomy and protagonism on the part of the buyers (Deininger, 1999, 658).

In practice, Law 160 had established a subsidized land market, not a public poverty relief policy. To try to correct this situation, in 1997 the government began a pilot program in five municipalities[4], based on a WB loan. The idea was for local administrators to identify situations in which the possible offer of land was three times superior to potential demand, in order to prevent the overvaluation of land prices; build partnerships with NGOs which could provide technical assistance and private financial institutions willing to finance the peasants; create new procedures for the selection of beneficiaries; and formulate productive projects before land acquisition (Deininger, 1999).

According to the WB assessment, these modifications revealed the lack of "experience" and "capacity" of the beneficiaries selected to perform the requirements inherent to MALR. On the other hand, the engagement of landholders entirely dominated the process, proving that they were “the most eager party to see it advance” (Deininger, 1999, 667).

Law 160 fundamentally responded to the interests of the dominant rural class. First, because it offered an alternative for landholders in financial problems or affected by internal conflict, through means of a high subsidy for the purchase of land. Second, because the law did not have mechanisms to expand the offer of land, as it did not involve progressive taxation. Third, although the law allowed for expropriation as the final resource, if voluntary negotiation failed, this instrument was not used (Höllinger, 1999).

Peasant organizations had little influence on the passing of Law 160. Due to their pressure the subsidy rose from 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the price of land, but their other demands were not accepted, such as the definition of a ceiling to prevent the increase of the price of land. Even though they rejected MALR and defended a redistributive agrarian reform, various organizations mediated the relations between purchasers and sellers, such as the *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* (ANUC – National Association of Peasant Users) (see Höllinger, 1999).

5. Brazil

According to the WB (1995), the government commenced in 1994 an economic plan which degraded living conditions in the countryside, for which reason it was necessary to create compensatory social programs. At the same time, the new context opened an opportunity to establish the land market as the central mechanism for the alleviation of rural poverty.

The introduction of MALR in Brazil occurred through the *São José* Project, a very small experience in the state of Ceará, based on a WB loan. Starting in April 1997, it funded the purchase of 44 properties by 694 families in a year. Out of this initiative there emerged a few months later the *Projeto-Piloto Cédula da Terra* (PCT – Land Cell Pilot Project), covering five states[5], following a new loan from the WB.

Politically the aim of the federal government was to recover its political protagonism. After all, agrarian conflicts and violence against landless peasants had achieved widespread international repercussion, and occupations were growing in number and volume, while the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Rural Workers' Movement – MST) had been successful in holding the National March for Agrarian Reform, Employment, and Justice in April 1997, bringing around one hundred thousand people to Brasília against neoliberal policies. For the Brazilian government, it was thus fundamental to undermine the struggles of peasant movements, and the WB considered MALR very useful for this:

> The government model of land reform through land distribution is a vicious cycle: land is redistributed where is a social conflict, and social conflicts put pressure on the government land redistribution program (…) As new alternatives started to take effect [the MALR], the government may be able to reduce the emphasis on expropriations and consequently break the link between its land reform policy and rural conflicts (WB, 2003b, 127).

PCT was thus directed at states with a high concentration of rural poverty and which had the operational conditions to obtain immediate results. The aim was to fund the purchasing of land by 15,000 families in four years and, after this, to legitimate the national expansion of MALR: “If the pilot demonstrates the viability of the market-assisted land reform approach (…), a program could attend to 1 million families in a little over six years” (WB, 1997c, 7).

PCT was opposed by MST and the *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura* (CONTAG – National Confederation of Agricultural Workers), being identified as an initiative which replaced redistributive agrarian reform (allowed for by the 1988 Constitution) with market transactions. At that time, the potential demand for agrarian reform was estimated at 4.8 million landless families. The midterm assessment commissioned by the government from external consultants clearly identified the nature of the political conflict:

> In the current context of mobilization, by providing a new option of access to land, the *Cédula da Terra* introduced a political and ideological dispute with other social movements and their mediators (principally MST, sectors of the Catholic Church, and civil society organized in NGOs), which nowadays hold the political initiative in this sphere and defend access to land via expropriation (Buainain et al., 1999, 281).

At the same time, in February 1998 the Congress approved the creation of the Land Bank/Land Fund (*Banco da Terra/Fundo de Terras*), a public fund capable of raising resources from various sources, including international ones, to finance the purchase of land by poor peasants and landless, both in an associational and individual manner. Without any assessment of ongoing experiences and against the opposition of all national peasant organizations, Congress passed the creation of an instrument which would implement MALR all over Brazil (and not just in a few states).

The creation of the Land Bank was seen by organizations which were part of the National Forum for Agrarian Reform and Justice in the Countryside (*Fórum*)[6] as a sign that the replacement of land reform by MALR was underway. The Forum then prioritized the struggle against PCT and the Land Bank, submitting two investigation requests to the WB Inspection Panel, but both were denied (see Fórum, 1998a, 1998b, Fórum, 1999a; Inspection Panel, 1999a, 1999b; Sauer, 2003; Pereira, 2007).

Despite these defeats, the Forum's actions were crucial in blocking the large loan which the WB intended to grant to the federal government to finance the Land Bank throughout the country. An impasse was

[4] Rivera (Huila), Montelíbano (Córdoba), San Benito Abad (Sucre), Fuente de Oro (Meta), and Puerto Wilches (Santander).

[5] Maranhão, Ceará, Bahia, Pernambuco, and the north of Minas Gerais.

[6] Created in 1995 as a space for organization of collective actions, in 1997 it housed more than thirty entities, of which the principal ones were CONTAG and MST.

thereby created, since the implementation of MALR at a national scale could not find political support of the principal national organizations linked in the Forum. What also contributed to this was the macro-economic crisis of 1998 – 99, which imposed other priorities on the government. However, in 2000, at the peak of the campaign against MALR, CONTAG decided to negotiation the creation of a new program, allowing the loan, until then not approved by the WB board, to be authorized. Therefore, the WB did not finance the Land Bank, but rather the *Crédito Fundiário de Combate à Pobreza Rural* (CFCP – Land Credit to Combat Rural Poverty).

The WB had tried to gain the adhesion of CONTAG since the beginning of the implementation of PCT, although until then it had ignored the demands of that organization, which were basically threefold: *a)* that PCT be complementary to agrarian reform, and not in competition with it; *b)* that it be directed at regions with a concentration of small landholdings or where there were no properties subject to expropriation, in a manner that was complementary to agrarian reform; *c)* that it be a project conceived, implemented, and assessed with local unions and CONTAG. On the other hand, although it had supported the two requests to the Inspection Panel, CONTAG had never refused to negotiate with WB possible changes in PCT (WB, 2000, 24).

Created in 2001, CFCP had the aim of funding the purchase of land by 50,000 families in 14 states. It is important to emphasize that the intention of the WB and the Brazilian government was for CFCP to be the first phase, in a total of three, which in ten years would finance 250,000 families, extending throughout the country (see WB, 2009, 2).

From then on, CONTAG continued to link PCT and the Land Bank to MALR, but differentiated them from the new CFCP, considering the latter as only a land credit program *complementary* to agrarian reform. At the same time, CFCP prohibited the purchase of areas that could be expropriated and, more importantly, created participation and co-administration mechanisms for rural worker trade unions and CONTAG.

All of this occurred in the Cardoso administration. In turn, the administration of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-10) decided not only to deal with the existing programs, but to expand MALR. Lula thus committed himself to agrarian reform through expropriations – as MST demanded – and through "land credits" – as demanded by CONTAG and also FETRAF-Sul (the representative organization of family farmers in the southern region of the country). This combination appeared in the II National Plan of Agrarian Reform (PNRA II), where there appeared financial targets to purchase land for 130,000 families in four years and to settle 400,000 families in agrarian reform projects (MDA, 2003). In other words, without criminalizing the struggle for land (as the previous government had done) and counting on the support of *all* agrarian social movements, the Lula administration operated an *accommodation* between the agrarian reform policy and MALR policies, funded by the WB. In this scenario, MST was isolated and abandoned the struggle against MALR, in order to preserve dialogue and the construction of common agendas with trade union organizations (e.g., against transgenic crops, deforestation, the indiscriminate use of agrotoxins, and the strong subsidies for the production of commodities for exports, as well as struggles for more credit and public technical assistance).

The Lula administration then created in 2003 the National Land Credit Program (PNCF), responsible for the management of Land Funds and programs in this area. In the same year, in response to numerous indications of irregularities and questions raised by social movements, the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) (2005) carried out an internal audit of the Land Bank program and suspended it, alleging serious problems in its administration and the chronic indebtment of families. It was announced that the program had funded 34,759 families in 18,294 operations (MDA, 2004, 1).

At the same time, the Lula administration created the Consolidation of Family Agriculture program, very similar to the Land Bank, and implemented CFCP. Furthermore, the government created lines of credit for young peasants and *quilombolas*[7] to purchase land. Moreover, it reformulated the Land Bank, in order to use it as a national counterpart to WB loans for the purchase of land (Pereira and Sauer, 2011). Trade union participation mechanisms were established in program administrations.

Approximately, 85,000 families purchased land through MALR programs between 1997 and 2006, including 35,564 families funded with PNCF funds between 2003 and 2006 (Medeiros, 2007, 1511). This points to the fact that the Lula administration did not reach its own target of financing 130,000 families.[8] The government did not explain the causes of the low performance in the implementation of programs. However, at least two facts influenced the result: constant budget cuts and the accentuated rise in land prices, in function of the growth of agro-exports of commodities caused by subsidized and abundant public credit (Delgado, 2012).

The Lula administration always denied the continuity between PNCF and the MALR programs of the FHC administration (MDA, 2005). On the other hand, the official discourse that PNCF did not compete with agrarian reform was false, since both were funded by the same source, the General Federal Budget (Pereira and Sauer, 2011).

CONTAG and FETRAF-Sul pressurized the Lula administration both in its first (2003 – 06) and second mandates (2007 – 10), for it to periodically renegotiate family debts due to land purchases, which led to an additional expenditure of public funds.

At the end of 2007, the Brazilian government announced that it would continue 'land credit' programs without new WB loans. These programs, administered by PNCF, were institutionally normalized, and consolidated as a set of public policies aimed at the purchase of land, ranging from peasants in conditions of misery to more capitalized family farmers. As the WB stated: "This institutionalization is viewed as a major achievement of the program and a good example of the high potential benefits of a long-term partnership between a committed client and a responsive Bank focused on addressing a complex, politically sensitive, and risky development challenge" (WB, 2009, 18).

6. Guatemala

In 1996, the Guatemala government and the guerrillas of the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) finally sealed a peace agreement, after ten years of complex negotiations, supported by the UN. This fact marked the end of almost four decades of civil war.

The difficult construction of peace involved the negotiation of agreements about a series of relevant themes for the country, whose definition and content resulted from bitter political conflicts. A strategic space where this occurred was the Civil Society Assembly, constituted to give a voice to proposals of parties and social organizations. There, the neoliberal forces managed to shape the fundamental interests in the economic context of agreements. Organized in the *Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agricolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras* (CACIF), they managed to consecrate economic growth as a maximum priority, above whatever (re)distributional consideration. Moreover, in the name of peace, the "land administration" package of the World Bank was placed at the heart of the agrarian policy of the country, which implied recognizing the land market as the principal mechanism of resource allocation. Together with this came the judicial formalization of property rights, the administration of rural conflicts and MALR (see Granovsky-Larsen, 2013, 2017; Gauster and Isakson, 2007).

With the political support and technical assistance of the WB, the

[7] *Quilombolas* are social groups which consider themselves descendants of African slaves and who live in rural or urban communities characterized by subsistence farming and cultural traditions which have a strong connection with the past of slavery. Brazilian legislation recognizes the special status of these groups and their collective right to land.

[8] As a comparative parameter, agrarian reform settled 435,748 families between 1997 – 2002 and 381,419 families in 2003 – 06. These numbers are contested by researchers and social movements, but they are the official numbers. In other words, it covered ten times more families than MALR.

presidency of the republic created in 1997 the Land Fund (FONTIERRAS), and in 1999 the national congress approved a law which converted it into a decentralized and autonomous public institution. The WB then approved a loan for the Land Fund project in 1999. Starting in 2000 – 01, it was the first phase (three years long) of a project intended to last a decade. The Brazilian experience was used as the model to be followed (WB, 2006). The objective was to grant credits so that poor peasants could purchase land. Before this, in 1998, the WB had approved a loan for "land management", with the improving the legal and institutional framework of the registration of rural properties and expanding the judicial security of land ownership in the state of Petén, whose implementation involved FONTIERRAS and other public institutions.[9] After 2004, FONTIERRAS also began a leasing program. In parallel, the Secretary of Agrarian Issues was responsible for mediating the resolution of agrarian conflicts in the country, which at times resulted in the direct purchase of land by the state for later distribution to peasants.

FONTIERRAS functioned as a facilitator and financier of commercial land transactions. Interested buyers selected the rural property and negotiated the price directly with the seller, with the assistance of FONTIERRAS. The institution was responsible for facilitating technical assistance, through the subcontracting of private service, so that groups would become "competitive". According to the FONTIERRAS' law, the target public were landless peasants or those lacking land, in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty.

Although the Assembly of Civil Society had been dominated by representatives of employer organizations and the neoliberal right, popular organizations, the organized left and progressive sectors in general also participated actively in it, disputing the definition, the content, and the extension of various points. In this way, part of what was agreed was due to their action.

The land management policy (the triad MALR, landholding regulation, and the administration of rural conflicts) defined an institutional framework for legitimate and disciplined action, into which peasant organizations were supposed to fit. At the same time, all forms of direct struggle came to be responded to by the state with a refusal to negotiate and above all repression. Thus, whether or not to participate in FONTIERRAS, and how to do so, profoundly divided peasant organizations (Granovsky-Larsen, 2017, 2013). Until the middle of the 2000s, the *Coordinadora National de Organizaciones Campesinas* (CNOC), created in 1982, functioned as an umbrella groups for various grassroots entities, such as the *Comité Campesino del Altiplano* (CCDA), the *Comité de Desarrollo Campesino* (CODECA), *Coordinadora de Cooperativas y ONGs de Guatemala* (CONGCOOP), amongst others. However, the divergences about participation in FONTIERRAS (which involved decisions about the administration of resources, the indication of representatives, the choice of priorities) weakened their position, fragmenting the peasant movement. Also contributing to this was action of the *Plataforma Agraria* (formed after 1996), which refused to participate in any FONTIERRAS program together with any other organization.

In 2004, the Óscar Berger administration (2004 – 08) decided not to continue the Land Fund project with the WB, but maintained FONTIERRAS as an instrument for promoting MALR, financing it with resources solely from the National Treasury. In turn, the WB (2006) redirected the US $30 million loan which made the second phase of the Land Fund a 'rural development' project (transport, communications, technical and financial services, and institutional reform).

7. Results and comparisons

In moving from theory to practice, MALR underwent many adaptations. Various factors were of importance, such as the type of political coalitions in favor and against, the capacity of the state to implement it, relations between the different levels of government (federal, state, and municipal) and with the WB, the political interests of public agents and budget priorities. As was stipulated in the original model, the governments of the three countries adopted policies with a voluntary and mercantile nature, a decentralized method of execution and privatization of the rendering of services; sought to legitimate the adoption of MALR through a radical criticism of the "expropriation model"; encouraged associativism as a criteria of access, and focused MALR on the poorest segments, adopting income ceilings as a criteria of access to funding.

Other guidelines of the original model were not fully followed. For example: *a)* the leasing of land acquired by MALR was prohibited in Colombia, but not in the other countries, although only in Guatemala were these relations actually stimulated by the central government, albeit later; *b)* in Brazil and Guatemala, individual financing and/or by associations was allowed, depending on the program; in Colombia, only through the intermediation of associations; *c)* only Brazil and Guatemala adopted variable combinations of loans and subsidies; in Colombia, 70 per cent of the price of land was subsidized, but no subvention was authorized for productive investments, which gave the Colombian model an eminently property-related characteristic; *d)* in Brazil, MALR operated as something separated and in direct competition with agrarian reform; in Colombia, there was the possibility of expropriation as the final option, if market negotiations failed, but in practice it was not used; in the Guatemalan case, MALR was converted into practically the only public policy for access to land, associated afterwards with a leasing program; *e)* private landholding programs advanced more in Guatemala and Brazil than in Colombia, but much less than recommended by the WB.

Finally, some components of MALR never left the drawing board. None of the three countries adopted complementary actions (such as progressive taxation and a decentralized apparatus of market information) which, in theory, could have contributed to increase the offer of land and reduce its price. Nor was MALR inserted in a connected and wide-ranging rural development strategy — in fact, strategies of this nature did not even exist.

In Colombia, the results of MALR were lower than expected by its proponents and operators. First, the process did not have scale, since between 1995 and 2001, only 19,397 families were funded, in a universe whose demand for land was estimated in the middle of the 1990s at around 721,000 families, of whom 166,000 were landless peasants and 555,000 poor farmers (Balcázar et al., 2003, 312; Urbina, 1996, 190). Second, the number of families who solicited access to credit was much larger than the number accepted, as well as demand being greater than the offer of land (Mondragón, 2003). Third, only the mid-sized landholders ruined by the commercial opening sold land through MALR, not the large landholders (Mondragón, 2003; Höllinger, 1999). Fourth, a significant part of the buyers became defaulters (WB, 2003a, p. 147). Moreover, the prices paid for land were largely arbitrated by landholders and by INCORA staff (Höllinger, 1999). Furthermore, land prices became overvalued where MALR was implemented (Deininger, 1999; Mondragón, 2003). In addition, in the majority of cases, agricultural production was limited to the subsistence of families (Borras, 2003). Lastly, the WB itself recognized that the large majority of buyers were in chronic default (Deininger, 2001, 89; Grusczynski and Jaramillo, 2002 WB, 2003a, 147). The project ended in 2003 and the WB (2004) abandoned the defense of MALR for Colombia, but continued to insist on the land market as a preferential means of rural poverty alleviation.

In the case of Brazil, PCT targets were fulfilled and 15,267 families purchased land between July 1997 and December 2002, when the project ended. Although the WB (2003c) had considered it "very successful", PCT did not achieve such encouraging results. First, the majority of properties acquired were abandoned or underutilized, due to drought and the crisis of traditional cultures (Buainain et al., 1999, 31).

[9] In 2006, the WB approved the second phase of this project, with a loan of US $62.3 million, extending it to another seven departments.

Second, the demand for land was conditioned by accelerated impoverishment, by the influence of the state agents and local politicians and through a combination of propaganda and repression of land occupations (Buainain et al., 1999, 27; Victor and Sauer, 2002, 34). Third, the resources meant for productive investments were absolutely insufficient (Buainain et al., 2003, 100, 150). Third, income projections made for the final assessment did not indicate the consolidation of profitable commercial agriculture (Buainain et al. 2003, 157−70). After 2002, the federal government had to grant additional subsidies for productive investment and for family support.

CFCP, supported by trade union organizations, began in 2001 and ended in 2008. The WB (2009) assessed this project as "moderately satisfactorily", because: *a)* it had as an original target the financing of 50,000 families in four years in fourteen states, but only managed to fund 40,102 in eight years (in the last year, 8300 families were approved and were awaiting financing); *b)* 60 per cent of borrowers (and 65 per cent of the amount borrowed) were concentrated in just three states (Maranhão, Piauí, and Bahia); *c)* in the three southern states, only 370 families (0.7 per cent of the total) were financed; *d)* the capacity for the implementation of states varied a lot and, in the majority of cases, was very slow; *d)* there was a very high turnover of borrowers, with a rate of abandonment and replacement of 83 per cent, compromising the productive development of projects – while for the WB the growth of the economy and employment probably *increased* the abandonment rate.

The (WB (2006) assessed the results of MALR in Guatemala as "satisfactory", but there was sufficient element for a greater skepticism (see World Bank, 2006; Garoz et al., 2005; Gauster and Isakson, 2007; Granovsky-Larsen, 2013), since: *a)* until 2006, FONTIERRAS had financed the purchase of 186 properties, totaling 71,361 ha, for only 15,487 families (240 rural areas); *b)* there predominated the offer of low quality and badly located private lands; *c)* the process of the selection of beneficiaries and the liberation of credit was slow and bureaucratized, varying respectively from 13 to 24.5 months; *d)* there were numerous denunciations of irregularities and deviations of purpose in the selection of beneficiaries; *e)* a significant part of beneficiaries lived without basic infrastructure, such as drinking water, electricity, and suitable housing; *f)* most productive projects did not have commercial profitability, due to the precarious infrastructure, inadequate technical services, the lack of commercialization mechanisms, the bad location and poor quality of purchased lands, the insufficiency of resources for investment and the absence of favorable prices for production; *g)* the participation of beneficiaries was very low, due to the lack of knowledge of the basic rules of the program, the asymmetry of power between the agents involved or, simply, the bureaucratic process of the program; *h)* in 2008, it is estimated that 37 per cent of all communities financed were behind in payments or no payment had been made at all; *i)* at the end of the 2000s, it is estimated that between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of original beneficiaries no longer lived in the lots purchased, or had sold their lands.

In the three countries, rural employer organizations adopted positions in favor of MALR for political and economic reasons. Furthermore, peasant organizations had criticized MALR since the beginning, but with important variations. In Colombia, local trade unions participated in the administration of the pilot-project in a marginal form. However, in Brazil, the national peasant organizations remained united against MALR until 1999, though afterwards MALR received strong support from family farming unions. In Guatemala, the majority of grassroots organizations participated in FONTIERRAS, which led to a more profound political division. The comparison shows that, in contexts of neoliberalization and the repression of land occupations, the participation of local or national peasant organizations in MALR constituted a form of obtaining occasional "conquests" for their social base, but this led to the breaking of political unity in defense of agrarian reform.

Despite the differences between the Colombian, Brazilian, and Guatemalan societies, the numerous empirical research projects carried out (national and local) (e.g., Höllinger, 1999; Mondragón, 2003; Borras, 2003; Buainain et al., 1999, 2003; WB, 2003c, 2004, 2006; Victor and Sauer, 2002; Barros et al., 2003;Pereira, 2007 Gauster and Isakson, 2007; Garoz et al., 2005; Granovsky-Larsen, 2013) evidenced that the implantation of MALR had similar characteristics and results in the three countries. In relation to the purchase of land, prices were not as low as expected (Brazil and Guatemala), or were above the prices paid via expropriation (Colombia). On average, the agronomic quality of the land and the productive infrastructure was poor. Basically, those who profited from MALR were those who sold mid-sized properties ruined by neoliberal policies. On the other hand, the programs provoked increases in land prices in many locations and the buyers had unequal power in negotiations with landowners. Moreover, there was no transparency and there occurred numerous denunciations of corruption. Lastly, the "voluntary" nature of MALR allowed landholders to decide whether or not they wanted to negotiate, for how long and under what terms.

Nor did the economic development of families present better results. In practice, the preparation of productive projects did not occur before the purchase of land. Moreover, technical assistance was precarious and irregular. Most productive projects were characterized by subsistence agriculture, and in cases considered positive by the WB in Brazil, monoculture was maintained. The subsidy conceded was insufficient to raise agricultural production, while private credit markets remained inaccessible to the poor.

Finally, it is important to highlight that MALR was based on a mercantile vision of land. In fact, in dependent capitalism land is a factor of production and a liquid asset in investment portfolios, but also as a source of political power and social prestige. The official vision ignores that land has a multidimensional character. Following this mercantile vision, MALR theorists stated that the large distance between the market price and the price according to productivity was a conjunctural phenomenon, resulting from "wrong" policies and institutions, but not structural factors and power relations. For these theorists, if protectionist and anti-inflationary policies were dismantled, rural land prices would fall drastically and there would be a substantial increase in the offer of lands in the market. However, neither thing occurred: prices did not fall strongly or in a generalized form, nor did offer rise noticeably. The mistake of this theory consisted in not considering that property rights and effective control over rural land derived from and expressed relations of power among social groups and classes (see Barraclough, 1999; Borras, 2003; Wolford, 2007; Congost, 2007).

The pro-MALR discourse progressively lost force at an international level during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Various factors contributed to this, especially the contradictions and inconsistencies of the programs associated with it, the incapacity to fulfill basic promises, the space for action allowed by national agrarian legislation, changes of priority of national governments, the opposition of various national peasant movements and *La via Campesina*, and the increase in the price of rural land after the 2008 crisis in various countries. In 2005, high ranking members of WB staff criticized the fact that the programs implemented in Colombia, Brazil, and Guatemala had remained tied to the dynamics of social conflicts and had been operated without the intention of effectively reducing rural poverty (De Ferranti et al., 2005, 183). In turn, in the 2008 *World Development Report*, MALR is only mentioned in an lateral manner (WB, 2008: 142−43). In other words, what had previously been propagated as a panacea became the target of skepticism or explicit criticism from within the WB itself. On the other hand, the WB continued to reproduce its criticism of re-distributive agrarian reform.

Moreover, since 2008, the institution has held various international conferences on agrarian themes, such as "land governance" (2009), “land grabbing” (2010), and “land and poverty” (2015, 2016, 2017, 2019), with the aim of organizing development aid organizations (public and private, national and multilateral) with their “land governance" agenda which combined the granting of land rights and the liberalization of land markets with state politico-administrative, judicial, and tax reforms. To make this feasible the great novelty is the definition of the *Land Governance Assessment Framework* (LGAF) World Bank, 2011. LGAF is intended to be a technical diagnostic instrument to assess the quality of a country's land governance (or the subnational levels). Panels of specialists (lawyers, researchers, NGO staff, public planners, etc.) prepared a ranking of countries structured around different themes representing key areas of political intervention in the agrarian space.[10] The score attributed to each of these serves for the measurement of the performance of government actions. Panels are supposed to involve representatives of the private sector, civil society, and the state. Each panel's final report also has to make policy recommendations. Generally, the institution organizes dialogue with the highest level of government to discuss the recommendations.[11]

LGAF is organized in a selective manner, involving social and political actors who, to some extent, share certain assumptions and interests, in order to reduce the degree of dissensus and reach agreements and recommendations. Moreover, LGAF is related to the more general WB policy of constructing assessment frameworks and indicators of government performance in all public administration areas of client states, following the *Country Policy and Institutional Assessment* model (CPIA).[12] This involves an intrusive mode of action, aimed at changing social and institutional conditions *within* countries, in a (programmatic or pragmatic) alliance with local actors.

8. Conclusion

The agrarian agenda propelled by the WB in the 1990s was part of the neoliberal program of restructuring the state, economy, and society in countries in the global south. This agenda had as an objective the creation or dynamization of formal land markets, through the complete conversion of rural lands into goods. At the same time, to alleviate the socially regressive impacts of structural adjustment policies, this agenda also preached actions focused on poverty relief, including through the public funding of commercial land transactions. MALR was an important item in the WB's agrarian agenda and combined both objectives, carrying an internal tension between the focus on the poorest and the agricultural profitability necessary to pay the debt. Implemented in Latin American, African, and Asian countries, MALR had distinct formats, but also common elements and the same source of irradiation.

The comparative study of MALR in three Latin American countries shows that the supposed advantages attributed to it by the WB were not confirmed. In effect, MALR did not contribute to democratizing the agrarian structure of these countries, nor to reducing rural poverty. In reality, the programs linked to it did not have the minimum conditions to meet the effective demand for land (expressed in collective occupations and social mobilizations) and much less the potential demand (of non-politically organized individuals who, due to their material condition, were interested in agrarian reform programs). In fact, MALR rewarded landholders, who through it sold abandoned, bankrupt, or badly located property, receiving in money. It is true that like all public policies, MALR could have been technically improved — e.g., increasing the mechanisms of social participation and transparency, the lowering of interest rate, or de-bureaucratizing procedures, as indicated by the Brazilian experience under the Lula administration. However, the model had insoluble contradictions and limits, such as the dependence on the offer of land by landholders and the incapacity to democratize the landholding structure and achieve social scale, due to payment in advance in cash and at market prices. As a result of this, the more or less chronic indebtment of the majority of "beneficiaries" became a common characteristic in the three countries, obliging governments (in particular, the Brazilian one) to reduce interest rates and renegotiate debts, going against the mercantile logic of MALR. In turn, the atomization of the offer of lands made any territorial planning and regional development policy infeasible.

Moreover, MALR followed a unidimensional focus, centered on the induction of commercial demand for land through credit which, disconnected from broader policies of support for agricultural production, resulted in the chronic indebtment of a significant part of borrowers.

Based on an economistic view of land, the model assumed that land speculation is something merely conjunctural and not structural, for which reason no instruments were offered to combat the forms in which relations of power configured land ownership in highly unequal societies. In all cases, thanks to their monumental economic and political power, the landlords managed their "indebtment crises", obtaining more public subsidies and successive debt renegotiation, which expanded payment periods and pardoned part of the principal. Thus, MALR served to offer governments politically conservative forms of access to land in light of the increased social pressure of peasant movements.

The implementation of MALR varied according to national particularities which involved the correlation of political forces, the contradictions of neoliberalization, the external economic conditions, budget constraints, the relationship between the federal and subnational governments, the implementation capacity of the state, amongst others. On the other hand, the relationship between the WB and client states varied immensely too, according to a series of factors and circumstances. Something important to highlight is that what is involved is a *relationship* and not a mere imposition, which implies considering the existence of a two-way road between the parties. In fact, by presenting governments with MALR, the WB was in harmony with the perspectives, convictions, and preferences of the political leaders of countries during that period.

For the WB, the Brazilian experience was not only the largest in terms of the number of loans and families funded, but also the most significant in political terms. There the opposition of peasant movements was more intense and played a decisive role in the connection of forces on an international scale against MALR. In turn, the later breaking of this unity and the agreement between the government, the WB, and trade union entities led to the progressive translation of MALR into "land credit" programs, which came to integrate the list of "normal" agrarian policies.

In all cases, WB loans induced changes in the composition and use of public expenditure, to the extent that for each loan governments had to disburse a still larger financial counterpart; afterwards they needed to pay the WB, always the preferential creditor, and in a strong currency. Moreover, the projects funded by the WB disseminated parameters of institutional reform, internalizing ideas, models, and practices in the public administration of client states, to the detriment of other conceptions of development. The evidence revealed that the effectiveness of the Bank's actions required a combination of money, technical expertise, and persuasion, through which, outside and inside national spaces, visions of development and mutual interests are constructed, both in civil society and in the state apparatus.

All MALR constructions were based on the disqualification of what WB economists called state-led land reform. It is not necessary to go very far to understand that the aim of the WB's attack never existed in the social world. The foundation of the WB's discourse was never the empirically founded analysis of the processes of social and political struggles which conditioned the holding of agrarian reforms, but rather a caricature – "statism" – to which was attributed responsibility for the

[10] See https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/land-governance-assessment-framework

[11] LGAF makes recommendation for countries from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Central Europe, and Asia. For Latin America, the countries assessed are Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, and Honduras.

[12] See https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/country-policy-and-institutional-assessment

supposed failure of the immense majority of agrarian reforms carried out around the world. In other words, criticism of the ‘expropriation model’ was done in an abstract, homogenizing, and biased manner, ignoring social conflicts and relations of power between social groups and classes which define the nature, degree, extension, rhythm, direction, and even the reflux of agrarian reforms, always very heterogeneous, as ample international literature has shown (e.g., García, 1968; Putzel, 1992; Sobhan, 1993; Thiesenhusen, 1995; Spoor, 1997; Barraclough, 1999; Kay, 2002; Wegren, 2005; Lipton, 2010; Fajardo, 2014; Almeyra et al., 2014; Kay and Vergara-Camus, 2018). Agrarian reform processes always had technical dimensions, but they were, above all, the result of political divisions in society, at times also in which foreign forces acted.

It is important to consider that, historically, the division of labor between state and market results from asymmetrical relations between social agents who act in accordance with their interests and identities, mobilizing unequal resources, in the framework of an economic structure and a political order of command and obedience, which include transnational actors. In this interaction, the objectives and strategies of development delimit different frontiers for the spheres of social life which are considered the legitimate competence of the state, the market, and the private sphere. There is no essentiality in this. Nevertheless, the experience shows that state action performed various roles during the twentieth century and the beginning of the following one, reducing or deepening social inequalities. Thus, the "goodness" or "perversity" its action (for what and for whom) depends on a wide range of political, economic, and cultural factors.

Under the façade of technical argumentation and naturalizing the neoliberal program, WB criticism constructed a caricature to politically dispute what the legitimate role of the state should be in some highly unequal societies, marked by an elevated concentration of landholding and significant social and political contradictions in the rural environment. In the three countries, MALR was implemented through a partnership between the WB and national and subnational governments *against* the agendas of the majority of peasant organizations.

The comparison also shows that the combination of economic liberalization with the repression of land occupations reduced the margin of action of various local or national peasant organizations, in such a way that participation in MALR programs constituted an opportunity (at times the only one) for obtaining immediate material gains on the part of its social base, even though it would lead to the fragmentation of the political coalition in defense of redistributive agrarian reform. It also shows that, with the world of rural labor being very socially and politically heterogeneous, there were sectors of peasantry which were not willing to participate in land occupations. On the other hand, due to the power of landlords in the three countries, not even as a last resort could governments use the threat of expropriation (with indemnity below market prices) to increase the offer of land and lowering its price.

MALR lost much of its appeal at an international level during the first decade of the twenty-first century, to the point of the WB practically abandoning it, although it maintained the neoliberal critique of redistributive agrarian reform. At the same time, in the three countries studied here numerous rural social movements continued to call for the implementation of profound agrarian reforms, with the aim of democratizing landholding structure and guaranteeing dignified conditions of social reproduction for peasants and landless, which depended on the strengthening of the redistributive action of the state and public policies connected in inclusive and environmentally sustainable and equitable development strategies. Without organized social pressure, without social movements with the capacity to produce relevant political facts and construct broad alliances, there is no redistributive policy. And it was precisely this, the popular struggle, which MALR fought against, by establishing a "negotiated" and "without conflict" way of access to land.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

João Márcio Mendes Pereira: Investigation.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* - CNPq) under Grant 118348/2017-5; and the Coordination of Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* - CAPES), under Grant 001. It's the result of postdoctoral research conducted in 2018 at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (*Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* - UFMG), Brazil, and at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), Spain.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.104909

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