



The meaning of the land as a central element in the capitalist modernization of Chilean agriculture

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Abstract

The capitalist modernization of agriculture in Chile involved the structural modification of the land tenure system and the promotion of an agro-exporting business class. This type of development implemented by the military dictatorship has been consolidated during the democratic governments. In this context, the objective of this study is to identify those elements that facilitated this hegemony, through a qualitative analysis of biographies, backgrounds, contexts and personal relationships of peasant families, agricultural business owners, and rural politicians. The results indicate that there would be a historical continuity regarding the meaning that both peasants and business owners have given to the land. For both groups, rural land is associated with individual and private use, which would have cancelled out peasant resistance and facilitated capitalist consolidation. In this sense, on the one hand, the substantive element in the construction of meaning would depend on the proprietary individualism rooted in the biographies and not on the social category, while on the other hand, it is possible to notice that the economic processes are highly receptive to significant constructions.

Keywords

Capitalist modernization; meanings; rural land; biographies; individual property;

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Introduction

The *latifundio*² in Chile, as a model of rural development, was characterized by a high concentration of land, low productive yield, and extreme poverty of peasant families (Garrido, Guerrero and Valdes, 1988; Moreno, 2017). This background allowed the discussion and promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law in 1967, which established a framework of restrictions on the use, benefit, and administration of the land that involved the expropriation of more than 10 million hectares between 1967 and 1973 (Cuesta *et al.*, 2017). The objective was to promote access to rural land for peasant families in a community structure (National Congress, 1970).

The latifundio as a structure is inherited from the colonial period (Olea, 2017), and it implicated very vast areas of land controlled and owned by an individual or family, known as the hacienda (Gwynne & Kay, 1997). In this structure, there were plenty of workers of different categories that responded to the owner and production of the latifundio. This type of work had a semi-feudal regime, in which they had right to live in the property and a minimum payment that usually was in species or products from the owners (Ortiz, 2019). This system was called *inquilinaje* and developed a relation of absolute dependency of the agrarian workers and the hacienda (Ortíz, 2019). In this sense, the land had an absolute prominence, not only in the macro-organisation of the agrarian sector, but also in the social relations existent in the rural territories, particularly in what is called Chile Central³ (Olea, 2017).

This particular socio-economic system did not only have very poor social conditions for the workers, but also a very inefficient agrarian management, which implicated a bad economic productivity (Gwynne & Kay, 1997; Olea, 2017). Both factors, the social and the economic, were the main arguments that led the first stage of the Reforma Agraria (Agrarian Reform). In 1964 Eduardo Frei Montalva wins the elections as a Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democrat), with a strong agrarian program that included an Agrarian Reform project, which showed the radicality of the agrarian problem in Chile⁴. This government created two main bureaus for the rural development CORA (Corporación de la Reforma Agraria/ Corporation of the Agrarian Reform) and Indap (Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario/ Institute for the Agricultural Development) (Kay, 1980). These two showed the main preoccupation of the government on the agrarian sector, the extreme concentration of the land, with its economic and social consequences, and the underdevelopment of the technology and organization of the agricultural production.

² Rural development model based on the concentration of land and other natural resources (Bellisario, 2009; Barraclough and Collarte, J, 1971; Barraclough, 1973; Barraclough and Fernández, 1974) Large estate.

³ *Central Chile* is usually understood as the central valley of the country, which not only was the core the colonization and the first development of the Chilean republic, but also has an important prominence in the *imaginaries* of the rural areas of Chile (Olea, 2017).

⁴ The Frei Montalva government had strongly been projected as an answer to the progression of the socialists in Chile, lots of his measures were in answer to the social conditions that were attended by the socialist ideology, trying to continue with a capitalist economy (Kay, 1980).

Frei's government begun a process of technification and democratization of the land tenure, leading to unionization of the peasants and the expropriation of latifundios that were badly managed (Kay, 1980; Ortiz, 2019). These two elements, unification and expropriation, were radicalized in the Allende government, which arrived with a socialist program in 1970. While the Agrarian Reform had a certain continuity in between these two governments, it had also major changes, especially in the focus and the manners that were used. The socialist program had a much more social approach and encouraged ground shots and grassroots organization, which had already been used and massified in Frei's government, this was actually something that gave more representative power to the left-wing politic movement that gave Allende the democratic power (Kay, 1980).

Looking back to the that period, we can establish two things about the Chilean Agrarian Reform. First, that the empowerment of the rural-peasant sector was one of the factors that destabilized the traditional political scene in Chile, leading to the military coup (Kay, 1980). And second, that as Olea (2017) argues the Reform had a land structure effect, attaining close to 10 million acres of expropriation and resocialization land, but did not achieved a real territorial-productive change. This means that the whole natural and social relations with the land and rural life could not be foully challenged and transformed (Olea, 2017). Even though the Agrarian Reform, in both Frei's and Allende's program had a strong social organization, the historical roots of the latifundio system and the fear of powerful conservative classes mined the transformative effect of the reform. It is fair to attribute this to the abrupt end of the process with the military coup, which left the Agrarian Reform as an incomplete process (Olea, 2017).

Between 1973 and 1989, the Chilean military dictatorship carried out the capitalist modernization of the Chilean agricultural sector (Kay, 1981; Silva, 1988; Bengoa, 2017). This process was characterized by the reversal of most of the expropriations carried out during the governments of Eduardo Frei Montalva and Salvador Allende, through a legal scheme that allowed business owners to access the land at a low cost and with high potential for profitability (Gómez & Echeñique, 1988; Kay, 1981; Villela, 2019). That is to say, the capitalist development scheme promoted by the dictatorship, as mentioned by Villela (2019), considered individual property as a substantial element for the fulfilment of its objectives.

The enactment of Decree Laws No. 165, 208, 240, 2,247 and 3,516 between 1973 and 1980 established a new tenure system in Chile, based exclusively on private property and the lack of regulation by the state. Until 2020, the democratic governments have not modified any of these decrees.

This model has allowed the agro-export sector to present a sustained growth in the last decades in the order of 5% per year (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia⁵, 2018; Gumucio and Amunátegui, 2017; ODEPA⁶, 2019). However, there are still unresolved questions.

⁵ Ministry of Social Development and Family

⁶ Office of Agricultural Studies and Policies, from the Spanish Oficina de Estudios y Políticas Agrarias, ODEPA

Never again, peasants organized to demand a fair distribution of the land and the agro-exporting political economy during the democratic governments, which consolidated and expanded as never before. Some determining factors in this process have been extensively developed by Bengoa (1983, 2016, 2017), whom the political persecution of peasant leaders by the dictatorship generated the resignation and definitive defeat of the movement. Although the research shares this approach, it proposes an analysis from a different conceptualization.

Given the historical importance of the land as a mobilizing agent at a political and economic level, this paper seeks to identify those qualitative elements that have facilitated the hegemonic consolidation of Chilean agrarian capitalism. That is to say, it is interesting to know how the biographies, backgrounds, contexts, and personal relationships of peasant families, agricultural business owners, and rural politicians have facilitated a conceptual construction on the land that allowed, without counterweight, this type of development.

The first part of the paper describes legality as a framework for capitalist development and the social meaning of the land as a theoretical element. The second part is focused on the qualitative analysis of the information collected in the interviews, based on the biographical elements considered in the construction of meaning, the individual and private use of the land, and the imposition of the dynamics of capitalist development.

State of the art: Capitalist legality and the social meaning of the land

a. Legality after Chilean capitalist modernization

The 1973 military coup allowed the dictatorship to reconfigure the agrarian scene in the country to consolidate an agro-export strategy. For this reason, the establishment of an open land market without state participation, as well as the promotion of a property and business class were fundamental (Kay, 1981; Murray, 2002; Villela, 2019).

Law Decrees No. 208 and 165 modify the system of plot allocation, promoting access to the land for an agro-exporting social class different from the peasant families that had participated in the reform process. For example, the use of Decree 208 allowed the exoneration of peasant leaders who had led the political transformation (Bengoa, 1983; Villela, 2019). On the other hand, Decree No. 165 expanded the universe of applicants qualified to participate in the allocation process, privileging those with studies related to the agricultural area. In this way, agronomists, agricultural technicians, or managers were given preference to access the land. From the above, we can see a radical change in the political subject that the land policy was intended to benefit. If the Agrarian Reform expressly fixed the focus of rural development on peasant families, then the dictatorship sought to privilege the construction of this modernizing class based on the structural exclusion of the peasantry.

Another characteristic element of the Agrarian Reform was the type of property right on which the tenure system was built. This point is useful to characterize the political economy of the land market devised by the military regime. Thus, the Agrarian Reform Law

promoted a property right restricted to its social function, which included limits, obligations, and modalities. This way, the restriction on the extension of ownership, operation by the same owner, the indivisibility of the production unit, the obligation to grow certain crops and the payment of compensation in the event of expropriation were legal expressions of this model. The dictatorship pointed out that it was imperative to strengthen the land privatization process, moving forward to establish a degree of legal equality with the rest of the productive activities (Vilela, 2019). In 1978, the military government issued Decree No. 2247, which repealed the Agrarian Reform Law. This regulation states, among its objectives, the need to recover the development of agricultural activities, for which it would be necessary to give stability to land tenure, thus promoting investment and the incorporation of technology.

In addition, Decree No. 2,247 puts an end to the social function of property, eliminating those limitations on the exercise of the right to property, thereby assimilating rural property to the general regime of property regulated by the Civil Code (Garrido, Guerrero and Valdes, 1988). From that moment on in Chile, companies could own land of more than 80 HRB⁷, without any fear of being expropriated.

According to Polo and Korovkin (1990), this process radically transformed the foundations on which rural development had been built before 1973, moving from an activity focused on the welfare of the rural masses to one marked by the purpose of accumulating private capital.

b. The social construction of the meaning of the land

Analysing the meanings that people give to rural property calls for considering the social construction of reality. For Schutz (1974), human beings move in the social world through common sense, which are constructions of sense on daily reality. In this way, the social world “has a particular meaning and structure of significance (relevance) for the human beings who live, think and act within it” (Schutz, 1974, p.37). Also, constructions of common-sense thinking occur in an “intersubjective cultural world” (Schutz, 1974, p.41). The intersubjective refers to that they are ideas constructed in the relationship, influence, and confluence with other human beings, and they are not isolated, private constructions, instead they are socialized, hence their intersubjective character (Schutz, 1974, p.41). The author emphasizes that human beings are biographically determined, that is, situated in a certain context.

The consideration that the person is biographically situated is important because it allows understanding of why the “purposes at hand and our significance systems originated from them must differ, at least to some extent” (Schutz, 1974, p.42). Regarding the social origin of knowledge, Schutz (1974) emphasizes that through socialization with different agents, knowledge is built; therefore, only a small part of that knowledge of the world originates in personal experience. The author points out: “the most important typification means of transmitting original knowledge is the vocabulary and syntax of

⁷ Hectárea de Riego Básico (Basic Irrigation Hectare). This is the surface unit of measurement that was used in the agrarian reform to define the minimum and maximum sizes of plots.

everyday language” (p.44). In Schutz’s proposal (1972), the meaning assigned to an ‘object’ is not a discrete experience, but rather a continuum “with horizons that open equally towards the past and the future” (p.104).

Berger and Luckmann (1968) propose as a central thesis of their proposal “that reality is socially constructed, and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes by which this is produced” (p.11). They propose to define ‘reality’ as the quality of phenomena that we recognize as independent of our own volition (...) and to define ‘knowledge’ as the certainty that phenomena are real and have specific characteristics. Berger and Luckmann (1968) agree with Schutz (1974) regarding the social relativity of what is considered ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’: “It results that specific accumulations of ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’ belong to specific social contexts and these relationships will have to be included in the appropriate sociological analysis of these contexts” (1968, p.13). Under these perspectives, it would be possible to suggest that, according to the position of the person in the social space, different meanings could be expected for the same object since the social, biographical context in which an individual is positioned, would permeate the meanings.

The aforementioned point is of particular importance in the context of this research, as it seeks to go deep into the significances given by different actors, with different positions in the social space in respect to the rural property. This perspective can be linked to the concept of “habitus” of Bourdieu (1999), from which it could be stated that the individuals in different positions in the social space, have different “habitus” and that could imply different meanings in front of the same object, in this case with respect to the rural property. The habitus (Bourdieu, 1999) can be understood as a set of dispositions that are inscribed in the individuals through the process of socialization, “they are structured structures, classifying schemes, principles of classification, vision and division, different tastes” (Bourdieu, 2007, p.33). In conclusion, these dispositions would allow the individual to move in social life and make possible the appropriation of the reality in which he lives.

According to Feixas (2003), individuals are capable of signifying their own experience, and in the process of constructing meanings, many elements are interrelated, such as images, behaviours, emotions and thoughts, etc.; and it is from the relationship between these elements that the constructed meaning and the generated knowledge can be seen. In this regard, Llambí (1995 as cited in Gomez 2003, p.12) says: “Properly rural lifestyles are being transformed by the values of modernity.” Thus, the meaning of the land could be mediated by values, specifically by those that rural communities have built during the capitalist modernization period.

Considering the above, Long and Long (1992) suggest a theory for the analysis of rural processes, focused on the perspective of the social actor, where they emphasize the importance of the meaning of things from the point of view of the actors “as a social construction subject to constant negotiations between social actors” (Long & Long, 1992). To this end, they are based on Appadurai (1991), who states that objects by themselves have no meaning or value, except that which society gives them. In his words, objects have a social life, that is to say, they lack an inherent value or meaning, but the judgment about

them is made by the individuals. Authors such as Appadurai (1991), Long and Long (1992) and Entrena (1998), have tried to support the idea that the social construction of rurality, and in this case the capitalist model, is historically conditioned.

c. New ruralities: actual dynamics in agricultural sector

During the last decades of the 20th century, the rural sector had experienced some important transformations, which led to reconfigurations and re-conceptualizations (Kay, 2016). This signified a change in the traditional way of considering the rural, which was usually understood as a rural population occupied in agricultural activities in low density areas, where there is also poor welfare conditions (as absence of services, basic infrastructure etc.) and backward cultural conditions, all these leading to an overvaluation of the urban sector (Gómez, 2002). In now days, the countryside cannot be taken just by its agricultural and forestall function, but also by a diversity of other activities developed by its population in a regional, national, and international scale (Arias, 1992a & b; Lara, 1993; Reardon et al., 2001; Schejtman & Berdegue, 2003).

This change of vision related to the emergence of the New Ruralities concept, came as an answer to a series of effects of the global economy in the rural spaces, especially to a globalization of the national economies and a foreign market orientation (García, 2003), which impacts the Latin-American rural sector in several ways, which are distinguish by Llambí (1995, in Gómez 2002) as the following:

- i) Territorial changes: characterized by the valorisation of rural space, linked to new investment flows that increased the demand for consumption of rural spaces;
- ii) Occupational changes: a transformation of a traditional structure towards secondary and tertiary occupations;
- iii) Cultural changes: in sense of new cognitive and evaluative schemes of the rural habitants of their life conditions, transformed by the irruption of modernity.

This process and its conceptualization have also had plenty of discussions and questions on the particularity and homogeneity of it. An important one is the established by Ramírez-Miranda (2014) and Eleazar (2005) which point that it has not been enough problematized if new ruralities are answers and resistance process from the rural communities or active agencies of them. The authors warn the lack of discussion on the way in which these changes have occurred, questioning the new and the old. In this line, they point an acritical use of the term new ruralities, saying that the existence of a new rurality would mean, at least, the existence of diverse important changes and new subjects and new production relations; all this with no evidence of been occurring in a homogenic way. For Bengoa (2016), new ruralities are related to what has been a structural change that has affected the rural subject which has not only had the inherence of the historical pejorative consideration of ruralities, but also a change in how elites approach the land, moving towards a productive factor of approximation and commoditization.

All these factors and changes are transcendental for this investigation because global, national, and cultural transformation of the rural territories have direct impact in how subject relates to their land. Even more new ruralities allow for the questioning of

dynamics and significant variations and continuities in how the rural is built and how people relate to their living spaces.

Data and methodology

The qualitative methodology allows for the addressing of discourses, subjectivities, and perceptions that certain actors present regarding an object such as the land. In relation to this kind of methodologies, they characterize themselves for a relative ontology, with a hermeneutical and constructivist paradigm, and a subjectivist epistemology. For this investigation we have used an interpretative paradigm which examines the reality in relation to the meanings attributed by people. For this, what people do or say depends and determinates how they define and construct their world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1986).

Since the present investigation aims to understand the meanings attributed to the rural land by the main characters relating to the gesture of it (families, business, and public agents), discourses, subjectivities, and perceptions of these are fundamental. For rural studies, qualitative methodologies can be very useful in analysing complex microsocial factors intervening in rural communities' lives, in relation to macrostructural historical and geographical contexts. On other hand, it allows process of social construction of spaces of interaction in between subjects, and the practices and meanings that are given (Feito & Mastángelo, 2000).

Given the above, three actors are selected: the peasant family, agricultural business owners, and political institutions. The first, because, in situ, their life stories are intertwined with the land as an economic and cultural element, while the second could conceptualize their bonds more linked to the economy and finally, and the third has played the role of delimiting what is possible, in terms of rurality and land tenure in Chile.

For the reason of the main topic of the investigation, the land, we used focalized interviews. This allowed us to approach the subject with more profundity, depending on the context and the relation of the subject with the object/ land. The study was realized on the ex-Hacienda San Antonio, which was, before Agrarian Reform, more than 1200 acres, and has been object of the Reform, the Counterreformer and the modern politics moving towards an agro-exporter development model. This means that the families living in this territory have lived expropriation process, the repression and devolution of the land, and the more recent individual assignation of individual properties, as well as the politics of subsidies and technical support by public organisations as INDAP. This accounts for the structural agricultural transformation lived in Chile in the last fifty years, which gives great validity given the object of our study.

Eighteen interviews were conducted, and the selection was made at convenience, as indicated in Table 1. To do so, semi-structured interview guidelines were designed, which generated degrees of flexibility for the interviewer during the exercise (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2010). In the case of rural families, they were selected based on the fulfilment of certain basic characteristics, such as having been directly or indirectly linked to Chilean rural history. At the business level, the president of the National Agriculture Society participated. Regarding the political actors, the person in charge of the Agrarian

Reform during the administration of President Eduardo Frei Montalva, the Minister of Agriculture of President Salvador Allende, the Director of the Institute of Agricultural Development, and the head of advisors to the Minister of Agriculture of Chile, both during the first administration of Michelle Bachelet, participated.

Table 1. Categories of interviewed actors

Actor type	Age	Gender
Peasant	79	M
Peasant	60	F
Peasant	61	F
Peasant	83	M
Peasant	84	M
Peasant	78	M
Peasant	78	M
Peasant	81	M
Peasant	83	M
Peasant	78	F
Young person	28	M
Young person	26	M
Young person	29	M
Politician	87	M
Politician	91	M
Politician	52	M
Politician	53	M
Business owner	75	M

Note: The young people interviewed have a direct link to families on the San Antonio *latifundio*.

The fieldwork was carried out between October 28, 2019, and March 1, 2020. Among the difficulties found, the most recurring was the mistrust of peasant families to participate in the interviews. They expressed a constant fear of handing over information that would harm them or that would result in their land being taken away from them. The remainder of the interviews, both with business owners and politicians, were conducted without major inconveniences.

The technique used was discourse analysis (Ibáñez, 1979). This model makes it easier to recognize the point of view of the social actor, detecting elements and the relationships that exist between different components, according to their contexts. From this, the differences, similarities, and emerging meanings are recognized. Also, according

to Cabezas (1992), this technique allows floating meanings to emerge, which must be observed from the context in which they occur (Flores Guerrero, 2009). In this way, the technique allowed for the development of the proposed objectives since it was of particular interest to verify and understand the construction of meaning based on the institutional or familiar place where the discourse of the actors takes place, as well as the linguistic forms used for its expression.

Based on the transcription of the interviews, three categories of analysis were elaborated to facilitate their classification (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The analysis of the results aimed at addressing the perceptions of the interviewees based on an understanding of reality as a unified whole (Perez Serrano, 2002), through the decomposition of the social sense (Flores Guerrero, 2009).

Results

a. Biographies and land. Elements considered in the construction of a meaning

Context plays a central role in the construction of meaning. This is where material, symbolic, and affective elements intertwine to generate bonds and subjectivities that give meaning to an object. The objective of this section is to identify what would have been the main elements for the meaning of the land by the interviewed actors.

The first issue deals with the elements that contribute to the configuration of a biographical situation (Schutz, 1974), and that impact on the perspective towards the objects (Taylor & Bogdan, 1986, as cited by Krause, 1995). In this regard, the biography of the initial assignees of the Agrarian Reform is characterized by a close bond with survival. For the interviewees, the meaning of the land is related to words such as “soul”, “heart”, and “life”. That is to say, the land is not only a geographical space that allows them to live, rather it is a group of experiences marked by a deep resilience, which has meant, in their opinion, to advance by granting guarantees of survival not only to them but also to their children.

Also, rural property as an object of study crosses the life stories of the peasant family, that is, in some way everyone has been sentimentally, politically, or economically linked to its management. As indicated by a 79-year-old farmer born and raised on a latifundio:

“My father was given his hectares with the CORA⁸, he had always had a subordinate job on the latifundio, so it was hard for him to produce. Then we grew up there striving and doing everything that could be done in the country and the land...”

For most of the interviewees who were beneficiaries of the Agrarian Reform, the land was fundamental because of the economic role it played in their families, providing opportunities that were seized by some peasants and lost by others. An 83-year-old

⁸ Agrarian Reform Corporation, from the Spanish Corporación de la Reforma Agraria, CORA. Institution for the management and implementation of the Agrarian Reform, which was terminated by the military regime.

peasant, who was an original assignee of the Agrarian Reform, for whom the land determined his structure of opportunities, said:

“(…) to be honest, I didn't know how to make the most of the opportunities we were given. Since I did not know how to read or write, one day I found myself with more than 30 hectares and when Pinochet became president it was all over, we did not know what to do. So, after a little while, I started to sell; many outsiders were buying, and at that time my wife got sick so I started to sell. Today I'm just left with the plot of the house…”

This testimony is related to the violent arrival of Pinochet military dictatorship, which did not only bring repression and the end of democratic organizations in rural sector, but also a brutal counter reform. This was characterized not only by the restitution of big properties, but also by the fragmentation of the land properties constituting small plots (Kay, 1981). Even though these small properties were given, in many cases to peasants, the lack of technical support, the destruction of social bonds, and an important economic crisis forced many of these peasants to sell their properties (Kay, 1981). This phenomenon, related to the quote, is a clear example of what Olea (2017) points as the incomplete process of the Agrarian Reform, which did not arrive to a true territorial reconfiguration of the rural.

The business actor interviewed, from a very young age had a bond with the land and the countryside, which has marked him throughout his life. He was a city councilor, mayor, CEO, director of the National Institute of Agricultural Development during the first administration of Sebastian Piñera, and he currently serves as President of the National Agriculture Society, a union that represents the largest and most important companies in the sector. The land has played a fundamental role in his education and development, where, in relation to another background, he builds a narrative. By 1966, the family *latifundio* reached more than 24,000 hectares, of which, as the same interviewee assured, no more than 1,000 were produced. Those lands came from the colonial period and had been the mainstay of the family business. An interesting issue arises when addressing the Chilean tenancy system:

“(…) There was clear support for the historical system of tenancy and landowners. At some point in some years, I do not remember exactly, but in 1964 some workers treated me as ‘su mercé’⁹, to show respect for the structure of the property and the agricultural work and trust, but we had a different style formed by my parents, a permanent help, we had schools and we cared about having good teachers, there was a highly appreciated relationship.”

In addition, the interviewee emphasizes the relationship established within the *latifundio* between employers and tenants, which were characterized by a very favourable coexistence, even during the Agrarian Reform, given the support they had from the workers. In this regard, he mentions:

⁹ “su mercé” is a respectful form of address equivalent to “sir” used for someone who does not have a higher, official title.

“Therefore, we cared that they did not lack anything of the essential elements. We had a shop, I do not remember, 12 or 15 products, flour, sugar, tea, coffee, oil. So, there was a very favourable coexistence until the presidential period of Allende began to approach... we were still producing, but the state began to intervene, trying to expropriate a latifundio of 24,000 hectares of which we were operating one thousand hectares.”

In short, the land is constituted as a historical space, characterized by norms of social behaviour based on respect for tradition. In the public discourse of the business owner, this scheme was widely approved by the peasants. However, the land is not only a space of interaction of social relationships but also an economic factor:

“I have the concept that the land is a company, just as it is a furniture factory or a shoe factory, whatever. According to that, the furniture factory worker could say that he is entitled to a piece of that factory... and that's part of the market-based economy, of people's ability.”

The last quotes indicate how much the land tenure is articulated towards a traditional economic asset. In this sense, the way peasants understand their property is in an individual way, in which they value their access to individual property rights. Even though the capitalism regime in Chile was reinstated long time ago, nearly 50 years, it also shows that the rearticulation of the countryside could only achieve a very partial redistribution of property on an individual capitalist basis and did not attained a true change in social usage of the territories (Olea, 2017). More so, how Kay (1981) argues, the process of counter reform solidified individual property identification.

About the politicians, the first issue was to try to characterize from where and how the first connections with the peasant world, land, and rurality in general arise. Of these, none expressed a peasant or rural origin, all were influenced by indirect experiences or political activities that allowed them to know the reality of the Chilean countryside in the mid-50s. This group shares the condition that at some point in their lives they had the power to make decisions or promote policies directly related to the land.

Two generations of politicians can be identified from their identity constructs on the land. The first group is composed of politicians who led the Agrarian Reform, for whom land is linked to power and the basis of the *latifundio* system:

“(...) Obviously, in all the work we had done it was clear that in Chile there was an enormous amount of land concentrated in a few hands and with very low productivity, to the extent that Chile had to import food increasingly year after year since 1959. Therefore, something was not working; besides the social problem where there were a tremendous injustice and practically a semi-slavery of tenancy, and that combination of factors leads us to commit ourselves definitively to this task...”

The following group is composed of former senior officials of democratic governments, who present a technocratic approach to the land:

“(...) I consider the land as a factor of production, that is to say, that you could not do agriculture without land. Today I see the land as a cultural or living space for the peasants, but for me, it is an economic factor.”

a.1 Misery, wealth, and not very diverse socialization in the construction of a meaning

According to Schutz (1974), the construction of typologies to signify would be preceded by a process that occurs through intersubjective socialization, that is, from construction with others, which in the case of the peasants, who were beneficiaries of the Agrarian Reform, would be conditioned by the relations of misery, poverty, and extreme inequality that characterized the latifundio system until 1966 (Kay, 1978). This is how the family and community biography fit inexcusably into this context.

The business owner describes his biographical experience based on the ideas of respect and trust between the tenants and the owners of the latifundio. The use of formalities in the peasant language, the high number of votes in the elections won by the interviewee, added to the defence of the latifundio by the peasants before the imminent expropriation would be the evidence of a peaceful relationship without major disturbances.

In this context, Scott (1990) points out that the greater the hierarchical distance between the dominant and the dominated, the more evident the public discourse and the ritual forms of the dominated will be. Therefore, the use of linguistic forms and acts of servitude are meant to provide public discourse that will offer convincing evidence of the hegemony of dominant values. “*The latifundio was defended by the workers*”, “*I was elected with a high number of votes*”, “*there was so much respect and trust in the latifundio*”, would be the evidence that Scott mentions.

For the politicians interviewed who participated in democratic governments, the meaning of the land is already in the economic sphere. “*I’m a technocrat more than a politician*”, one of them said. While they value a first stage where the term has a political meaning, the land means a factor of production. The evolution of the meaning of the land shows a process of transition. Scott’s approach is consistent with Kay (1981, 1978), who stresses the economic importance of the land for the consolidation of the agrarian counter-reform of the dictatorship.

According to Long and Long (1992), the social construction of significance is the product of constant negotiation with other social actors. In the same sense, Schutz (1974) proposes the relation-influence scheme in the socialization process. That is, the construction of the meaning given to an element should be subject to tensions, which will depend to a large extent, on the degree of resistance or resilience of the process of socialization or negotiation with others. By recapitulating the elements and conditions that have been in the sight of the interviewees for the construction of meaning, the peasant families developed the meaning based on socialization without diversification of actors. That is to say, the relationships within the family, as well as with their peers shape the meaning of the object. The interviewees describe the Agrarian Reform as a process that arrives, that appears, and develops, and none of them addresses it as their own. While they find it fair and necessary, there is no doubt that they qualify it as something given.

b. The individual as a transversal element in the meaning of the actors on the land

Most interviewees attributed individual meaning to land use and management. In other words, the way to understand the right of ownership of rural land comes from an individual perspective, which would provide greater certainty at the political, family, and productive levels. However, when we analyze the foundations of this construction, the situation changes substantially. In this regard, a 78-year-old peasant says:

“(...) my experience with the cooperative was not very good. It was very difficult for all of us to be on the same page for work. I prefer to manage my plot alone. At first, it was with other neighbours around here, but it didn't work out, we had a lot of fights.”

Another peasant, who benefited with the land during the allocation process carried out by the dictatorship, says:

“If you ask around here, I'm sure everyone would tell you that we wanted to be the owners of our plots, I'm pretty sure of that. Here we were told that we were going to be business owners and that now since we had land, we would be able to do many things.”

For the business owner, the land issue must be managed individually, given the efficiency that this type of management brings to the owners.

“(...) There's a romantic aspect with collective work, but in practice, it doesn't work because getting everyone to agree on what, how and when to produce is a mess.”

Regarding the political actors, we must distinguish two trends. In the first group are those directly linked to the process, who in general defended the structure of the established procedures:

“What the Agrarian Reform established was the transitory creation of settlements, which had common lands destined for education, sports, and other activities, while the plots would be managed at the family level...this last aspect could not be carried out.”

On the other hand, there are the political actors with responsibilities in contemporary governments, for whom the experience in terms of efficiency of public policies indicates that individual management of the land would facilitate production and thus improve efficiency levels:

“... A lot is going on with cooperatives and communities as forms of production... when you begin to know how the small farmer works you realize that those models, at least in Chile, are not feasible. Old farmers like to feel that they are the owners and that means that they decide what, how, and when to produce. And for us, from the government, at least in my opinion, the private management of the land is preferable, because it allows the design and implementation of more focused policies.”

b.1 Individual property as an illusion of material equality

The relationship that exists between the peasants and the structure of the property is clearly identified as an individual relationship. Peasants privilege a relationship based on the ability to dispose of property individually. This characteristic identified in the interviews is consistent with Villela (2019), who points out that among the strategies used by the dictatorship to co-opt and consolidate the construction of a business class linked to agriculture would be that of granting land titles at an individual level. That is to say, the dictatorship would have used a historical demand of the Chilean peasantry for access to the land, to establish a hegemonic and dominant capitalist model in rural areas.

To freely dispose of the land meant the real possibility that the old and new assignees could easily get rid of it, given the lack of state support for the production of small peasant family agriculture and the complex economic scenario experienced during the first years of the military regime. Bengoa (2016) has a similar opinion. For him, the peasant movement involved in the reform process was always owner-driven, an issue not so accepted by the governments that promoted the Agrarian Reform. In this respect, the author claims that the peasants would have been left alone in their demands.

This analysis would show a close connection between the way the peasants approached the concept of rural land, the capitalist modernization of the dictatorship, and the successive democratic governments since the objective of the peasants was always managing rural property individually.

Among politicians, the land is also configured in the biographical order, so those who had direct responsibilities in the development of the Agrarian Reform, still suggest the importance of the initial community formulas. However, for those who held positions during democratic governments, the fundamental idea about the land is its efficiency and the importance of its individual use, a similar reason given by the business owner interviewed.

c. Neither negotiated nor agreed, but imposed

In general, the interviews show that capitalist modernization was carried out based on the political and economic defeat of the peasant sector, where imposition and no negotiations were the main characteristics of the process. This is how an 81-year-old peasant describes it:

“(...) We were never asked about anything. Well, a little earlier with the reform, we did have meetings and there we discussed what we wanted for the latifundio. But after that, all this about the division of the plots is not much we could talk about, it was like the luck of the draw and with that you have to manage.”

The business actor has a favourable opinion of this process:

“I think that the peasantry in general in the period that you mention (1973-1980) had a period—I do not know if it is the right word—of resignation; this did not work out and the land had to be returned. Therefore, you had to learn the work and start working with

the employer who had a job. Some of them sold the plot of land because they were well paid with the money of that time and others stayed...”

The idea of resignation for the peasants crosses time. It comes and goes as the conversation goes on. Many times, it does not appear with that name, but it is the facts that evokes it. The memory of what could have been and what was not is associated with the guilt and sorrow of having sell the land. Only one interviewee conceived this resignation with the capacity to link it to a structural process that had no degree of justice with them. He pointed out:

“Several times it is said that we sold the land because we liked the party or we were alcoholics, of course, that must have happened. But not all of us were like this. Most of us were people of effort and among those, there were several who sold the land because we were left behind...”

Resignation and fear are often mixed in the stories of the peasants. For many, the dictatorship meant owning the land, that is undeniable. For others, of course, it meant persecution and defeat. These perceptions are well reflected in the opinion of a 60-year-old peasant woman:

“We grew up on the latifundio with my dad, with the reform we were able to have land. But we were still afraid of everything, especially me because I was a girl. I remember that under Pinochet's regime, the social leaders were taken hostage and most of them ended up in Quiriquina Island, where they died. And so you grew up, immerse in all that fear.”

c.1 Capitalism built on defeat

At the beginning of the talks, the peasants remembered with a certain degree of nostalgia for the latifundio period. The memory of the monthly payments and a place to live served as a reference. However, as the interviews went on, the perception changed radically. The latifundio system was no longer so friendly, the employers were not good people, and working twelve hours a day was never reasonable.

Thus, the peasant defence of private property emerges as a response to the context and not as an ideological manifestation. First, no precedent allows pointing out, with some exceptions mentioned by Bengoa (2016), that the peasant sectors were part of a neoliberal ideological formation process. And second, from the interviews, we can see the relevance of the material and biographical context as spaces from which the meaning is constructed. The land is the only thing we have, the peasants will say. Thus, it was the weight of the colonial and latifundio tradition, with its set of misery and exclusion, which would have directly fostered the peasant idea of individual land as a space of security, economic certainty, and survival.

Another idea that characterizes the interaction between policy and meanings is resignation. This perception has a basis among the peasantry interviewed, for whom the rural transformation that capitalist modernization implied was characterized by economic imposition. We were never asked about anything, the interviewees repeated. In this way, the process emerges as a non-negotiated space with the peasant actors, where the new is

often confused with the old which was never or rarely observed, or probably where instead of changes, there would have been displacements with greater or lesser intensity from one social category to another (Bengoa, 2003; Gómez, 2003).

In this scheme, the land is articulated from a non-negotiated construction of rurality. First, it was the misery and extreme poverty of the *latifundio* that biographically conditioned the individual idea of the land as a space of economic security for peasant families. Then, the call of the ruling classes for emancipation through the Agrarian Reform to finally know the few benefits of the capitalist modernization of Chilean agriculture (Kay, 1981, 2002; Murray, 2006).

Conclusions

The results show that there would be a historical continuity regarding the meaning that both peasants and business owners have given to the land. For both groups, it means private property and individual use. At the political level, the matter changes between those actors linked to the Agrarian Reform process and those who have been given responsibilities in democratic governments. The former kept the idea of a collective or community use, while the latter, based mostly on their territorial experience, privileged to keep the individual approach.

This would partly explain the hegemonic consolidation of capitalist modernization promoted by the dictatorship and continued by democratic governments, although the actors interviewed construct their meanings based on diverse biographical conditions, they seem to converge, with respect to the land, for different reasons and origins, in an individual meaning about property.

Finally, it is possible to observe that economic processes are not only constructed based on the military force of a dictatorship or legislation, but they are also highly receptive to the biographical and cultural conditions that would have influenced the construction of a particular meaning. Individual property, as a value for peasant families, is an example of this since it would have facilitated the concurrence of the economic objectives of the military regime, the deactivation of any type of political tension, and the old landowning desires of the Chilean peasantry.

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