

Resiliency in Hostile Environments

A Comunidad Agrícola
in Chile's Norte Chico

William L. Alexander



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Standardization of Rural Livelihood and Market Integration Policies

IN THE PREVIOUS THREE CHAPTERS WE SAW THAT SELLING THE PRODUCTS (primarily hand-pressed cheese) from their goat herds is a key source of income for many families in Loma Seca, as it is in most *comunidades*. In many ways goats are a symbol for this traditional livelihood. In a positive sense, goats stand for freedom of movement as they function as a kind of “mobile capital,” a portable tool of production that can be relocated during drought years. Others emphasize the negative aspect of this symbol. Goats graze incessantly and they will seemingly consume anything. Like mining, goat herding is viewed as an unsustainable “extractive technology” that depletes the land and makes it unusable. As discussed in chapter 3, there are competing theories about the origins of the *comunidades agrícolas* and differing ideas as to the ethnic and cultural identity of the people who live in them. Their way of life was at times described to me by outsiders as a backward indigenous system and their selfish attitude toward the land as a “mining mentality,” both of which need to be changed for the *comuneros*’ and the region’s economic betterment. In this chapter I examine a law that is having a drastic impact on the lives of *crianceros* (people who raise goats) and the “policy environment” (Weaver 1996) from which this law originates. In doing so, I think about how images of origins and ethnicity are implicit in the development ideology and consider how they differ from the self-image and self-identification of the *comuneros* with whom I lived and worked. I contend that “Policy-Positioned Ascriptions of Ethnicity Identity and History” is a useful designation for such naturalization of ethnic difference via the economic development apparatus of the state. I will also argue that consideration of petty commodities—such as the home production of goat cheese—is important in understanding both the nature of *campesino* livelihood and the relationships between peasant and nonpeasant economies and cultures.

“THE STATE”: WEIGHING IN ON STANDARDS AND MEASUREMENTS

The government of the military dictatorship was more concerned with elite interests than with rural poverty, but the state's influence was still felt in the countryside. Foreign investment was courted while government spending was slashed as, in theory, government intervention took a backseat to market-driven export-oriented “agents of growth” (Hojman 1990, 1–3; Kay 1993, 19–20). Portes has emphasized the duplicitous and ironic nature of this guise of *laissez-faire* economics pointing out that “Chile’s neoliberal experiment did not so much ‘free’ markets as to create them from scratch using the resources of the state” (2000: 360). Typically, neoliberal agendas espouse nonintervention in the economy while simultaneously making concerted offerings to transnational interests in the form of investment enticements and the removal of trade barriers. While certainly more attention is paid to rural poverty in postdictatorship Chile, the channels through which much of this assistance is given are firmly positioned in the familiar “free market” model. In addition, the discourse of economic development with regard to the *comunidades agrícolas* at times draws upon imagined ethnic traditions positioned in opposition to the model and ideals of “modernization.”

Any state may control the actions of its citizens through law so as to explicitly circumscribe what actions will not be tolerated. This restraint of individual will via punitive means is overt and easy to identify. Any state may at the same time authorize specific ways of “doing business” or participating in particular activities. This creation of consensus—“inclusive” rather than “exclusive”—can in the final moment serve the same function as the wielding of coercion, but it is achieved through ways that present themselves as benign or even benevolent.

Beyond the judicial domain, at the level of nationalist discourse and ideology, a familiar practice of exclusion by way of defining inclusion emerges through the fashion by which the modern nation-state, to quote Anderson’s famous phrase, “imagines itself” (1991). Having developed into complex political structures through conquest, colonialism, boundary redefinition and migration, state society has always been comprised of diverse cultures. But although constitutively diverse, they are never genuinely pluralistic in terms of equal participation and representation for all segments. The political elite must maintain an order of authority that is in agreement with the legitimizing social pact or moral charter and at the same time create or conserve efficacious practices that ensure the survival of its ability and perceived

right to rule. To secure the continuance of its dominion, it is often necessary for the state to differentiate between those who are and who are not judicially under its sway, and it is through such processes of inclusion and differentiation that ethnic antagonism arises. Dynamic interethnic relationships are thus part and parcel of the continuous process of state formation. Although ethnic variation is a quality attributable to all populations under the rule of a state, the essence of that diversity is specific to the ways in which an individual state operationalizes its particular construction and maintenance (Toland 1993, 2-5). Nationalism has come to connote loyalty to the state rather than loyalty to the nation. In a world rife with ethnic antagonism within state borders, it should be clear that this is not simply a matter of quibbling over semantics. Perhaps incognizant of this instability, policy makers and some scholars who insist that the state is the political extension of the nation must either believe that ethnic group loyalty corresponds with state loyalty or that it will fade away through the modernizing advances of state society (Connor 1994, 97-98).

The abstraction of "nation" as the defining element of "nation-state," then, is fraught with contradictions surrounding the questions "which nation?" and "whose state?" Some social theorists have complained that many political scientists, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, have overdrawn and mystified the state as an object of analysis, confusing what states *do* with what they *are* (Abrams 1988; Corrigan and Sayer 1985). This should not be surprising because the modern state presents itself in an overdrawn and mystified form, hiding the incongruity of its declaration that it speaks for a diverse mass of people. The illusion of the history of the modern capitalist state as a singular history of successive laws, which separates law from its empirical relation to material conditions and is incognizant of its actual historical struggle to seize and maintain power, is what Marx and Engels call the "specific illusion of lawyers and politicians" (2001, 148). This illusion involves both memory and amnesia. Anderson's contention is that, like all communities, states imagine themselves as cohesive, legitimate, and sovereign through *classificatory* practices and *selectively constructed* historical narratives (1991, 3). In a similar vein, Corrigan and Sayer contend that the history of state formation is a continuous cultural revolution, centuries spent manufacturing a *standard* of national identity by which oppositional cultures and behaviors are measured. These authors argue that the state acts as the moral regulator of society by "stating"; that is, imbuing normative meanings into what are actually "ontological and epistemological premises" about acceptable behavior through sanctioned societal institutions: "schooling" equals "education," "policing" equals "order," and "voting" equals

“political participation” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985, 4). “Measured” is the operative word as Corrigan and Sayer assert that upholding the state depends to some extent on the “moral regulation” of its citizens through standardizing and classificatory practices. In addition, privileged historical narratives of a national/cultural past are given currency while others are ignored as nationalist discourse obscures the inherent contradiction that it speaks in a single voice for what are in reality diverse groups of people living within the country’s borders. In the course of forging a consensus among these groups as to what makes up a national identity, a unified history, and a common heritage, cultures, behaviors, and values that do not “measure up” to these standards are identified and, to a large extent, defined (via the insider/outsider binary) in terms of “what they are not.”

“Measurement” is also a consequence of economic development policies that promote the integration of peasants, or other “peripheral” groups, into new markets. Development agencies in establishing the outlets through which aid is given and setting standards by which progress is measured play an important part in this process. Standardization and regulation—purportedly value-free and objective measurements—may serve to construct oppositional identities and difference in measurable terms. Failing to meet these standards naturalizes this difference as something autonomous and “real” rather than one part of a binary in a modernizing discursive construct. Images of identity and ethnicity may spring from the contested ground where “national” comes to mean “modern” and “traditional” becomes a euphemism for “backward.”

REGLAMENTO SANITARIO DE LOS ALIMENTOS

On May 13, 1999, the sale of hand-pressed artisanal goat cheese was placed under the regulation of a national law in Chile that fixes standards for the sanitary production of food items for sale to the public (Reglamento Sanitario de los Alimentos). The initial legislation (which regulates the sale of many other items, such as cakes and sandwiches) was passed in 1993, but cheese producers (queseros) were given an exemption until a plan could be developed to ease the impact that the restriction of this source of income would have on families like those in Loma Seca. Throughout the course of my work I heard the widely varying points of view from herders to public health officers to development agents. They voiced opinions and reactions running the gamut from fear to optimism to uncertainty. Government officials assured the public that the central objective is to establish improved

levels of hygiene that will both protect the public health and help producers reach new markets with an improved and well-marketed product. The development agencies involved emphasized that their primary goal is the integration of small-scale local producers into national and, eventually, international markets. By the time that I left Chile in May 1999, many others in the countryside still did not share this confidence.

What development specialists have devised is a multiple sector plan of subsidies and credit extension for improved irrigation and animal forage. With these two needs met, it is hoped that ecological resources can be stabilized so as to allow consistent production of milk and a production of cheese that complies with the requirements of the law. They anticipate that state support will yield actual progress in the creation of locally owned small factories and milking centers. However, many small producers worry that their inclusion in the law represents a targeting of their previously unregulated activities and that it will ultimately eliminate a critical productive activity for those who simply cannot conform to the new guidelines and standards. They do not believe that they can compete with big commercial factories because of their limited production season, their lack of start-up capital, and their continued dependence upon natural forage. They also fear becoming vulnerable to credit institutions should they take out loans to finance this enterprise.

In response to the grave problems of drought and erosion in Region IV, recent Chilean governments have vowed to address rural poverty through development projects that are environmentally sound. These efforts include: (1) transfer of appropriate modern technology and management practices demonstrated through pilot programs; (2) the growing of animal feed such as alfalfa and planting reforesting plants such as *Atriplex nummularia* and *Acacia* shrubs to reduce dependency on the depleted natural forage and to help maintain the animals year-round; (3) irrigation projects for such plantations; and (4) support for small-scale commercial enterprises, including the creation of small cheese factories and milking centers. All of these projects are funded through a combination of state subsidies and easy term loans.

Initially a public health issue, the project to improve the quality of cheese soon came under the management of economic development and environmental policy. But even proponents recognize that this is only the beginning of a long-term plan that may take a number of years before the necessary elements are in place. Now clandestine production in the informal market continues but under a cloud of enforcement as venders now must show that they purchase their cheese from registered cheese makers. As discussed earlier, in times of



“Milking goats in the corral.” Photo courtesy of the author.

drought, those who can afford it rent pasture outside of the community, and many still move their animals to the cordillera, the Andes mountain pastures that Chile shares with Argentina. (Recall that for several months, Pablo and his brother Gustavo seriously considered this move during the drought.) Even in adequate years, those who depend on natural forage can generally only expect to produce sufficient milk between the months of August and January. This short production season is the reason why small producers skeptically view their ability to compete with large factories and why they feel that they should not have to conform to the same production standards. To produce year-round requires cultivation of food for animals to get them through the winter, and most producers simply cannot do this as adequate water and forage are the first elements needed for compliance with the law.

MODERNIZATION AND LAW

Region IV is one of the poorest regions in Chile, and it is here where the majority of goat and sheep raising is practiced, so there was much concern about the impact of the application of the new law. Health

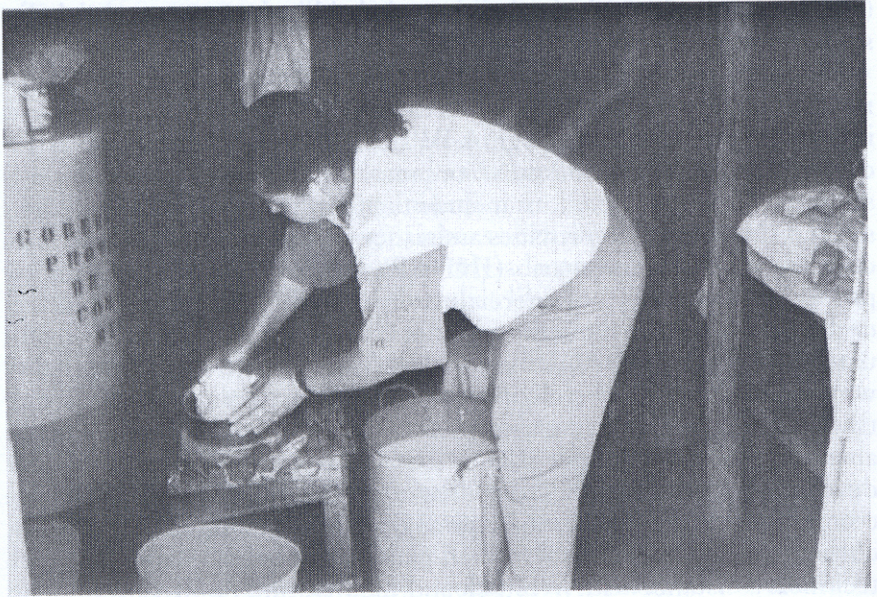
officials became alarmed over the public health risk of contamination in artisanal cheese with an outbreak of food poisoning in Santiago in 1990. A subsequent study revealed the frequency of microorganisms from samples purchased in public markets, roadside stands, and from vendors boarding buses on the Pan-American Highway. The conditions under which milk is collected and cheese is produced were identified as the cause for this contamination. In the last few years, public awareness has been raised about sickness-causing microorganism contamination in this cheese. Subsequently a large part of the market for this product has been reduced. Families like Pablo and Amelia's have long sold goat cheese as a means of supplementing their incomes. Small stands are scattered along the coastal highway. Cheese produced by such families sells at a price that is about a quarter of what cheese produced under sanitary industrial conditions costs in the grocery store. The people living in the communities of the producers themselves seem to have no problem with eating the cheese because they have been doing so all of their lives. A health official offering an explanation to me said that having had the cheese as part of their diet for a long period of time, many people are resistant to the bacteria. Beyond the communities themselves, the internal market is seen as negligible and the result is low production and low profit. However, as in the example of wheat production that I offered in the previous chapter, a seemingly low-profit, low-cost commodity can be a crucial piece to an integrated system of production.

A 1991 study argued that such local commercial production in the hands of the small producer could be viable provided that there was government assistance in terms of credit, proper forage, donation of building materials, training in sanitary manufacturing of cheese, access to market, and the employment of community labor resources (Ramirez 1991, 146–48). Following such recommendations, a program was created to help producers improve the milk coagulation process by using chemical enzymes. So far there are ten factories in the Limarí province, with plans for five more in the near future. In March 1998 the initial construction of one such factory in the rugged interior between Ovalle and Loma Seca was garnering a good deal of attention. Located near Punitaqui, in the heart of a concentration of comunidades in the “interior arido” sector, the factory at Ajial de Quiles is owned by forty-nine socios from the community. It will serve about 200 crianceros in the area, and there are plans to build two milking centers (*centros de acopios*) to serve them. The factory is organized as a Sociedad Agro-Industrial, a small business cooperative eligible for special loans and partial government subsidy of building the factory. The total cost for the plant at Ajial de Quiles was 55 million pesos

(\$122,000) of which the government subsidized 20 percent and the socios borrowed the rest.

The Department of Rural Development (Departamento de Desarrollo Rural, or DDR) is a large government organization that is directing projects throughout Region IV. This group's primary job is to coordinate the efforts of those organizations providing specific assistance. These organizations include the Corporación Nacional Forestal (CONAF), which provides assistance with reforestation; Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (INDAP), which offers small loans to producers for strictly commercial enterprises; and the group Proyecto de Desarrollo Rural de Comunidades Campesinas y Pequeños Productores (PRODECOP), which makes loans to the rural poor who would not otherwise be eligible for them. Most comuneros fall into this latter category since corporately held communal land is unavailable for use as collateral. PRODECOP is especially proud of the development projects that they have sponsored and funded in the comunidades. Other assistance-giving groups include Servicio Agricultura y Ganadería (SAG), which provides veterinary medicine and technical assistance with livestock and the Instituto de Investigaciones Agropecuarias (INIA), which carries out research projects at experimental stations and promotes the transfer of technology to small-scale producers. While the Ministry of Health (Ministerio del Salud) in Ovalle is responsible for enforcing the law in the Limarí province, they prefer to emphasize their role as a provider of education and assistance in helping cheese makers meet the new standards. There are also private consulting companies, such as IPD (Inversiones Producción Desarrollo), which has an office in Ovalle and is the group directing the cheese factory in Ajial del Quiles. This firm focuses on developing small-scale businesses in the countryside, providing such new entrepreneurs with technical and legal assistance to help them make it through the critical early years when many endeavors fail.

This assistance is needed because it is difficult for small community-based factories to make it on their own initially because they lack the resources to be entirely self-sufficient. It also is important that cheese be produced under acceptable conditions and in quantities that a viable market can bear. It is acknowledged that care must be taken to prevent overproduction and market saturation. Some opponents feel that this is where the "sacrifice" of the majority of small producers under the new regulations comes in. While many see two paths to development for crianceros—to either produce and sell milk or produce and sell cheese—other paths go unmentioned on: to sell on the black market or to stop producing altogether.



“Making goat cheese at home.” Photo courtesy of the author.

The law requires that all sites of production have potable water, showers for workers, sterilized equipment, special corrals with concrete floors or rooms with milking platforms and sterile rooms where cheese is pressed and set out to mature. As I have described, crianceros like Pablo and Amelia milk their goats every day in their corrals, press the cheese by hand in their kitchens, and leave it out to mature on shelves in cool, dry rooms in the backs of their houses. Most of these homes have neither running water nor electricity.

Since the average family cannot comply with these standards, there was great apprehension among the crianceros, and many saw the law as a form of persecution. In 1997 it was calculated that there were 308,000 goats in the region, while before the devastating drought there were more than 500,000. It was also shown that there were more than 5,800 families dependent upon this form of production (PRODECOP 1997). The word “persecution,” perhaps, assumes a malicious intent that may more likely be a blind spot of faith in market-oriented development to solve all problems. It is ironic that state intervention is limiting the market access of many producers participating in what is sometimes called the “informal economy”—“informal” indicating that which operates outside of the purview of state control. The market here only appears “free” for those who can participate in the costly

sanctioned style of production. Many producers believe that state control of this activity will bring an end to a crucial part of their traditional livelihood.

It is very difficult for administrators to reliably estimate the number of goats in the region at any particular point in time. Herders, wary of government interference in their lives, will often underestimate. With the scarcity of forage and degradation of the land that excessive herding brings, development agencies would prefer that the same amount of production be obtained from two or three hundred thousand. Sometimes administrators are frustrated with what they see as a family's desire to own as many goats as it can. (Recall a similar frustration described in chapter 5 over the status symbol of owning many horses in the countryside.) State agents, however, realize that in light of drought and little access to more efficient productive methods, a large number of animals is often seen as a means of economic security, allowing the flexibility to either thin the herds or keep the animals depending upon changing climatic conditions. The more goats a family owns, the more that will survive the dry season. There will be a larger pool of animals available to sell, to use in cheese production, or if times are very bad, to eat. The latter option was said to have been chosen at an alarmingly high rate during the time of my initial fieldwork when the first phase of the drought was at its peak. This backup plan, in which hungry people eat the scrawny meat of hungry goats, is a truly depressing scenario. (However, during that time I also heard this described to me by urban academics in Santiago unfamiliar with the life ways of rural people in the north as simply, "Things are so bad that they're *eating* the goats." Only during my fieldwork in the community did I learn that male goats are eaten regularly and are meat staples during both good and bad years.) For Pablo and Amelia a large number of goats was necessary in their attempt to balance income and expenditure in the time spent away from the community.

When I left Chile in April 1998, the status of the exemption was undetermined. When I returned in September of that year, I found that indeed the exemption had been extended. Throughout that year and into 1999, as the deadline approached, the controversy became a hot-button issue in regional elections, and the government attributed much of the fear of the law to opposition parties' propagation of confusion and myths concerning the state's real intention. Although some figured that after granting a twelve-month exemption the previous year the authorities would yet again give in to popular sentiment, the line was held this time, and the law went into effect. Portraying the hard-line position as a short-run sacrifice for long-term progress, press statements used language recognizable to applied an-

thropologists familiar with classic Rostowian modernization rhetoric and evolutionary metaphors (stages of growth, the "precondition" runway leading to "flight" [Rostow 1960]): "We are taking the more difficult road for the sake of future producers . . . "Our intention is to make sure that the majority of the producers are part of the 'take-off' [*el despegue*] plan, which will eventually place their products in international markets" (*El Día* 1998, 16; translation mine).

My first indication of the extent of the acrimony that was developing over the end of the exemption came toward the later part of my second stay in Chile when I went to visit an animal husbandry specialist in La Serena whose institution was working closely with comuneros on improving goat production. I had interviewed him twice during my previous visit, and I felt comfortable in telling him what I had been doing that year in the countryside.

I was taken off guard when he incredulously questioned me, "You've eaten this cheese?"

After informing him that Julie and I had not only eaten it regularly but that we had participated in the making of it for a good part of the last two months, he looked at me as if I had just told him that we had been handling plutonium.

"And you've never gotten sick?" he continued the interrogation.

Still unsure as to exactly where this was heading, I cheerfully bantered back that not only had we never gotten sick, but also that we both found it to be delicious. He was still smiling, but the edge to his sarcasm became sharper: "And where did you make this cheese? In the shade? On the kitchen table? . . . *Under* the kitchen table?"

Realizing that my careless disclosures were coming off as an affront to his authority and to what his organization was trying to accomplish, I hastily began to backtrack.

"But would you trust it to give as a gift to a friend in the United States?" he asked, "Would you let your professor eat it?"

"No, no, of course not," I assured him. I told him that I saw his point and that Julie and I had been very lucky indeed to have never taken ill.

There is a critical element of "image" implied in the modernization discourse. Statements by officials in the press often claimed that, cloaked in illegality, clandestine production has long depressed the product's price, has cut off access to new markets, and has hurt the region's image as a whole. Words like "traditional" and "artisan" (which the *crianceros* especially hold as a source of pride) have contested meanings in this public debate of a free market development ideology that is seeking to control, through standardization, livelihood strategies that have articulated peasant production with market

economy but outside of state control. These contested meanings appear to me to represent a struggle over the image of a modernizing Chile and the role that “peripheral” or “marginal” sectors of society play in this national image.

I do not intend here to write off the real and serious issues of food contamination and illness. Nor do I mean to cast doubt on either the motivation of the people working to solve the problem or the desire of the *crianceros* to bring a safe and desirable product to market. What are relevant, I believe, are the differences in perceptions of the product among different public sectors. These perspectives became polarized as the deadline grew nearer. Opponents of the law saw the declaration of a public health risk as alarmist and unfairly assigning blame to the local producers. (This resembles Julia Paley’s description of the Chilean government’s discourse on the threat of cholera in the early 1990s—see chapter 5 on “The Paradox of Participation” in her book *Marketing Democracy*, in which the health issue was framed in terms of individual responsibility and behavioral changes regarding cleanliness, thus delimiting the government’s role as restricted to an educational function [2001, 159–60].) In the rural areas almost everyone eats this kind of cheese, while many in the city, especially those with ties to the countryside, praised its distinct taste, a preference that endorsed the *crianceros* and their position. On the other hand, many urban residents do not trust the rural product and will only buy factory-produced cheese in the supermarket. For my eighty-year-old landlady in Ovalle, who owned a house and was solidly middle class, Pablo and Amelia’s cheese was a guilty pleasure. She seemed to believe the dangers as reported in the media, but could not resist eating it when I brought it in from the countryside. Once during his family’s transient period in the Limarí valley, Pablo aptly expressed the feelings of most people in the area who had eaten this product their entire lives. Holding up a cloth sack stuffed with a number of cheeses that Amelia’s sister was taking to Ovalle to sell, he pointed to the contents inside, winked, and said “contrabando.” The product was the same as the ones that we had made together the previous season and that his family has been crafting for generations, but the market for it had turned from informal to black.

Such patterns recall Arjun Appadurai’s groundbreaking ideas on “the Social Lives of Things,” or how commodities and their demand are socially constructed and bear cultural dimensions and how their consumption create meanings in our lives in ways that tie local producers and consumers to “larger regimes of value” (1986). In the capitalist economy, this is accomplished through processes of “commodity fetishism” and “reification” whereby in the exchange of com-

modities the social relationships between human beings are masked and subsumed in the commodities themselves. They assume the appearance of relationships between "things," as producers and consumers only come into contact with each other through the market. Their products, which are in actuality subjective, unique, and qualitative (that is, they are produced by social labor), are transformed into objects that are purely quantitative via a system governed by exchange-values appearing to be inherent to the commodities exchanged (Marx 1976, 167-77). This intrinsic sleight of hand (of masking "a relation concealed beneath a material shell" (Marx 1976, 167) from a Marxist perspective is an ideological mechanism serving to reproduce class relations.

In the case at hand, a kind of microlevel "development-of-underdevelopment" effect can potentially divide producers into the "haves" who can fill the market niche and the "have-nots" who cannot. This differentiation, in a sense, is disguised in the transformation of the product itself. On the market shelf, the consumer sees only the replacement of an unsafe product that is symbolic of backwardness with a safe, modern commodity that many are told and many believe the region as a whole can take pride in.

¡COMO LOS INDIOS!

Pablo and the other queseros are always quick to stress the word "artesanal" in distinguishing their product from other types of cheese in the market. (The word is also used to describe other petty commodities that they sell as supplemental forms of income, such as the handworked lambskin that Pablo occasionally makes.) These products are considered to be of high quality (*fino*) because they are handmade (*hecho a mano*), which means that they are unique, they take a certain amount of time to produce, and they are representative of long-practiced local cultural traditions. The goal of the cheese factory is to continue to make the product by hand but under sterile conditions. The *maestros de queso* in these factories are local people who are skilled at pressing cheese, but by making their product within state guidelines, it is hoped, their cheese will bring a price that queseros making cheese the traditional way cannot get.

Others see mainly negative connotations in the word "artesanal." One official at the Ministry of Health in Ovalle with whom I spoke said that to advertise the factory cheese as such would be "bad advertising" (*mala propaganda*) and would tell the consumer that the product is of poor quality (*falta calidad*). He, like many other officials in

many of the other agencies, spoke of the difficulty in getting the "stubborn" crianceros to abandon their "antiquated "backward" system (*sistema rustico*) of letting large numbers of poorly producing animals forage on rapidly deteriorating land so as to make an inferior product under unsanitary conditions. He boasted that he saw a product from one of the Limarí factories selling for \$6 U.S. (he did the currency conversion on a calculator) recently at a supermarket in Region V. Slowly the habits of the crianceros will be changed, and they will learn that they can, under the right conditions, produce milk (in his words) "HERE in this sector without having to go to the cordillera." Their resistance to change is unfortunate, he said, but their fears are understandable. He stressed that this is why enforcement of the law was going to be "flexible." He, like others with whom I spoke, also corrected me when I referred to the Reglamento Sanitario de los Alimentos as "the new law." The law was passed several years ago and the producers of other manufactured food commodities (candy, baked goods, etc.) have been adhering to it all along. The cheese producers, he reminded me, were generously given an extension of the deadline while the Plan Caprina (the integrated plan for helping crianceros comply with the law and integrate external markets with their products) was being worked out.

While "artesanal" may be a "dirty" word to some, others are using images reflecting public perceptions of tradition and ethnicity to their advantage in the marketing of this product. On the wall of his office was a poster demonstrating possible labels and advertising for one of the cheese factories. The image on one of these labels was a drawing of a generic "Indian" with a single feather in his hair, sitting cross-legged on the ground and pounding a drum with his hands. Behind him a goat peers from behind a mountain, and in the valley are cacti and rows of grape vineyards. While farcical in its representation of the ethnicity of the people who make this product, the company is nonetheless playing upon outsiders' perception of who they are.

The three largest producers of pisco in Region IV are making use of a similar trope. Pisco, a kind of jam brandy, is the national drink of Chile. Most of the special grapes used to make it and most of the factories that produce it are in Region IV. Pisco Capel advertises its product as "El Autentico Pisco del Valle Elqui." Pisco Control bills its product as "Full of History" (*Lleno de la Historia*). Tres Eres makes an expensive premium brand of pisco under the label "Los Artesanos de la Cochiguaz." The Cochiguaz is a famous valley with a mystical and romantic reputation not far from Vicuña. My friends there laughed at this claim as it is no more made "by hand" than it is made by elves.

Claims to authenticity and appeals to tradition, of course, are common themes in advertising worldwide. Sparsely populated, poor, and distant, the Norte Chico (and most certainly the regions of the Norte Grande to the north) contrasts strongly in the public mind with Santiago (where one-third of the nation's population lives) and the fertile Central Valley of Chile (the agricultural heartland whose bounty is the nation's patrimony). Living in the northern desert and mountains and making a living from the land in traditional ways makes them seem more vaguely "Andean." The other important image of the north is that of copper mining. Unlike the "indigenous history," however, the history of copper is that of the nation. The northern frontier was settled because of copper. Copper has always been the main reason for Chile's relative wealth in comparison to other countries in Latin America.

Seeing the advertising mock-up in the health official's office reminded me of two instances during the previous year's wheat harvest in Loma Seca. I used sixteen rolls of film that year, but afraid of being intrusive, I was always a little self-conscious in photographing people. Most of the time people were happy to be photographed and eager to show me where they lived and how they did things. At two different times during the trilla when I was photographing Pablo and the other men working together to separate the newly cut wheat with the wooden shovels and whisk brooms made of tied sticks, he stopped to pose. Holding the broom rigidly to his side, he said, in mock-solemnity to the delight of his friends: "¡Como los Indios!" His ribbing was good-natured, but he was responding not only to the awkwardness of being photographed but also expressing his self-consciousness over using a rudimentary technology that is perceived by most outsiders in his country as a "backward tradition." He was also more than likely responding to what he knew about the interests of most anthropologists. The only other time I can recall Indianness being invoked in the community was in a similar situation in which the objective was to ridicule. I had been expressing my frustration at my inability to penetrate the thick accent of an old man in Loma Seca. This frustration was increased by the fact that he was warm and genial, ever present at community functions, and almost always eager to talk to me. His articulation was impaired by the fact that he was toothless and sometimes intoxicated, and I could scarcely discern from his utterances more than a word or two at a time. My friends agreed that even they had difficulty with his accent. They laughed and said, "Don't worry. No one understands him. He speaks Mapuche."

Chile is known as one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in Latin America. The largest Indian group is the Mapuche, who live in

the southern part of the country. As previously described, the members of the *comunidades* do not consider themselves to be any more “indigenous” than anyone else. They are not ethnically distinct from the majority of Chileans. As also discussed, in terms of self-identification, the predominant image for most of the men is that of the historically romanticized *huaso*, the Chilean cowboy. This identification is seen in the style of everyday life, but is especially evident in their fanaticism for horsemanship, rodeos, and horse races. Public events such as the *carreras* and the *rodeo Chileno* where *huaso* culture is strongly expressed and where money is raised by the various *comités*, I have argued, play a key part in reproducing the local economy and promoting group cohesion (see also Alexander 2006).

PETTY COMMODITIES AND PEASANTS

What of the commodity itself? What is the significance of cheese in both material (the money it brings in for family producers) and ideal (the images and identifications associated with its regulation) terms of economic production? These are important questions for other commodities and producers outside of north-central Chile.

A literature review of recent studies of petty commodities and artisan production in peasant communities in Latin America reveals some important themes relevant to the impact of the law regulating goat cheese in the Norte Chico. These include the importance of petty commodity production as a meaningful unit of analysis in understanding: (1) the *diversity* of income-generating activities in impoverished areas, (2) the *linkages* between subsistence-oriented and market economies, (3) the effects of uneven *capitalist development* in the countryside, and (4) processes of class *differentiation* within peasant communities. The study of petty commodities, like the “peasant” category itself (see chapter 2), comes with its own particular set of contradictions that have inspired rigorous debate stemming from the “in-between” nature of their participation in different economic spheres. In the case at hand, the Reglamento Sanitario de los Alimentos is the dividing line in this differential access to the requirements of standardized production.

In many ways, peasant culture by its very nature defies easy categorization, as is evident in Kroeber’s archetypal definition of peasants as people who “are definitely rural—yet live in relation to market towns; they form a class segment of a larger population which usually contains also urban centers . . . They constitute part-societies with part-cultures” (1948, 284). This definition has understandably proven con-

troversial in recent decades as many analysts, for good reason, take issue with the condescending bias in the term "part-culture." Yet differential access to material resources remains an important element of any peasant analysis and, as Gavin Smith has pointed out, even those who distance themselves from Kroeber's definition still acknowledge peasant culture's "Janus-faced propensity . . . to relate both to the characteristics of the larger society and to those of the local, face-to-face community" (1989, 18). Discussing new meanings of the peasant category in the late twentieth century, Cancian noted that peasants "have long been partly market dependent and partly subsistence producers, partially autonomous and partially controlled from the outside" and even though subsistence production is no longer the primary activity for the majority, there is still something expressly distinct about, as Cancian described, "people who have some ability to produce their own food, or have a close kinship connection to people who have some ability to produce their own food, or interact in a local economy with people who have some ability to produce their own food" (1989, 164). Cancian's expansive category includes not only (1) "traditional" peasants substantially involved in subsistence production, but also (2) "petty commodity producers" who sell goods made with a low level of capital investment and little or no hired labor and (3) "semiproletarian" wage laborers whose survival depends in part upon the production of food or petty commodities by themselves or their families (1989, 165).

Thus, production of petty commodities for local and regional markets has been for a long time considered a defining feature of the peasant mode of production. As Plattner points out, petty commodity production in peasant households is both similar to and different from commercial forms of market commodity production. Competitive markets may exist for petty commodities between specialized producers who for the most part "control their own means of production," but such "owners" do not extract "significant surplus value" from wage labor in the process of production. Even though individuals in peasant economies own or have exclusive rights to land, they are often impoverished (from a monetary "standard of living" viewpoint) and they frequently supplement their incomes with wage work and the manufacturing of goods for sale (Plattner 1989, 392-93). Roseberry extols the potential that research on petty commodities has for giving us a complete picture of how rural livelihoods are reproduced in the countryside. Too often, exclusive focus on land and farming in his words "precludes a more sophisticated understanding of the *actual* reproduction strategies" (1989, 123; emphasis mine). Along these same lines, Estellie Smith notes the usefulness of studying petty commodity production as a means of clarifying linkages between peasant modes

and the “developed” economy, since the emergence of economic practices in this so-called “informal” sector is largely a response to conditions in the “formal” sector (1989, 306–7).

Recognizing the subaltern position as a response to uneven development, however, is not an acceptance that economic relations in peasant communities will operate by either the “rationality” of the “universal” laws of neoclassical economics or the orthodox Marxist position on the inevitable impact of capitalism in the countryside. Carol Smith’s landmark study of weavers in western Guatemala describes several generations of successful manufacturing that did not produce permanent class differentiation through the “inevitable” (by capitalist logic) expansion of business and the hiring of outside labor for low wages. Her argument is that this was neither the result of scurrilously attributed “cultural inertia” or hidebound “peasant tradition,” but rather a consequence of the shared feeling of Indian solidarity in response to domination by Ladino society. In this way, the dynamic integrity of the community is recognized and represented as an active response to their engagement with capitalism and not in terms of “timeless customs” or an ambiguous “moral economy” somehow separate from the modern world (C. Smith 1984, 1990). Binford and Cook’s exploration of peasant differentiation in Mexico’s Valley of Oaxaca, however, eschews descriptions of small producers as subsistence-oriented, petty commodity producers that function outside of capitalism. Their framework is a complexly differentiated capitalist system that organizes even the smallest and most isolated of producers. Primarily a rejection of “functional dualist” (see chapter 2) analysis, which sees things such as markets for petty commodities as the exploitative links between “connected but distinct” relations of production, this aspect of their work is heralded by Kearney in his “reconceptualization”/rejection of the “peasant concept” in the contemporary world (1996), even as he mildly chides them for lumping such subaltern sectors into a singular “other” position through their insistence that the penetration of global capitalism determines this differentiation (1996, 96–97). More recent work in the Valley of Oaxaca by Clarke (2000) adheres to a conventional category of “peasants”—that is, they are small-scale farmer/artisans historically geared for self-sufficiency but struggling in the modern world—yet avoids criticism of producing “timeless,” “romanticized,” or “essentialized” ethnography by emphasizing processes of change and dynamism in the petty commodity sector of maize, mescal, and coffee.

Some recent studies of the results of the market expansion of artisan goods produced by peasant groups in South America offer surprising and complex views that transcend the well-worn “developed-underdeveloped” binary. Colloredo-Mansfeld documents a cultural

renaissance among Octavalo Indians in the Ecuadorian Andes spurred by the global marketing of textiles from peasant villages known for their weaving. This economic success has ushered in many other remarkable transformations, including the invention of new and strongly marketable "traditions," the abandonment of traditional farming practices, and new ethnic and class division within communities that are expressed in the conspicuous consumption patterns of what Colloredo-Mansfeld identifies as a globe-trotting "native leisure class" (1999, 2002). Healy's *Llamas, Weavings, and Organic Chocolate* (2001) provides numerous case studies of grassroots movements in Bolivia from recent decades that likewise challenge both Western models of development and essentialist views of peasant culture. Relating oral histories of small-scale projects that promote active expressions of indigenous culture, Healy gives voice to associations of indigenous artists and weavers in the Andes valleys and the eastern lowlands whose success has not only generated substantial income for poor communities but has also revitalized indigenous identity, increased outsiders' respect for their craft traditions, and even worked to improve the status of women (2001, 267–326).

Success of this exact nature may not be feasible in ecosystems like the Norte Chico where the limited and erratic availability of natural resources make multiple and flexible survival strategies necessary. In a case study from Sardinia, Vargas-Cetina shows how the market expansion of handcrafted pecorino cheese resulted in a commoditization process that spawned a roller-coaster trajectory of development resulting in great disparities of wealth and differential access to economic opportunity. A diversified subsistence economy of which handicraft production was one component was ultimately eliminated in response to rising demand for the product. A short-lived prosperity resulted from the expanded market, but once the market was saturated by the product, an ensuing crisis culminated in rural development and a critical need for alternative sources of income (Vargas-Cetina 2000). These transformations in the lives and livelihoods of Sardinian pastoralists may be seen as a cautionary tale for the development of artisan goat cheese in northern Chile.

"POLICY-POSITIONED ASCRIPTIONS" IN THE DEVELOPMENT MILIEU: FROM "SPATIALIZATION" TO "PRACTICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY"

At times development literature and policy materials present representations of comunero culture that reflect assumptions of ethnicity and identity. As I have argued elsewhere, frequently "these assumptions

conflate *where* these people live and *what* they do to make a living into a representation of *who* they are ethnically” (2006, 153). Instructional manuals on cheese production and land regularization are very revealing in this way. In a 1988 publication by the NGO Juventudes para el Desarrollo y el Producción (JUNDEP) entitled “A Brief History of the Comunidades Agrícolas” (Una Breve Historia de las Comunidades Agrícolas) (JUNDEP 1988), the development of the community system makes use of strikingly exaggerated illustrations of race and ethnicity. In depicting the evolution of the communities over several hundred years, the drawings show: (1) Diaguita Indians idyllically living the simple life of communal land, subsistence farming, and terrace irrigation; (2) the rude introduction of the concept of private property by the conquering Spaniards as a question mark hovers above the confused Indian’s head; (3) the rise of the institutions of slave labor and the *encomienda* system as gold-crazy Spaniards drive marginalized Indians (*indígenas arrinconadas*) up into the peripheral lands; (4) sons of a conquistador whose estate has fallen into disrepair deciding that it would be in their best interest to work and possess their *hijuelas* (the predecessors of the irrigated *goces singulares*) individually while leaving the inferior quality land intact as common property to be worked together; and (5) mid-nineteenth-century *pirqueneros* feeling the exploitation of royalties and rent deciding to abandon the copper mines and throw their lots in together to work the unused land as farmers.

A composite drawing of the land tenure system in a typical *comunidad* that is often used in research publications shows pre-Columbian artwork etched into the stratigraphy between the sloping communal land and the individually possessed irrigated plots, a faint indicator of the indigenous history. Ethnic caricatures in illustrations that appear in “Training and Consultation for the Constitution of a Comunidad Agrícola” (Capacitación y Asesoría Jurídica Para la Constitución de una Comunidad Agrícola), also published by JUNDEP (n.d.) are more obvious. This handbook gives basic information on the 1967 law (Ley de las Comunidades Agrícolas) (and its 1984 revision during the Pinochet era), which enacted the legal means by which *comunidades* may standardize (*sanamiento*) their boundaries and set the number of internal use rights. As mentioned, nearly 180 *comunidades* have registered themselves in this way with others in the region in the process of doing so. Again, recall that the legal definition of what constitutes a *comunidad agrícola* is that they are comprised of lands held in common in which the number of people holding use rights exceeds the capacity of the land to provide adequate subsistence. Other aspects that distinguish *comunidades agrícolas* from *comunidad indígenas* (primarily Mapuche *reducciones*) include the three

particular forms of land tenancy within their boundaries and the fact that they are "communities" comprised of different families rather than the smallholdings of single kinship groups. While the JUNDEP publication does not mention *comunidades indígenas* the subjects in the illustrations are caricatures of perhaps Mapuche or Aymara people. The manual also outlines procedures for electing a *Directiva*. Here, the stereotypical representations in exaggerated physical characteristics and Andean dress and their slumping body language contrasts strongly with that of the modern dress and upright posture of the ethnically neutral figures of a lawyer and official with the Registry of Property (*Conservador de Bienes Raices*). In the final panel, having achieved legitimate recognition, the body language of the *comuneros* is then rendered as upright and serious as they conduct a community meeting. Along these same lines, pamphlets providing instruction on how to make goat cheese according to the law's sanitary standards convey a similar transformation (*Comisión Regional de Ganado Caprino* 1993). In these illustrations, a disheveled, careless cheese maker working in filthy conditions is changed into a clean and conscientious *quesero*, proud to be getting the stamp of approval from a paternalistic figure of the health inspector. Both the commodity and the producer are essentialized as "clean" and "correct" subjects imbued with legitimacy via the state.

In this discourse of development, "indigenous" acquires a meaning analogous to "noncapitalist" and "backward." "Mining" becomes synonymous with an "individualist" and "extractive" way of life. "Comunero" is externally identified as a kind of conflation of the two meanings: antiquated and backward, selfish and obstinate, carrying on an environmentally damaging extractive livelihood, and committed to radical political and social organization. Constructed in opposition to images and ideals of modern, ethnically neutral Chile, I have coined the term "Policy-positioned Ascriptions of Ethnicity, Identity, and History" (2006) to describe such attributes in that (1) they have meanings that are generated via public policy and the state apparatus and (2) they can be corrected through conforming to authorized standards of production and participation in sanctioned programs and forms of organization. The message is that collective action and organization in itself is not a "bad thing." *Sociedades* are cooperatives, but they are seen as forward thinking and with an entrepreneurial purpose, while *comunidades* are usually seen as obstacles to development because they represent a rigid monopoly on worthless undeveloped land as well as resistance to change.

Identifying *comunidades* with "indígenas arrinconadas" based on where they are located and the poor quality of their land suggests the

discursive use of both “spatialization” and the “backward other” (Alonso 1994, 393–96) in development ideology. Brackette Williams notes how such state control of the mechanisms by which group and individual identities are brought into existence as positioned subjects in a power hierarchy is a process by which subaltern societal segments bear the stigma of racial difference in relation to an “unmarked” homogenous mainstream category (1989, 429–39). All of this suggests that race as a category is just a fiction playing against a nationalist identity. Balibar tells us that through “social normalization and exclusion” such categories carry meanings not of “group x as group x” but “group x as . . . criminals, degenerates, etc.” (1991). In the case that I am presenting here, it is the presumed attribute that signifies the ethnicity: “noncapitalist” or “backward” *as* “Indian.” Gupta and Ferguson, reflecting on the construction of such “spatialized culture through both state policies and anthropological inquiry and state policies” warn that “Associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, not given as natural facts. . . . whatever associations of place and culture may exist must be taken as problems for anthropological research rather than the given ground that one takes as a point of departure . . . cultural territorializations (like ethnic and national ones) must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes. . . .” (1997a, 4).

In the quote above, they are insisting that such a recognition is a preliminary step toward moving beyond naturalized conceptions of “spatialized cultures” (such as “indigenas arrinconadas”) and toward exploring the “production of difference within common, shared, and connected spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, 45). To reiterate my contention, these ascriptions via public policy only fully “make sense” within the particular development context, and they are by necessity not static. They function to naturalize as “common sense” categories such difference even while they promote prescriptive measures to change them. This may seem paradoxical, but Hannerz for one emphasizes that even though such ideologically positioned common sense may be ubiquitous, it is not comprised of a crosscutting uniform content. Genuinely geared toward securing a stability of meanings, one form of common sense may appear dominant, but it is never exempt from change (1992, 128–29).

Once race or ethnicity becomes an objectified principle, it is propelled by forces quite different from those forces that were working to bring about its rise. This is Comaroff and Comaroff’s dialectical model of ethnicity as a historically specific process that includes control over various modes of production in seemingly uncontested ways.

These modes are simultaneously symbolic (cultural) and material (structural), and principles of ethnicity can work as both the tool of exploitation and the ideology of nationalism. And, importantly, the particular “set of relations” (or “mode of consciousness”) that constitutes ethnicity often has an influential power over the social organization from which it emerges, an illusion of autonomy that may define cultural boundaries and determine social action (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). As such identities come from specific histories and political economies, their meanings are not fixed for all time. With regard to meanings of “rurality,” Ferguson shows in an interesting example from Zambia that popular discourses shifted over the course of that nation’s economic development from idealized images of country life to negative images of “selfishness” following an economic crisis (1997).

While the orthodox Marxist model and the sociological split-labor market theory of race (Bonacich 1972; Farley 2005, 265) view racial categories and relations as serving the needs of capitalism and empire-building (see, for example, Wolf on the “New Laborers” created by the expansion of European capitalism into the Western Hemisphere [1982, 379–80] and Worsley on the “situational” nature of racial identity via exploitative labor relations [1984, 242]), it is important to also recognize that once split from their material genesis, ascriptions may act upon and alter these relations of production. Recall my discussion in chapter 2 of Kearney and Nagengast’s research on the incorporation of Mixtec labor from southern Mexico into the economies of northern Mexico and the United States. Substantively drawn along similar theoretical lines as those suggested by Comaroff and Comaroff, they observe that while institutionalized racism is one of the forces that pushes the Mixtec from their homelands and is reproduced in the severe working conditions in the northern fields (that is, racism is articulated in the social formation with capitalist expansion), the resulting resurgence of Mixtec ethnicity as a result of the labor migration process has led to union organization and inroads into the improvement of these conditions. In a dialectical class struggle played out across cultural and national boundaries, the instruments of domination—including racial distinctions that support dual standards of wages and treatment—bring forth modes of resistance and opposition (Nagengast and Kearney 1990).

Policy-positioned ascriptions can also work to the advantage of the subjects of development. Much recent work focuses on the positive aspects of ethnicity and identity as shaped by state policies within the development milieu. In the field of applied anthropology, it has been

recognized that development initiatives may be improved, accountability increased, and trust in the government earned when states acknowledge the pluralistic makeup of their societies (Carroll and Carroll 1997); construction of collective identity as a means of uniting small producers that transcends traditional ethnic boundaries can be used successfully to make demands upon the government (Medina 1997); and subaltern groups can make essentialized representations work in their favor via the “vocabulary with which to defend the rights of communities vis-à-vis states” in what Li terms “practical political economy” (1996, 501). There is little doubt that renewed expressions of *comunero* identity via *comunidad* advocacy organizations in the post-Pinochet transition era have produced positive results. Unfortunately, as the sample cheese label described previously shows, representations in advertising that reinforce and give legitimacy to stereotypical images may be another manifestation.

FROM CLANDESTINE ARTISANS TO INTEGRATED PRODUCERS

Many critics feel that the program to develop small factories has drawn disproportionate attention in the public eye than the problems associated with the plan and the negative impact of the policy on people who do not have the resources to participate in the project. The government has maintained all along that soft credit will be available to small producers who form the commercial associations and show that they are willing to do what it takes to make a viable factory. A combination of subsidies and credit has also been extended in order to convert arid land into sustainable pasture called *praderas* or *empastadas*. It was expected that the majority of small producers who participate in this new system of regulated production would fill the niche of selling milk to the factories, however, so far only a few of the authorized milking centers (*centros de acopio*) have been built. To reasonably expect these *crianceros* to meet the sanitary law's standards, there will have to be a large number of such production sites in operation over the entire region and into remote areas like those that I have described in which roads and infrastructure are inadequate and undeveloped. It is unrealistic to think that those producers living in the most rugged parts of the interior could make use of these centers. Recall that for a couple of months when they were living away from home in a part of the Limarí valley near the main road between Ovalle and the Pan-American Highway, Pablo sold milk to a buyer from a cheese factory in Santiago. When they had to leave the accessible spot

on the highway, they simply returned to making their own cheese. When living in Loma Seca selling milk is not a viable option but making and selling cheese is. For Pablo and Amelia and the others living in the El Arroyo sector in the campo común, such accessibility is not in the near future. The 1997 earthquake caused further damage to the already unsound road (the "burro trail" in the words of my friend from Vicuña), and because the comuna of Ovalle has limited funds for repairs, a road that serves as few people as live in El Arroyo is far down on the list of priorities. They and many others in Loma Seca understand that funds are limited, but many are resentful that the location of the community puts them in an untenable position for complying with the new production requirements.

Again, authorities acknowledge that this is only the beginning stages of a long-term plan that may require eight or more years before all of the elements are in place. In the meantime, clandestine production and the informal market continues as before but at a much reduced level because of the year's devastating drought. Likewise, milk and cheese production at the new factory has been minimal. During times of extreme drought, a 75 percent drop in milk production in Region IV can be expected. Enforcement of the law occurs at the place of sale, where vendors must show that their cheese is made by registered producers. The drought had temporarily made the controversy a "nonissue," as those noncomplying producers who are dependent upon rain-fed natural forage struggled to keep their animals alive, to prevent the natural abortion of the fetus that occurs under starvation conditions, and to produce enough milk to feed the newborn animals. At the time that I left Chile in May 1999, the plant at Ajial del Quiles was producing a small amount of cheese, but because of the drought the milk used to make this cheese was being brought in on trucks from Ovalle, a distance of more than forty kilometers each way over rough roads. This reaffirmed the skepticism of the crianceros in Loma Seca with whom I spoke. The socios were becoming restless while the consultants were telling them to "stay the course."

Concerns over the problems associated with state assistance and the special needs of the communities are voiced by representatives and advocates in public meetings and workshops, and in newspaper interviews. I discussed the general response to the Reglamento with the president of the Limarí Asociación de Comunidades Agrícolas. A bright and animated woman who views her vocation as a combination of advocate and educator, she is responsible for organizing regional meetings to inform comuneros and community residents of their

rights and of the assistance that is available. She also works to educate the public on the cultural importance of the comunidades and to raise consciousness regarding their particular challenges. We first met on a Sunday afternoon in February at a big agricultural exposition at the municipal soccer field in Ovalle. The exhibit where she and another woman in the association were stationed was creatively built as a kind of composite picture of a typical comunidad dwelling, featuring adobe construction, a stone corral, and a cactus fence. A few days later I met with her in the office of the Asociación, a simple single-room wooden structure on a backstreet in Ovalle, makeshift in design and surrounded by ongoing postearthquake construction. A couple of days after that, an interview with her appeared in the local newspaper in which she discussed issues dealing with the termination of the exemption.

The president repeated the complaints that I had heard from the crianceros in Loma Seca: Credit is still difficult to come by for the poorest of the rural poor; there is favoritism for the commercial farmer over the individual producer; and the state's requirement that crianceros form commercial enterprise associations as a stipulation to receiving loans and subsidies is a dangerously divisive force within communities because it furthers the concentration of wealth in the families who can afford the legal fees and take on the risk to borrow money. She went on to note that there are problems in the coordination of assistance, that projects are sometimes redundant with many organizations working in one community while others in need go neglected. She inferred that there is preferential treatment in the selection of the communities to receive services.

Development officials see many of these problems but counter that due to limited budgets it is a healthier risk for both the government and the producers to form sociedades. Additionally, they point out that because sustainable development requires input from a variety of economic, environmental, and technological transfer agencies, it makes more sense to concentrate efforts in particular communities as initial steps toward overall regional development. They defend the use of selected communities as pilot programs of "demonstration," the strategy of giving full technical support to a few selected households as a means of dispersion of technology and practices in order to show others "the way." This is a method that has been used in this region on many other projects in the past. In the short-run, it is cost-efficient in terms of administering aid, but critics say that it potentially provokes counterproductive resentment and factionalism.

The program emphasizes the inclusion of those producers who can

conform to these standards set down by the law and assures that those who do can expect a higher standard of living as a result. What often goes unexamined, however, is the exclusion of those unable to abide and participate and their projected loss of a crucial means of support. Albeit under the auspice of development, ultimately poverty in an already poor segment may be exacerbated and the decline of a traditional livelihood that is already in decline may be hastened.

Such potential effects are insightfully examined in an investigation by Ciadella (2003) that provides an overview of the great diversity of campesino production relative to access to pasture and ability to comply with the new law and the resulting varying impact that the sanitary law will have on these groups. Drawing upon information from three different zones in Region IV, she identifies several representative types of producers, the disparity between their income and quality of life levels, and the relations and conflicts of interest between them. At the top is the big entrepreneur (*el gran propietario*), owning large tracts of irrigated land in a prime spot near the coast and engaged in various agricultural and livestock activities, including a cheese factory. The study notes that this producer was aligned with other industrial and semi-industrial producers in putting pressure on political institutions to enact the prohibition on artisan cheese (Ciadella 2003, 347). At the bottom and in a dependent relationship with the big proprietor is the milk-selling landless producer (*el sin tierra vendedor de leche*) renting irrigated pasture. Also in a designated "marginal" position is the "traditional comunero" (*el comunero tradicional*) who is dependent upon the insufficient dryland of the campo común and who produces hand-crafted cheese and the non-comunero landless producer of cheese (*el sin tierra productor de queso*) renting pastureland. Faring somewhat better is the "specialized comunero" (*el comunero especializado*) who has entered into a cooperative with others to build a cheese factory. However, the ensuing debts, the poor yield of milk and cheese, and competition with the big factories places him in a precarious position. Maximizing production via freedom of movement to the veranada pastures in the Chile-Argentina cordillera is the "transhumant producer" (*transhumante*) who fares far better but also finds himself in competition with the *gran propietario* and at the mercy of the new law. Utilizing this complex production mechanism ecologically adapted to arid lands, possessing a deep knowledge of the land and the seasons, and enjoying a modest livelihood and higher status, Ciadella and Dubroeuq (2003) note that the future of the transhumant pastoralist is uncertain as their critical mobility of production is threatened by the sanitary law.



“Pressing cheese by hand.” Photo courtesy of the author.

“NATURAL TRUTHS”: OF MUSHROOMS AND GOAT CHEESE

Philosophers do not spring up like mushrooms out of the ground; they are products of their time, of their nation . . . Philosophy does not exist outside the world, any more than the brain exists outside man because it is not situated in the stomach.

(Marx 1989, 5)

Idealists, in contrast [to materialists], place more emphasis on what goes on in human minds than on what goes into human stomachs.

(Peoples and Bailey 1988, 98)

The first passage above is a barb aimed at both those who produce and those who consume ideas about “economy” and “history” as natural, neutral “things.” It encapsulates Marx’s historical materialism in appropriately alimentary metaphors. Such “ruling ideas” should be exposed as “ideal expressions of dominant material relationships” (Marx and Engels 2001, 92) that have been detached from the social relations of production that produced them and that have given them credence as seemingly objective “truths” ready-made to be swallowed whole. Once this is understood, Marx says, “history ceases to be a collection of dead facts, as it is with the empiricists . . . or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists” (Marx and Engels 2001, 69). For Marx and Engels, social structure and the state are not imposed from above, but emerge from the “life-process of definite individuals,” not as they are imagined by others or imagine themselves to be but as “material producers under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will” (2001, 68). This notion of “limits” is crucial because within limits or “boundaries” is space. Within this space people live their lives. They may comply with some conventional ideas, reject others, or come up with their own unique ones throughout the course of their pursuance of a material means of support and subsistence.

The second passage is taken from a popular introductory textbook in anthropology and frames materialism/idealism into a familiar “either/or” debate. Here the subject is contrasted in exemplary fashion in opposing explanations of religious prohibition against the eating of pork. In the book *Case of the Unclean Pig*, Mary Douglas’s idealist categorical disorder argument (1966) is pitted against Marvin Harris’s materialist cost/benefit analysis (1977) of the pork taboo. In this book I have made a case for the historical materialist method in understanding the mutually formative material/ideal factors involved in the rural development policy environment in Chile—one manifestation of which I have described here in what might be called “The Case of the Unclean Cheese.”

The revealing of the false dichotomy between the material and the ideal is the greatest strength of the historical materialist method. This is contrary to what many critics of Marx claim and to what many reductionist "vulgar proponents" (Friedman 1974; Post 1978) of Marxism *do*. (In a famous correspondence in 1890, Engels himself complained that many young Marxists of the time misunderstood historical materialism and myopically regarded the economic base as the master determinant in society despite the fact that these spectra of social, historical, and cultural elements interact to shape the organization and style of production [Engels 1890/1978, 761].) This is a practice that Raymond Williams says came after the ironic "transition from Marx to Marxism" (1977, 75), or the leap from ideas and methodology of historical materialism to the orthodox dogma of the determining economic base and the determined superstructure (culture, ideology, etc.). This is ironic because this is exactly the kind of reductionist dualism Marx was rejecting, and that a dialectical approach strives to correct.

Although in the course of "making history" human agents make use of "time-honoured disguise" and "borrowed language" (Marx 1994, 15) taken from the material and ideational toolbox left for them by previous generations, the ways in which they use these tools are neither predetermined nor predictable. This is because of the dynamic reciprocal action between (1) people and the parameters of environment and social structure, (2) between "ideas" and material limits, and (3) between alternative forms of production and the limits set by the capitalist mode with which they are articulated (R. Williams 1977, 81). Such a structurally limited but open-ended approach to history and human agency, while still maintaining an articulation of modes of production framework (a dialectic of "structures in process"; see Comaroff 1982), allows breathing space for local culture and addresses the concerns of those who find the extreme structural and ahistoric elements of Althusser unpalatable if not impossible to digest. (In Althusserian terms, development and policy could be described as "Ideological State Apparatuses": those seemingly "nonpolitical" institutions of civil society that "naturalize" as custom, routine, and spontaneous behavior action that ultimately works to the advantage of those in power.) For applied anthropology, in terms of operationalizing political economy toward goals of development policy, it is necessary to take into account the history of capitalist expansion of large-scale commodity production in order to understand how this past has shaped present-day relations between local communities and agents of development. In the example of the *comunidades agrícolas* of Chile's Norte Chico, copper mining and wheat production were the major

areas of export production that impacted regional environment and economy (the material), the formation of both capitalist and non-capitalist social relations of production in specific communities (the ideal). The mutually formative historical relationship between these two realms has produced the political economy of today, the differentiated structure that has revealed itself in the form of this controversial law.

Laws and policies, unlike then “lived” and seamless forms of state ideology, must work harder to cover the tracks between themselves as ideal expressions and the material relations upon which they are based. They must disguise or “make natural” their stated goals as things that are separate from the class interests they represent. State coordination of laws and policies serves to maintain particular structures of power through the creation of new political subjects and the maintenance of old ones with the sanctioned and outwardly nonpolitical institutions or intermediaries between the political and the civil or between the individual and the state (Gramsci 1971, 3–23; 105–20). The state often presents aid and assistance in objective and neutral ways even while it is controlling the means and setting the requirements through which this assistance is given. Standardization, in a sense, creates a problem and then presents itself as the solution. This process echoes what Escobar calls the state’s creation of “victim subjects” (1995, 155). The stimulus for much recent criticism of development can be found in his book *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, in which he challenges conventional thinking by asserting that in targeting marginal or minority groups—including peasants, women, ethnic minorities, and so on—a new style of rhetoric has formed around an emerging paradigm that co-opts these groups via language that constructs them as passive recipients whose needs are defined by and can only be solved by the apparatus of development (1995, 155–59).

In general, this seems to be what is happening in Region IV as the government’s new attention to poverty is not just guided by faith in the free market, but its drive toward market integration at times writes the viability of nonmarket production and communalistic conservation practices completely out of the story. The observation that the state’s use of intermediary entities to distribute assistance is a divisive process resonates with the point that Escobar is making. This process recalls the more sophisticated aspects of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony: in times of political stability the state must constantly try to maintain the balance of power through the creation of new political subjects and the upkeep of old ones within the sanctioned and ostensibly nonpolitical institutions of everyday life. Institutions like the ones

that usurp power from the traditional *comunidad* political structure (albeit in the capacity of providing support) promote the agenda of the construction of consent for the free market model policies through a deceptive democratizing of authority: communal class interests are divided and, through necessity or otherwise, these subjects, receiving both assistance and ideology, participate as or place their faith in the intermediaries between the political and the civil. In Gramscian language, the “organic intellectuals” (directly informed by their class position) of the *comunidades* both experience and perceive the negative results of policies that impede their ability to sell their products. (This stands in contrast to the modernization discourse of the “traditional intellectuals” of the free market cure-all tradition [Gramsci 1971, 3–23, 105–20; Hall 1988, 53–54].)

In the law that I have described, many of the “peripheral people” who it purports to help are negatively impacted. The socioeconomic structure of unequal access to resources and power is not precisely reproduced, however. There are some whose lives will be improved by these policies, but there are others, at least in the short run, whose lives are being made worse. Still, as we will see in the final chapter, there are organizations in Chile with a better understanding of the particular needs, values, and social relations of the *comunidades* who are working with the communities to help them solve their problems in more appropriate ways. Many *comuneros* with whom I spoke emphasized that working *with* them is the key to success.

Marx sought to clip the wings of the “natural truths” of major epochs in world history: his mission was to expose the fallaciousness of “philosophy” in general and “natural economy” in particular descending from heaven to earth by showing it rather as entailing the ascent from earth to heaven (Marx and Engels 2001, 68–69). He held that Aristotle’s “man is a political animal” reflects the political economy of ancient Greece’s “town-citizen” fixation, and that Benjamin Franklin’s assertion that “man is a tool-making animal” reflects “Yankee industriousness” (Marx 1976, 444). The political economy of “The Development Project” (McMichael 2004) in Chile, one might say, produces a set of material and ideological limitations codified in law as to the correct way of doing business where it is cheese, rather than politics or tools, that is being made.

CONCLUSION: THE LAW’S IMPACT ON LOMA SECA

As shown in chapter 6, over the course of the nineteen months leading up to the beginning of the official restriction on artisanal cheese, Pablo

and Amelia earned 25 percent of their income from the sale of the product. While this percentage is considerable by itself, it is the mobility and supplemental role of this income-generating activity that is even more important. In the five and a half months that they produced cheese in El Arroyo—the traditional “short season” within the community—they earned more than \$800 U.S. During the drought months away from home, during the “prolonged” production season made possible by the rented pastures, they expediently switched from selling milk to selling cheese when they were no longer able to continue living near the route of the milk buyer. Both in and away from home, the income is relatively small, but it is a steady source that keeps the family going during the long “valleys” between the brief income “peaks” of wheat and lamb sales.

There are three other families in Loma Seca with at least as many goats as Pablo and Amelia. (Recall that the community sets a limit to the number per family.) There are seven other families with at least forty goats. The sale of cheese, then, could be considered a significant source of income for at least eleven of the thirty-nine households in the community. These eleven households contain thirty-eight people and harvested 188 hectares of wheat in the individual *lluvias* (or nearly half of the 392 individual hectares harvested). Eight of these eleven households also contributed a total of eleven laborers to the group harvest, the benefits of which were received by non-criancero participants in the cosecha. As mentioned previously, the community as a whole benefited that year from the bountiful cosecha in terms of the money raised by comité-sponsored events. Seen in this way, production of the petty commodity of cheese is in many ways a keystone to both family and community success. It is no wonder then that crianceros were granted exemption for several years, that enforcement of the law was expected to be lax, and that authorities and crianceros alike agree that the “black market” (*mercado negro*) could scarcely be controlled. Still, there is no doubt that the law will only make a difficult way to make a living more difficult and make poorer and further stigmatize those who cannot conform to it.

The comunidad continues to not only provide security in indivisible land that cannot be lost on the open market, it engenders relations of mutual assistance, and it provides a safety net where the government’s social welfare system is lacking. In the case of the comités it is encouraging that the state is working with the human resources and communitarian ideals that the comunidad system engenders. Rather than implementing change from above, policy should enhance local level structures already in place. Peasant forms of cooperation and mutual assistance are not incommensurable with capitalist aims.

In 1998 as part of this market integration plan, the government subsidized the cost of a project in which twelve comuneros from Loma Seca (referred to as “socios” or “associates” when they are members of such an organized project)—including Pablo—took out loans and contributed labor to convert a few hectares of land previously used for wheat into an irrigated alfalfa field. Each socio’s share was about a quarter of a hectare. As with the funding for cheese factories, the unsubsidized portion was paid for with money borrowed through soft loans. For the pradera of alfalfa, the twelve individuals pay around 300,000 pesos (about \$670 U.S.) taken out in long-term credit paid back over a period of four to five years at 7 to 8 percent interest after a two-year grace period. The irrigation for this pradera cost about 1,790,000 pesos (about \$4,000 U.S.) of which the state subsidized 75 percent. The twelve socios shared the cost of the remaining quarter, which comes out to about \$80 U.S. tacked on to each individual loan. Eduardo, who lives in Loma Seca most of the time with Elena, contributed to the labor project. I monitored the progress of the project from time to time when I made trips to the community. The men were proud of their work and quite optimistic. The finished irrigated field was very impressive. For Pablo, who has more than one hundred goats and nearly two hundred sheep, it will be important but will only serve as supplemental food for animals. Alfalfa is the highest-quality forage and important for good milk production. Pablo is very slowly replacing his animals with breeds that produce a higher rate of milk, but the cost is prohibitive.

As I stated in a 2004 article in *Culture and Agriculture*:

These are only small first steps, and the prohibition on the sale of cheese is here now. Meanwhile families wait for stable animal forage, the creation of milking centers, and improved transportation to bring this commodity to market in a way that meets the new standards. Mainly, however, they wait for rain. When the winter rains return, they will plant wheat again. They will clandestinely sell cheese on the informal market because for the poorest of them, the “step-by-step” process of standardized market integration has a few steps missing. (Alexander 2004, 49)