

RETHINKING RURAL POLITICS IN POST-
SOCIALIST SETTINGS

Natalia Vitalyevna Mamonova

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RETHINKING RURAL POLITICS IN POST- SOCIALIST SETTINGS

**Rural Communities, Land Grabbing and
Agrarian Change in Russia and Ukraine**

HEROVERWEGING VAN PLATTELANDSPOLITIEK IN
POSTSOCIALISTISCHE OMGEVINGEN

PLATTELANDSGEMEESCHAPPEN, LANDJEPIK EN AGRARISCHE
TRANSFORMATIE IN RUSLAND EN OEKRAÏNE

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Natalia Vitalyevna Mamonova
born in Zhytomyr, USSR

International
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Social Studies



Erasmus University Rotterdam

Doctoral committee

Promotores

Prof.dr. M.N. Spoor

Prof.dr. S.M. Borrás Jr.

Other members

Prof.dr. J. Pallot, University of Oxford

Dr. M. Arsel

Dr. M.L. Schneider

Co-promotor

Dr. O. Visser

Dedication

Эта научная работа посвящается моему дедушке Шуляренко Максиму Николаевичу, который страстно любил науку и знания; который после убийства своего отца-помещика во время разгромов дворянских усадеб после революции 1917 г. отправился пешком в Киев – как Ломоносов – чтобы поступить там в университет. Этот человек прошел всю Великую Отечественную Войну от Москвы до Берлина и имел множество наград, в том числе ордена Красного Знамени и Отечественной Войны I, II, III степеней. Он всегда был примером для всех нас, его потомков. У него была мечта, чтобы его любимая дочь – моя мама – стала профессором в университете. Дочь не оправдала отцовских надежд, хотя большую часть жизни занималась наукой. Надеюсь, внучка оправдает.



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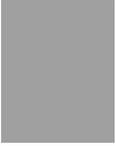
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Acronyms

- AKKOR – Russian Association of Farmers and Agricultural Cooperatives
FAO - The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FSU – Former Soviet Union
GONGO – Government-Operated Nongovernmental Organisation
LFE – Large Farm Enterprise
NAS – The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
RAS – The Russian Academy of Sciences
Rosreestr – Federal Service for State Registration, Cadastre and Cartography of the Russian Federation
Rosstat – Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation
RSMO – Rural Social Movement Organisation
Ukrstat – State Statistics Service of Ukraine
UN – The United Nations
WTO – The World Trade Organisation



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Abstract

Rural politics in the time of global land grabs and neoliberal agricultural development have received much international attention. However, the processes at work in the post-socialist countryside (such as in Russia and Ukraine) are rarely addressed in the critical agrarian studies debates. The prefix ‘post-’ in post-socialist and post-Soviet studies is often associated with lagging behind. This doctoral study demonstrates that the analysis of rural politics in these settings can generate new insights about contemporary changes in the agrarian world. This study investigates official rural politics (the state politics of resource allocation and large-scale agricultural development); politics of organised rural resistance and mobilisation; and everyday unorganised rural practices of adaptation, compliance, resistance and acquiescence in contemporary Russia and Ukraine. It demonstrates that land grabbing and the development of large-scale industrial agriculture are often accepted by post-Soviet villagers, who – contrary to rural people in other parts of the world – do not necessarily resist, but rather struggle to be incorporated into large-scale agriculture. This study also shows that small-scale subsistence farming can coexist with large-scale agriculture, due to the continuation of the Soviet dual agricultural system and the symbiotic relations between large and small farms. The analysis of rural resistance and mobilisation in post-socialist post-Soviet settings reveals that social movements and activists are more effective when they cooperate with the state and employ official regulations, norms and rhetoric in their politics, rather than openly oppose the regime. Finally, the study indicates that the rights to culturally appropriate food and defining one’s own food system are not alien to the post-Soviet population. However, these ideas are not accompanied by public discourses and open mobilisation, thus, representing a ‘quiet’ form of what can still be seen as food sovereignty.

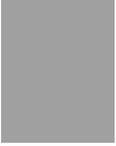
Heroverweging van plattelandspolitiek in postsocialistische omgevingen. Plattelandsgemeenschappen, landjepik en agrarische transformatie in Rusland en Oekraïne



Samenvatting

Door de neoliberale ontwikkelingen in de landbouw en wereldwijde landjepik heeft de plattelandspolitiek veel internationale aandacht gekregen. De ontwikkelingen in de postsocialistische landen (met als voorbeeld Rusland en Oekraïne) worden daarentegen nauwelijks behandeld in het agrarische academisch debat. Het voorvoegsel ‘post’ in postsocialistische en post-Sovjet-studies wordt vaak geassocieerd met ‘achtergesteld’. Dit promotieonderzoek toont aan dat de analyse van de plattelandspolitiek in de postsocialistische landen nieuwe inzichten over hedendaagse veranderingen in de agrarische wereld kan genereren. Officiële plattelandspolitiek (de staat die verantwoordelijk is voor de toewijzing van middelen en voor de grootschalige plattelandsontwikkeling); politiek, mobilisatie en verzet op het platteland; en alledaagse ongeorganiseerde aanpassing, naleving, verzet en lijdzaamheid op het platteland in het hedendaagse Rusland en Oekraïne staan centraal in dit onderzoek. Het onderzoek toont aan dat landjepik en de ontwikkeling van intensive (grootschalige industriële) landbouw vaak door de post-Sovjet-dorpelingen wordt geaccepteerd, ze weinig weerstand bieden – in tegenstelling tot mensen op het platteland in andere delen van de wereld – en proberen zelfs in de grootschalige landbouw geïncorporeerd te worden. Het onderzoek toont ook aan dat, als gevolg van de voortzetting van de Sovjet-duale landbouwsysteem en de symbiotische relaties tussen grote en kleine bedrijven, kleinschalige zelfvoorzienende landbouw kan samengaan met grootschalige landbouw. Uit analyse van plattelandsverzet en mobilisatie in postsocialistische post-Sovjet-omgevingen blijkt dat sociale bewegingen en activisten effectiever zijn wanneer ze samengaan met de nationale overheid en gebruik maken van wettelijke voorschriften, normen en retoriek in de politiek, in plaats van openlijk verzetten tegen het regime. Ten slotte blijkt uit het onderzoek dat de rechten op cultureel passend voedsel en het definiëren van het eigen voedselsysteem niet vreemd is voor de post-Sovjet-bevolking. Echter, deze ideeën gaan echter niet gepaard met

openbare toespraken en open mobilisatie, hetgeen neerkomt op een ‘stille’ vorm van wat gezien kan worden als voedselsoevereiniteit.



Preface

This doctoral dissertation is composed of seven chapters; five of them are published as academic articles in leading peer-reviewed journals in the field of rural politics and agrarian transformation (see publication information at the end of each chapter). The introduction (Chapter 1), two empirical chapters (Chapters 4 and 5), and conclusion and discussion (Chapter 7) are written solely by the PhD candidate. Another empirical chapter (Chapter 3) is co-authored with the candidate's co-promotor, in which the candidate is the leading author. Two remaining empirical chapters (Chapters 2 and 6) are co-authored with several other academics, including members of the supervisory team.

1

Introduction. Agrarian Capitalism and Rural Politics in Post-Socialist Contexts and Beyond

Abstract

This chapter presents and discusses the overall research findings of this doctoral study on rural politics in post-socialist settings, which was conducted from 2012 to 2015 in Russia and Ukraine. It situates its analysis within global debates on agrarian capitalism, land grabbing, food sovereignty, rural resistance and mobilisation. Five key themes of the doctoral study are identified and discussed in this chapter, namely: 1) post-Soviet agrarian capitalism ‘from above’, which includes analysis of land reforms and the neoliberal mechanisms of ‘enclosure’ or land grabbing; 2) agrarian capitalism ‘from below’ and the peasant question; 3) rural politics of the post-socialist state; 4) rural resistance and mobilisation; and 5) ‘everyday’ politics and adaptation practices of post-Soviet rural households. By bringing post-Soviet, post-socialist rural politics into the context of global agrarian debates, this dissertation aims to rethink some predominant assumptions in critical agrarian studies. Likewise, it challenges the common understanding of contemporary transformation in the post-socialist countryside by bringing fresh insights from the agrarian studies literature. In addition to introducing this dissertation’s major debates and findings, this chapter discusses the research methodology and epistemological approach.

1.1. The prefix ‘post-’ in critical agrarian studies on rural politics

Rural politics have been of interest to many social scientists and political activists ever since Alexander Herzen – one of the fathers of agrarian populism – proclaimed ‘*V narod!*’ (‘To the people!’)¹ as the solution to

the socio-economic crisis of the 1860s in Russia. Since then, academic and political interest in rural politics has fluctuated but never entirely disappeared. The twentieth century witnessed a number of rebellions, revolutions and national social movements, in which peasants played an important role. Those historical events contributed to major debates on rural class struggles, mobilisation and agrarian change in the field of peasant studies (Scott 1976, Paige 1975, Wolf 1969, Bernstein and Byres 2001). The contemporary globalisation of agriculture and neoliberal capitalist development in many parts of the world brought new challenges to rural communities, provoked new types of rural politics, and forced critical scholars to rethink mainstream assumptions and orthodoxies in rural studies (Borras 2009). Rural rebellions and peasant wars became features of the past; contemporary rural politics are characterised by ‘mid-range and micro (everyday) forms of peasant political action or forms of agency’ and ‘non-revolutionary but radical, unarmed but militant’ rural activism (JPS, Editorial note, 2009: 2).

Rural politics is a very broad concept. It is primarily associated with acts and practices of poor rural communities in response to the dynamic changes in the agrarian world. The rural poor – including various peasant strata, rural labourers, and indigenous peoples – are often considered victims of agrarian capitalism, which is characterised by land and capital accumulation that leads to dispossession and marginalisation of smallholders. Rural responses to agrarian capitalism have constituted the research objective of many studies. Contemporary critical agrarian scholars analyse rural political reactions to industrial agriculture, land (or land control) grabbing, globalisation, food-for-fuel conversions and other challenges of neoliberalism (e.g. Schneider 2011, Alonso-Fradejas 2015, Moreda 2015). Whereas some rural responses involve covert unorganised practices, others take the form of open structured mobilisation. Thus, many covert contemporary rural politics fall into the category of hidden ‘everyday peasant resistance’, as conceptualised by Scott and Kerkvliet (Scott 1985, Scott and Kerkvliet 1986), others are rather within-the-system ‘rightful resistance’ as developed by O’Brien (1996, 2013) using the example of rural China. The overt organised type of rural resistance and mobilisation is the primary focus of rural social movements studies. Recent years have witnessed the growth and empowerment of many transnational and national social movements, such as La Via Campesina and Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (MST). Those

agrarian justice movements advocate food sovereignty, de-globalisation, and the use of diverse sustainable agricultural practices through agroecology (Desmarais 2002, Stahler-Sholk et al. 2007, Scoones 2008, Newell 2008). For some critical agrarian scholars, however, rural politics is also an ideological struggle of indigenous peoples around the meaning of territory as it is associated with food, land and natural resources (Howitt 2001, Li 1996, Peluso 1992). Moreover, there is a growing body of academic research focused on rural politics of the state and state actors regarding resource allocation and rural development (Wolford et al. 2013, Das 2009). Whereas some authors focus primarily on the role of the state in agrarian transformation (e.g. Corbridge et al. 2004, Lavers 2012), others analyse state-society interactions which lead to political change in agrarian power and politics (Fox 2007, Evans 1997).

In view of the complexity and variety of rural politics, Kerkvliet (2009) proposed the following typology. He divided all rural politics into: 'official politics' (the state politics of resource allocation and promotion of so-called 'good governance' and decentralisation), 'advocacy politics' (direct and overt opposition of rural dwellers to state policies and the system of agrarian relations) and 'everyday politics' (which include peasants' complying with, modifying, and contesting the official politics in a quiet, mundane, unorganised manner). Taking rural politics seriously in agrarian studies requires consistent investigation of every type of these politics (Borras 2009).

Furthermore, recent scholarship on rural politics in the neoliberal era contests the previous assumptions about rural dwellers' resistance to land (or land control) grabbing and industrial capitalist food system. In the introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* 'Land grabbing and political reactions 'from below'', Hall et al. (2015: 468) wrote: 'when land deals hit the ground, they interact with social groups within the state and in society that are differentiated along lines of class, gender, generation, ethnicity, and nationality, and that have historically specific expectations, aspirations and traditions of struggle'. This provokes a variety of rural responses, which range from radical resistance to acceptance and struggles for incorporation into large-scale agricultural development (White et al. 2012, Wolford et al. 2013, Hall et al. 2015).

This study analyses the diversity of rural politics in the former Soviet Union (FSU), with a particular focus on contemporary processes in rural Russia and Ukraine. This region is largely overlooked in current critical

agrarian studies debates (with some notable exceptions such as Spoor 2009, Visser and Spoor 2011, Wegren 2014, Pallot and Nefedova 2007). This is rather surprising given the importance of this region for developing the field of agrarian and peasant studies. The classical ‘Lenin-Chayanov’ debate on agrarian differentiation in twentieth century Russia – generated by two of the most influential thinkers in agrarian studies – remains central to the field of agrarian change and peasant studies worldwide. The history of Russian peasant wars and revolutions was used in many iconic works on agrarian class struggles and rural resistance (Field 1976, Wolf 1969, Shanin 1986). Today, however, rural processes in the former Soviet Union have been mostly sidelined to the fields of post-Soviet and post-socialist studies.

Some academic attention was devoted to this region after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The unsuccessful transition from socialist collective agriculture to capitalist private farming was discussed by Wegren (1995, 1996, 2005), Csaki and Lerman (1997), Leonard (2000), and Lerman et al. (1995). A few scholars argued that land reform failed because of rural resistance to capitalism and the market economy (Leonard 2000). According to Wegren (2005a), this idea was espoused especially by reformers who blamed rural dwellers for the disappointing results of their privatisation policies. Other post-Soviet experts stated that the institutional environment was hostile to private farming, therefore, rural dwellers preferred to stay within the collectives, which allowed them to adapt and survive in the market economy (Amelina 2000, Spoor and Visser 2004, Visser 2008). Most post-Soviet area studies focused on studying land reform implementation, the informal economy, and survival strategies of the rural population during the transition period of the 1990s (e.g. O’Brien et al. 2004, Wegren 1996, Vlasenko 2008). However, as soon these issues were explored, academic interest in the post-Soviet rural politics declined significantly.

The study by Visser and Spoor (2011) ‘Land grabbing in post-Soviet Eurasia: the world’s largest agricultural land reserves at stake’ was the first comprehensive attempt to ‘analyse the largely unnoticed, and partly concealed, process of land accumulation’ in the former Soviet Union (ibid: 306). They argued that while the attention of international society is devoted to land grabbing and dispossession of the rural poor in many developing countries, post-Soviet Eurasia constitutes a void in global land grab debates. Meanwhile, the region experiences widespread large-

scale accumulation of land and associated resources by national and transnational investors, which leads to (re-)emergence of industrial monocrop production, accelerates socio-economic stratification, and exacerbates the marginalisation of the rural population.

This dissertation responds to this gap in the literature by investigating the socio-economic impacts of the ongoing process of land grabbing and industrial agricultural development in the former Soviet Union (focusing largely on Russia and to a lesser extent on Ukraine). The main objective is to understand what kind of challenges and opportunities these issues pose to post-Soviet rural communities, and how rural communities resist, modify, or accept the process of capitalist accumulation in this region. Post-Soviet rural communities are certainly stratified, although to a lesser extent than in urban areas. They consist of various economic and political elites, civil servants, farm owners, farm labourers, pensioners and various marginalised groups. All of these actors have different interests, goals and responses to large-scale land accumulation. Despite its diversity, the majority of the rural population is impoverished, depending largely on small-scale household farming for their subsistence. Today, household farming accounts for nearly 90% of the potatoes, 80% of the vegetables and 50% of the milk produced in Russia and Ukraine, while accounting for less than 15% of the total agricultural land².

This dissertation explores the rural politics of various actors, with a particular focus on the small-scale food producers and their response strategies. It investigates everyday rural practices, organised resistance, and the activities of grassroots social movements and institutionalised rural organisations. It also analyses the politics of the state and large land investors in the countryside. Hence, it attempts to cover the full spectrum of rural politics, namely, 'official', 'advocacy' and 'everyday' politics. Its main research questions are formulated as follows:

How does the process of large-scale national and transnational accumulation of land and associated resources occur in the post-Soviet countryside? What challenges and opportunities does it bring to rural communities and how do rural communities respond to the related transformations? How do the 'official', 'advocacy' and 'everyday' rural politics constrain, modify, or facilitate (if at all) the development of agrarian capitalism in Russia and Ukraine?

Besides answering the aforementioned questions, this study aims to insert analysis of post-Soviet post-socialist rural politics into the international debates on the agrarian (or peasant) question³, rural resistance and mobilisation, food sovereignty movements, and agrarian activism. By bringing evidence from post-socialist settings, it attempts to rethink some predominant assumptions in critical agrarian studies. At the same time, it challenges the common understanding of contemporary transformation in the post-socialist countryside, by adding fresh insights from the agrarian studies literature.

Until recently, post-socialist rural processes have been studied in a vacuum with virtually no reference to the global and transnational processes (Kay et al. 2012). There are several explanations for this. First, post-Soviet/post-socialist scholars previously assessed rural transformations in this region as a very unique and ‘specific period of change from above’, where rural people ‘hav[e] little of positive value to contribute to such transformations’ (Kay et al. 2012: 55). Second, the agrarian (or peasant) question has ‘disappear[ed] from the intellectual, political and policy agendas of rural and agricultural development shortly before the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union’, and remained largely ‘forgotten’ until recently (Leonard and Kaneff 2002: 2). Many post-socialist scholars posited that the agrarian question was ‘solved’ and ‘[t]he laws of capitalism now apply equally, it would seem, to industrial and agricultural production, and class has become politically irrelevant in both urban and rural areas’ (Cash 2014: 164). Third, the post-Soviet rural population is often considered conservative, fatalistic, and politically passive (O’Brien and Wegren 2002). Neither overt resistance nor rural social movements can easily be detected in the post-Soviet countryside. Even the Ukrainian Euromaidan revolution of 2014, which provided ‘open moments’ for political contestations, did not motivate rural dwellers to address their problems openly and engage in collective action (see Chapter 5). Fourth, the studies of post-socialist state politics and state-society relations tend to have an urban bias (Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya 2006, Easter 2008, Henry 2006, Chebankova 2012). Civil society in the former Soviet Union is considered to be underdeveloped or state-guided when it concerns urban moments, and considered as virtually inexistent in the countryside. The limited academic interest in state-society relations in the post-Soviet countryside was also influenced by the state’s withdrawal from active participation in rural politics during

the early post-Soviet transition period. Only some recent work aims to bring the state back into the discussion of agrarian transformations in Russia (e.g. Wegren 2007, Kay 2011). Finally, the prefix ‘post-’ is often associated with processes reflecting backwardness, and, therefore, post-socialist studies are considered less likely to generate new insights on contemporary changes in the agrarian world (Smith and Jehlička 2013).

This doctoral study contests the aforementioned approaches to post-Soviet (and post-socialist) rural politics. It follows the position of Kay et al. (2012) and Smith and Jehlička (2013), who criticised the deconstructive academic thinking about the prefix ‘post-’, and argued that the study of the post-socialist countryside can reveal different trajectories of development, which may bring new insights and generate new theories.

The term ‘post-socialism’ is often applied to post-Soviet and Central European societies that experienced transformation from socialism to capitalism⁴ (Matkowski 2004, Stenning 2005a). These societies have much more in common than ‘actually existing socialism, [which is] unevenly distributed and moulded in divergent ways in different countries’ (Humphrey 2002b: 12). According to Humphrey (2002b), the ongoing capitalist development in post-socialist countries is not unidirectional: ‘there is rather an unpredictable propensity to “turn back”, or at least resolute refusal to abandon values and expectations associated with socialism’ (ibid: 12). Comparative analyses of post-socialist countries are essential for understanding the transformation processes in this region. Meaningful comparison, however, is problematic because of incomparable differences within and between post-socialist countries: ‘there is X here, but not there; there is Y here but not there’ (Humphrey 2002b: 12). Therefore, rather than describing different situations and then totting up, we need to investigate broadly in order to understand a particular case. Put another way, ‘comparison should inform the description, not the other way around’ (Humphrey 2002b: 12).

The choice of two countries for this analysis was influenced by the aforementioned considerations. Although the current geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine pushed these countries far from each other in politico-ideological outlooks, the common Soviet legacy and similar trajectories of agrarian transformation provide a rich base for drawing some parallels regarding post-Soviet rural politics that is relevant elsewhere.

Indeed, Russia and Ukraine are often compared to each other with regards to their agricultural and rural development (i.e. Allina-Pisano 2008, Pallot and Nefedova 2007). These countries are the region's major agricultural producers, in which farmland is the target for national and international capital investments. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Russia and even more so Ukraine were seen as the 'breadbasket' of the world (Visser et al. 2014). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the countries underwent land reform programmes in order to distribute collective farmlands to the rural population. Despite the slightly different institutional design and the speed of land distribution in Russia and Ukraine, the results were very much the same: rural dwellers were unable to use the distributed land, collective agriculture has collapsed, and many fertile farmlands were lying idle. In the 2000s, this "empty land" attracted foreign and domestic investors, who started the process of land accumulation, triggered in part by the global food price hikes⁵ and state support to large-scale agriculture (Visser and Spoor 2011, Visser 2016).

This dissertation focuses primarily on the second phase of the post-socialist transformation – namely from the 2000s onwards – which is characterised by the expansion of large-scale industrial agriculture. Whereas the first period, following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, was characterised by economic crisis of large-scale agriculture, from the 2000s onwards recovery and expansion took place. The latter period also represents the time of the re-emergence of a strong Russian state, with insider oligarchic power. The dissertation investigates various rural politics in different settings: an agriculturally-advanced area (the so-called 'Black Earth', which covers the Russian south-west and nearly the entire territory of Ukraine), a central suburbanised area, and hinterland in the non- Black Earth area (the detailed description of the fieldwork sites is presented in the methodological subsection). The geographical diversification of the analysed processes justifies the prevalence of Russian cases in the empirical analysis, as the country covers a wider range of geographical zones. The example of Ukraine expands the analysis beyond Russia, which allows to identify post-Soviet and post-socialist characteristics (not particularly Russian or Ukrainian), and to provide a more comprehensive picture of agrarian transformation in this region.

The present chapter addresses the five key themes of this doctoral study, namely: 1) post-Soviet agrarian capitalism 'from above', which includes a discussion on land reform implementation and the neoliberal

mechanisms of ‘enclosure’ or grabbing; 2) agrarian capitalism ‘from below’ and the peasant question; 3) rural politics of the state; 4) rural resistance and mobilisation; and 5) ‘everyday’ politics and adaptation practices of post-Soviet rural households. The analysis of these themes is followed by a discussion of the methodology and epistemology used in this study.

1.2. Post-Soviet agrarian capitalism ‘from above’: new order upon old structures

Borras and Franco (2013) have argued that unravelling rural politics requires an understanding of the dynamics of agrarian change and the nature of political conflict. The system of agrarian capitalism, which divorces the producer from the means of production, has been discussed even before Marx (1867) introduced the concept of ‘primitive accumulation’ in his first volume of *Capital*. More recent theories expanded many classical ideas about capitalism to address the neoliberal mechanisms of ‘enclosure’ or grabbing (see for example Harvey’s (2003) ‘accumulation by dispossession’ and Levien’s (2013) ‘regimes of dispossession’). However, the main idea remains unchanged: the capitalist process of accumulation creates a small privileged class of ‘super winners’ at the expense of ‘others’, who are dispossessed of land and associated resources and prevented from deriving benefits from them.

In order to understand socio-economic changes in the post-Soviet countryside, we need to examine two channels through which capitalism penetrates the region: ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. Lenin (1964), and later Byres (1996, 2009⁶) offered two possible transitions to agrarian capitalism: ‘from above’ (with the example of Prussia, where ‘primitive accumulation’ was carried out by landlords at the expense of tenants – resulting in their subsequent transformation into bourgeoisie and proletariat), and ‘from below’ (when land and capital accumulation occurred within family farming communities – such as is in the case of the United States). For a while, these two paths to capitalism were considered as separate processes that were country case-based. Yan and Chen (2015: 370) suggested that ‘capitalist dynamics exist both from below and from above’. They studied how capital moves into the countryside with agribusiness supported by the state’s de-peasantisation policies, and how it is generated locally at a peasant household level in China. The following

analysis builds upon the latter premise, and discusses the development of capitalism ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ in the post-Soviet countryside.

1.2.1. Transition to capitalism with limited social transformation

The transition ‘from above’ to agrarian capitalism in the FSU occurred without far-reaching social transformation. This study demonstrates that neoliberal agricultural development and land grabbing in Russia and Ukraine were not accompanied by the physical displacement of small-scale producers or their direct separation from the means of production. During the Soviet period, rural dwellers possessed small household plots used for ‘subsidiary household farming’, which provided a supplementary household income in addition to employment at *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* (collective and state farm enterprises). After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the new independent states, of which Russia and Ukraine are the focus of this analysis, initiated land reforms. The reforms were aimed at a ‘fundamental restructuring of the countries’ agricultural sectors, including price liberalisation for agricultural products and inputs, disappearing guaranteed markets within the Eastern Bloc, increased foreign competition, and the privatisation of land and capital assets’ (Kuemmerle et al. 2011: 1336). Farmland of *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* was distributed among rural dwellers by means of land share certificates for private farming development. Despite the slightly ‘different institutional design and the speed of post-socialist land reforms in Russia and Ukraine, the reforms affected most rural people [...] in highly similar ways, with virtually identical levels of apparent success and similar results in the actual allocation of land’ (Alina-Pisano 2008: 11).

Rural dwellers were unable to use the distributed former collective and state land – it had been concentrated in the hands of local rural elites, and later, in the early 2000s, domestic and foreign land investors accumulated it. Spoor et al. (2012) argued that the post-Soviet land reforms did not fundamentally change the existing land ownership: rural dwellers remained dependent on highly productive (semi-)subsistence farming on their household plots, while the former Soviet collectives were gradually transformed into large farm enterprises (LFEs). The term LFEs is commonly applied in post-soviet studies to refer to the contemporary large agricultural operators, which can take different organisational forms and use different sources of capital⁷ (see Kuns and Visser 2016 on the typology of LFEs in Russia and Ukraine).

Jansen (2014: 220) mentioned the ‘grabbing of public resources in the transition from communism to capitalism’ as a type of capitalist ‘enclosure’, which occurred in the last decades. However, such capitalist accumulation did not lead to drastic changes in the social order. The studies of post-Soviet transformation revealed that the socialist structures remain dominant despite the introduction of market relations and private property. In the book *‘Transition without transformation. Russia’s involutory road to capitalism’*, Burawoy argued that contrary to post-socialist Eastern European countries, the transition to a capitalist society and a market economy in the FSU was not accompanied by significant social transformation. He referred to old-established Soviet social networks, which were ‘deployed around strategic manipulation of resources’ (Burawoy 2002: 294). Therefore, a ‘transition without transformation’ took place⁸. In rural areas, it occurred as follows: rural dwellers, which were excluded from the Soviet elite networks, remained excluded, while the Party nomenclature (i.e. former kolkhoz chairmen and top management) benefited from the distributed land and capital (see Chapters 2 and 5 for a discussion on the implementation of land reform and its results in Russia and Ukraine).

The preservation of former Soviet structures and social networks makes current agrarian capitalism, at least to some extent, socially accepted. Contrary to many other countries, primarily in the global South, where large-scale land acquisitions by foreign and domestic investors for industrial export-oriented agriculture faced strong civil opposition (White et al 2012, Borrás and Franco 2013), the post-Soviet rural population has mostly remained quiet (Visser and Spoor 2011). In the empirical chapters of this dissertation, it is shown that many former Soviet practices persist in the contemporary Russian and Ukrainian countryside. The most vivid practice is the preservation of the Soviet productive symbiosis, which occasionally takes the form of ‘parasitic symbiosis’, as noted by Spoor and Visser (2004). Rural dwellers receive farm inputs and output from LFEs at lower prices, or even take some ‘for free’ without any permission, as was commonly practiced in the Soviet era. Furthermore, the current dual system of agricultural production – large-scale industrial agriculture versus so-called ‘people’s farming’⁹ – strongly resembles the former socialist farm structure. Just prior to the USSR’s collapse in 1990, rural household production contributed to 27% of the gross agricultural product, while kolkhozy and sovkhozy produced the rest (Rosstat 2015).

Today, this bifurcation has become even stronger: the share of people's farming went up to 40-45% of the total output, while LFEs contribute to nearly 50% (commercial family farms emerged at a limited scale and produce only 8-10% of Russian and Ukrainian agricultural output). The continuity of socialist legacies manifests itself also in rural discourses. For example, rural dwellers still call LFEs 'kolkhozy' and 'sovkhozy' (see Chapter 5 for discussion about post-Soviet nostalgia).

The transition with limited social transformation affected the ways in which the post-Soviet rural population sees itself in the contemporary system of agricultural production. Petrick et al. (2013: 164) in their analysis of Kazakh agriculture argued that 'due to the socialist tradition of industrialised farming operations, rural inhabitants regard themselves primarily as workers and not as landowners, therefore, they do not long for independent family farming, but are willing to get wage jobs at LFEs. This argument is relevant in the analysis of Ukrainian rural dwellers' incorporation into large-scale agribusiness as wage-workers.

The socialist tradition of industrial farming is only one side of the coin. The entire socio-economic system has grown around the generalised Soviet belief that 'big is beautiful', which continues to be dominant in state policy and is used to justify the expansion of LFEs. Meanwhile, 'people's farms have been portrayed as the official "other" of the agri-food system' (Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 202). Small-scale food production is commonly discussed as 'backward', a 'relic of the past' and 'without long-term perspective'. This position is also shared by rural dwellers who consider their farming not as an alternative to industrial agriculture, but rather as a means of survival in rural areas (see Chapters 5 and 6). This largely reflects the former socialist discourse about "modern" and "progressive" collective farming (despite its factual unprofitability and inefficiency) and household farming as 'subsidiary' to it.

The continuous character of the current agricultural system creates doubts as to whether any transformation has, in fact, occurred. Spoor et al. (2012) called the new system of large-scale agricultural operators the 'ultimate Soviet dream' when the large collective and state farms were transformed into even larger LFEs. Nevertheless, a capitalisation of agriculture took place. The stabilisation of the politico-economic situation in Russia and Ukraine and the global financial and food price crisis in 2007-2008 stimulated many foreign and domestic investors to acquire farmland and invest in this region's agriculture. New agricultural operators

use economies of scale, advanced technologies, and are actively supported by national states (see Chapter 2). This large-scale agricultural development made Russia and Ukraine the top food exporters in the world (Liefert et al. 2013, Visser et al 2014), while the rural population continues to be engaged in semi-subsistence farming at their household plots. Contrary to classical Marxist theory, which predicts separation of agricultural labourers from the means of production¹⁰ (i.e. land and capital) as a consequence of agrarian capitalism, post-Soviet resource accumulation and concentration took place on the former collective land (although formally owned by rural dwellers) and did not entail encroachment on household land plots cultivated by the rural population. Thus, arguably due to the preservation of former Soviet structures and principles, agrarian capitalism ‘from above’ was not accompanied by direct dispossession of smallholders from the land.

1.2.2. Incorporation of rural dwellers into large-scale agricultural development

McMichael (2013: 13) posited that the contemporary corporate-driven food regime¹¹ destroys traditional farming systems for the sake of free trade and agricultural development, and imposes a model of ‘agriculture without farmers’ across the world. Indeed, there are many cases when ‘land is needed (for global production and corporate profit), but peoples’ labour is not needed to realise this production’ (Li 2011: 283). The expelled farmers may find employment in other economic sectors, however, in many cases, they join the ranks of an impoverished army of ‘relative surplus population’ (Li 2011). This dark side of the neoliberal agricultural model is often exposed in anti-land grab campaigns of agrarian social movements and allied civil society organisations. Bernstein (2014: 10) criticised civil activists for ‘view[ing] capitalism only as destructive’ and ‘neglecting the productive possibilities created through the dynamism of capitalist expansion’. Recent studies suggest that capitalism does not necessarily lead to the exclusion of small-scale food producers from large-scale agricultural production. Following Li’s (2011) analysis of contract farming and jobs, provided by large-scale agriculture, Hall et al. (2015: 470) argued that there are cases – although rather exceptional – when investors ‘need the land and the labour’ and where ‘villagers are not expelled, but may be subsumed into corporate enterprises as workers

(perhaps even leasing land to their employer) or as contracted small-scale farmers?

The post-Soviet land reforms have made rural dwellers the main – albeit mostly nominal – owners of the agricultural land in Russia and the sole owners in Ukraine (a moratorium on farmland sales has existed in Ukraine since 2001). Therefore, LFEs have to engage with the rural population in their investment projects. Chapter 5 of this dissertation is devoted to the analysis of terms of incorporation of the Ukrainian population in land deals. In that chapter, I follow McCarthy's (2010) critique of the 'simplistic dualist model' that presumes that there is either inclusion or exclusion of a rural population in agribusiness-driven agriculture. McCarthy argued that there are much more nuanced terms or scenarios in which the rural population is engaged in economic, social and political relations with large business, what affects agrarian transformation in the country. Given such assumptions, three different types of Ukrainian villagers' incorporation in land deals were distinguished and analysed. The first type is 'illusive inclusion'. Rural dwellers, many of them elderly, lease out their "unused" former collective land to LFEs. These land leasing agreements imply a very small payment (in kind) to the landowners and are arranged with almost no possibility to negotiate rent. Nevertheless, this rent is considered a significant contribution to rural households. Due to an inability to use the distributed land in other ways, rural dwellers want such inclusion. The second type is 'subordinate inclusion' – where many working-age rural dwellers lease (or lose) their land to LFEs and gain wage jobs often at the same LFEs. This creates the 'post-Soviet land paradox' when 'the proletariat leases its land to the bourgeoisie' (as referenced in Chapter 5). Modern large farms apply economies of scale and labour saving technologies, therefore needing much fewer workers than their Soviet predecessors. However, due to the transition period of the 1990s, which was characterised by the widespread bankruptcies of collective farms and rapidly increasing rural unemployment, new jobs at LFEs are highly appreciated by Ukrainian rural dwellers. Yet the third type is 'competitive exclusion' – a situation where subsidised LFEs outcompete a small group of private family farmers (less than 1% of the rural population) and expel them from the market. This often leads to the farmers' impoverishment and marginalisation.

A similar situation is observed in Russia. Although the land sales moratorium was lifted in 2002, massive sales of farmland occur pre-

dominantly around large cities where land was needed for rapid (sub)urbanisation (Mamonova and Sutherland 2015). Meanwhile, long-term land lease agreements with local populations remain the primary land accumulation strategy of LFEs in agricultural regions. According to Lerman and Shagaida (2007), the share of leased land is about 60% of the total area of land used by LFEs (see Chapter 2 for more information on land accumulation strategies in Russia).

These terms of incorporation and their acceptance by the rural population are largely an outcome of the socialist legacy and preservation of many Soviet structures, as was mentioned in the previous section. Lease payments, received by rural households through ‘illusive inclusion’, are often perceived as a continuation of the (once interrupted) ‘social contract’ with kolkhozy and sovkhozy (see Pallot and Nefedova 2003, 2007 about the ‘social contract’ in the FSU). ‘Subordinate inclusion’ is associated with the return to the late Soviet collective agriculture system: when rural dwellers combine employment at kolkhozy and sovkhozy with personal farming at their household plots. Only ‘competitive exclusion’ of commercial family farmers is a rather new capitalist feature – a phenomenon that can be categorised under ‘accumulation by dispossession’.

The inclusion of the rural population in large-scale agricultural development (although under adverse conditions) is not only a post-Soviet characteristic. There are a number of examples where the rural population finds its way into the new system. McCarthy (2010) analysed the adverse inclusion of smallholders in industrial palm oil production in Indonesia based on contract agreements. He argued that the outcomes critically depend on the existing smallholder development schemes, state-agribusiness coalitions, land tenure, and livelihood strategies. While under some conditions, contract farming or open market competition can be advantageous to poor rural communities, in others it marginalises them. Smalley and Corbera (2012) revealed different attitudes to large-scale land development projects among various rural groups in Kenya: pastoralists were against it, being afraid of eviction or losing access to common-pool resources, while family farmers welcomed agribusiness in their region hoping for agricultural development and the new jobs it could create. Large-scale land acquisitions influence different rural groups in various positive and negative ways.

Thus, under this assumption, the 2008 World Development Report’s argument that ‘a strong link between agribusiness and smallholders can

reduce rural poverty' (World Bank 2007: 137) is not entirely wrong, as many social movements suggest. The arrival of large-scale agribusiness in Russia and Ukraine coincided with the general recovery in agriculture and the reduction of rural poverty. The share of rural households with incomes below the subsistence level decreased from 74.2% in 2000 to 20.3% in 2010 in Ukraine (Moroz 2010), and from 73.1% in 1999 to 15.4% in 2006 in Russia (O'Brien et al. 2011). Policy makers and large agribusinesses often use this argument to justify large-scale agricultural development (Lapa et al. 2008). However, along with general economic recovery, which is indeed beneficial for the rural poor, 'control grabs' became the scourge of the post-Soviet countryside affecting sustainable rural development over the long term.

1.2.3. Control grabbing and its main mechanisms

While post-Soviet rural dwellers are not physically displaced from their lands, became partly incorporated into large-scale agricultural development, and even experience a general increase in living standards with the arrival of agribusiness – can we conclude a 'win-win scenario'? According to the World Bank, globalisation of agriculture and agribusiness stimulated agricultural development of the region and opened a number of development opportunities for the rural poor – the so-called 'win-win scenario'. It was an especially strong argument in the case of post-Soviet countries, which are characterised by agricultural land abandonment and low density of the rural population (World Bank 2007). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, vast stretches of farmland were taken out of production (about 40 million hectares were abandoned in Russia during 1990s). Chapter 2 deals with the question of the post-Soviet "empty land" and a possible 'win-win scenario'. Contrary to the prevalent discourses on land abandonment in Russia, it demonstrates that the unused land is located predominately in the North of the country (with poor soils, and worse climate for agriculture). Land investors, instead, are interested in the well-developed fertile regions in the South, where the land was abandoned more recently or never abandoned. Moreover, as Meyfroidt et al. (2012) found, only 8% of the abandoned land can be easily brought back into production (because of the scrubs and bushes that have been growing for years on this land), which increases the competition for the incessantly cultivated land.

In recent debates on corporate land deals and displacement of rural communities, White et al. (2012) followed Peluso and Lund's (2011) argument that 'land grabbing' should be better termed 'land control grabbing', as it does not necessarily lead to a direct dispossession of peasants or smallholder farmers from their land, but implies gaining corporate control over the land, natural resources, results of rural labour, and agricultural value chain. Therefore, the mechanisms of control (or restriction of access) are essential for understanding the impacts of land deals on rural livelihoods. Different authors revealed various practices that enable corporations to control production and territories. Hall et al. (2011) argued that control is exercised through four 'powers of exclusion': regulation, force, the market, and legitimation. Peluso and Lund (2011) listed the following control mechanisms: enclosure, territorialisation, legalisation, force, and violence. The mechanisms proposed by Hall et al. (2011) and Peluso and Lund (2011) correspond to each other to some extent, and are relevant to this study of the post-Soviet countryside. 'Force' and 'violence' are common control mechanisms. However, actual violence is rather exceptional; meanwhile the threat of violence is practiced more often. Chapter 3 on rural social movements in Russia provides several examples of hazards and dangers that rural activists experience in their struggles for restitution of their land rights lost during illegal/semi-legal land acquisitions in suburban regions. The coalitions between the mafia and the state, with its 'chaotic form of sovereignty' as described by Rigi (2008), are common practice in suburban central Russia, where land investment became a very profitable business, resulting in shady land deals and violation of rural dwellers' property rights.

Another control mechanism – 'enclosure' – implies the establishment of physical or institutional boundaries, which 'are intended to secure access for the actors in control' (Peluso and Lund 2011: 672), and includes Hall et al.'s 'market forces' (i.e. exclusion based on the price of land and other resources). 'Enclosure', which includes a few actors, and 'exclusion', which excludes the rest, are basically different sides of the same coin. This study demonstrates that LFEs control nearly 80% of Russian and Ukrainian farmland, monopolising many segments of domestic agricultural markets and holding nearly total control over the productive value chain, which prevents the access of small-scale producers to them.

Hall et al. (2015: 474) drew attention to the corporate 'extension of value chains and [...] control over production and territories' as a

control mechanism. This is commonly practised by large *agroholdings* (i.e. vertically and horizontally integrated groups of affiliated and associated agroenterprises), which became the dominant characteristic of contemporary large-scale agricultural development in Russia and Ukraine¹². Agroholdings ‘often combine agricultural production enterprises with other upstream and downstream firms in the agri-food chain, such as producers of concentrated fodder, elevators, processing units and wholesalers’ (Chapter 2: 73). Furthermore, ‘enclosure’ (or exclusion) mechanisms include the ‘appropriation of subsidies, bank loans using land permits as collateral, or to speculate on future increases in land values’ (McCarthy, Vel and Afiff 2012: 523). Chapter 5 indicates that 60% of the total state agricultural subsidies were obtained by LFEs in Ukraine in 2012, which shows the alliance between the state and agribusiness.

Lund and Peluso (2011: 673) argued that control is exercised ‘by *claiming* the power to govern territorially’ [emphasis added], which they termed ‘territorialisation’. They saw territorialisation as a process of ‘governance’ of people and resources, and ‘governmentality’ – the concept originally used by Foucault, which implies a mechanism of state control over its population and territories. However, Lund and Peluso (2011) did not connect ‘territorialisation’ to state claims only. Territorialisation is produced collectively through interactions between institutional and individual actors. This control mechanism is, to some extent, similar to ‘regulation’ as coined by Hall et al. (2011), which implies institutionalisation of private property and legal restrictions on access to land and related resources. Indeed, although the post-Soviet rural population has legal rights to land and associated resources, their abilities to use and derive benefits from this land are limited by institutional and legal framework. Registering land involves time-consuming and financially cumbersome procedures (Lerman and Shagaida 2007), while land lease agreements with LFEs are often unfavourable for rural dwellers (as discussed in Chapter 5). Because of their illiteracy and pressures from the local state and elites, rural dwellers often sign land lease agreements that give total control to LFEs over the given rent period. In many cases, rural dwellers are unable to terminate the lease and to withdraw the land for personal use. In cases where possible, LFEs usually offer land plots that are less appropriate for farming (the exact location of the distributed land is often not defined *a priori*), leaving rural families with a burden rather than a valuable asset. The ‘regulation’ control mechanism is also

observed in local authorities' decision-making in favour of the development of LFEs. For instance, according to regional amendments to the land law in Russia's Krasnodar Krai, farmers have to possess a land plot of at least 300 ha in order to establish a farm. This requirement obstructs the emergence of small and medium-scale farms (see Chapter 2).

'Legitimation' as a control mechanism, implies the justification of large-scale land acquisitions and the schemes under which they are carried out (Hall et al. 2011). As mentioned earlier, the belief in 'big is beautiful' is dominant in rural Russia and Ukraine due to the legacy of socialist collective farming. However, in comparison with the former Eastern Bloc countries, which share the history of collective agriculture, the reinforcement of the notion of 'big is beautiful' is primarily a FSU characteristic. The reason is the merger between large businesses and the state apparatus in Russia and Ukraine (as discussed later in this chapter). The agricultural policy serves the interests of oligarchs and megafarms. The contrary would be surprising in a context where, for example, the current Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko, formerly known as the 'chocolate king', is the owner of the large agricultural company Agroproinvest, whose land acreage tripled after Poroshenko's inauguration (Plank 2015). The large business does not only lobby for its interests within the state; it is so strongly interwoven, that it partly *is* the state. Therefore, the 'legitimation' of land deals and industrial farming occurs at a very high level.

1.3. Agrarian capitalism 'from below' and the peasant question

Agrarian capitalism 'from below' implies transformation and stratification *within* rural communities, which inevitably entails the discussion of the agrarian or peasant question. Does the peasantry differentiate into the classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat under capitalism, as Marxists anticipated (Lenin 1964), or do peasants preserve their mode of production and lifestyle, but differentiate based on their position in the demographic cycle and labour-consumer ratio (Chayanov 1966)? This Lenin-Chayanov debate remains critical to contemporary agrarian studies. The Marxist school of thought puts forward the question of labour in this process and analyses how rural dwellers 'pursue their reproduction through insecure and oppressive – typically scarce – wage employment and a range of likewise precarious small-scale and insecure 'informal sec-

tor' ('survival') activity, including farming' (Bernstein 2007: 6). Marxists, as well as neo-classical scholars, predict the demise of the peasant mode of production because of the competition with 'more efficient' large-scale industrial farming (Bernstein 2007, Deininger et al. 2014, de Janvry 1981). Contemporary populist scholars, however, emphasise the phenomenal persistence and sustainability of the peasant mode of production due to the moral economy, self-exploitation, and subsistence logic (van der Ploeg 2013, Desmarais 2002). Agrarian activists – most of them coming from this school of thought – argue that small-scale farming has the capability to 'feed the world' and is the best alternative to the current, unsustainable corporate food regime (La Via Campesina 2013). This political position has become dominant in the international food sovereignty movement of rural working people and their urban counterparts, who claim their rights to 'healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems' (Shattuck et al. 2015, Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2015, Edelman et al. 2014).

The agrarian (peasant) question gets little attention in contemporary post-Soviet post-socialist studies. A number of scholars have argued that class analysis is inappropriate for studying the post-socialist transformation, because social stratification cannot be adequately explained by relationship to the means of production (i.e. Burawoy 2001, Clark and Lipset 2001). Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002) have even called class a 'zombie category': meaningless, and playing a small role in shaping post-socialist identities and politics. Stenning (2005b: 991) explains this unfavourable attitude to class-based frameworks by pointing to the growing recognition of factors that influence socio-economic stratification (ethnicity, gender, age, identity, etc.) and the process of individualisation in post-socialist societies (in which people are seen as 'authors of their biographies', not just passive victims of class exploitation). New forms of social stratification are now discussed: emerging elites (or the 'top 1 percent'), the lower class (or precariat), and many strata in between (Wegren et al. 2006, Stenning 2005b). However, ignorance of class dynamics might lead to an incorrect interpretation of rural poverty as a 'temporary, transitional result of the shift from plan to market' (Stenning 2005b: 98).

The following section attempts to rehabilitate the agrarian (peasant) question for studying post-soviet agrarian capitalism 'from below'. It en-

gages with contemporary scholarly work on post-Soviet rural stratification and critically discusses the disappearance and persistence of these¹³ in regards to Russian and Ukrainian rural communities..

1.3.1. Disappearance or persistence of the peasant mode of production in the post-Soviet countryside

Although the theory of social classes is not popular among post-socialist scholars, many studies still follow – often implicitly – the disappearance thesis of the agrarian (peasant) question. The academic conviction regarding the disappearance of the peasantry is partly the result of the socialist history of collectivisation, expropriation, and forced industrialisation, which aimed at the erosion of the peasantry as a class (Dorondel and Şerban 2014). The elimination of the peasant mode of production is considered as unavoidable by those who follow the ideas on capitalist modernisation (Kitching 2001). Wegren (2005b) challenges the principles of moral economy in contemporary rural Russia. He argued that post-Soviet rural dwellers are not ‘antimarket’ and ‘antiprivatisation’ and are able to adapt to capitalism. He is convinced that despite the ill-functioning market economy, the liberalisation of land and capital markets and the removal of restrictions on incomes and trade of household producers caused stratification within rural communities and created the basis for the development of a class society (Wegren 2005b, 2011a). Pallot and Nefedova (2007) have also observed the tendency in the smallholders sector towards commercialisation and intensification of production over the last 15 years. Depending on the region and method of estimation, from 8% to 40% of rural households’ output is sold (Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 195). The various levels of market engagement and commercialisation became the basis for clustering the smallholders into different groups. Skalnaya and Burykin (2009) identified that 6.3% of rural Russians are engaged in individual commercial farming¹⁴, 20.3% of rural dwellers produce for self-consumption and for market sales, 40.6% – for self-consumption only, which can be equalised to subsistence (or semi-subsistence) farming, 20.3% are wage-workers, and 12.8% are jobless.

Wegren (2014) is convinced that commercialised rural households are able to expand their production through land and capital accumulation, and could become a rural bourgeoisie, particularly if the state would create favourable conditions and stimuli for that. Pallot and Nefedova

(2003, 2007: 189) are less confident about the emergence of a 'definite class structure' in the post-Soviet countryside. They argue that the commercial orientation of smallholders' farming depends on their geographical location. Thus, rural households located near large cities have more stimuli for agricultural intensification and commercialisation than inhabitants in remote areas, who have neither economic or infrastructural resources nor proximity to markets. Furthermore, households in northern territories are the most subsistence-oriented, much more than those in the central and southern regions. However, despite some levels of commercialisation, 'production for consumption equals or exceeds in importance production for the market' for all small-scale food producers (Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 202). Moreover, when smallholders sell their produce, the profit is used to maintain a reasonable standard of living, not for expansion of production (Pallot and Nefedova 2003, 2007).

The recent MARTOR¹⁵ collection of articles on 'The Agrarian Question in Southeast Europe' (2014) put forward the assumption about the persistence of a peasant lifestyle in the post-socialist countryside. Cash (2014) argued that despite the post-socialist land distribution and capitalist development, the moral economy of the peasantry delayed agrarian differentiation. Dorondel and Şerban (2014: 20) argued that the majority of the post-socialist rural households represent a hybrid peasant-worker formation, 'having one family member earning an industrial wage and another one working the land is a matter of subsistence in harsh economic times'. The investment of household income in the expansion of agricultural production is seen as unbeneficial as it would require a full-time engagement of all household members in farming, what would negatively affect a household's diversification strategy and, consequently, its resilience to economic shocks. Chapter 5 of this doctoral study similarly discusses the 'peasant-worker' rural stratum in contemporary Ukraine and demonstrates that a combination of employment at LFEs with semi-subsistent farming leads to the lowest poverty risk and is therefore preferred by the rural population.

It is argued here that the development of capitalism 'from above' in the post-Soviet countryside has hindered agrarian transformation 'from below'. As mentioned previously, large agribusiness gained control over most of the land and associated resources, monopolised the agricultural value chain for staple crops and processed food, and accumulated nearly all state subsidies for agriculture. This control grabbing limits diversifica-

tion within rural communities based on access to productive resources. The majority of rural households are unable to accumulate land and capital for commercial farming. However, they do not turn into proletarians due to (semi-)subsistence farming at their household plots and limited employment possibilities in rural areas. On one side, this study agrees with Wegren (2014) on the limited manifestations of the moral economy in the post-Soviet countryside. On the reverse side, it detects other distinct peasant features such as family labour, self-exploitation, traditional agriculture, and subsistence logic, which have been preserved and even reinforced in the post-socialist era (Chapters 5 and 6).

Despite all the factors limiting agrarian diversification ‘from below’, rural communities are far from homogeneous. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of household response strategies to land grabbing and large-scale agricultural development as the drivers for differentiation. This approach, to some extent, resembles the ‘sustainable rural livelihoods’ approach developed by Scoones (1998, 2015). The sustainable rural livelihoods approach focuses on analysing rural households’ material and social assets, access to productive resources, and the strategies employed by people to earn a living. I directed my attention primarily to household strategies for the following reasons. First, the overall impoverishment of the rural population after the collapse of the Soviet Union has relatively equalised economic assets between rural households.¹⁶ Second, the general ageing of the rural population and its social disintegration after the collapse of the collectives have minimised differentiation in social assets (see Vinogradskiy 2013 on the decline in social capital in the post-Soviet countryside). Third, the exclusion of rural households from capitalist accumulation ‘from above’ has limited their access to productive resources. Certainly, the choice of response strategies is influenced by the different social and economic characteristics of rural households. However, these factors have less significant impact on rural stratification, than do the strategies people follow in resisting or adapting to the neoliberal agricultural model.

Based on the analysis of different response strategies of rural households in Ukraine, Chapter 5 concludes that the post-Soviet rural dwellers do not necessarily oppose capitalist agriculture. Instead, many of them are able to adapt and derive benefits from it. This study distinguishes five different rural response strategies: competition with LFEs, taking a free market niche, employment at LFEs, rural outmigration, and indifference.

More adaptive response strategies can be beneficial to their adherents, whereas less adaptive strategies might lead to marginalisation and relegation of rural households to lower socio-economic strata. This study reveals that a rural group ‘*odnoosibniki*’¹⁷ – rural households who practice the adaptive ‘taking a free market niche’ strategy – are very similar to classic ‘middle peasants’, as they are autonomous small-scale food producers who do not exploit the labour of others, but can meet their families subsistence with own farming. However, can we call them ‘peasants’ if they do not define themselves as such? Can we consider different social groups in the post-Soviet countryside as different peasant strata?

The answer to this question depends on how we define peasants. Edelman (2013) distinguished historical, social scientific, activist, and normative definitions of the peasantry, each of which modifies and adjusts this concept according to the purposes of its use. Here, I discuss only the social scientific formulation. Shanin’s classical definition of the peasantry implies the following interlinked facets: ‘the *family farm* as the basic multi-functional unit of social organisation, *land husbandry* and usually animal rearing as the main source of livelihood, a specific *traditional culture* closely linked with the way of life of small rural communities and multi-directional *subjection* to powerful outsiders’ (Shanin 1973: 63, emphasis added). This dissertation detects all four facets of the peasantry among the post-Soviet rural population. Chapter 5 on rural Ukraine and Chapter 6 on ‘quiet food sovereignty’ in Russia demonstrate that traditional ways of farming and family labour are the main characteristics of people’s farming. On a related note, Chapter 4 on naive monarchism and rural resistance in Russia discusses the submission to power as one of the post-Soviet rural characteristics.

The four peasant facets, nonetheless, do not provide strong evidence to argue that post-socialist villagers are, indeed, peasants. First, the peasant identity is weakly developed in this region due to the generalised belief ‘big is beautiful’ and the legacy of the Soviet policy aimed at the erosion of the peasantry. Rural dwellers rarely call themselves ‘peasants’. Second, smallholders’ engagement with markets and diversity of income sources undermine the assumption about the peasantness of the post-Soviet rural population. Thus, according to Moroz (2010), in-kind income from cultivating the household plots accounted for 44.4% of the total rural household income in Ukraine, while wages and social transfers contribute to 16.3% and 13.4%, respectively (Chapter 5).

However, the diversification of household income does not necessarily contradict the idea of the peasantry. Rather, it points towards rural pluriactivity and multifunctionality, which is often overlooked in agrarian studies (Kay 2008). Kay highlights the importance of the so-called ‘new rurality’ approach, which focuses on non-farm rural activities and other practices that have been largely neglected until recently. Hart (2014) argued that the incomes from non-farm activities make peasant farming more efficient and persistent under contemporary neoliberalism. The diversification of rural activities is not a new phenomenon. Comitas (1973) discussed the ‘occupational multiplicity’ of the rural poor, arguing in the context of rural Jamaica that peasants diversify their income sources through produce vending, carpentry, and various off-farm jobs. Abercrombie (1985) posited similar ideas in her study of ‘part-time farming’, Losch (2004) wrote about ‘multifunctionality’ of peasant farming, and Eikeland (1999) introduced the term ‘new rural pluriactivity’. Bernstein (2007: 6), however, saw rural pluriactivity as a survival strategy of the classes of labour, and part of a heterogeneous proletarianisation process in the countryside.

Van der Ploeg (2009) did not counterpoise ‘the peasantry’ to commercial farmers, but instead, looked at these categories as positions on a continuum. In his book *‘New Peasantries’* he argued that many Western farmers got locked in a vicious cycle of scale enlargement, intensification of production and dependency on suppliers, retailers, and banks, which lessens their resilience to the fluctuations in food markets. In response, many farmers try to reduce their dependency on external resources (including credit), optimise the use of internally available ones, become closely involved in relations with ‘living nature’, and differentiate their activities in order to increase family labour income. These, as van der Ploeg argues, are the components of a peasant mode of production. If we look at post-Soviet rural households from van der Ploeg’s position, we observe the persistence and even partial re-emergence of the peasantry in Russia and Ukraine.

This dissertation highlights the importance of the peasant question for understanding agrarian transformation in Russia and Ukraine. It does not take sides in debates on the disappearance or persistence of the peasantry under capitalism, but reveals a number of peasant-like features, which allow rural households to survive and persist under contemporary conditions. Thus, this research calls for a critical reassessment of the

agrarian (peasant) question in the contemporary post-socialist countryside.

1.3.2. Coexistence of peasant farming with capitalist agriculture

The possibility for the coexistence of pre-capitalist alongside capitalist modes of production is an old, but still open debate. Marx (1867) and later Lenin (1967) were convinced that peasant farming would be completely replaced by capitalist agriculture under capitalism. Kautsky (1899), however, observed that small farms do not disappear as fast as the Marxist-Leninists anticipated. Instead, he argued that poor peasants are an integral part of the capitalist mode of production as they are a constant source of cheap labour. The commodification of agriculture inevitably leads to insertion of peasant farms into the market under subordinate positions. Being unable to sustain their competitiveness in markets, peasants engage in wage labour in order to mitigate income deficits of their households. Capitalist farms, however, according to Kautsky, are not interested in degrading peasants to the position of landless labour, as only autonomous peasant households are able to reproduce workers.

Agricultural capitalist development in the neoliberal era does not need as much labour as it did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, the coexistence debate regained its importance. The World Bank argued that at low levels of population density, large-scale land acquisitions can be beneficial for both the rural poor and capitalist farmers as they can coexist in one territory (World Bank 2007). De Schutter (2011) criticised this 'coexistence scenario' because of its simplification. However, he acknowledged that coexistence is possible if the existing rights of land users are clearly defined, and the markets where peasants and large agriculturalists operate remain segmented. De Schutter argued, however, that such coexistence is 'a slow-motion path to the transition towards a rural economy dominated by large production units, in which small-scale farming will be marginalised and subordinated to the large productive units' (ibid: 261).

This dissertation argues in favour of the coexistence scenario in the context of post-Soviet agricultural development. The competition between LFEs and rural households for land is insignificant due to the legacy of industrial agriculture and LFEs' control grabs (as outlined in the previous section). Furthermore, this study reveals a division in agricultural markets: large-scale agribusinesses are specialised in monocrop ex-

port-oriented agriculture (predominantly grain) and have more recently started to invest in industrial style meat (poultry and pork) production. In contrast, rural households engage in labour-intensive and time-consuming production of potatoes, vegetables, milk, and meat for family consumption and sale in local markets.

However, is this coexistence temporary, an ‘indicator of a process of atypical reproduction’ as Djurfeldt (1981: 142) argued, or is it a stable bimodal agricultural system? This doctoral study aims, in part, to answer this question by analysing relations between LFEs and rural dwellers, their productivity, sustainability and viability, and the structural changes within agricultural markets. The analysis of the productivity of small-scale and large-scale food producers in Russia demonstrates that rural households are as productive (in terms of yield) as LFEs (see Chapter 6). The LFEs’ productivity is primarily achieved through the use of chemical inputs, state subsidies, and advanced machinery. On the contrary, households produce their food traditionally, manually and without direct state support. At first glance, the conclusion might be that small-scale producers can feed themselves and the country, and substitute the less efficient LFEs if the state provides stimuli. However, this research reveals that the phenomenally high productivity of rural households is partly achieved due to their symbiotic (and even parasitic) relations with LFEs. Many rural households are helped by LFEs with ploughing, cheap farm inputs, and sometimes allowed to graze their animals at LFEs fields. Lerman et al. (2007: 79) wrote: ‘it is virtually impossible to imagine production on household plots without assistance from the farm enterprise with mechanised field works, with farm inputs and with marketing of farm products’. Therefore, most rural dwellers do not strive for autonomy in production but benefit from coexistence with large farms.

Large-scale agribusiness, in turn, mostly does not attempt to subordinate rural dwellers completely by reducing them to dependent labourers or evicting them from their lands. Households’ land plots are too small to be prime targets for accumulation. Meanwhile, the former collective land is already controlled by LFEs. Existing tenant-landlord relation with the rural population satisfies many large-scale agricultural producers, as it does not entail huge financial investments. According to the analysis of Murova (2014), the lease of land by LFEs contributes to the increase of technical efficiency of Ukrainian crop sector, whereas ownership would decrease it. Kay (1980: 13) suggested that coexistence of the pre-

capitalist with capitalist farming increases ‘the adaptive rationality of landlords to the different and changing situations they encountered in their pursuit of profit maximisation’. Therefore, if it is profitable for LFEs to tolerate smallholders, the coexistence is maintained. Chapters 5 and 6 indicate the growing interest of LFEs in the market segments, occupied by rural households. If the interests of smallholders and LFEs collide, the latter resorts to predatory practices to squeeze their small-scale competitors from the market, which might endanger coexistence.

1.4. The role of the state

The existing literature on state-society relations and public policy can be divided into three major camps: ‘society-centric’, ‘state-centric’ and ‘state-in-society’ approaches. From the society-centric viewpoint, the state represents the balance of interests of a range of socio-economic groups or classes, and its policies correspond to this balance of interests. The proponents of this position are Marxist thinkers. Although the state plays an important role in Marxist analysis, it is difficult to clearly pinpoint its adherents’ understanding of the state (Hey 1999). Most Marxists agree that the primary task of the state is to serve capital accumulation and class regulation; however, there is disagreement with regards to the nature and position of the capitalist state in class struggles, as shown by the emergence of instrumentalist, structuralist, and strategic-relational approaches within the Marxist state theory. Instrumentalists – for example, Miliband (1969) – see the state as nothing more than a tool of the ruling classes (they derive their position from Marx’s (1848) statement that ‘the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’). Structuralist Marxists – Poulantzas (1973) and later Offe (1984) – argued that the structure of the state (i.e. its bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation) reflects class struggles. Poulantzas (1973) asserted that, although class conflict originates outside the state, the state becomes a part of it by defending the interests of the dominant and creating divisions within the dominated. However, the state also has to respond to the demands of dominated classes and find compromises, which requires ‘relative autonomy of the state’ (Poulantzas 1973: 143). The strategic-relational approach was developed by Jessop (2008a) based on Poulantzas’ and Gramsci’s notion of the state as a social relation. Jessop saw the state as a macro-political organisation and argued that ‘the impact of state power depended heavily

on the changing balance of forces and the strategies and tactics pursued by class and non-class forces alike' (Jessop 2008b: 12).

The state-centric approach rejects the Marxist standpoint on the class nature of the state. According to this position, the state is independent of society and classes, and has a monopoly on using coercive power in maintaining the existent order. The state-centric approach draws heavily on Weber's theory of the state and political power. Weber (1948: 78) defined the state in a realistic tradition as a 'human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'. Supporters of this position focus primarily on studying government agencies and policy elites (policy makers and state managers), who often follow their own interests in policy making, which do not always coincide with the interests of society (Grindle 1977, Mann 1986, Skocpol 1985). The state's ability to control, force and discipline the society is rooted in the specialised state capacities or 'power resources' (as discussed in works of Held 1983, Mann 1986, Skocpol 1985, Tilly 1973). The idea of the repressive state is often used in theories of collective action to explain the dynamics of social protest (see Tilly 1978 on resource mobilisation theory, Skocpol 1985 on social revolutions, or Goldstone 1991 on the theory of the state breakdown). The state-centric framework is also used to explain the nature of the authoritarian state (for example, Fravel's 2008 study of the Chinese state). Modern theories on the autocratic power of the ruler are commonly based on Weber's (1978) concepts of patrimonial (traditional) domination and legal-rational bureaucratic domination (which is established rationally and based on legality).

The 'state-in-society' approach combines elements of the previous two approaches and focuses on interactions between the state and society, which influence the policy outcomes. Migdal (1988) argued that the state is a type of social organisation whose structure is defined by interactions of its members and between members and non-members. Migdal gave great importance to state capabilities, which 'include the capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources in determined ways. Strong states are those with high capabilities to complete these tasks, while weak states are on the low end of a spectrum of capabilities' (Migdal 1988: 4-5). Fox (1993) developed this idea further in his theory of the state's capacity and autonomy. Building on Migdal's dichotomy between state 'strength' and

‘weaknesses’, he argued that the outcome of state policies depends on the state autonomy in decision making and its capacity in implementation of these decisions.

The state has always played a prominent part in agrarian transformation and, therefore, is an important subject in critical agrarian studies (Byres 2009). However, with the rise of neoliberalism, which is characterised by state withdrawal from active participation in politics, including rural, academic interest in the state somewhat declined (Das 2007). Das observed a decrease in number of journal articles published in the 1980s on the topic of the state. This trend can also be explained by increasing popularity of the postmodern theory, ‘the focus of which switched away from political economy and the state, and towards cultural issues as these manifested themselves at the local level’ (Das 2007: 353). However, while reducing its role in welfare provision for the rural population, the state became actively engaged in facilitating large-scale agricultural development, which triggered a new wave of research on the state from 1990s onwards (Das 2007).

Post-Soviet literature echoes the trends in global agrarian studies on the state. The transition period from socialist agriculture to a capitalist market economy provoked a wave of studies on the transformation of the state’s role in the countryside. The majority of those studies were focused on land reform (Wegren 1997, 1998, Csaki and Lerman 1997, Infanger 1994). Others became preoccupied primarily with the state’s withdrawal from rural politics and the rise of informal economic regulations in the countryside (Kay 2011, Kurakin 2015). Wegren (2007) aimed at ‘bringing the state back in’ to the discussion of agrarian transformation and highlighted the increasing role of Putin’s state in the regulation of economic activity in the countryside. However, the majority of post-Soviet studies tend to avoid conceptualisation of the state and do not discuss its rural politics theoretically.

This section unpacks the post-Soviet state from a theoretical perspective (with focus primarily on the Russian state alongside some references and comparisons to the Ukrainian case), which is important for understanding state-society relations in rural areas. State politics in the countryside certainly reflect the interests of powerful classes, as Marxist theory suggests. This manifests itself in many national and regional policies, which benefit the economically dominant group of large farm enterprises. However, it is much more complicated than that. As it is detailed

below, the Russian state is characterised by the merger of economic elites and the state, which somewhat separates the state from society. Meanwhile, the patrimonial character of the state with the unprecedented role of its leader as ‘the present-day tsar’ influences the ways in which rural dwellers respond to state policies and frame their resistance. The following discussion includes an analysis of state from the Weberian tradition with some elements of the relational approach. It is followed by a discussion of ‘official’ rural politics using class analysis, which takes into account the interests of various state actors and state-society relations.

1.4.1. Understanding the state in Russia

Contemporary studies on the Russian state often substitute ‘the state’ with ‘the political regime’, which, although being interconnected concepts, represent different phenomena. In his study of ‘State, Regime and Russian political development’, Robinson (2008: 3) explained this shortcoming by pointing out that ‘in post-communist transitional systems both regime and state are in the process of reconstruction at the same time and are mutually constitutive so that distinguishing them is especially problematic’. These unfinished processes of the state and regime building, as well as ‘the locus of power, the rules and limitations governing its use, and particular constellations of political actors using power’ generate a vague distinction between the Russian state and regime in political and academic debates (Robinson 2008: 4). Many post-socialist scholars tend to study the Russian state through the analysis of general patterns of governance, which results in literature that has more to do with the Russian regime than it does the actual Russian state. Thus, Putin’s rule has been characterised as ‘presidential autocracy’ (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008), ‘post-imperial authoritarianism’ (Hanson 2006), or even ‘neo-tsarism’ (Canciani 2012). These names point towards the authoritarian power of the leader and non-democratic governance. However, how do we understand the state, which generates this regime?

To understand the interactions within the state and between the state and society, I follow the Weberian perspective on the patrimonial state and the state monopoly on power resources, modified by Held (1983), in order to include the relational component in this framework. The state is pictured in this dissertation not as an autonomous actor with its own logic and goals, but in competition with other social actors over power resources (i.e. economic, bureaucratic-administrative, coercive and ideo-

logical resources). This framework was advocated by several scholars as most appropriate for studying the post-socialist state, characterised by ‘state capture’ (i.e. Frye 2002, Easter 2008). Below the four key characteristics of the Russian state are distinguished and discussed. The following characteristics are the most important for this analysis: 1) the merger of oligarchic capital with top state bureaucracy; 2) neopatrimonialism; 3) state’s abuse of its coercive power; and, 4) the cult of the state as the ‘sacred Fatherland’, which is inseparable from the cult of its leader. As mentioned earlier, the focus of this thesis is on the period from the 2000s onwards, thus it is the Putin-era state that is discussed here, with some reference to its roots in the Yeltsin and Soviet periods.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a relatively small number of Russian industrial tycoons, or ‘*oligarchs*’ came to control a large share of the Russian economy and correspondingly, became influential in politics (Goldman 2003, Guriev and Rachinsky 2005, Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya 2004, 2006). The post-Soviet privatisation of collective and state land and properties led to the concentration of productive resources in the hands of a few, as described in Chapter 2. According to Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya (2006), this process, together with the weakness of democratic institutions and the lack of the state’s accountability to the public, led to full-scale ‘state capture’ by new powerful elites.¹⁸ The governance of the first Russian president Yeltsin (1991-1999) was very much associated with ‘state capture’ by the biggest and richest enterprises, which influenced state decision-making ‘from outside’ (i.e. not being a part of the state). Putin’s reign is characterised by the nationalisation of some of this oligarchic capital and the merger of various large businesses with the state apparatus (Afanasyev 2008). This led to state capture ‘from within’ by companies belonging to the federal government, and ‘federal oligarchs’¹⁹ (Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya 2004, 2006). The nationalisation of oligarchic capital is partly the result of Putin’s attacks on the Yeltsin-era oligarchs (Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya 2006). However, the main reason for state capture ‘from within’ was and is the possibility of deploying power resources of the Russian state for personal interests. This motivated many businesspersons to take governmental jobs, and, vice versa, where state authorities have been encouraged to engage in business activities (Afanasyev 2008). Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya (2006) showed that enterprises, which belong to ‘federal oligarchs’ or federal government, are the most effective lobbyists and receive significantly greater preferen-

tial treatment (economic power resources) than those who do not have connections with the top-levels of the government of the country.

In agriculture, this tendency is observed in Uzun et al.'s (2012) analysis of agrohholdings in Russia. The authors revealed that nearly 60% of the agrohholdings in Russia are state (or municipally) owned; whose leaders often occupy important governmental positions. The close connections between Russian agrohholdings and state authorities was also observed by Wandel (2011: 403), who argued that the real danger to social welfare and fair competition in agricultural markets 'does not come from [agrohholdings'] ability to raise non-legal barriers to entry, but from government protection'. Government protection implies state control over oligarchs and their agrohholdings, which reduces political competition between them, thereby, making the Russian state system relatively stable. Meanwhile, in Ukraine – which also experiences the fusion between large businesses and the state apparatus – agrohholdings compete within politics (i.e. for an ability to exercise control over members of the parliament), which shatters the state apparatus. Whereas the Ukrainian state is formed through the political and economic competition between oligarchic alliances, the Russian state moves towards new Kremlin absolutism and presidential patrimonialism (Afanasyev 2008, Easter 2008).

Patrimonialism, according to Weber (1978: 1029), is a form of governance in which the political administration 'is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler and political power is considered part of his personal property'. The historical continuities are remarkable in Russia. The patrimonial rule defined the relations between the tsar and nobles, and, later, between the Communist Party leaders and their underlings (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002). The contemporary Russian system is often referred as 'neopatrimonialism', which implies the coexistence of patrimonial politics with modern bureaucracies. Since the 2000s, Russia has moved towards significant de-institutionalisation of state governance, resulting in a nearly absolute form of presidential power (Afanasyev 2008). Chapter 4 discusses the principles of '*vertikal vlasti*' (vertical power structure) and '*ruchnoye upravleniye*' (hands-on/manual management) of Putin's governance, which define power relations in the country. The autonomy of public institutions was deliberately devalued not through changes in their legal status, but through informal orders and arrangements, bringing the Russian state closer to what Reno (2000) defined as a 'shadow state', which 'leaves the formal institutions of government little

more than an empty shell' (Ferguson 2006: 39). This explains why rural dwellers are unable to obtain justice through official channels of dispute resolution and therefore ask Putin directly for patronage (see Chapter 4). The principle of 'ruchnoye upravleniye' characterises the president's practices of direct intervention in internal affairs, and his power over political, social and economic institutions. This is one of the factors which influences rural dwellers to approach the president, as 'the tsar-deliverer', who has the power to restrain the court and arrogant elites, and make 'wrongs' 'rights', as discussed in Chapter 4 on 'naive monarchism' in Russia.

The lower authorities' obedience to presidential orders is realised by means of patron-client relations with the use of state concessions as economic incentives. Easter (2008) called this system 'concession capitalism', attaching a larger importance to state concessions than to private property. The patron-client imperative is present at all levels of government. It also manifests itself in state-civil society relations, as discussed in Chapter 3. Many civil society organisations have become embedded within the state, resulting in the development of a 'state-guided civil society' in Russia. Chapter 3 demonstrates how the state uses the 'carrot and stick' strategy towards institutionalised social movements: the organisations that are loyal to the state receive state financial support and political space to conduct their activities, but at the expense of their autonomy. Meanwhile, more independent civil organisations face major financial and institutional obstacles and are often exposed to political repression.

The Russian state does not hesitate to use its coercive power resources. Although coercion is a building block (at different scales) of many political regimes, it has gained a special importance in contemporary Russia (Easter 2008). Following Weber's definition of the coercive capacity of the state, Easter (2008: 206) called the Russian state a 'police state' because of its use of military, police and the Procuracy,²⁰ whereas Taylor (2011) referred to the 'regime of repression', used to 'weaken actual and potential opponents of the Kremlin, such as oligarchs, opposition parties and movements' (Taylor 2011: 3). This study takes the limited political opportunity structure in Russia as its starting point and looks beyond statist and liberal approaches to state-society relations. It argues that the state embeddedness of many (rural) social movement organisations does not necessarily make them an extension of the state ap-

paratus, and the affiliation of grassroots rural protesters with state rhetoric, policies and principles does not undermine their resistance (as is briefly discussed further in this introduction and elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4).

The discussion of the Russian state requires mentioning its (re)production of key ideological discourses, or in other words, use of ideological power resources. These resources are generated to legitimate the state's/leader's authority, and to support and strengthen the system of domination, according to the Weberian intellectual tradition. The 'cult of the state', which is inseparable from the cult of its leader, is a part of Russian identity and power relations (Molchanov 2002). It 'involves the mystification of the source of authority, justification of the distribution of power resources, and sanctification of coercive resources' (Easter 2008: 220). The cult of the state is largely influenced by patriotism and people's devotion to the 'sacred Fatherland' raised during the Soviet period, and by contemporary state propaganda about Russia as a Great Power and Putin as the 'present-day tsar' (see Molchanov 2002, Easter 2008). Chapter 4 is largely devoted to the analysis of the cult of Putin's personality and his use of the 'myth of the tsar-deliverer'. Putin draws from the playbooks of Russian tsars to show his benevolence to ordinary people for the purpose of social control. Moreover, he resurrects main elements of the tsarist legacy to develop patriotism and a unified sense of Russian identity, and to create positive historical parallels to justify the state's policy towards the internal opposition and external enemies.

Contrary to the strong state in Russia, the Ukrainian state is often characterised as fragile and ineffective – and is continually being torn apart by oligarchic clans competing over power resources. The post-Euromaidan Ukrainian government has not – at least yet²¹ – changed the essence of the national state. The oligarchic alliance of the former president was replaced by another, whereas the system of patron-client relations and the merger of the business elites with the state bureaucracy remain largely unchanged.

1.4.2. Rural politics of the state

State interventions in rural areas and the impact on the peasantry and agrarian transformation are discussed by Das (2007) as a contradictory continuum 'from dispossession to repeasantisation and back again'. Das adhered to Poulantzas' (1973) views of the state's role in class struggles

and argued that the state – as an instrument of capitalist classes – neglects smallholders’ interests. Yet at times, state policy is ‘designed to reproduce peasant economy and – on occasion – even to repeasantise landless workers’ (Das 2007: 358). In land grab debates, the state in developing countries is frequently discussed within a Manichean perspective:²² either as a weak ‘target’ state, which does not have the capacity to resist the pressures from foreign and domestic agricultural businesses, or as a ‘host’, which facilitates land accumulation by providing infrastructure and financial support to large farm enterprises (Hall et al. 2015). However, if we view the state as a blend of ‘multiple actors, factions and interests, many of which are in direct competition for political influence’, as Hall et al. (2015: 475) suggest, the incoherence of state policies and contradictory practices at different governmental levels can be explained. This section analyses ‘official’ rural politics at different state levels, taking into account the interests of various state actors and state-society relations.

Rural politics of Soviet and subsequently post-Soviet states reflect transformation within the state and its relations with powerful classes. The Soviet state exercised control and planning of agricultural production and rural social lives.²³ After its collapse, the newly emerged states of Russia and Ukraine largely followed a neoliberal *laissez-faire* approach, and were particularly influenced by Western consultants, who advocated in favour of free market competition and private family farming (Csaki and Lerman 1997, Infanger 1994). State intervention in rural areas was reduced to a minimum: agricultural subsidies were curtailed, agricultural inputs and output prices were left uncontrolled, and rural employment was no longer guaranteed by the state (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4). At the same time, the Russian and Ukrainian states pursued land distribution reforms. According to Wegren (2007), during this period the state was active in privatisation, but followed a *laissez-faire* approach in terms of the regulation of the agricultural economy.

However, the role of authorities – especially at lower levels – was not entirely *laissez-faire*. State capture ‘from outside’ originated at lower state levels. As a result of post-Soviet governmental decentralisation, local authorities gained control over resource distribution, and, hence, became key actors in capitalist accumulation. The implementation of land reform was often locally modified to serve elite interests. For example, 80% of rural dwellers in Ukraine were “informed” by local authorities and farm

mangers that they could let their land shares be incorporated into farm enterprises, while just a few knew that they could establish a farm (Csaki and Lerman 1997, referred in Chapter 5). The elites' use of local state power as an instrument of land accumulation is revealed in land grabbing and agrarian transformation literature. In his analysis of local rural government in Mexico, Fox (2007) argued that wealth accumulation by the elite was a result of their capacity to exercise control over local level authorities. Milgroom (2015) demonstrated with the example of Mozambique that the effect of state policies, which were developed at a high level, depends on how they were 'enacted' at the local level. This dissertation shows that the early post-Soviet period was characterised by the elite's use of the lower state apparatus as an instrument for land and capital accumulation.

Since the early 2000s state policy in Russia has become increasingly interventionist. Wegren (2007) characterised this period as 'bringing the state back in'. The crisis of 1998 created the official discourse 'that the laissez-faire, neoliberal model had failed, and that a strong Russian economy would require a more interventionist state' (Wegren 2007: 513). With Putin's rise to power, the state revitalised the process of agrarian reform with the aim to develop large-scale agriculture (see Chapters 2 and 3). This coincided with the strengthening of the centralised state and state capture 'from within', as discussed in the previous section. Thus, if in the early post-Soviet period, elites influenced the state policy implementation via local authorities, since early 2000s state policies have directly served the interests of 'federal oligarchs' and large agribusiness. Similar to Russia, the Ukrainian state – although remaining largely decentralised – turned its attention to large-scale agriculture in the early 2000s, partly because of the stagnating growth of private family farming (not to be confused with the rather successful production from household plots), and partly due to state capture 'from within' by oligarchic clans. According to Kuns (2016), even though president Poroshenko officially declared his intention to help small farmers, in fact, his current policy follows his earlier assessment 'that large-scale agrohholdings are Ukraine's competitive advantage' (Poroshenko 2012, referenced in Kuns 2016). This resulted in state financial support (i.e. cash transfers, grants, tax credits and low-interest loans) and provisioning of essential infrastructures and services to large agribusinesses. Thus, 60% of the Ukrainian state subsidies to agriculture in 2012 went to agrohholdings, while the re-

maining part was largely divided between other large farm enterprises with little or nothing reaching medium- or small-scale farmers (see Chapter 5). In Russia, 22.5% of all subsidies were received by 1.4% of the largest corporate farms (Uzun 2005).

State interventionism improved the performance of the agricultural sector (Wegren 2007), which indirectly benefited the rural population, at least initially through symbiosis with and employment at LFEs. What else does the state do for villagers? In a capitalist society, the state cannot entirely overlook peasants because the 'petty commodity producers who own land, are a source of legitimacy for private property itself, and therefore their continued reproduction has an ideological function for capital and its state' (Das 2007: 358). In the post-Soviet countries, private property is not associated with rural households, and state support to them is often perceived as 'compelled necessity' (Skalnaya and Burykin 2009). Russian academics Skalnaya and Burykin (2009: 34) highlighted this discourse in their statement: 'everyone understands that the state agricultural policy should not be based on semi-skilled manual subsistence agriculture in the times of high technologies...[however]...the state has to deal with it because of nearly an absolute engagement of the rural population in this activities'. Therefore, state support to smallholders is a 'social question', not a part of national economic policy in the former Soviet Union.

Wegren (2007: 515) argued that despite state interventionism during Putin's time, the role of the central state remains *laissez-faire* 'in rural social policy, as the state neither intervened to protect rural standards of living, nor acted to close the gap between urban and rural incomes'. Many state programmes, which were designed to support smallholdings, remain underfinanced. For example, the state programme 'Social Development of the Village till 2010', adopted in 2002, placed the financial burden on regional budgets, which already experienced substantial deficits (Yakimova 2006). In Ukraine, the central state is largely absent in rural development, giving local authorities the reins of governance (see Chapter 5). Some of the state interventions do not only overlook, but also work against smallholders. The 2014 proposal of the Ukrainian government to formalise the informal commercially oriented people's farming will most likely have a negative impact on such households (Borodina 2014, Kuns 2016). In Russia, the state policy aimed at limiting livestock owned by rural households and systematic pig slaughtering re-

portedly due to swine flu, which jeopardises smallholders' subsistence, is perceived by rural dwellers as 'a war against them' by the LFEs interested in monopolising the pork meat market (see Chapters 4 and 6).

State support to the rural population is important for social and political control (Das 2007). Wolf (1969) argued that villagers, who possess landed property, are most inclined to revolution, while Paige (1975) attributed the revolutionary potential to landless peasants and labourers. Meanwhile, Chapter 3 indicates how the phenomena of post-Soviet rural political apathy, conservatism, patience and endurance is unlikely to lead to a revolt. However, as rural dwellers constitute roughly one-third of the Russian and Ukrainian population, elected politicians should be responsive to this group. This responsiveness, however, is varied across different state levels. Whereas the federal state declares its intention to support ordinary people, the local state is often too underfunded to fulfil many of the promises of the federal state. Moreover, if the federal state represents the interests of 'federal oligarchs', the local state continues to be captured by local elites. Rural dwellers face local state capture on a daily basis, while federal processes are hidden from the general public by the state-controlled mass media. Chapter 4 on 'naive monarchism' in Russia reveals that rural dwellers have different attitudes towards authorities at various state levels. People blame local authorities and elites for rural scourges, while Putin is often seen in a positive light. This is largely a result of Putin's public appearance as an ordinary people's intercessor, whose noble orders are distorted by unfaithful officials. This myth of 'the tsar-deliverer' and 'arrogant nobles' is important for Putin to maintain or increase his popularity, and for purposes of social control and political stability.

The state's coercive power is applied in rural areas much less often than in large cities, where the majority of political protests take place. Ruzhkov (2012) argued that Putin aligned himself with the conservative population of provincial towns and rural areas, and 'initiated a war against the values important to progressive Russia[ns, particularly in urban areas]: freedom of speech, the right of assembly, etc.' Chapter 4 explains the federal state's tolerance to rural grievances given the fact that these grievances are framed within the 'naive monarchist' discourse that reinforces Putin's authority and neopatrimonial regime. Rural activists primarily target local authorities and elites in their campaigns and demand nothing more than compliance with official state laws and regula-

tions. This resistance is unable to challenge the existing order but provides rural dwellers with a means to remedy local injustices, as is discussed below.

1.5. Advocacy politics: rural resistance and mobilisation

Existing research on rural resistance and mobilisation falls within three main paradigms depending on the unit of analysis: classical collective action theory, Marxist class-based analysis, and heterodox theories of social movements, which analyse rural resistance at the individual, class and social movements' levels, respectively.

The classical collective action paradigm is based on rational choice theory, which implies that rural dwellers are rational and engage in open collective protests based on costs-benefits calculation (Popkin 1979, Olson 1965). If the participation in collective action is too risky and their costs are higher than the anticipated benefits, people chose a 'free rider' strategy, hoping to benefit from risks borne by others (Olson 1965). However, this approach often overlooks ideological and emotional aspects of social relations (see Edelman 2001).

The Marxist school of thought understands resistance as the result of class struggles over productive resources in the process of capitalist development. According to Marxists, peasants constitute a 'class in itself', which cannot represent itself, but must be represented, whereas rural labourers are free from prejudice and property, and, therefore, are more likely to engage in revolt (Marx 1852, Paige 1975). Marxists see current rural resistance and mobilisation as struggles against dispossession or/and incorporation into the capitalist agricultural system (Harvey 2003).

The heterodox social movement paradigm includes: political opportunity structure theory, agrarian populism, and the studies of transnational agrarian movements (TAMs).²⁴ Political opportunity structure theorists argue that success or failure of social movements depends on political opportunities – 'dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics' (Tarrow 1998: 19). The agrarian populist approach is related to 'grassroots' social movements and small-scale farmers' resistance to capitalism, inspired by Chayanovian ideas on 'peasant economy' and the 'eternal' family farming system as a backbone of society (Chayanov 1966). In their explanations of rural

resistance, agrarian populists often refer to the notion of the ‘moral economy’. According to Scott (1976: 3), moral economy is the peasants’ ‘concept of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation – their view of which claims towards their product were tolerable and which were intolerable’. If the expropriation of peasant households’ surplus by the state and landlords exceeds the peasant understanding of economic justice, rural revolts might occur (Chayanov 1966, Scott 1976, Siméant 2011). Furthermore, many populist scholars recognise gossiping, non-compliance, pilfering, and foot-dragging as hidden forms of rural resistance, following Scott’s theory on ‘everyday peasant resistance’ or ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985). Finally, TAM studies focus on transnational or global rural social movements and their politics in response to land grabbing and globalisation of agriculture. However, as Edelman and Borrás (2016: 5) remarked, ‘peasant organisations, whether transnational or not, tend to represent themselves as *sui generis* processes originating in and developing exclusively through the agency of their peasant supporters’, while their leaders are not classical peasants, but well trained rural activists.

Although many theories on collective action are based on the historical analysis of Russian rural resistance and peasants wars in the era of the Tsars and the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 (Field 1976, Wolf 1969, Shanin 1986), contemporary studies on resistance and mobilisation largely overlook rural discontent in post-socialist settings. The research on rural resistance in the FSU is limited to a few studies, which link the failure of distributive land reforms to villagers’ resistance to capitalism and the market economy (see for example Leonard 2000, Pallot and Nefedova 2007). This dissertation contributes to revitalising studies on rural resistance in the region and demonstrates their importance in global debates on contentious politics.

As mentioned previously, the post-Soviet rural population is considered peaceful, politically apathetic, and unwilling to defend their interests in open protest. This is, perhaps, the major factor, which lowered academic interest in rural contentious politics in the region. The reluctance of the post-Soviet rural population to engage in overt political resistance and mobilisation is often explained by the history of 70 years of socialism, under which disagreements with governmental actions were banned and prosecuted (Visser 2010). In addition, Chapters 3, 5 and 6 discuss other reasons. The first of those is the possession of household

plots (different from the distributed former collective land) that secures rural families' subsistence in times of crisis. Second, the lack of rural resistance can be explained by overall ageing and 'negative social selection' processes (i.e. when young and active dwellers migrate from rural to urban areas, see Nefedova 2012). Third, some authors conceptualise villagers' pilfering and foot-dragging at LFEs as 'everyday forms of resistance' (i.e. Nikulin 2003, 2010). However, it can be difficult to distinguish these practices from socially accepted petty thefts, which are a continuation of the former socialist legacy of 'everything collective, everything is mine', as discussed later in this chapter. Finally, Putin's regime creates a limited political opportunity structure, as it is able to divide, demobilise and repress undesired civil protests. In Ukraine, the political space for rural contestations is also narrow, not due to the coercive power of the central state, but because of the local elites' (often criminal) control of the existing order, as discussed in Chapter 5 based on the example of the 'milk mafia'. Visser and Mamonova (2012) detected more rural protests in Ukraine than in Russia during the last decade. Villagers protest against the arbitrariness of local state authorities and misconduct of elites, local state capture, land grabbing, or even against their fellow villagers, although the latter conflicts are primarily resolved at the household level and rarely take the forms of overt resistance and mobilisation. Post-Soviet rural protests do not challenge the political regime or the status quo; instead, they are related to 'bread-and-butter' issues and local wrongdoings, as discussed further.

Many classical studies on popular resistance either focus on official institutionalised acts and political participation, or analyse institutionalised resistance in the forms of demonstrations, protests, and revolts. McAdam et al. (2001) defined these two different forms of resistance as 'contained and transgressive contention'. O'Brien (2002: 52), however, argued that the boundary between these two kinds of contention is very vague, as they 'interact incessantly'. By studying protests in rural China, he revealed that rural dwellers combine the authorised channels of dispute resolution (collective petition writing, meetings with state authorities, etc.) with disruptive non-institutionalised, but peaceful protests (e.g., silently parading with candles). Rural protesters employ the official state laws, norms and rhetoric to force power-holders to meet their official obligations and promises, and to exploit the division between different level officials. This boundary-spanning contention was conceptualised as

‘rightful resistance’ in the context of China (O’Brien 1996, 2002, Li and O’Brien 1996).

This study attempts to contribute to the discussion on the boundary-spanning rural contention by applying the concept of ‘naive monarchism’ to study rural resistance in contemporary Russia (see Chapter 4). I used the theoretical framework from Field’s (1976) historical analysis of peasant resistance in Tsarist Russia, which argued that ‘naive monarchism’ (i.e. peasant traditional expressions of reverence for the tsar as their benefactor) was a common rural belief during Tsardom and was frequently employed by peasants for certain ends. The veneration of the tsar in peasant grievances reinforced the tsar’s authority and existing order, thereby, protecting peasants from state repression. At the same time, this allowed peasants to blame local authorities of disloyalty to the tsar and demand their compliance with the tsar’s orders. Although Russia is no longer a monarchy and rural dwellers are not traditional tsarist peasants, elements of naive monarchism are present in the countryside. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of rural petitions and letters to the president, demonstrations and peasant marches to the Kremlin, and geographical renaming in honour of Putin. In this chapter, it is argued that many rural activists deliberately exploit the image of Putin as ‘the present day tsar’ in their grievances to shield themselves from repressions and to threaten their local offenders with a possible presidential intervention. Rural activists also refer to official laws and regulation to legitimate their causes and demand local authorities to meet their obligations. However, contrary to ‘rightful resistance’ in rural China (O’Brien 1996), where rural workers use authorised channels of dispute resolution and do not hold illusions of patronage ties to the head of state; Russian villagers appeal directly to the president, due to the corruption of the judicial system and Putin’s neopatrimonial governance with its ‘ruchnoye upravleniye’ principle. Rural grievances that have traits of naive monarchism are unable to challenge the existing order in Russia, but they do provide the rural poor with a means to tackle occasional local injustices.

Thus, this study demonstrates that alliance with the state’s official discourse, norms and policies is a more effective and less dangerous strategy than direct confrontation with it. This corresponds to the recent shift in the understanding of state-society relations in Russia and globally (see for example Kröger 2011 on the Brazilian rural movement MST). Until recently, civil society in the FSU was considered as inexistent, underde-

veloped, or ‘state-guided’ (Janoski 1998, Salamon and Anheier 1998, Hale 2002). However, if we look beyond the liberal and statist models of state-society relations, which understand civil society as antagonistic to the state, we can discover unforeseen forms of collective action that emerge in a constrained political opportunity structure (see Chapter 3 on rural social movements in Russia). Recent studies on environmental, disability and animal rights movements in Russia have demonstrated that social movements are most efficient if they cooperate with the state, but preserve their autonomy (Chebankova 2012, Fröhlich 2012, Henry 2006, 2010, Kulmala 2011). Chapter 3 builds its analysis upon this assumption and takes the limited political opportunity structure as a point of departure. It analyses the paradoxical emergence of various rural social movement organisations (RSMOs) in Russia during the last decade, taking into account the increased coercive power of the state and reluctance of the rural population to engage in collective action.

The existing analysis on rural contentious politics (except TAM studies) tends to prioritise bottom-up resistance and mobilisation over professional formal organisations. Meanwhile, formally structured social movement organisations can provide resources and an institutional framework to social movements, guide protests, and carry movements’ goals and values throughout the periods of low mobilisation activity (Zald and McCarthy 1987, Taylor 1989). Chapter 3 distinguishes five types of RSMOs in Russia: semi-institutionalised grassroots movements, professionalised organisations, government affiliates, politically oriented organisations, and phantom movements, each with different goals, resources and levels of institutionalisation. Many of them are established top-down, lack constituency (real connection with the rural population), and largely support the status quo. The state-embeddedness of the majority of RSMOs reflects the existing development of civil society in Russia, where civil organisations have to cooperate with the state in order to pursue their activities. On the one hand, these organisations can be labelled as ‘state marionettes’. On the other hand, ‘the state-oriented organisations correspond more with the population’s ideas on civil society’ (Vorobjev 2009) and the patrimonial governance in the country, leading to a rethinking of the reasons for their embeddedness (Chapter 3). Considering the villagers’ unwillingness to participate in the collective action and general distrust of the post-Soviet population to social and political movements (Shevchenko 2008), the RSMOs’ alliance with state policies,

norms and rhetoric could be the way to gain support from the population.

Mobilisation of rural dwellers for collective action is one of the main obstacles of RSMOs and grassroots rural activists. This study challenges several assumptions about the rural dwellers' participation motives in collective action. Globally, agrarian populist movements frequently resort to 'peasantness-as-empowerment' as a mobilising ideology. Some scholars, like Brass (2000), argue that many rural social movements revitalised romantic populist discourses on the 'peasant way of life' to counter the destructive model of capitalist agriculture, largely inspired by the Chayanovian theory of the peasant economy. However, while social movements proclaim a 'peasant way of life', 'food sovereignty', 'environmental justice', or 'resistance to land grabbing' as their main goals, individual members may have other reasons for collective action. In this vein, Pye (2010) identified a discrepancy between the campaigns of international agrarian movements, and the interests of Indonesian villagers: while movements were preoccupied with 'biodiversity conservation' and 'climate justice', rural dwellers were more concerned about their land rights and employment. Similarly, Mamonova (2013) analysed the mismatch between the aims of the movement 'Defenders of the countryside', who fought against grabbing of historical land of Radonezh in the Moscow region, while local villagers protested against the restriction of their physical access to forest and river due to unauthorised construction on Radonezh land. This dissertation, therefore, calls for a critical assessment of reasons behind rural dwellers' participation in collective action. Chapter 3 argues that material bread-and-butter reasons for mobilisation (such as a compensation for lost land rights) are more effective in post-Soviet settings than ideological motives related to peasantness and a peasant way of life. The general negative attitude to the peasant lifestyle and small-scale family farming in the FSU influences the motives behind mobilisation. Furthermore, there are no visible social movements that advocate for 'food sovereignty' or 'a peasant way', making these ideas very abstract and unpopular among the rural population. However, these are not the only reasons. Chapter 5 analyses the villagers' concerns with personal gains in their response to land grabbing. It reveals that many rural dwellers put their own interests above a community's interest. In their discourses on the moratorium cancellation, rural Ukrainians foresee negative consequences for the village from land sales; nevertheless, they

would be willing to sell their land plots as soon as land sales are legalised. This collision of private and collective interests adds one more dimension to the political dilemma, formulated by Borrás and Franco (2012: 56-57), ‘when a situation is acceptable in terms of labour justice, but not in terms of agrarian justice; when it is acceptable in terms of agrarian justice, but not in environmental justice terms, and so on’.

1.6. Everyday rural politics

Everyday rural politics are commonly associated with hidden or everyday rural resistance in peasant societies (Scott 1985, Scott and Kerkvliet 1986, Adnan 2007, 2011 among others). Everyday resistance is a hidden unorganised form of protest by subordinate rural groups/peasants against a system of domination (oriented towards powerful classes within the state and in society), in which protesters express their dissatisfaction with what they regard as unjust, but do not attribute any political dimension to their insubordination. This everyday resistance does not occur at official dispute resolution places, but happens at places where people live and work through interactions within subordinate rural groups or between subordinates and superiors. Although there are divergences in the definition and understanding of everyday rural resistance, scholars generally agree on the ‘intention and upward orientation’ of rural acts (Kerkvliet 2009: 233). However, Kerkvliet²⁵ argued that everyday rural politics is a much broader concept than just everyday rural resistance. In his recent work ‘Everyday politics in peasant societies (and ours)’ he distinguished four types of everyday politics: support, compliance, modifications and evasions, and resistance. This study analyses different types of everyday rural politics in the post-Soviet countryside and aims to contribute to a better understanding of their diversity.

Everyday forms of peasant resistance were first mentioned, although without conceptualisation, by Adas (1981) in his study of Burmese and Javanese peasants who engaged in destructive acts against the colonial system without direct confrontation with their oppressors. Scott is one of the most influential thinkers in the field of everyday peasant resistance. In the book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, he conceptualised and provided a multi-layered analysis of hidden resistance in a Malaysian village (Scott 1985). Scott saw peasant foot-dragging, pilfering, false compliance, poaching, sabotage, anonymous threats, jokes and gossip about their oppressors as the means by which

peasants manifest their political interests. This non-explicit, yet political, resistance often takes the forms of individualised, unorganised and localised practices, and is therefore difficult to repress.

Das (2007) criticised ‘everyday forms of resistance’ for being self-defeating. He argued that everyday peasant resistance ‘confined to and aimed at a power structure within its own immediate vicinity, [while] class power is concentrated in the state at the national level, and those who proclaim the efficacy of everyday forms of resistance tend to forget this’ (Das 2007: 363). However, many studies on everyday resistance prove the opposite and observe a slow transformation of the system under gradual pressure from peasants. In his notable study of peasant everyday resistance to the collective farming system in northern Vietnam, Kerkvliet (2005) revealed that the Vietnamese government eventually moved away from collective agricultural production due to continuous peasant sabotage at collective farms. Moreda (2015) had a similar perspective in his analysis of contemporary resistance of Gumuz rural communities to land grabbing in Ethiopia. He argued that, on one side, everyday hidden resistance of Gumuz people is unable to challenge the status quo and the state’s patronage of agribusiness. On the other side, peasant covert insurgency (i.e. destruction of crops and machineries of land investors) and more open acts (i.e. refusal to pay taxes or disregard for investors’ properties) negatively affect the economic viability of large-scale agricultural projects, which might decrease the Ethiopian state’s interest in supporting such projects.

As mentioned earlier in this introductory chapter, Nikulin (2003, 2010) characterised the post-Soviet villagers’ pilfering and foot-dragging regarding LFEs as ‘everyday rural resistance’. However, these rural destructive acts are often situated at the intersections of resistance against domination and traditional rural behaviour. There is a strong legacy of rural thefts in Russia. Ioffe et al. (2006) referred to the popular legend about Nikolai Karamzin, a famous Russian historian and writer of the early nineteenth century, who characterised the situation in rural areas with just one word: ‘*voruyut*’ (they steal). Of course, this could have been a common (mis)perception among educated urban people at that time. However, more recent history likewise indicates that rural theft is a common and socially-accepted practice. Humphrey (1983: 136) discovered that the Soviet villagers used the ‘word theft to refer only to stealing from one another’ while pilfering from collectives was named ‘takes’.

According to Humphrey, people explained it as ‘recovering things that were rightfully theirs, either because they had worked on those things (harvested corn, pulled potatoes, or collected fruit) for inadequate pay or because they had once owned the land for growing these things and they were not getting enough to live on’ (ibid 1983: 136). The theft can be also interpreted as rational economic behaviour at the individual level (yet with irrational outcomes at the farm/community level) (see e.g. Visser 2003). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rural population continued to practice petty theft, this time around on the fields of LFEs that replaced *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* in the agricultural system (see Chapter 2). Chapter 6 continues the discussion on everyday rural resistance in Russia and argues that rural dwellers do not resist against LFEs, as they ‘can hardly imagine a future without them’. However, villagers’ foot-dragging and pilfering can be classified as everyday resistance against LFEs’ decreasing support to rural households, in other words, against gradual termination of the ‘social contract’ (Pallot and Nefedova 2007).

Whether post-Soviet rural pilfering and foot-dragging are intentional acts of resistance or traditional rural behaviours, they do not represent a significant force to change the status quo. However, they may influence the activities of large farms. Spoor and Visser (2004) were sceptical about the effectiveness of post-Soviet everyday politics of rural resistance. They argued that these practices could only satisfy their adherents’ need for food and vengeance. This study, however, revealed that rural foot-dragging and pilfering have some impact on LFEs. Many companies have to accept this behaviour and call these losses, for instance, the ‘angel’s share,’ as in the case for the Swedish company Black Earth Farming²⁶. Those companies that fight against villagers’ foot-dragging and pilfering deal with more significant losses. For instance, a Russian agroholding in Rostov hired a helicopter to monitor the fields during harvesting (Prishchepov et al. 2012). In this context, Rylko (2011) jokingly suggested that modern LFEs might have installed such departments as an ‘anti-trespassers brigade’, ‘field-theft accounting’ and a ‘department of field security’, leading to increased monitoring and management costs. Chapter 5 demonstrates that rural foot-dragging and pilfering motivate LFEs to engage with rural development projects and to provide some help to rural households in order to formalise this kind of ‘social contract’ and, thereby, keep it under control.

Everyday support and compliance are at the other end of the spectrum of everyday rural politics. Kerkvliet (2009) argued that not all everyday practice is rural resistance to the state authorities or to the existing order. Some villagers express support, which involve ‘deliberate, perhaps even enthusiastic endorsement of the system’, others just go ‘through the motions of support without much thought about it’ – i.e. are in compliance with the system (Kerkvliet 2009: 235). Kerkvliet argued that subordinate groups sometimes accept their subordinate position and act in accordance with patron-client relations within and outside rural communities. Chapter 5 discusses acceptance of Ukrainian rural households of their disadvantageous socio-economic position in comparison with LFEs. Instead of resistance to land and control grabbing and large-scale agricultural development, many rural households choose to adapt their production, distribution, and use of resources in order to coexist with large-scale farming. These everyday forms of villagers’ support and compliance are among the major factors, which make the coexistence scenario possible and guarantee the persistence of small-scale people’s farming.

Besides acceptance of power relations at the rural community level, everyday forms of support and compliance can be related to ‘particular authorities, governments, and regimes’ (Kerkvliet 2009: 236). In his study of rural politics in socialist Czechoslovakia, Havel (1985) observed that many rural residents symbolically supported communism in their daily practices (he referred to the example of a rural dweller, who displayed a poster ‘Workers of the World, Unite!’ on his window). Havel argued that although this obedience to the regime might be not a deliberate political act, this behaviour guaranteed a ‘relatively tranquil life in harmony with society’ (Havel 1985: 28). Chapter 4 on naive monarchism in Russia represents another example of everyday rural politics of support and compliance. For instance, it reveals that some rural streets and other geographical objects were recently renamed in honour of Putin. Thereby rural dwellers express their love for and appreciation to the Russian president, corresponding to the patrimonial governance of Putin and his role as a ‘present-day tsar’. This rural behaviour reinforces the existing order, but at the same time allows rural dwellers to put pressures on local authorities and elites in order to force them to act in compliance with the system.

Everyday modifications and evasions are the everyday rural politics that fall between compliance and resistance. According to Kerkvliet (2009: 237) ‘indifference to the rules and processes regarding production, distribution, and use of resources’ are the most common everyday forms of modifications and evasions. In his study of collective farming cooperatives in Vietnam, Kerkvliet describes a case where rural labourers complied with the requirements of the system in terms of field fertilising. However, without close supervision, they ‘did the work sloppily, such as dumping excessive amounts of fertiliser in a few spots, so as to complete the task quickly and easily, rather than spreading it evenly, which would take more time and effort’ (Kerkvliet 2009: 237). This study provides another example of everyday evasions or indifference. Chapter 5 describes cases where rural households show little or no adaptability to neoliberal agricultural development in Ukraine. While most elderly widows and some working-age villagers do not resist the existing power relations in the countryside, however, they also do nothing to support or adapt to the existing order, which often contributes to their socio-economic marginalisation.

Besides analysing the everyday support, compliance, modifications, evasions, and resistance of the post-Soviet rural population, this study discusses food self-provisioning as a type of everyday rural politics. People’s farming and the food exchange and consumption practices associated with it are not everyday resistance, compliance, nor indifference. They represent an alternative way of food production and distribution, which falls outside the LFEs’ dominated food system and is not controlled by any formal institutions. This study discusses everyday food practices of the post-Soviet population within the concept of food sovereignty. It argues that although post-Soviet rural dwellers do not oppose large-scale industrial farming, the idea of the right to food and the right to define their own food systems is not completely lost on them. These rights are not explicitly discussed in the post-Soviet countryside; and culturally appropriate and ecological food production is done in a ‘quiet’ way, without attaining a great importance to it. This resembles the Nyéléni definition of food sovereignty,²⁷ although without associated discourses and social movements. Chapter 6 introduces a distinct form of ‘hidden’ or ‘quiet’ food sovereignty without a movement in post-socialist Russia.

The concept ‘quiet food sovereignty’ was largely inspired by Smith and Jehlička’s (2013) concept of ‘quiet sustainability’. According to their research in Eastern and Central Europe, up to one-third of post-socialist Europeans grow their own food. These food practices represent a highly productive, localised and ecological form of farming, which carries social, cultural and environmental benefits for the population and the region. This food self-provisioning is not related to market transactions and is ‘not represented by the practitioners as relating directly to environmental and sustainability goals’ (Smith and Jehlička 2013: 155), explaining the presence of the word ‘quiet’ in its name. Chapter 6 analyses the food self-provisioning of Russian smallholders as an everyday form of food sovereignty, which is not accompanied by public discourse and social mobilisation. It argues that the production of one’s own food is an important right for Russian dwellers. However, this right is rather implicit in post-Soviet countries: small-scale farming is seen as the natural order of things, and only if household food production is directly threatened (as in the case of organised pig slaughtering reportedly due to swine flu, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6), open resistance and mobilisation might occur.

1.7. Methodological reflections on conducting research in post-socialist settings

This section introduces and rationalises the general methodology of data collection and analysis used in this dissertation. It discusses the applied research design, strategy and techniques within present and past methodological debates. This study combines certain elements of realist and constructivist schools of thought – the so-called ‘realist constructivism’ approach – in order to understand the objective and subjective factors that influence agrarian capitalism and rural politics in the FSU.

Until recently, constructivism and realism were defined in opposition to one another. Constructivists saw the social world as a product of ‘meaning-making activities of groups and individuals’ that are shaped by norms and ideas (Lincoln and Guba 2000: 164, Onuf 1989, Charmaz 2003). According to these scholars, social phenomena ‘are contextualised events which are perceived intersubjectively, [...] recur in the flow of time, and are only meaningful when understood in context’ (Cupchik 2001: 4). They argued that knowledge of social phenomena could not be detached from the observer/viewer, who ‘creates the data and ensuing

analysis through interaction with the viewed' (Charmaz 2003: 273). Realists criticised constructivists for subjectivity and utopianism, and argued that social phenomena are independent of the observer and can be analysed even without hers or his direct engagement with the viewed or analysed reality (Patomiki and Wight 2000). Realist research aims at 'the neutral discovery of an objective truth' (Jonassen 1991: 10). These two polar positions have greatly influenced research methodology. Constructivists use qualitative methods of primary data collection, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation, and emphasise the importance of researcher self-awareness and reflexivity. In comparison, realist researchers prefer to use quantitative measures to study phenomena, and attempt to make their analysis free from personal bias or judgments (Creswell 2007).

Barkin (2003) suggested that the antagonism between constructivism and realism is not as straightforward as commonly presented in discussions. In his study of international relations theory, Barkin argued that constructivist epistemology and classical realist theory are able to complement each other. The merger between these two approaches – the so-called 'realist constructivism' (or 'constructivist realism') – is a way to combine 'postmodern²⁸ theory's study of subjective text, positivist realism's study of objective phenomena, [and] constructivism's study of intersubjectivity of norms and social rules' (ibid: 338). According to this ontological position, 'physical phenomena can exist without human apprehension but they only become meaningful events, in the sense of influencing action, when noticed or observed by a group of people' (Cupchik 2001). This approach has gained popularity among scholars working on topics such as international relations, social inequality, morality and power (Jackson and Nexon 2004, Mattern 2004, Sterling-Folker 2004). Although this approach was criticised for focusing primarily on methods through which to study power relations, and not to understand the nature of power, it contributed the concepts of norms and ideas to realism, which allows its application across different schools of thought.

This dissertation applies the realist-constructivist ontology that accommodates realism and constructivism and the methods that they subtend. It combines an analysis of objective facts with subjective opinions, both of which shape agrarian transformation in Russia and Ukraine. At the same time, it recognises that fully objective interpretation of facts is impossible and reflection on the role of the researcher is paramount for

credible research (see further on). It examines the political economy of land and capital accumulation in the FSU, and delves into the four key questions of agrarian political economy, advocated by Bernstein (2010): Who owns what? Who does what? Who gets what? And what do they do with the surplus created? This study attempts to understand these processes holistically and from the perspective of the participants. It analyses rural dwellers' own discourses about their socio-economic position, power relations in the countryside, the socialist past, the contemporary dual agricultural system, and so on. This analysis encompasses an extensive set of primary qualitative data, which was collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions and participant observation. The primary data is complimented with secondary data (a detailed discussion of data collection techniques is presented below). Together, 'qualitative and quantitative methods provide complementary views of the phenomena and efforts at achieving their reconciliation can elucidate processes underlying them' (Cupchik 2001).

Furthermore, this research attempts to exhibit maximum transparency in regard to the researcher's personal assumptions, biases, and normative commitments, which might influence knowledge production. Smith (1987: 72) argued that relations between the researcher and informants are a 'socially organised practice' and need to be studied and reflected on in the analysis. She believed that the academic researcher should be primarily 'responsible not for impartiality or replicability of his/her research, but for the 'situated knowledge',²⁹ which was produced during interactions between the researcher and hers or his informants. According to Haraway (1988: 577), knowledge in the field is 'always situated [...] and produced by positioned actors working in/between all kinds of locations, working up/on/through all kinds of research relation(ship)s'. In this section, I discuss my fieldwork roles and how they influenced my interaction with rural communities and power-holders during the data collection process. This section also presents reflections on the impact of my personal and professional position over the course of the interpretation of data and post-fieldwork interactions with informants. The principles of researchers' self-awareness and reflection enable this study to meet the criteria of rigour ('trustworthiness') in qualitative research, which increases the credibility of the data and conformability³⁰ of research findings (Darawshah 2014).

1.7.1. Choice of fieldwork areas and primary data collection techniques

The primary data was collected during fieldwork conducted from 2012 to 2014 in Russia and Ukraine in the following regions: the Moscow and Vladimir regions (the central part of European Russia), the Stavropol Krai (the South of Russia), the Kiev region (Central Ukraine) and the Khmel'nitsk region (Western Ukraine). A field trip to Eastern Ukraine was planned for the summer of 2014; however, it was cancelled due to the outbreak of civil war in that part of the country. The fieldwork sites were chosen to reveal rural politics in settings that differ across the following areas: infrastructural development, agricultural specialisation, proximity to large cities, and presence of large-scale agribusiness. The Moscow region is known for its rapid process of (sub)urbanisation and semi-legal/illegal transformation of farmland into construction sites. More than 80% of newly built houses in this region are built on former agricultural land, and often entail dispossession of the rural population's land (and property) rights (Visser et al. 2012, Mamonova and Sutherland 2015). The majority of open land conflicts and rural mobilisation against land grabbing take place in the Moscow region. The Kiev region has been experiencing suburbanisation as well, although to a lesser extent due to the moratorium on farmland sales. Similar to the Russian capital's suburbs, the Kiev region is characterised by good infrastructural development, the gradual expulsion of agriculture, and the daily commute of many rural dwellers to work in urban areas. The Khmel'nitsk region of Ukraine and the Stavropol Krai of Russia are agriculture-specialised regions, located partly in the fertile Black Earth zone.³¹ The largest agricultural (multinational) corporations operate there and the majority of the rural population depend on (semi-)subsistence farming. The Vladimir region was selected to represent an area outside the Moscow city agglomeration, and is characterised by the instability of its agricultural development and the financial losses of the majority of its agricultural enterprises (Tsarkov 2014). The rural population in the Vladimir region is unable to commute to the capital daily, while employment in regional urban centres is limited. Furthermore, as Visser (2009) indicated, the productive symbiosis between rural households and LFEs is weaker in regions with weaker LFEs, which is the case in the Vladimir region. The fieldwork in every region included visiting³² a minimum of three districts, in which residents of at least two villages were interviewed. Every em-

pirical chapter of this dissertation contains detailed information on the fieldwork sites and periods of primary data collection.

Map 1.1. The fieldwork sites



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The primary data collection was conducted in ‘naturally occurring settings or “fields” by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities’ in accordance with the main principle of ethnography (Brewer 2000: 10). In-depth interviews, focus groups discussions, and participant observation were important methods to observe and understand ‘everyday’ rural politics, social networks, and to reveal ‘hidden transcripts’ – i.e. rural dwellers’ hidden critique of power-holders and the regime, which manifests itself in daily discourses, jokes, and rumours about the dominant group (see Scott 1990 on ‘hidden’ and ‘public’ transcripts). Besides that, primary data was collected in settings, which were less natural for the participants, such as at dispute resolution institutions (the public prosecutor’s office, local and regional courts, etc.), or during organised rural protests in various locations. Participant observation of ‘advocacy’ rural politics and interviews with activists provided information on the motives of collective action, the transformation of rural protests, state-society relations, and ‘public transcripts’ (i.e. the

open official interaction between the dominated and the dominants). The analysis of ‘hidden’ and ‘public transcripts’ is important to understand the power relations in the countryside and to explain rural politics.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with different members of rural communities (subsistence and semi-subsistence small-scale farmers, commercial family farmers, rural workers, and many sub-groups in-between – of different ages, genders, occupations, experiences with socialist agriculture, and household compositions). The snowball sampling technique was applied to recruit informants for the interviews. Snowball sampling is often criticised for its community bias³³ and a non-random selection (Morgan 2008). However, taking into account the low population density and relatively small size of post-Soviet villages,³⁴ this technique provided access to the majority of the households in the villages, which is likely to minimise the error of non-random choice. Nevertheless, some villagers remain outside the sample, which influences its representativeness and is acknowledged as a limitation of the study. Most members of the commercial family farmers group, which constitute less than 1% of the rural population, were selected based on purposive sampling in order to increase the scope of observations (Palinkas et al. 2013).

Access to and cooperation with different informants was often facilitated and ensured by ‘gatekeepers’. For the purposes of this research, gatekeepers were selected among rural residents, who are respected within their communities, but did not belong to groups of power-holders (they were: rural teachers, postal workers, senior villagers, etc.). This helped to build trust with rural communities and avoid ‘public transcripts’ and socially desirable answers, which would be given in front of power-holders. However, as Bryman (2001) argues, gatekeepers might have their own hidden agendas, ideologies and cultures, which may lead to a bias in the selection of informants. This requires a careful choice of gatekeepers and deliberate explanation of research goals to them, which was done in this fieldwork (see the discussion on researcher-informant field relations in the following section).

The guidelines for in-depth interviews were designed to cover the main topics under investigation, such as rural income generating activities, attitude toward subsistence farming, relations with LFEs and authorities, etc. Many questions were open-ended, which, according to Hancock et al. (2009: 16), ‘provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss one topic in more detail’. These testimonials

give ‘insights into how people think about certain events and what they perceive their own role to have been... an expression of the personality of the interviewees, of their cultural values, and of the particular historical circumstances which shaped their point of view’ (Hareven 1992: 275). In addition to interviews with ordinary villagers, this research includes a number of interviews with rural social movement members and leaders, local authorities, LFEs’ managers, representatives of NGOs, agrarian universities, and other informants inherent to the nature of the study.

In some cases, a household survey was conducted to obtain additional data on household activities and was a tool to recruit informants and initiate a mutually productive discourse. Post-Soviet rural dwellers have experience participating in household surveys and are often willing (or feel obligated) to answer the survey questions. National social research institutes frequently carry out sociological surveys and public opinion polls on behalf of the state or non-state organisations. For example, every rural Russian was required to participate in the All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2006. The villagers’ familiarity with, and openness to, survey practices allowed me to recruit more participants and discuss many issues beyond the scope of the questionnaire. The survey data provided interesting insights into the studied phenomena and revealed some common trends and patterns. Thus, Chapter 5 builds its argument on the correlation between rural response strategies and intra-community differentiation on the small household survey conducted during fieldwork in Ukraine. The questionnaire was designed to cover the following research topics: household response strategies, relations with LFEs, socio-economic transformations, and attitude toward land sales. In total, 44 rural households were surveyed. The detailed description of the survey data analysis is presented in Chapter 5. An example of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

Focus group discussions were organised in order to reveal collective discourses and group dynamics. As Ackerly and True (2010: 172) argued, ‘often multiple people who have shared the same experience can come to a different understanding of the experience if they arrive at that understanding through shared conversation than they might have arrived at it through individual reflection’. This was particularly important for studying the reasons for rural resistance and mobilisation or lack thereof. Some of the focus groups were composed directly during or after a collective action occurred and included its participants. Other groups were

organised by inviting village members to gatekeepers' homes. In the latter case, focus groups were conducted taking into account the diversity of rural communities and included its various members (of different genders, ages, and occupations), but excluded power-holders (local elites and authorities).

Participant observation, which implies observing and participating in the activities of the people under study, was used to gain insights into the daily practices of the rural population and intra-community dynamics. This 'written photographing', as Erlandson et al. (1993) put it, was used to capture rural households' responses to land grabbing, detect elements of the peasant mode of production, and to experience the relationship between authorities and rural dwellers. In addition to 'written photographing', photos were taken in order to vividly remember rural activities, and as a means of engaging with informants in a more interactive manner.³⁵

In the beginning of every interview or focus group discussion, information sheets in the Russian or Ukrainian languages were distributed to every participant with information about the research, the terms and conditions of data collection, storage, and use, and the researcher's contact details (according to the ERC Ethical Guidelines, see Appendix 2). In the case of participant observation, the distribution of the information sheets was done upon request or during natural interactions between the researcher and informants. In order to protect the informants' anonymity, I considered changing their names and their settlements' names to pseudonyms. However, contrary to my expectations, many villagers did not mind having their real names mentioned in the research. Some of them were against using pseudonyms for their villages, as they wanted the story of *their* village to be told. White (2004) reported similar experiences in her study of post-socialist livelihoods and identities in a small Russian town, as did Kay (2011) in a case study of the Burla village in Russia's Altai Krai. In this dissertation, the real geographical names are used, and the informants are referred to by their first names (either their real names or pseudonyms, depending on preliminary agreements). If the informant was interviewed as an official representative of the authorities, LFE, a social movement, or other organisation, his or her name and surname were used (with permission), unless otherwise stipulated. Managing and sharing research data was carried out in accordance with the guidelines of the ERC Scientific Council.

Note taking and audio recording were the principal means of recording observations and interviews. A voice recorder was used only after verbal permission from each informant, according to the requirements of the ERC Ethical Guidelines. However, I noticed that informants are inclined to give more socially desirable responses during audio recording. Many rural dwellers were worried that the information they gave could be used against them, if it is taped. Meanwhile, handwritten notes were considered as less dangerous, and, therefore, a more reliable data recording technique. I often began interviewing using a voice recorder as a part of the official process of data collection, and continued with note taking, which led to a more confidential conversation. The transcription of field notes and audio-recordings, and detailed descriptions of observations were done in the evening of the same day of data collection (or as soon as possible) to maximise recall. The transcripts, notes and other textual information were later coded using the data analysis software programme Atlas.ti. Cluster analysis was applied to coded qualitative data in order to develop typologies within the existing qualitative data set. Codes and clusters were created based on the themes in interview guides and then reviewed with regard to theoretical concepts. Furthermore, elements of discourse analysis were applied to analyse the transcripts of interviews in order to reveal informants' perceptions and popular discourses (every empirical chapter contains a detailed description of the data analysis techniques).

1.7.2. Secondary data and challenges in working with national statistical information

Secondary data analysis techniques are not widely discussed among social scientists, primarily because of the complementary role of secondary data in developing arguments (Heaton 2008). Meanwhile, almost every researcher uses qualitative and/or quantitative secondary data sets. Moreover, the researchers' re-use of their own data for new research purposes also falls into the category of secondary data. According to Heaton (2008), the application of secondary data analysis requires the following methodological and ethical considerations: origin and trustworthiness of the secondary data; 'match' between the purpose of the analysis and the qualities of secondary data; and transparency in the analysis of secondary data.

Secondary data is used in this dissertation to support, complement or extend the research findings to a broader population. Thus, qualitative data from secondary sources, such as national and international analytical reports, academic publications, and news articles, was collected in order to gain relevant background information on the implementation of post-socialist land reform, state policy, civil society, and general discourses on food, land, and small-scale versus large-scale farming. Every empirical chapter has specific secondary data sources, which correspond to its topic. For example, Chapter 4 on naive monarchism in Russia includes an analysis of rural complaint letters to president Putin and top governmental authorities, derived from the online petition platform Change.org. Chapter 3 uses 'grey literature' and web pages of the analysed state-embedded social movement organisations in order to compare their stated goals with their actual accomplishments. In the case of extensive sets of secondary qualitative data (such as the rural complaint letters in Chapter 5, or texts with written discourses on large versus small-scale agriculture in Chapter 6), Atlas.ti software was used to assist with qualitative data analysis. In other cases, the data analysis was manual.

Statistical data from national statistic agencies, such as Rosstat and Ukrstat, quantitative information from state land cadastre, ministries of agriculture, and various state registries and agencies were used to support the results of primary data analysis and/or to reveal regional or national trends. However, as stated in Chapters 2 and 5, Russian and Ukrainian official statistics are incomplete, often outdated, and do not always represent reality as it occurs on the ground. Thus, it was particularly challenging to find reliable quantitative data on rural households' farming. The official statistics on small-scale food production of post-soviet populations are often unclear concerning categories of food producers included in estimations,³⁶ and smallholders' farm output is calculated based on the multiplication of data from a selective sample of the general population, which often overlooks regional differences and leads to statistical discrepancy. In order to mitigate the weakness of statistical data, some additional calculations were carried out based on data derived from different sources. Some problems with secondary data could not be resolved, such as a difference in the amount of commercial family farmers reported by Rosstat and AKKOR.³⁷ In such cases, a footnote was added to specify the inconsistency of multiple data sources.

The national statistical information was also compared (when possible) with data from international databases on Russia and Ukraine (such as FAO), and adjusted accordingly. Furthermore, this study uses quantitative data from various national and international (agricultural) surveys and public opinion polls, such as the All-Russian Agricultural Census 2006, surveys carried out by Russian and Ukrainian Academies of Sciences, FAO Farm Surveys, and various studies of the Levada Center.³⁸ This allows for the development of judgements about the representativeness of primary data and its generalisation at the national level.

1.7.3. Fieldwork roles of the researcher and 'situated knowledge' production

Adams (1999: 332) argued that 'the researcher-informant relationship brings into play dynamics of race, gender, class, nation, and age'. This influences the roles assigned to the researcher in the field. When my informants and gatekeepers introduced me to those who did not know me, they often mentioned the following characteristics: 'a researcher/student from a Dutch university' often followed with 'but she is from here'³⁹ originally', and 'a charming/pretty girl'. Such characterisation was, apparently, seen by my informants as the best way to introduce me in order to guarantee a productive collaboration. These three major roles – among many other roles – influenced my relations with informants and the production of 'situated knowledge'.

The first two roles, 'a researcher/student from a Dutch university', and 'from here', expose the contradiction between my 'outsider' and 'insider' positions. Although the fieldwork researcher is commonly perceived as the 'other' in the field (De Soto and Dudwick 2000), this 'otherness' can be on different scales. A foreign researcher – as discussed by De Soto and Dudwick – is a complete alien to the population under study, which requires longer-term research-informant interactions for trust-building. Meanwhile, researchers, who speak the same language and have similar cultural backgrounds as their informants, need less time to build trust and initiate productive conversations. I was able to associate myself with both countries under study by 'adjusting' my identity' – emphasising my Ukrainian origin or Russian nationality accordingly.

Nationality and national identity became very sensitive issues in Russia and Ukraine since the Ukrainian Euromaidan revolution of 2014, followed by the civil war in Eastern Ukraine and ongoing geopolitical con-

flict with Russia. Although these two countries share a somewhat common history, and ‘Ukrainian identity evolved close to the Russian one and within the envelope of Russian state institutions presented Ukrainian elites’, the new Ukrainian government has chosen to advance ‘the negative identity of Ukraine as a “non-Russia” par excellence’ (Molchanov 2015). At the same time, 17.3% of the Ukrainian population identify themselves as ethnic Russians, and the Russian language is commonly used in many cities in the East and South of the country (Pavlenko 2008). The current crisis has drawn Russia and Ukraine apart, and political propaganda on both sides has exacerbated anti-Russian movements in Ukraine and created anti-Ukrainian moods in Russia. Although the majority of field trips were conducted before the culmination of the Russia-Ukraine political crisis, nationality and national identity were already sensitive issues at that time. My biographical characteristics helped me to associate myself with both countries. Having a Ukrainian mother and a Russian father, I was born in Ukraine, but lived and studied in Russia before moving to the Netherlands to do academic research. I was raised in a Russian language environment, while Ukrainian became my passive language.⁴⁰ A similar mixed autobiographic context was described by Florescu (2006), who was Romanian by origin, but appropriated a number of other identities throughout her lifetime – which she called, ‘not the incarnation of the twenty-first-century cosmopolitanism, but the “disordered personality” of an aphasic post-socialist subject’. This post-Soviet ‘disordered personality’ was beneficial to me, as I was able to relate better to my informants, and occupy the position ‘from here’ in both countries.

Besides its advantages, the role ‘from here’ imposed certain limitations on primary data collection. For example, the interview guide contained several questions related to ‘universal knowledge’, which a researcher ‘from here’ should be familiar with. According to Wall (2006: 116), an ethnographer can be perceived as ‘ignorant for being unaware of seemingly universal knowledge’. To mitigate negative consequences from asking naive or obvious questions, Wall occupied the position of a foreign researcher who ‘was eager to learn’ during his fieldwork in Uzbekistan (Wall 2006: 116). Although my position ‘from here’ did not allow me to take the role of ‘eager-to-learn foreigner’, I resorted to my role of ‘a researcher/student from a Dutch university’ to explain my scientific interest in rural dwellers’ perceptions and discourses – as a method of

constructivist ethnography – which allowed me to ask seemingly obvious questions.

Furthermore, my affiliation with a foreign institution sometimes provoked the ‘pragmatic identity’ of rural dwellers that have experience with (or knowledge about) rural development projects, initiated or sponsored by foreign institutions (which is especially common in Ukraine). The ‘pragmatic identity’ of small farmers and peasants was characterised by Landini (2012: 520) as ‘one that encompasses peasants’ view of themselves as poor and in need of assistance, which in turn legitimises efforts to obtain public assistance’. In their discourses, some of my informants deliberately understated their households’ productive resources or exaggerated rural poverty, which was later exposed in further conversations.⁴¹

The third characteristic, which was given to me in the field – ‘a charming/pretty girl’ – was less an assessment of my attractiveness, but rather an appeal to a traditional principle that young women need help and assistance (Adams 1999). According to Warren (1988), a female ethnographer ‘can achieve her research goals more easily by abandoning her cherished feminist identity’ (quoted by Adams 1999: 337). My gendered role provided a number of advantages in the post-Soviet countryside. First, people are more likely to help a young woman travelling alone in the countryside. Second, women are traditionally considered less harmful with regard to discussing political themes, especially in politically constrained environments (Golde 1986). In interviews with rural dwellers, I emphasised the peaceful nature of my research, aimed at revealing villagers’ everyday practices and response strategies. In interviews with managers of LFEs and local authorities, I used apolitical language and called land grabbing ‘large-scale agricultural investments’. However, besides these advantages, my gendered role also caused some obstacles, especially in interactions with representatives of higher-level authorities and business elites. Whereas my age and gender were associated with ‘harmlessness’ by rural communities and village authorities, the top power-holders often did not take me seriously, which resulted in refusal or too little time for interviews.⁴²

Besides performing the three main fieldwork roles, I was also a ‘guest’. People in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are known for their overwhelming hospitality, which is often associated with food, drinks, and gift giving (Polese 2009, Werner 2000). Post-Soviet hospitality rituals underwent a simplification process due to the marketi-

sation and modernisation of society. However, food and drink customs remain an important means to construct host-guest relations (Adams 1999, Polese 2009). Similar to the fieldwork experiences of Polese (2009) in post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine, I was fed plentifully and received gifts from my informants, primarily self-grown and self-made farm products. This obliged me to enter into reciprocal social relations. I gave little gifts brought from Holland (usually *stroopwafels*, typical Dutch cookies), to my informants, or sent them their photos by post, which I took during fieldwork, as a way of thanking my informants for their time and hospitality.

The guest role leads to a number of benefits, such as local people's care of, assistance to, and protection of the researcher. However, it also implies the loss of the researcher's independence. In her analysis of researcher-informant power relations in Uzbekistan, Adams (1999: 341) argued that 'the guest dynamic plays a trick in which the apparent power relations are inverted. The guest is treated with great generosity and by custom can demand a great many things from the hosts, but entering into the guest mode actually implies acceptance of submission'. My hosts – which were concurrently gatekeepers in many cases – had a great influence on my access to information and data collection. They tended to select informants for my interviews based on their own understanding of what and whom I should research. This often results in biased sampling, which I had to mitigate by returning to the field sites without gatekeepers. Furthermore, being a guest from Holland obliged me to be present at various social occasions to perform the functions of the 'honoured guest', which was similar to what Adams (1999) experienced being a 'mascot researcher' in Uzbekistan. The most challenging was to control my research directions and identity when local authorities hosted me. Before being allowed to work in the field independently, I had to make a number of official ceremonial visits to the most promising enterprises and farms, together with representatives of local authorities, according to the socialist legacy of official hospitality. The connection with local power-holders endangered my identity as an independent researcher; however, it is difficult to avoid becoming an 'officially recognised guest' when doing an ethnographic study in post-Soviet rural areas.

The researcher's presence in the field is always 'consequential' – it unavoidably provokes reactive effects. In other words, it influences the behaviours and discourses of the people under study (Emerson et al. 2011).

However, this ‘consequential presence’ should not be seen as diminishing the quality of fieldwork data, but rather as a source of observation and learning in and of itself (Clarke 1975). Considering this, I studied reactive effects from my presence in the field as part of ‘situated knowledge’ construction. Many rural dwellers, with whom I collaborated in the field, were interested in my opinion on the topics of research and challenged me with difficult questions. Such a role reversal, according to Lohmeier (2009), ‘blurs the lines between researcher and researched and underlines the performative and relational aspect of self [...] which allow for mutual disclosing and exchanging’. Furthermore, my interactions with informants have continued even after the fieldwork, leading to a correspondence with some of my informants (through post letters or e-mails) to receive their feedback on my observations and preliminary findings. In several cases, informants themselves initiated post-fieldwork correspondence. Those interactions helped to reveal differences in interpretation of events, and provoked reactive effects, which were not detected in the field.

Thus, after conducting fieldwork in the Sergiev Posad district (in the Moscow region), which was aimed at analysing rural mobilisation against land grabbing, I was asked by activists to share my preliminary conclusions with them. I wrote a popular article, where I discussed the process of social mobilisation and the state-society relations in this district, which was later uploaded on the movement’s webpage (Mamonova 2013). In my analysis, I tried to be very objective and to not hurt anyone’s feelings; nevertheless, the reaction was ambivalent. Many activists agreed with me on many points and provided additional information and clarifications for my analysis. However, a few of them reacted painfully to my conclusion that social mobilisation and movements in Russia are weak, disconnected, and lack the ideological component for large-scale political mobilisation. Thus, one of my opponents acknowledged that I was right concerning the weakness of political protest in Russia; however, he accused me of writing this article ‘upon the order of western enemies’. This reaction points to the insecure position of political activists in Russia and their intolerance to criticism and western ideas, and made me even more conscious of my role as ‘a researcher/student from a Dutch university’ in the ‘situated knowledge’ construction.

The following five empirical chapters present a detailed analysis of rural politics in Russia and Ukraine. The political economy of large-scale land acquisitions and the role of the state and other stakeholders in contemporary agrarian transformation in Russia are examined in Chapter 2. Following it is an analysis of the ‘advocacy politics’ of institutionalised rural social movement organisations in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 investigates state-society relations, which lead to the emergence of ‘naive monarchist’ practices of the rural population in Russia. The Ukrainian situation is presented in Chapter 5, providing an analysis of resistive and adaptive household strategies to land deals and industrial agricultural development. Chapter 6 discusses everyday practices of food production by the post-Soviet rural population within the concept of ‘quiet’ food sovereignty. Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the research findings, initiates a discussion on their generalisability, implications and limitations, and identifies potential directions for future research.

Notes

¹ This phrase became the slogan of the social movement *Narodnichestvo* during the 1960s - 1970s (from the Russian word ‘*narod*’, which means ‘common people’), whose proponents saw the peasantry as a revolutionary class and the rural commune lifestyle as a prototype of socialism. This movement was also known as Radical Populism, and its ideas formed the foundation of Agrarian Populist school of thought and contemporary populist agrarian social movements.

² These are approximations, used to show the general trend; for exact numbers, see Chapters 5 and 6.

³ The agrarian question and the peasant question are often mistakenly used as synonymous; there are conceptual differences between them. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1979) defines the agrarian question as ‘the question of the laws of development of capitalism in agriculture, the relations between classes which arise on this basis, and the class struggle connected with it’. Meanwhile, the peasant question is ‘the question of the historical destinies of the peasantry and of the role of the peasantry and its place in the revolutionary transformation of society’ (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia 1979). These two questions remain continued to be debated and their definition continues to be reformulated by contemporary scholars in order to include the latest agrarian transformations.

⁴ This study uses the term ‘post-socialism’ in reference to the FSU and post-socialist Europe, and ‘post-Soviet’ when discussing the FSU only. Besides the

FSU and post-socialist Eastern Europe, the countries of China, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba and several others, share the history of socialism and often called as post-socialist societies. This study draws some parallels with rural China, for example, when discussing the within-the-system protest (see Chapter 3 and 4). However, an inclusion of those countries in this doctoral analysis would blur its focus and be undoable in the given timeframe.

⁵ Earlier studies on land grabbing considered the global financial crisis as one of the factors that triggered land grabs (see, for example, Jouko and Granberg 2011 as referred in Chapter 2). However, the global rise in food prices is significantly more influential than the global financial crisis (see the discussion of Visser 2016 about land investments in the FSU and beyond). The global financial crisis had differentiated impacts on investment activities. To some extent, the financial crisis made investors suspicious of complicated financial products, leading them to turn their attention toward the real sector of food and land. However, the financial crisis also limited liquidity for investing. In 2009, when the financial crises belatedly reached Russia, it reduced the flow of money available for agricultural investments. Moreover, the land rush globally and in Russia started before the financial crisis (Visser 2016).

⁶ In his later work, Byres (2009) included the example of France that experienced a process of ‘delayed capitalism’, which is neither ‘from above’ nor ‘from below’.

⁷ LFEs can be state or private owned, with domestic or foreign capital, in the form of a single enterprise or agroholding, etc. Although the organisational form does impact the corporate politics, the major operational principles remain the same: LFEs feature large land holdings, economies of scale, modern labour-saving technology, and the accumulation of state subsidies.

⁸ Burawoy’s argument about involution to the former socialist structures or ‘transition without transformations’ was largely based on the analysis of post-Soviet restructuring during the 1990s. The 2000s are characterised by further developments towards capitalist economy, however, aspects of involution remain existent. Therefore, Burawoy’s concept of ‘transition without transformation’ is slightly modified in this study and referred to as ‘transition with limited social transformation’ for a more precise definition of the current state of the post-Soviet transformation.

⁹ The small-scale personal farming of the rural population (and, to some extent, urban dwellers’ gardening) are commonly united in the category of *‘khozjajstva naseleniya’* (people’s farming) and used in the Russian and Ukrainian agricultural statistics.

¹⁰ Marx (1977) argued that capitalist production leads to the emergence of two classes: the class of labourers, who are divorced from the means of production and, therefore, have to sell their labour power, and the class of capitalists, who

accumulate the means of production and employ wage labour. However, not all even orthodox Marxists argue that the class of labourers (or proletariat) lacks access to land resources. For example, Kautsky (1899) argued that agricultural labourers are not necessarily completely dispossessed from the land as industrial labourers are. According to him, the proletarianisation in the countryside takes the form of peasant families who do not have enough land to meet their subsistence, and have to sell their labour, while land cultivation remains just a household activity.

¹¹ The theory of food regimes was developed by Friedmann and McMichael (1989) and is aimed at explaining the strategic role of agriculture in the global capitalist economy. The current ‘corporate’ food regime, which emerged in the 1980s, is the neoliberal model of industrial and transgenic export-oriented agriculture, which is dominated by transnational corporations and institutionalised through the WTO (McMichael 2012).

¹² It is important to note that domestic agrohholdings are those who primarily conduct control grabbing in the food chain. Foreign agrohholdings generally are less integrated vertically, and focus mainly on the agricultural production (with as a light form of vertical integration and control related to storage facilities). For more information, see Kuns et al. (2016).

¹³ The ‘disappearance thesis’ states that the peasant mode of production is (or inevitably will be) expelled in competition with more ‘effective’ industrial agriculture. This position is advocated by Marxist (class-based) theorists (see Bernstein 2014). The populist thinkers, to the contrary, argue in favour of ‘the persistence thesis’, which refers to the persistence of the peasantry despite the pressures of agrarian capitalism due to the moral economy, subsistence logic, self-exploitation and other principles of the peasant economy (van der Ploeg 2013).

¹⁴ This includes family farmers (*krestyansko-fermerskiye khozyaystva*), individual rural entrepreneurs (*individualniye predprinimateb*), as well as rural households, which have not officially registered their entrepreneurial farming activities.

¹⁵ The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review (MARTOR).

¹⁶ At the onset of the post-socialist transformation process in the early 1990s, high rural unemployment and overall rural poverty prevented any significant stratification within rural communities. The small exception to this trend was the emergence of a group of commercial family farmers (less than 1% of the population). The early 2000s were characterised by large-scale industrial agricultural development and state investments in rural areas, which provoked some economic stratification in rural areas (although limited compared to urban areas). Furthermore, it is important to note that economic stratification in rural communities differs geographically. In the northern regions with weak conditions for agricultural development, stratification remains insignificant, while the

diversification of rural households occurs in the well-endowed southern regions (for the latter see the study by Nikulin (2003) on the growing inequalities in the countryside).

¹⁷ *Odnosibnik* is translated from Ukrainian to mean an independent and autonomous peasant, although the word ‘peasant’ is not specifically included in the Ukrainian term.

¹⁸ State capture is not exclusively a post-Soviet or post-socialist phenomenon, but can be observed in other parts of the world. Thus, Visser and Kalb (2010) revealed many similarities in state capture between the FSU and the West. According to these authors, state capture in western societies is carried out by big banks and multinational corporations, but this process is more hidden than in the FSU and occurs at different scales.

¹⁹ i.e. the oligarchs who are connected to or employed by the federal government.

²⁰ Procuracy (in Russian *Prokuratura*) is a state bureau, which ensures administrative legality in Russia. According to Burger and Holland (2008: 142), ‘the Russian Presidential Administration under President Vladimir Putin misused the Procuracy for political purposes in high profile cases having great economic or political significance’.

²¹ There are attempts by the Ukrainian central government to constrain the oligarchic influence, yet the effect of it is unclear.

²² Here, it refers to a dichotomy between good and evil (or victim and predator).

²³ Collective and state enterprises (kolkhozy and sovkhozy) were heavily subsidised by the state and their agricultural activities were organised in accordance with production targets and directives from the state central planning organs. The state regulated rural incomes (by bringing them closer to urban ones) and directly and indirectly (through kolkhozy and sovkhozy) was responsible for rural services, such as education, transport, medical and health care and cultural activities, and even pension payments (see Wegren 2007, Pallot and Nefedova 2007, Visser 2008)

²⁴ Transnational agrarian movements (TAM) - the term, proposed by Borras et al. (2008: 170), which, in its loose definition, means ‘movements, organisations, coalitions, networks and solidarity linkages of the rural poor, [...] and some of the national peasants’ and farmers’ groups directly linked to these transnational movements’. The term is challenged by different scholars, including its authors, because of the ambiguity between ‘movement’ and ‘organisation’ (see Borras 2010 referring to Fox 2009) and the controversy of the term ‘transnational’ or ‘global’ when it is used to describe civil society, as discussed by Hearn (2001) and referenced by Borras (2010).

²⁵ Kerkvliet is one of the authors of the concept of ‘everyday politics’, which he developed in the co-authored book with Scott about everyday forms of resistance in Southeast Asia (Scott and Kerkvliet 1986) and in the study of everyday politics in the Philippines (Kerkvliet 1990).

²⁶ Black Earth Farming is one of the largest landowners in Russia. It was established in 2005 in Russia and was among the first foreign-financed companies (primarily based on Swedish capital investments) that invested in the Russian agricultural sector. In 2014, the company controlled 271,000 hectares of Russian farmland, of which 86% were in ownership.

²⁷ Food sovereignty is ‘the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems’ (Nyéléni 2007: 1)

²⁸ Postmodernist constructivism argues that social structures are not independent from our observations and discourses about them; therefore, no ‘true’ reality exists.

²⁹ Until recently, ‘situated knowledge’ and researchers’ self-reflection were central to feminist epistemology (Adams 1999, Smith 1987). However, according to Hughes (2012: 35) ‘self-reflection upon the constraining conditions is the key to the empowerment “capacities” of research and the fulfilment of its agenda’, which is especially important for critical agrarian studies.

³⁰ Objectivity in qualitative studies is commonly associated with the ‘conformability’ of research findings and is related to research neutrality. Conformability is ‘the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the data’s accuracy, relevance, or meaning’ (Elo et al. 2014: 2). In other words, it is the degree to which readers of a qualitative study agree with and can corroborate (and to some extent duplicate) the research findings.

³¹ Besides Black Earth soils, the Stavropol Krai has ‘kastanozems’, i.e. relatively less fertile, dry soils, that are rich in humus and calcium ions, often used for pastures.

³² The periods of field visits were relatively brief – about one month on average. This is a result of doing research in multiple regions (and villages within them). The fieldwork roles of the researcher (as discussed further) enabled trust to be built up between the researcher and informants relatively quickly, which facilitated data collection.

³³ Community bias in snowball sampling occurs when the first informant has a strong impact on the sample.

³⁴ Excluding the Stavropol Krai, where villages are relatively large and can have up to several thousand inhabitants.

³⁵ In Ukraine, I travelled with an Italian photojournalist, who took pictures of post-Soviet rural dwellers. I discovered that many villagers were open for interaction and interested in posing for pictures. This behaviour can be explained by the Soviet legacy of photographing for local newspapers or '*doska pocheta*' (billboard of honour), aimed at telling the stories and displaying the portraits of the heroes of socialist labour, which led to developing positive associations with photographing. Furthermore, photos remain special in the post-Soviet countryside, and, therefore, highly appreciated. Many people asked me to send their photos to them by post. I took my semi-professional camera with me on every fieldtrip afterwards. This method helped me to recruit more people for my interviews, facilitated collaboration and was a perfect means to thank my informants for their hospitality and the stories they shared with me.

³⁶ Two terms are commonly used to refer to small-scale food production: 'people's farming' or 'personal subsidiary farming'. The category of 'people's farming' often includes rural household production and small-scale farming of urban dwellers at their dacha [country house] plots. It is different from 'personal subsidiary farming', which usually includes only rural household production (but not always). These two categories are used in Russian and Ukrainian statistical analysis interchangeably, which leads to the general confusion of terms and errors in estimations.

³⁷ Association of Family Farmers in Russia.

³⁸ Russian independent, non-governmental polling and sociological research organisation.

³⁹ The phrase 'from here' was used to indicate the national affiliation of the researcher to the country of informants.

⁴⁰ Not being a fluent speaker of Ukrainian language did not harm my 'from here' identity, as many urban citizens in Ukraine speak Russian as their mother tongue, while Ukrainian language skills often remain passive.

⁴¹ Despite the fact that this research project was exclusively aimed at academic research, it facilitated a collaboration between a rural community in the Khmel-nitsk district (the Kiev region) and a Dutch charity fund that sponsored a replacement of windows in a rural kindergarten.

⁴² I conducted an experiment. After several weeks of unsuccessful attempts to arrange an interview with a CEO of a large multinational agricultural company, I asked my supervisor to call and schedule an appointment. I believe that the fact that he was a male and held a senior position at a university, made the company's PR manager (who was a woman) forward his call directly to the CEO, with whom he made an appointment for an interview (which I conducted afterwards).

2

Oligarchs, Megafarms and Land Reserves: Understanding Land Grabbing in Russia

Abstract

This chapter seeks to unravel the political economy of large-scale land acquisitions in post-Soviet Russia. Russia falls neither in the normal category of ‘investor’ countries, nor in the category of ‘target’ countries. Russia has large ‘land reserves’, since in the 1990s much fertile land was abandoned. This study examines how particular Russia is with regards to the common argument in favour of land acquisitions, namely that land is available, unused or even unpopulated. With rapid economic growth, capital of Russian oligarchs in search of new frontiers, and the 2002 land law allowing land sales, land began to attract investment. Land grabbing expands at a rapid pace and in some cases, it results in dispossession and little or no compensation. This chapter describes different land acquisitions strategies and argues that the share-based land rights distribution during the 1990s did not provide security of land tenure to rural dwellers. Emerging rural social movements try to form countervailing powers but with limited success. Rich land owners easily escape the implementation of new laws on controlling underutilised land, while there is a danger that they enable eviction with legal measures of rural dwellers. In this sense, Russia appears to be a ‘normal’ case in the land grab debate.

2.1. Introduction

The topic of large-scale land acquisition or ‘land grabbing’ has recently received growing attention among academics and policy makers (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, World Bank 2010a, HLPE 2011). Specifically, land grabbing has been studied in Africa (Cotula et al. 2009, Hall 2012), South-East Asia (Julia and White 2012), Latin America (Zoomers 2010, Borras et al. 2012) and China (Ding 2007, Hofman and Ho 2012).

However, until now, the vast land masses of the former Soviet Union constitute a blank spot in the global investigation of land grabbing, as noted by Visser and Spoor (2011) in the first overview of land grabbing in this region. This chapter builds on the study of Visser and Spoor (2011) with a more elaborate investigation of land relations and mechanisms of land acquisition, focusing on the case of Russia. Furthermore, the present study is based on recent fieldwork, whereas Visser and Spoor (2011) was predominantly based on media and web research. The current literature on land grabbing predominantly tries to map the magnitude and speed of land grabbing, the main types of countries or private actors involved worldwide, and the general drivers of the global land grab. Following new research lines advocated by Borras et al. (2011: 211), this chapter pursues a closer look at the actors involved, their motivations and interests, and especially the mechanisms through which large-scale land deals are enacted. The link with the global land grab debate will be made in particular through analysing the ‘availability of land’ and what this means in the Russian context.

Russia is the largest agricultural producer in post-Soviet Eurasia, and worldwide it is one of the countries with the largest land reserves for agricultural production, as well as the country with the potential for the largest increase in grain production worldwide (World Bank 2010a). Russia has one of the highest levels of arable land in the world, namely 0.9 hectares (ha) per capita (World Bank 2010a, b). This ratio is higher only in Canada and Australia, but these countries have less potential to increase production, as most agricultural land is being used, with high land productivity. Moreover, it is to be expected that climate change will reduce the acreage of arable land, whereas in Russia the acreage of cultivable land might expand northward, for instance. According to the World Bank, water availability will increase (5–15%) in the north of Russia and Kazakhstan (FAO 2011), which may offset the higher occurrence of droughts in the south of Russia (HLPE 2011, Dronin and Kirilenko 2011). Whereas most countries in the world face declining availability of agricultural and arable land per capita, in Russia the availability of land per capita has actually *increased* over the last two decades, because of stagnation of the population¹. Moreover, a substantial amount of Russia’s agricultural land was taken out of production in the 1990s. According to the former president of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, the amount of unused or inefficiently used agricultural land may total 30 million ha

(Wegren 2011b: 152). However, reports differ on the amount of land taken out of production (IAMO 2011, Ioffe and Nefedova 2004). This abundance of available ‘unused’ but often very fertile land has raised the interest of investors, not only of domestic investors (the Russian oligarchs amongst others), but also of foreign companies and governments. However, whether all of the land classified as such really is ‘unused’ or ‘abandoned’ needs further scrutiny.

The phrase ‘global land grab’ has become a catch-all to describe and analyse the current explosion of large-scale (trans)national commercial land transactions. Some see land grabs as a major threat to the livelihoods of the rural poor and oppose such commercial land deals. Others see them as a necessity to modernise agriculture and as an economic opportunity for the rural poor, although they are wary of corruption and negative consequences, and hence, call for improving land market governance (Borras et al. 2011). Often land grabbing has been defined as large-scale land acquisitions by foreigners (GRAIN 2008), but currently, a substantial share of land grabbing is conducted by domestic investors, or by coalitions of foreign and domestic actors. Land grabbing is defined in this study as ‘the large-scale acquisition of land or land-related rights and resources by a corporate, non-profit or public buyer for the purposes of resource extraction geared towards external consumers (whether external simply means off-site or foreign)’ (Borras et al. 2012). Extraction and alienation are essential to this definition rather than the type of capital invested, the intended market or the act of commodification or privatisation of land *per se*.

The widespread farm restructuring and share-based land reform in Russia in the first half of the 1990s ‘opened up’ a huge and fertile area of land for investors in agricultural land. However, for more than a decade this sparked little interest among investors. The picture changed when Russian oligarchs and Western investors started to search for new frontiers of investment with domestic economic growth and the influx of Russian offshore capital as well as due to the global financial crisis (Jouko and Granberg 2011)². Moreover, rapidly increasing local demand for livestock products (related to demand for grains) in Russia, and subsequent legal and policy changes stimulating agricultural investment, caused a high demand for agricultural land. Large-scale land investments became popular among Russian and foreign companies. Foreigners are not officially allowed to acquire agricultural land in Russia. However,

they do so by means of their Russian subsidiaries, which are considered as Russian domestic companies by Russian law. 'We are seeing a land grab bigger than anywhere else in the world, and it has attracted a mighty cast of characters', stated Kingsmill Bond, a chief strategist at the Moscow Brokerage firm Troika Dialog (Kandell 2009).

This current rush of investors for land (and the earlier experience with industry) raises serious concerns about the transparency, inclusiveness and fairness of land acquisitions. There is a danger of widespread dispossession of rural inhabitants who recently acquired entitlements to property in the form of land shares in the 'cosmetically' privatised, large-scale successors of the state and collective farms, which are developing into megafarms. Will land grabbing cause rural dwellers to lose their land rights, soon after they received them in the 1990s? In the absence of studies on land grabbing in the former Soviet Union, we know relatively little of the various effects.

This chapter focuses on the investors in land and their strategies. However, effects of these land acquisitions for the rural population regarding land ownership (and potential dispossession) will also be addressed. This study examines the main players in the Russian land market and the strategies and mechanisms they use for land acquisition, such as deliberate bankruptcy of collective farms in order to buy their lands, the massive purchase of land shares acquisition after land law (2002), and using the inequality in power relations. Finally, the role of the Russian state *vis-à-vis* large-scale land acquisitions is discussed.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section (Section 2.2), the specificities of research on land grabbing in Russia are described, with special attention to difficulties with data collection. In Section 2.3, it will be shown that the land rights ('shares') the population received during the restructuring of state and collective farms were rather insecure, which facilitated land grabbing later on. Section 2.4 investigates the magnitude of large-scale land acquisitions in Russia, and the actors and structures behind them, such as Russian oligarchs, megafarms and foreign investors. Section 2.5 looks at the motivations of investors and the land acquisition strategies that are used to avoid different restrictions on land sales in legal (using loopholes in Russian legislation) and illegal ways. Section 2.6 looks at the issue of abandoned land, land reserves and dying villages, distinguishing between discourse and reality. Section 2.7 analyses land accumulation strategies and responses of rural dwellers attempting

to counter or mitigate unfair land acquisition. In Section 2.8 the role of the Russian state in the facilitation of land grabbing is analysed, which is often crucial. Finally, Section 2.9 looks at land grabbing in Russia in the years to come, arguing that it is expected to continue at great pace, and that proposed government interventions to constrain land grabbing will likely not prevent illegal land acquisitions, and might even have adverse effects.

2.2. Doing research on land grabbing in Russia: data resources

To study land grabbing empirically in Russia is complex. The information about domestic and foreign land transactions provided by Russian statistical institutions such as Rosstat and the cadastral agency Rosreestr is incomplete and provides only general information about land ownership and usage. Furthermore, the rapid increase in international transactions in agricultural land renders available information quickly outdated (Visser and Spoor 2011). Moreover, according to Uzun et al. (2009), statistics on landholdings and land deals are collected at the agricultural enterprise level and are generally not available for agrohholdings (Uzun et al. 2009), which are the crucial actors in land acquisitions. An agrohholding includes a number of agricultural organisations whose controlling blocks of shares are owned by the holding company. It acts as an umbrella for the subordinated (not necessarily only agricultural) units and controls their policies and management. Agrohholdings often combine agricultural production enterprises with other upstream and downstream firms in the agri-food chain, such as producers of concentrated fodder, elevators, processing units and wholesalers. As a rule, investors (both domestic and foreign) invest in Russian land via agrohholdings.

There are no databases in Russia that include full information about Russian agrohholdings, their capital or the acreage they control. As these agrohholdings are currently the main actors in the land grabbing process, this shortcoming seriously complicates research on land grabbing in Russia. However, even with more statistical data at this level, the reliability of such data would be questionable due to the lack of transparency of Russian agrohholdings and the concealed nature of much of the domestic and foreign investment that is taking place.

Therefore, this chapter is based on the following methods. First, through web research: gathering many dispersed pieces of information from the Russian media, reviews in web journals, and examining web pages of agroholdings and foreign investment funds operating in Russia. Second, in-depth interviews with leaders of some foreign and domestic agroholdings operating in Russia, government officials, rural inhabitants and representatives of emerging rural movements were conducted in the Moscow region during autumn 2010 and winter-spring 2011³. This chapter focuses primarily on the general tendencies in land acquisitions in Russia, and only limited attention is devoted to the regional differences in regard to the analysed processes (for studies that deal extensively with regional differences see the work by Pallot and Nefedova (2007) that covers a wide range of regions, as well as the work of Visser (2006, 2008) and Lindner (2008), which provides a close-up study of farm enterprises in three contrasting regions).

2.3. Post-Soviet land reform: the political economy of insecurity

2.3.1. Post-Soviet land reform after 1991

The Russian land reform was aimed at changing ownership of farmland from state into private property, while the dominant large state and collective farms were to be restructured towards 'individualised' production. No land restitution policy was followed as it was not possible to determine who the previous landowners were before the forced collectivisation of farms and the nationalisation of land in the 1930s. This was only done in the Baltics and in some countries of Central Europe. Moreover, the collectivisation had often been carried out together with imprisonment, deportation and killing of numerous 'rich' peasant farmers (the so-called *kulaks*). The various farm enlargement campaigns in the later Soviet period were accompanied by multiple relocations of rural settlements, further adding to the alienation of the rural population from their former or ancestral land. Therefore, among both policy makers and the rural population, there was no serious interest for restitution of land to the pre-communist owners. Instead, the land was to be distributed equally among the current rural inhabitants (World Bank 1992), although, as it is shown below, this was not done in a physical sense, but through share-based entitlements to land (Spoor and Visser 2001).

In the early 1990s, only 1% of the agricultural land was privately used (these were the subsidiary household plots of the employees on the state and collective farms). The other 99% of land belonged to the state (Poshkus 2009: 68). This situation changed dramatically with the post-1991 land reform. The land was given to the former *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (collective and state farms) for further distribution among their members in the form of paper shares. During that time, investors in agriculture were not able to buy land, but they were not completely passive. Some of them waited until the end of this moratorium (2002), in the meantime making contacts with the management of attractive farms and lobbying with local authorities.

Land reform in Russia was carried out in two stages. First, in 1990, the law 'On land reform' focused on taking 10% of *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* land and transferring it to local authorities for distribution among rural dwellers who were willing to establish a private family farm. However, at the end of 1992, there were only 50,000 private family farms that owned less than 1% of agricultural land. According to Poshkus (2009: 68), problems arose due to the unwillingness of *kolkhoz* leadership to hand over the land to local authorities and the lack of understanding of land reform among peasants. Second, at the end of 1991 the Presidential Decree No. 323 (*On urgent measures for the implementation of land reform in the RSFSR*⁴) was issued by the first Russian President Boris Yeltsin. This involved the transformation of state and collective farms into new juridical forms (mostly closed joint-stock companies or CJSC) with the employees becoming 'shareholders'. Subsequently, each employee received non-land asset shares and land shares (on average four hectares) for free. However, the shares did not include real, individual ownership. The land shares that employees received were paper certificates, that substantiated their rights to unspecified land plots on the territory of their former state or collective (Poshkus 2009: 68, Spoor and Visser 2001). Gustav Wetterling (Agro-Invest Group – a subsidiary of Swedish Black Earth Farming Ltd) calls this process 'semi-privatisation', meaning that peasants did not become real owners of the land, as they only received the right to be owners⁵.

Ownership of such land could occur in two cases. First, the land recipient transferred his/her land share to the charter capital of the restructured farm enterprise. In this case, the land became the property of the farm. Second, the land recipient created a peasant farm⁶, by register-

ing the land as his/her ownership. However, private land registration required significant time and financial resources due to the highly bureaucratic system in the country. According to Poshkus (2009: 69), the main weakness of the reform was ‘the problem with the definition of land rights and their usage’. This provided a loophole facilitating future land grabbing in Russia and is increasingly generating land conflicts in the country. However, more clearly defined property rights alone would not have been a solution, as land reform took place in a situation in which markets were still in the making, political interference remained strong, and distribution of power was highly unequal (Spoor and Visser 2004).

During President Vladimir Putin’s first term the Federal Law N136-FZ *Land Code of Russian Federation* (2001) was adopted that modified property rights for land with the exception of agricultural land, and in 2002, the Federal Law N 101-FZ *On Agricultural Land Transactions* came into force. This law specified procedures for selling agricultural land and served as a template for regional legislation (Wegren 2009b). Tamara Semenova (one of the leaders of the rural social movement *Krestyanskiy* (Peasant) *Front*) suggests that this law ‘was lobbied by a group of oligarchs who had already bought or planned to buy land. This law was worked out to legalise their purchases’⁷. During Putin’s second term (2004–2008), Russian and foreign investors became interested in agricultural land and commenced buying land shares.

2.3.2. High costs of land registration

Land reform in Russia during the 1990s did not lead to clearly defined land rights and tenure security. According to Lerman and Shagaida (2007), most (84%) of the peasant farmers in the more agriculturally developed regions in Russia regarded first, complex procedures of land transactions, and second, high registration costs as major problems in the development of their farming operations. In order to register their land, land shareholders had (and have) to pass three organisational levels: the aforementioned district committees, cadastral chambers and registration chambers.

After this long procedure, the land shares are transferable: they can be leased or sold, transferring the rights to the underlying acreage to another operator or owner. However, land shareholders have to spend considerable costs to pass through the entire procedure. ‘Often people in

remote areas do not even have money in order to formalise their land shares', as Tamara Semenova of Krestyanskiy Front stated⁸. First Deputy Premier Viktor Zubkov revealed in February 2009 that of the 12 million land shareholders, only 400,000 have been able to register their land plots. With the emergence of outside investors (see next section), the weaknesses of land reform in securing land rights of the rural population have become more and more apparent⁹.

2.4. The magnitude of land grabbing and the types of actors involved

2.4.1. Domestic investors

In the 1990s, most Russian companies considered the agricultural sector as unprofitable and preferred to invest in other branches, while interest from foreign investors was also limited (with a few exceptions; see below). The new Russian government sharply curtailed investment in the agriculture sector (Barnes 2006) and the large farm enterprises (LFEs), successors of the kolkhozes and sovkhozes, faced severe financial difficulties.

The privatisation of oil, gas, and mineral resources and industry sectors in the early 1990s led to a rush to acquire former state enterprises. A fierce struggle for the most prized assets evolved between the Russian oligarchs and sometimes between worker collectives and oligarchs. Later, foreign investors and the Russian state (especially in the oil sector) became involved in this struggle over acquisition of property (Barnes 2006). However, as indicated above, land reform had been 'largely cosmetic', involving little more than 'changing the name plate of the farm' (Brooks et al. 1996). Comparing agrarian property transformation in the 1990s with privatisation in other sectors, Barnes wrote that:

...the struggles in the sector could also seem underwhelming, lacking even the guilty fascination provoked by the decadence of conflicts in industry. [...] Private farmers did not drive around Moscow in Mercedes cars or pull rolls of hundred-dollar bills from their pockets in casinos. Newspapers did not brim with stories of upstart speculators battling corrupt managers and organised crime bosses for control over agricultural production. Instead, the sector often seemed interesting only for its pity value. (Barnes 2006: 141)

Indeed, Russian agriculture was in dire straits (with roughly 80% of the farm enterprises incurring losses by the mid-1990s). The market-oriented agrarian reform took place in a period of sharp economic decline of the economy at large and drastic cuts in government spending on agriculture in particular (Wegren 2009a, 2011a). In the 1990s, land prices were very low and often land even had a negative value because of costs in the form of land tax and informal social obligations attached to land, such as to provide feed for private livestock of the villagers or provide social infrastructure (Visser 2006). During this period the sparse outside 'investors' (from outside the agribusiness sector) who took over farm enterprises did so often with the goal of asset stripping. Equipment and buildings were sold off, while the land was mostly left unused (Kalugina and Fadeeva 2009).

Due to the dire straits of the large farm enterprises, part of their lands ended up in the hands of creditors in order to pay off farm debts, in particular to suppliers of fuel such as the energy giants Gazprom and Lukoil (Barnes 2006: 161). The first substantial agricultural land bank, operated by Gazprom, started when farm enterprises were unable to cover their fuel debts and had to pay back with their land. The total property of Gazprom is more than 500,000 ha. Gazprom is currently engaged in a process of selling off its agricultural land again, as the company was not successful in agribusiness due to the absence of skills and knowledge in agriculture (Uzun et al. 2009).

'Attendant with strong economic growth that ensued from 1999 through 2007, land began to be perceived as a valuable commodity from which to build wealth. Agricultural land became the new frontier for those with money' (Wegren 2009b: 3). New changes in Russian land laws, focusing on attracting direct and indirect investments to the agricultural sector by guaranteeing private property rights on the land, gave impetus to the creation of large-scale agrohholdings or megafarms at the expense of rural dwellers. In Russia, most agricultural land continues to be controlled by LFEs, and since the early 2000s, a growing percentage of these are controlled by large agrohholdings and corporations, previously state- and now privately owned.

According to the All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2006, peasant farmers (private family farmers) owned only 13% of agricultural land in Russia in 2005 and household plots accounted for less than 5% (Rosstat 2006: 36). All other land is controlled by LFEs and agrohholdings, both

national and international, although a large share of this land is still formally in the hands of (former) employees *cum* shareholders¹⁰. Nearly 60% of agricultural land is now privately owned, but most of this land (51%) is represented by land shares – pieces of paper corresponding to virtual plots of specified size in an unspecified location (Lerman and Shagaida 2007). These land shares are transferable: they can be leased or sold, transferring the rights to the underlying acreage to another operator or owner. Only 6% of agricultural land is in the form of physically demarcated plots, (that means land shares which were actually registered by the possessor), most of it owned by individuals (household plots and peasant farms) (Lerman and Shagaida 2007).

The number of agrohholdings (as well as the size of their landholdings) has rapidly increased since the early 2000s. According to the Russian Ministry of Agriculture in 2003, more than 90 agrohholdings were active in 25 regions. By 2006, 319 private agrohholdings were already registered (Uzun et al. 2009: 159). By the mid-2000s in various fertile Black Earth regions, such as Belgorod, Lipetsk, Voronezh and Tambov, there was practically no ‘free’ land available that was not yet controlled by an agrohholding (Didenko 2009). By mid-2008, according to the Institute for Agricultural Market Studies, 196 large agrohholdings controlled 11.5 million ha (BEFL 2010: 9). Of these agrohholdings, 32 had landholdings of over 100,000 ha.

It is hard to say how many land transactions are conducted in Russia exactly, let alone those of specifically agricultural land. But, definitely, the number of land transactions is growing. In the mid-2000s about 5% of agricultural land was transacted annually (Shagaida 2005), a figure which has risen further in the last few years to at least 8% (see Table 2.1) with a strong rise in the number of land deals (25% in 2009) between citizens and legal entities. These data, of course, do not include shady, unregistered deals¹¹.

*Table 2.1
Land transactions (sale and lease) in Russia (2006-2009)*

| | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Transactions with state and municipalities | | | | |
| Number of transactions | 3 921 393 | 3 875 650 | 3 985 846 | 3 887 691 |
| Change in amount | | -1% | 3% | -2% |
| Amount of land (ha) in transactions | 105 214 779 | 114 622 029 | 115 351 558 | 114 018 863 |
| Approx ha per deal | 27 | 30 | 29 | 29 |
| Transactions between citizens and companies | | | | |
| Number of transactions | 623 747 | 643 443 | 794 792 | 996 462 |
| Change in amount | | 3% | 24% | 25% |
| Amount of land (ha) in transactions | 1 231 830 | 1 221 829 | 2 415 179 | 18 761 609 |
| Approx ha per deal | 2 | 2 | 3 | 19 |
| Total transactions | | | | |
| Number of transactions: | 4 545 140 | 4 519 093 | 4 780 638 | 4 884 153 |
| Change in amount | | -1% | 6% | 2% |
| Amount of land (ha) in transaction | 106 446 609 | 115 843 859 | 117 766 738 | 132 780 473 |
| Total amount of land | | | | |
| Total amount of land in Russia | 1 709 800 000 | 1 709 800 000 | 1 709 800 000 | 1 709 800 000 |
| Total amount of agricultural land in Russia | | | 402 300 000 | 400 000 000 |
| Land transacted as % of the total amount of land in Russia | | | 7% | 8% |

Source: Authors' own compilation based on Rosreestr (2010).

Notes: Land transactions include buying, selling or leasing of all categories of land: agricultural land, settlement, industrial land, special protected land, forest, and land reserve. Therefore, land transactions were calculated as a percentage of the total amount of land in Russia, which somewhat understates the share of land in transaction. However, if this share was calculated as a percentage of agricultural land, the share of land in transaction would rise from estimated 8% to nearly 30%, which likely overstates the percentage transacted.

2.4.2. Foreign land acquisitions: a brief overview

Foreign land acquisitions are clearly on the rise in Russia since the mid-2000s (Visser and Spoor 2011), although already in the mid-1990s some Western companies attempted to enter Russian agribusiness. However, it

is hard to quantify foreign land acquisitions. Foreign companies are not allowed to directly buy land.

The Land Code (adopted in 2001) prohibits ownership of agricultural land by foreign citizens and companies, as well as Russian companies with foreigners owning more than 50% of the shares. To avoid the application of this law, foreign investors establish Russian subsidiaries that are legally not regarded as foreign companies (a strategy that is actively promoted by the Russian government, as will be shown in Section 2.5). This study estimates that roughly 50 foreign companies control up to an estimated 3.5 million ha of Russian agricultural land. However, accumulation of land is a highly sensitive issue for both the leasing and the hosting countries, and therefore, it is likely that the process of land grabbing in post-Soviet Eurasia has advanced further than official statements and media reports suggest (Billette 2009, Visser and Spoor 2011). In terms of the total size of the agricultural land obtained, Russia is not a top target of foreign investment, but investment by outside investors is indeed substantial and the size of average land deals, including actually implemented ones, is very large. Having access to large financial resources, foreign investors acquire the most fertile land, use modern technology to achieve high productivity, and take leading positions in regional and sometimes even national markets.

The origins of the companies that are interested in Russian land acquisitions are quite diverse. Among them are the Western companies investing primarily in the European part of Russia, and the Asian (most notably Chinese companies) in Siberia and the Far East¹² of Russia (Visser and Spoor 2011). Investors from the Middle East (in particular from the Gulf States) have only been searching for land in some of the former Soviet republics very recently and have not yet concluded major deals (Visser and Spoor 2011). Until now Gulf States investors have focused more on Ukraine and Kazakhstan rather than Russia. When discussing the origin of investors it is important to realise that the identity of investors might be different, and more complex, than what it seems at a first glance. Various recent studies in Africa have shown that what appears to be a foreign investment is in fact investment by representatives of the diaspora from the target country. Furthermore, Hall (2012) has shown that the widespread land acquisitions by South African investors across the African continent are often indirectly based on Chinese investments in South African companies that are funding these acquisitions. Part of

what seems like foreign investment appears to consist of investment by Russian oligarchs (Visser and Spoor 2011).

Finally, a note about the aim/orientation of foreign farmland acquisitions. Globally an important share of the large-scale farmland acquisitions is not (solely) for food or fodder but also for biofuel production, for instance in Brazil and large parts of Africa¹³. In Russia, the share of land acquisitions aimed at biofuels production is rather insignificant. Various factors seem to play a role here. Russia, which is itself a prime oil and gas exporter with low internal fuel prices, does not actively stimulate biofuel production as is done, for instance, in Brazil and the USA. This makes the Russian case special, although the mechanisms of land grabbing are often comparable. Foreign investors who want to produce biofuels for export (mainly to the nearby EU) prefer Ukraine, which has better port infrastructure and a government that is more interested in stimulating biofuel production and processing, being very oil-dependent on neighbouring Russia¹⁴.

2.5. Motivations for large-scale land deals: finance and the political economy of the land rush in Russia

The recent land rush in Russia has clear characteristics of a new frontier for investors. In the creation of this new frontier, global factors play a role (such as the financial crisis and the search for an inflation hedge) but domestic factors seem to be more decisive. Also, domestic land acquisitions predominate over foreign ones.

After the slump of the 1990s, the Russian economy has shown impressive growth rates throughout most of the 2000s and demand for high-quality food products, such as livestock products, is continuously rising. An important factor on the supply side is a large amount of capital in the hands of the Russian oligarchs, which after the appropriation of the energy and industry sectors are looking for new frontiers of development. Whereas in the 1990s they transferred their capital to tax havens in the West, with the economic recovery of the 2000s these oligarchs increasingly started investing their offshore capital again in Russia. By 2002, a senior economist of the Moscow Brokerage firm Aton Capital Group concluded, 'Russians are starting to trust Russia' and therefore 'money is coming back' (Starobin and Belton 2002).

The land rush can be seen as part of the larger 'hunt for the Next Big Thing', the new accumulation drive that started in the 2000s with the privatisation of assets which were left in state ownership in the 1990s, such as railways, electricity and financial services (Starobin and Belton 2002). The Russian state plays an important role in enabling the boom in large-scale land acquisitions, in legal terms by adopting the 2002 land law allowing free sale of land and, even more important, by financial stimulation through mechanisms that lower taxes and increase subsidised loans.

The fact that the current boom in agriculture takes the form of large-scale land acquisitions with the predominance of huge agrohholdings is often portrayed as an inevitable process or the most efficient mode of farming for Russia, by investors and authorities alike. While it is true that the Russian landscape and the crops cultivated allow for a high degree of mechanisation and economies of scale, there are also various diseconomies of scale associated with these large farm enterprises (Nikulin 2005, Visser 2006, 2008), such as those related to monitoring costs. Another justification for large-scale land acquisitions and mega-farming given by the major actors in Russia is that the rural population is not willing to take up independent farming, that small or medium private family farms are not a feasible form of production, or do not have the finances to expand and modernise production. 'Today only agro-industrial holdings can be profitable in farming, because it requires huge financial resources', stated Zorigto Sakhanov, chairman of Agro-Invest Group, the subsidiary of Swedish Black Earth Farming (Bush 2008).

Indeed, the growth of private farms has been below expectations. However, it is important to stress that many of the farmers face obstacles which are not simple natural problems related to their size, but a direct problem of a political economy (and government policy) targeted at large-scale farming (Visser 2008). The lack of investment in extension services, as well as the large-scale nature of input and output channels, form obstacles for private farms (Visser 2008). Further, some regional authorities have set limitations on the minimum size of land deals, such as in Krasnodar Krai where there is a threshold of 300 ha for land deals, hindering the emergence and expansion of small and medium-sized farms.

A very important factor that skews the agricultural boom towards large-scale farming is the financial system. There is an urgent lack of accessible finance/credit. Obtaining loans is virtually only possible through

take-over and capitalisation by rich investors who have built up their capital in another sector, or via state subsidised credit. Most commercial banks are more vehicles for the investment projects of oligarchs than accessible sources of credit. Interest rates are very high and agricultural land is mostly not accepted as collateral. Furthermore, banks are generally not much oriented toward agriculture.

From the early 2000s, the state has increased finance for the agricultural sector. A network of state-owned and operated banks for agribusiness was set up, but in some regions, these bank branches were only established when agriculture had already virtually disappeared. State-subsidised loans have been targeted predominantly towards large farm enterprises, and within this group, towards the largest and most successful ones. For instance, Uzun (2005) states that '1.4% of the largest corporate farms received 22.5% of all subsidies'. Also, the more indirect forms of subsidisation seem to stimulate mostly the largest LFEs¹⁵. Various requirements of the loans, such as the need for matching of resources and often brief repayment terms, skew the loans towards the largest farm enterprises. Due to the abovementioned problems, it is difficult to develop agriculture without investors that already gained capital in lucrative sectors outside agribusiness. Whereas in the 1990s, the few investors in agriculture and land were mostly coming from that sector (food processors, food wholesalers, or providers of inputs for farming), now they often do not have any existing link to the sector.

2.5.1. Motivations for large-scale land acquisitions

The precise motivations of outside investors/oligarchs to acquire land are not easy to discover since the whole process is highly non-transparent, not least for the villagers, who often know little more than that 'a rich investor from Moscow' obtained their land (D'Hamecourt 2010: 13). However, it is clear that the current land rush cannot be explained sufficiently by economic incentives or rising food demand only. This section investigates the triggers for the large-scale land acquisitions taking into account various national and international processes. With regard to the global food prices and land grab debate, several authors have argued that the idea of the growing global population and rising food demand as an explanation for rising food prices and subsequently the drive for land acquisitions is a mystification of reality (Jouko and Granberg 2011). This is clearly the case for Russia. Except for the more

obvious economic reasons for investment, such as increased demand for livestock products, and aspects of investment portfolio management (integration, differentiation and risk-spreading), there are several other motivations for investment. The following will be discussed: high subsidies, speculation, state pressure and state-business agreements, tax evasion and money laundering.

High subsidies

Acquiring land and investing in agriculture has been made attractive by the policy of the Russian government. Since the early 2000s the state has stimulated agriculture through a range of instruments such as a debt restructuring programme, the establishment of a state-financed agricultural bank, subsidised crop insurance programmes, simplified and lowered taxes on agriculture, and subsidised loans for capital investment (Wegren 2007: 517). Whereas in the 1990s subsidies for the agricultural sector were sharply curtailed, under Putin, from 2006 onwards, agriculture became one of the four priorities of the 'National Project'. The government set ambitious goals for domestic food security, targeting first of all the livestock sector, which experienced the most dramatic decline during the 1990s. As a result, cheap, state-subsidised credit is available for investments in livestock and especially dairy production. Asked about the motivations of the investors he had worked with, a Dutch interim farm manager and consultant, Han van Riel, who has worked in several agroholdings in Russia, answered:

...it could be, normally you get 10 million from the state, with a guarantee by Putin. The interest rate is zero percent. [...] Yes, there are enormous funds. Look, normally the interest rate is 15% to 16%. But then it is zero percent¹⁶.

Western observers often hasten to characterise state intervention in Russia as a legacy of, or return to, the Soviet past, but it is more productive to see it as an example of the wider global tendency of various states to stimulate a boom in agriculture. Whereas in some countries the subsidies focus on biofuel/diesel and energy security (such as the biofuel (corn) subsidies in the US, or biodiesel policies in Germany), in Russia, as a major fossil energy exporter and a weak food (livestock) producer, the subsidies focus on livestock production.

Speculation and land conversion

Land brokers and representatives of agroholdings searching for investment widely mention the expected value appreciation of agricultural land in Russia. Also, part of the land is obtained in order to sell it off later with a large premium as land for construction sites (in a later section several such cases will be discussed):

I have [...] tried to cultivate cabbage, on 20,000 ha, for a real estate agent. He wanted it in ownership, at least, the right of usage. But he had to cultivate it, otherwise, he would not get it [...]. Just what I thought. At least 50% to 80% of his territory is now expansion area for construction for Moscow for the next 25 years. He knew that already by then. Thus, yes, for him it was just to have it, due to its location in Moscow [region]... (Han van Riel, Dutch interim farm manager¹⁷).

Pressure by the government

Furthermore, many political and other, often hidden, motives seem to play a role, such as creating loyalty and political support among regional governors and a tacit agreement with the Kremlin, which seems to have promised not to investigate the dubious practices of the oligarchs in return for their investment in the countryside (Boldyrev 2001: 21). Interviews with consultants in agriculture suggested that regional authorities made agreements with the largest oligarchs that the latter should invest in the cumbersome agricultural sector in return for earlier or forthcoming privileges such as tax breaks, cheap credit or other forms of state support (Visser 2008). Obviously, it is difficult to find clear evidence for such influence, but anecdotal evidence suggests that this indeed played a role. The quoted Dutch interim farm manager confirmed this pressure: 'I think one of the motives is the choice you have: either you pay tax arrears or you start producing food'¹⁸.

For instance, one investor, the director of a fur factory described by Kalugina and Fadeeva, started to invest in a near-bankrupt farm enterprise after multiple requests by the district authorities, with promises of state support and privileges for its development. The investor described the interaction: 'the district head insisted that I who come there [to invest]. He said, "nobody except from you can revive this enterprise". I tried several times to run away from it' (quoted in Kalugina and Fadeeva 2009: 165). A German investor even stated that 'the land was almost forced on us' (Winter 2012).

Tax evasion and money laundering

Furthermore, tax evasion, and probably money laundering, seems to play a role (Boldyrev 2001). Agriculture is a complex sector, with large fluctuations in production and profitability year to year, which allowed for extensive creative accounting already in the Soviet period (Visser and Kalb 2010). Furthermore, the tax on agricultural production is low to virtually zero.

2.6. Abandoned land, dying villages and investment: discourse and reality

Whereas Section 2.5 looked into the motivations behind the land rush, this section will turn to a major topic in the legitimisation of these deals: the concept of ‘abandoned’, ‘unused’ or ‘available’ land.

2.6.1. The discourse of abandoned land

The idea of widely available abandoned land waiting to be (re)cultivated is very widespread among media and investors describing the Russian countryside:

You should take the car. Drive to the North, [further] across Belarus, and then towards the South, Smolensk, and in the direction of Moscow. Or even go further. [...] Then you will meet millions of hectares which are just abandoned. Nobody is living there anymore (Han van Riel, Dutch interim farm manager¹⁹).

and:

Back then this tradition-rich region was on its knees. The giant state agricultural collectives of the Soviet era were all bankrupt; their ancient equipment was in disrepair, and their land stood largely fallow. Young people fled to urban areas, leaving behind ageing parents, decrepit farm houses and weed-choked gardens. Today, however, the region has burst to life. The capitalist upheaval that years ago began sweeping through Russia’s big cities and oil and gas fields have finally made its way to the country’s rural heartland. Newly imported tractors and harvesters with the latest ground-positioning satellite systems navigate vast privatised estates, producing bumper crops of wheat, barley, rapeseed, sugar beets and corn. (Kandell 2009: 1)

The director of the largest German investor in Russian agriculture (Ekoniva) states: 'We change the attitude to land. In every farm we start restoring abandoned, neglected, often uncultivated lands and some points which were marked as fields on the map even appeared to be forest-belts in reality' (Zaslavskaya 2010).

2.6.2. Is a win-win situation possible?

If anywhere, it would appear that a 'win-win' situation proposed by investors and for example studies such as World Bank (2010a) on land deals would be possible in Russia. A few features of agriculture in Russia suggest, at a first glance, that this is indeed the case. First, in general, there is no food shortage or hunger. Russia is even a main exporter of grain (although importer of livestock products).

Second, much land is not cultivated. Indeed, rates of land that turned from agriculture into non-agriculture were very high in Russia in the 1990s, with this process already starting in the 1980s during the last decade of the Soviet Union (Ioffe and Nefedova 2004). Prishchepov et al. (2012) show based on detailed Landsat satellite data, that 52% of agricultural land in the North-Western Smolensk region was 'abandoned' between 1989 and 2000. Ioffe, Nefedova and Zaslavsky (2006) estimate that about 30% of Russia's rural settlements 'have either died out or are about to do so'. Ioffe and Nefedova (2004) suggest that as a rule farm enterprises are not profitable in areas where population density drops below 10 people per square kilometre. Low population density, an ageing rural population, and out-migration of working-age people all confirm the image of abandoned land. Ioffe, Nefedova and Zaslavsky (2004: 934) even speak about 'black holes' in the countryside. In some villages, most of the titles to land were in the name of people who had disappeared or owners who had died. In one district, Shagaida (2005) found that nearly half of the land shares were owned by people who had died²⁰.

Third, the population often appears willing to rent out or sell the land. Simon de Schutter (a farm consultant for large-scale farms in Russia) states:

Indeed, many do sell their land. Some [of the rural population] do nothing with their land, which is just laying fallow. They don't get any revenue from it. And as I just said, if they hand it over to the large enterprise – let me put it that way – then they get some return from it. They earn something from it²¹.

There is no widespread desire to become an independent peasant farmer. In fact, in the 1990s, when some new independent family farmers emerged, a large share of the population was quite hostile to these efforts as they feared for the break-up of LFEs and the loss of their low-paid, but until then 'secure', jobs and the whole social infrastructure, pensions, etc., connected to it (Visser 2008). The majority of the working-age people (and a lot of people above pension age trying to supplement their low pensions) prefer to have a job at a LFE. Consequently, many of them are indeed happy if an investor approaches them to buy or rent the shares with the promise to lift up production and re-create employment. Quite a large part of the population is above working age and would physically be unable to work the land.

2.6.3. A critique of the discourse of abandoned land

Despite the arguments above, one should not jump to the conclusion that therefore land acquisitions in Russia cannot be but beneficial for rural dwellers next to the investor.

First, the empty or uncultivated land is predominantly in the north (with poorer soils, and worse climatic circumstances) where hardly any investors are interested in obtaining land, with the exception of land near the large cities (Uzun 2011). In the well-endowed south, there is fallow land in the peripheral regions but here investors are also mostly not interested in obtaining land. A Dutch farmer/investor, who on a trip to Russia in search of agricultural land, met with a mayor showing him a potential investment site, stated in an interview:

...we said, ok, that is not worth investing in anymore. If we want to start with a big unit, we like to build it near a big road. There we have good infrastructure... [...] we didn't want to build it in the village. We wanted to put it in the middle of the fields. That works most efficient (Farmer De Boer²²).

Second, when land is not cultivated it does not mean that land is unused. Often villagers do use it in some ways and have (informal) entitlements to land for functions other than agricultural cultivation, involving such functions as grazing, hunting, bee keeping and mushroom or berry collection. It is important to note that in the Soviet era, a symbiosis existed between the collective farm and the household plots of the employees and other villagers (see Visser 2006). Households were mostly

allowed to let their private livestock graze or bees forage at the fields of the collective farm. Further, the collective farm, as a rule, ploughed the household plots and provided free inputs such as manure or fodder for private livestock. Most of these entitlements were mutually agreed between farm management and employees, although employees and villagers also had one-sided claims on collective property, which were considered stealing by the farm management. The land reform and reorganisation of the farm enterprises in the 1990s did not take into account these existing property relations.

Research on property in other countries has shown that informal property rights are often overlooked during property reform, and it is not easy to do justice to the complex web of pre-existing property rights when formalising them (von Benda Beckmann 2003, von Benda Beckmann et al. 2006). While many of the farm directors continued part of these longstanding, informal entitlements after the land reform of the 1990s (Spoor and Visser 2004, Visser 2009), with the emergence of outside investors farm property is often fenced off, support to households is curtailed and guards are installed (Visser 2008, Nikulin 2010). Nikulin (2010) shows in his case study of a large investor in Perm region that while villagers quite easily sold their land shares as they did not cultivate the land, they often persistently opposed the new production technologies (industrial ploughing and chemical fertilisation) brought along by the investor, which disturbed the livelihood they had built on the 'abandoned' land. The investors stated:

Now we ...will increase the ploughing area up to 7 thousand, [...] Meanwhile, many people here have formed a certain lifestyle, the lifestyle of living in the forest. They go to the woods, they keep bees. When we arrive here with an active production cycle, to some extent we disrupt their social rhythm. Now they cannot already wander in the fields and ride as they please, because the fields are ours, and they are ploughed by us, [...]. Instead of their wild strawberries, there is, let's say, our pea. We begin ploughing the young forest with which the fields are overgrown, but there are mushrooms there (Nikulin 2010: 26).

Third, even if the land is uncultivated usually there is an owner. Although part of the population is prepared to sell or rent out their land, not all of them want to do so. Some would be able to work the land physically. Some of them sell the land due to the institutional environment, described earlier, is such that they have difficulty getting finance or

registering their land, and also sometimes there are regional limitations (minimal limits to the size of farms).

Fourth, the rural dwellers are often in unequal power relations *vis-à-vis* the investors and rarely get a good price for their land. Here the difficulties mentioned earlier, of registering land for rural dwellers, play an important role. Costs of registration hamper them in their opportunities to sell the land freely. Often, the costs of registration are prohibitive and investors buying the land take up these costs. Even when agroholdings 'freely' buy up the shares of the employees, as is often the case with LFEs, the management and employees often sell under pressure from the investor. In a survey among 200 farm employees who sold off their land shares to an agroholding, 156 answered that they did so under pressure of the holding group (Gerasin et al. 2003: 176).

2.7. Land accumulation strategies

A major consequence of the share-based privatisation of land was that large farm enterprises (LFEs) retained control over former state-owned agricultural land because most land shareowners rented their share allotments back to the large farm in return for payment (incidentally, villagers rented out their land to private family farms but in many cases there was no other actor to rent the land to than the local farm enterprise). As a result, investors in search of land normally encounter large farms with integrated landholdings, but with actual ownership being very dispersed in the form of land shares. A relatively small amount of agricultural land concerns land shares concentrated in the hands of one, or a few, owners. Normally these are farm managers or outsiders who managed to obtain shares from the rural population. Finally, as mentioned earlier, a minority of agricultural land is still held by the state (often regional authorities or municipalities).

There are several strategies to acquire land in Russia. Land can be leased, or it can be bought in various direct and indirect ways. Buying up (or leasing) land from a large number of land shareholders takes quite some time. It was shown earlier that the registration procedure leads to high transaction costs. Sometimes investors try to avoid the time-consuming and bureaucratic procedures of acquiring land, in order to grab land at a very low cost²³. Frequently, the strategies of land acquisition within the framework of the law are combined with or substituted

by means that contradict the national laws or obey the letter of the law but not the spirit, using loopholes in Russian legislation to legalise unfair land acquisition²⁴. Thus, one could discern a continuum of land acquisition strategies, running from acquisitions within the framework of the law, strategies at the fringe of the law (including misinformation, deceit and pressure), and finally outright fraud and dispossession. Due to limitations of space, the discussion below will cover strategies at the two opposites of the spectrum and largely leave aside the in-between category.

2.7.1. Land accumulation strategies within the framework of the legal system

The first way of obtaining land is leasing or buying land from (dispersed) land shareholders. The lease was already possible before the 2002 land law on land transactions. Buying and selling of agricultural land by individuals is minor compared to leasing land shares from shareowners (or the state). According to the research of Lerman and Shagaida (2007) on LFEs and peasant farms, the share of leased land is on average 60% of the total area of agricultural land used. In LFEs, three-quarters of the leased land are in the form of land shares and only one-quarter is leased as land plots.

Currently, much of the land acquired by agroholdings is rented, but there seems to be a growing tendency to buy land, which is of course partly due to the law of 2002. Based on web research and in-depth interviews, collected for purposes of this study, it can be concluded, not surprisingly, that foreign investors prefer buying to leasing. Thus, Gustav Wetterling (a manager of Black Earth Farming) said:

We have significant costs related to getting rid of all the weeds, all the trees... So that's why we want ownership. So we know that we have it for a long period, so we will get this money paid back. There is a significant investment in the beginning...²⁵

Many agroholdings do not disclose information about land in use and ownership, but the official web pages of the main ones which do so suggest that the aforementioned statement by the representative of Black Earth Farming is indicative of a wider trend.

This company buys land rights directly from every individual shareholder, making an agreement with rural dwellers to register the land unit in their name and on their behalf and then buying this land according to

a sale-purchase agreement. When Black Earth Farming began land acquisitions in 2004, it paid 90 Euros per ha (Kandell 2009). According to the director, the shareholders were happy to sell their rights as they were not able to register the lands themselves due to bureaucratic obstacles and the costs of registration, which can be too high for poor villagers; hence, their land did not provide them with any income. Gustav Wetterling stated that ‘during the last two years we got one offer per week to buy a land plot. There is no shortage of land for sale in Russia right now’.

The same mechanism was used by Agro-Invest Brinky BV. The CEO of this Dutch company, Willeke van den Brink, stated that it was difficult to acquire the shares of former collective employees. ‘It was problematic not only to agree on the (conditions of the) sale, but even to find all these people: someone died, someone had left, et cetera’ (Luchev 2009). Acquiring shares for a controlling stake in the hands of Agro-Invest Brinky took close to one year. Dealing with large numbers of shareholders is a common downside for investors building up an agroholding in this way. The UK company Heartland Farms Ltd, owner of 18,500 ha in 2009, concluded contracts with around 1500 land owners (BTA Analitika 2008: 15).

A way to obtain large amounts of land in one go without numerous negotiations with individual land shareholders is, first, to buy a whole farm enterprise (in which land shares were already accumulated by the farm management). Buying land in this way is in some cases not done completely legally (see Subsection 2.7.2). The villagers-shareholders do not always want to invest their shares in the companies. Investors used tricks, and some started preparing the documents of the enterprise and placing their managers in the farm staff several years before they announced their wish to acquire the farm²⁶.

Second, a minor, but increasing, percentage of land has been accumulated by companies and is offered for purchase. For instance, Gazprom, which ended up with half a million ha of land, is selling off much of this land. Also, some agroholdings which grew rapidly sell off some of their lands due to financial problems or to cluster their land in a few regions. In these two variants, a (foreign) investor faces fewer transaction costs in obtaining land, but of course, it has to deal with all the other organisational issues of starting up a new farm enterprise, which can be quite a laborious process in Russia.

With the emergence of increasing numbers of domestic agroholdings in the past few years, there are foreign and domestic investors that have taken equity (whether a minority or majority share) in these entities. Several large domestic agroholdings in Russia and Ukraine are even quoted at stock exchanges in Western Europe and others recently have announced plans to do so. Also, some Western agribusinesses operating in Ukraine and Russia are quoted on stock exchanges, such as the French farming group AgroGeneration. Although this process of share emissions only started after the mid-2000s, currently Russia and Ukraine already have more agroholdings at the stock exchange than do the large agricultural powers of Latin America, Brazil and Argentina (World Bank 2010a). In this sense, Russia, which was still a socialist country dominated by state and collective farms two decades ago, is now at the 'forefront' of financialisation and large-scale global commodification of agriculture and land. An expert with Renaissance Capital stated that Russian agriculture will increasingly be dominated by agricompanies with a capitalisation of over half a billion dollars (Vasilyeva 2008: 2).

In February 2011, US-based PepsiCo, the second largest beverage and food company in the world, obtained a majority share in OJSC Wimm-Bill-Dann, the largest dairy agroholding in Russia. Wimm-Bill-Dann owns 37 food factories, many dairies around Moscow and elsewhere in Russia and even in other countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as port infrastructure. It also controls 40 large farm enterprises, with 20,000 ha in ownership and 250,000 ha in leasehold. The legal obstacle concerning foreign land ownership has been solved by transferring the land bank formally to the owners-founders, who had the controlling share before PepsiCo came in. One of the largest agroholdings in Russia, Cherkizovo Group OJSC, which holds numerous pig farms and fodder producing farms, is now predominantly owned by US investors, namely JP Morgan Chase Bank and MB Capital Partners. Also in the Far East of Russia, agroholdings are taken over by foreign investors (Visser and Spoor 2011).

2.7.2. Land accumulation outside the legal system

There is increasing evidence of illegal land deals in Russia, in a land market which is generally far from transparent. According to official statistics, the number of land disputes in the first half of 2008 compared to the first half of 2007 increased by 63% for the whole system of arbitra-

tion courts of the Russian Federation²⁷. An analysis of crimes associated with illegal registration of land transactions also indicates growing abuses associated with the misappropriation and illegal registration of land transactions (Moskalkova 2011). The 'leader' in terms of criminal investigations is the Moscow region, due to its advantageous location close to the capital and due to the high land prices, which reach 1000–1500 USD per square metre²⁸ as a consequence of the demand for land to build *dachas*²⁹. In 2011, the Governor of Moscow region said that 'almost of all of them [the investors who buy large plots of land] have problems with documents about the land rights' (Moskalkova 2011). Tamara Semenova (Krestyanskiy Front) stated:

[S]ince the moment that, in 2002, the state law about the turnover of agricultural lands came into effect and land became a commodity, illegal court practices have become popular in the Moscow region. Before 2002 the land rights were given to peasants, after 2002 – the other way around³⁰.

In almost every district of Moscow region, there are land conflicts between villagers and the new owners of the land, according to the Krestyanskiy Front. Moreover, the illegal land deals do not only happen in the Moscow region, but also in the well-endowed regions of south Russia (for instance, the Stavropol Krai) and in various other regions (Visser and Mamonova 2011), where land acquisitions focus less on conversion into construction sites than in Moscow region. However, due to the fact that these regions are covered less by the mass media, the situation there is less well known.

According to Tamara Semenova, 'invaders' usually pretend to be investors, offering to invest in the development of agricultural enterprises by buying shares. If villagers refuse to sell their shares to these investors, then various illegal schemes are used to achieve the goal. Manipulations with land units through forgery of farm enterprise documents on land ownership is the most common illegal method of weaning the land from its official owners, because technically and time-wise it is most simple to realise. For example, employees of former state farm Zaoksky in the Serpukhov district of Moscow region have lost their land because of the enterprise bankruptcy. As a result of bankruptcy proceedings, more than 6,000 ha of land were purchased for only 10.8 million roubles (approx-

mately 270,000 euros) by Center-Capital CJSC. As a result, over two thousand people lost their legal right to the land shares.

Another criminal case has happened with CJSC Matveyevskoye in the Odintsovo district. This case can illustrate an important mechanism through which land grabbers acquire land. First, there was the falsification of a meeting of shareholders, at which they ostensibly gave their shares to the capital of the enterprise. This already took place in the 1990s. There was also a case between the two main shareholders of the farm. Supposedly, they were going to share their land shares. This court case was specially fabricated to get control over the land shares. During this court case, Matveyevskoye acted as a third party. Matveyevskoye came with a counterclaim to recognise the rights to the entire land mass for Matveyevskoye. Finally, the court recognised the property rights of Matveyevskoye on the land shares of a common area of 712.4 ha of land of agricultural value (land value of more than 600 million roubles – approximately 15 million euros). Shareholders came to know about this court case, which was carried out in another region, only three years later when the statute of limitations had passed. In that period, the former CEO of Matveyevskoye N. Dubrovsky and the next CEO V. Bobynin were assassinated, murder cases that remained unresolved.

For six years, the shareholders of Matveyevskoye have been seeking the recovery of their land shares. However, the prosecutors and investigative bodies, one after another, refused to initiate criminal proceedings. Currently, Matveyevskoye is owned by a company registered in Britain, Millhouse Capital UK Ltd, which manages the capital of the famous oligarch Roman Abramovich and the company Inteko (headed by Elena Baturina – wife of Moscow ex-Mayor Yuri Luzhkov). There seem to be no real plans to develop agriculture as had been promised. The lands are used to build VIP country houses and business centres. On 1 November 2008, appealing to the article 159 Part 4 of the Criminal Code ('fraud, committed by a group of persons on a large scale') the criminal case No. 152983 was initiated against the 'raiders' of Matveyevskoye. However, a few months later the case was dismissed at the request of the Moscow region Prosecutor's Office. Currently, the victims are appealing to higher authorities for help.

2.7.3. Countering illegal land acquisitions

In a few cases, mobilisation by dispossessed rural dwellers who also pursued court cases resulted in some effect, but only after very long legal procedures (often involving multiple court cases at different levels). Former employees of a poultry farm in Krasnogorsk, Moscow region, were in a similar situation to Matveyevskoye above. The farm was acquired after the bankruptcy of the Agricultural Land Corporation *Znak*, co-owned by oligarch Nikolai Tsvetkov. Since 2001, people have been trying to restore their rights, but had not succeeded. However, in the middle of March 2010, the equity holders were paid 190 thousand roubles – approximately 4,750 euros – (per share of 0.39 ha), to make them withdraw their complaints. The following successful case gives more insight into the enormous efforts and kind of strategies that are required by rural dwellers to achieve some form of justice.

‘It is impossible to fight land grabbing with classical legal instruments alone’, says Tamara Semenova of *Krestyanskiy Front*³¹. According to her, the courts in Russia, especially those that deal with land issues, are bought by raiders. The rural social movement *Krestyanskiy Front*, which was founded by dispossessed shareholders of former sovkhos *Gorki-2* in the Moscow region, was the most active among the recently emerging rural movements in Russia (see Chapter 3). It started by organising public events (pickets) in Moscow city in order to draw the attention of federal authorities to this issue. It did not work particularly well. The state did not respond to their repeated appeals to address the large-scale dispossession of land held by rural dwellers. After that, the movement developed another strategy. The movement sought a solution on a case-by-case basis and mobilised those rural dwellers directly involved and targeting the companies and authorities related to each case. Tamara Semenova, a shareholder herself, led 600 other deprived shareholders of *Gorki-2* in protest. In the interview for this study, she explained that, for two years, the group held demonstrations on the *Rublyovo-Uspenskoe* highway, where the management office of *Agrocomplex Gorki-2* was situated.

We had been standing for two years three days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with placards along *Rublevka*³². Well, because it was *Rublyovo-Uspenskoe* highway, many officials and government members use that road every day and they had been asking our raiders: ‘When will you pay, when will these protesters leave the road?’ It was the sore point that we

found. Courts didn't work for us, of course. In courts, we lost every case. Totally absurd decisions were made by courts, even sometimes hard to believe: is that a circus or a court?³³

In total, the fight against the Agrocomplex Gorki-2 took five-and-a-half years. According to the Krestyanskiy Front leadership, they experienced threats and violence and were offered bribes in attempts to stop their efforts. But the activists continued their activities to get compensation. Finally, in 2008, the shareholders got financial compensation for their lands.

The previous two cases led to compensation being paid, but restitution of the dispossessed land was not achieved. In Moscow, there was only one court case of illegal land acquisition that has led to land being returned to the former, rightful owners. One of the main landlords of the Moscow region, JSC Vash Finansoviy Popechitel, has more than 63,000 ha in the Ruza district in the Moscow region. The chairman of the Board of Directors Vasily Boyko is currently under home confinement. He is charged under the articles of 'large-scale crime' and 'legalisation of monetary funds or other property acquired as a result of crime'. Boyko used a standard way to assemble the lands: buying up the collective farm land units. He acquired nine of eleven farms in the Ruza district with a plan to develop a real estate project called 'Ruza Switzerland'. The resort should occupy 40 ha in the Ruza district. The project included a country hotel with a golf club, equestrian parks and spas, sports facilities and yacht clubs, a ski resort, a mini-airport for sports and business aviation, helicopter pads, a safari park and elite cottage villages.

However, due to the activities of rural dwellers – official owners of the Ruza farmland – and the decline in the support from local authorities, the project had to be postponed. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether rural mobilisation in the form of a court case and demonstrations alone could have achieved this result. Some observers say that several deprived land shareholders had private connections with bodies of internal affairs and that due to these connections their request was met (Kozyrev and Abakumova 2008). Others argue that Boyko lost the support of the local authorities and that is why he lost the court case (Solomatina 2007). Meanwhile, the CEO of Vash Finansoviy Popechitel, Maria Loboda, expressed her point of view that the arrest of Boyko is linked to the struggle for control over the land in the Ruza district. 'The purpose of this attack is to take away our business by competitors, and law agen-

cies are used as a tool to achieve this goal,' she said in an interview with Rambler Media Group (Rambler 2007). According to Boyko's lawyers, the criminal case was initiated by organisations that are interested in obtaining contracts for the construction of the Central Ring Road and have close contacts with the government of the Moscow region. In this last version, which might be compatible with the earlier explanations, the restitution of land is not a sign of the impartial functioning of the rule of law, but rather the result of a power struggle within the arena of the business and political elites that offered a rare window of opportunity for the rural dwellers, an example of 'divided elites', one of the political opportunity structures for social movements as described by Tarrow (1998). Therefore, it is important to take a look at the role of the state.

2.8. The state: policies regarding foreign land investment and land grabbing

2.8.1. Attracting foreign investment

Agrarian policy of Russia in the Putin/Medvedev era (the 2000s and beyond) has become characterised by what has been called 'economic nationalism' (Wegren 2009a, b); with more focus on food security, increased customs duties (formal, or informal through quality controls), and increased use of food policy as a political tool in international relations³⁴. Nevertheless, the authorities seem to be convinced that modernisation and production increases could be enhanced with foreign investment. As a consequence, over the past few years, the Russian government is actively encouraging this.

By Russian law, foreign persons and companies are not allowed to own land. However, the legal loophole to avoid this, by establishing a majority or fully owned daughter company in Russia, is not at all frowned upon by state officials. In fact, this loophole is actively promoted. During a seminar on investing in Russian and Ukrainian agriculture, a Dutch farmer, operating in Russia, complained about the fact that a foreigner cannot own land. The Russian vice-minister of Agriculture responded that it is no problem, as a foreigner 'you just open a subsidiary in Russia, and buy as much land as you want'³⁵. On the regional and local level, the stance of the authorities differs, depending to a large extent on the governor in charge (Zimin 2010), but most authorities encourage both domestic and foreign investment in agriculture³⁶.

2.8.2. Policies to address illegal land grabbing

There are some attempts by the Russian federal state to prevent illegal land grabbing, at least in discourse. High-ranking Russian officials have recently condemned illegal land grabbing and announced measures to prevent it. Former Minister of Agriculture Aleksei Gordeev criticised urban 'raiders' and warned of 'wars' over rural land. As land 'raiding' became more frequent Gordeev advocated greater government regulation of land relations in order to protect the property rights of land shareholders (Wegren 2009b). In 2011, president Medvedev condemned land 'raiders' in a speech and proposed laws to limit conversion of agricultural land into construction land as the main tool to deal with the issue. Overall, there is a very little indication that the regulations by the state are guided by a concern for the dispossession of land held by the rural population. Rural social movements fighting in defence of the rural dwellers' land rights have not been allowed a single meeting with federal government officials. In discussions on land governance between officials and academics from the FSU countries within the framework of meetings on the voluntary guidelines for land grabbing by FAO in Moscow (November 2010), of all the officials, Russian officials were least inclined to introduce policies to allow free or transparent access to land registration for the population.

Instead, current policies (and proposed new regulations) are largely oriented at keeping intact (and furthering) the concentration of land and the dominance of agroholdings, with more power for government land governance bodies (see also Wegren 2009a, b). In 2010, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade began working on amendments to the Land Code, although there is no indication as to when these might be considered by the Duma. Draft legislation suggested by the Ministry of Agriculture will: (1) give right of first refusal to large farms to lease reregistered land; (2) give preference to municipal and regional governments to convert unclaimed, unwanted, and abandoned land to state property; (3) increase fines and/or land taxes for land that is used inappropriately or is not used for its intended purpose; (4) create a unified system of state monitoring of agricultural land.

At the moment, two main ways of controlling the land market are implemented. First, conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural is becoming more regulated. As Anton Mitrofanov, director of the real estate agency Housing Strategy, stated, 'it was relatively easy, in negotia-

tion with the municipality and with limited expenses, to convert agricultural land into another category, for instance for the construction of dacha complexes' (BFM 2011: 3). Beginning in 2011 it became more complicated as Federal Law (2010) N 435-FZ 'On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation with regard to improvement of agricultural lands' entered into force, which contained additional requirements to a transaction of the land is converted from agricultural to construction purposes, making such a conversion more difficult. In the Moscow region, where illegal land deals are particularly widespread, to prevent the widespread conversion of land for agricultural purposes to construction purposes the Federal Law No. 172-FZ 'On the transfer of land or land plots from one category to another' (2004) has been further elaborated. In the near future, there will be annual quotas on the sale of land to prevent the sale of agricultural enterprises (to agroholdings). However, there is a danger that such measures will only add to further bureaucracy and corruption, without substantially reducing illegal conversions.

Second, regulations combating ineffective use of agricultural land have been introduced, and are more often enforced. Authorities can penalise owners for 'ineffective use' of agricultural land by penalties and even dispossession by the state of agricultural land that is not used for at least three years³⁷. In 2009, several regions started to enforce the first part of this law. In Leningrad region, the authorities checked 170,000 ha, of which 10,500 ha were not properly used, thus, total penalties for these land plots amounted to over half a million roubles (40 roubles was about one euro) (BFM 2011: 2). Unfortunately, this enforcement can also be used to the detriment of land right holders who do not have the funds to 'properly use' their allocated land, and could, therefore, be dispossessed by law.

An important question, therefore, arises: namely, to what extent will these new laws and state policies of closer monitoring of land use (and penalising or even dispossessing land in case of misuse) lead to constraints on illegal land acquisitions? Or will they facilitate dispossession and further land grabbing? First of all, the attempt to address the downside of land grabbing through handing more power to the state encounters the problem that the local authorities are strongly in favour of large-scale land acquisitions and are often part and parcel of the problem. It seems that land acquisitions are not possible without 'friendship' with, or

at least ignorance by, the government. According to Tamara Semenova (Krestyanskiy Front):

[W]hen the raiders came and started buying land, they came not just off the street. It was by prior arrangement with the regional and district authorities. Who would let the strangers do this business in the Moscow region!? Well, we suppose they got the possibility to do this business for *'otkati'*³⁸.

If authorities were willing to address the problem, what are their chances of succeeding? As mentioned earlier, authorities have conducted legal procedures to withdraw land that is not used for over three years from its owners. However, in practice, it is not easy for authorities to succeed. In interviews with authorities in Moscow region, it was stated that it is very difficult for the state to win such cases, and the interviewees did not know of any example in the region where land was actually taken by the state. Sources from elsewhere in Russia confirm these statements (BFM 2011: 2). Due to breaches of the legal procedures, the state loses these disputes (BFM 2011) in court cases with rich investors employing highly skilled lawyers.

Moreover, owners of agricultural land with speculative aims go to great lengths to circumvent above-mentioned laws. Some landowners are even building (partly) virtual agrohholdings to accumulate low-priced agricultural land for other purposes³⁹. Vasily Boyko of JSC Vash Finansoviy Popechitel has created the 'agricultural' holding Ruzskoe Moloko (Milk from Ruza), which sells packaged milk. However, the pastures are empty as livestock is sorely lacking. It appears that the company buys milk from farmers in neighbouring areas, which it (re)packages to sell under its own brand. Another example is oligarch Nikolai Tsvetkov's agricultural company Znak, which pretends to be a poultry farming agrohholding. The bulk of the eggs the company 'produces' it actually buys from a poultry farm in another region and subsequently resells under its own brand.

Thus, the law enabling confiscation of ineffectively used land so far does not pose a major obstacle for rich land owners, who can hire expensive lawyers and devise creative business strategies to prevent dispossession. At the same time, the law may form a threat for the rural population with their small land shares' land plots. Small-scale landowners who are temporarily unable to cultivate their land may easily lose their land as they are not able to hire lawyers to dispute confiscation of their

land by the state. The situation of a school director in a village in Moscow region gives an indication of the uncertainty among the rural population due to this law. The director was close to his pension, but had no time to work the land currently. He was afraid that the state would take this land, and therefore he considered hiring someone to plough the land, to prove that he was cultivating the land⁴⁰. Proposals in the Russian parliament (which to date have not been accepted) to have the state confiscate all land shares not yet registered (Wegren 2009a, 2011a) would primarily lead to dispossession of rural dwellers, instead of limiting dubious land acquisitions by outsiders.

2.9. Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the post-Soviet land reform, the emergence of domestic and foreign investors, their types and the forms of land acquisitions, and the role of the state in the land grabs. Russia (and the former Soviet Union in general) is largely overlooked in the land grab debate, although the process of land grabbing is occurring there at a great pace. Russia is a special case in the global land grab debate. It has vast amounts of land reserves and therefore is attractive to domestic and foreign investors. Russian companies, in particular in the energy and mineral resources sector, are very active in land acquisitions. Interestingly enough, these land deals are not for biofuels production as is the case in other parts of the world, since Russia is blessed with ample energy resources and low domestic energy prices as a consequence. The land has a speculative value and is meant for food production, urbanisation (construction land) and building dachas ('dachatisation').

Russia does not fit in the mainstream division of 'land grabbing countries' (oil-rich, and highly populated) versus 'target countries' (poor and land abundant). Russia is both an oil-rich country and at the same time one of the most land abundant countries. Also, the case of Russia confirms recent critiques of the idea, that land grabbing is predominantly carried out by foreigners. In addition, Russia does not conformably fit into the two main drivers of land grabs distinguished so far: food security (by governments) or commercial motives (by companies). In fact, in Russia the government plays an important role in stimulating large-scale investments (despite some occasional rhetoric to the contrary), but not only with the (primary) aim of food security (at least not in the crop sec-

tor), but also with the aim of using food export as a political tool in international relations (cf. Visser and Spoor 2011, Wegren 2009a, b).

Although high levels of corruption and government intervention are a major drawback of Russia in terms of risk for investors, there is also a range of features of Russia that are likely to further raise the interest of domestic and foreign investors in large-scale land acquisitions. The huge size of landholdings and farm enterprises, and related infrastructure, is attractive for investors. Increasingly, the land is available not only as large-scale land plots jointly owned in the form of hundreds of individual land shares, but also as ownership concentrated in the hands of farm directors, agroholdings or land brokers, although often not in accordance with Russian legislation. Also, foreign investors can take equity in large agroholdings registered on the stock exchange (Visser and Spoor 2011). Despite the very recent emergence of Russia as an agricultural producer and major grain exporter, together with Ukraine, it already has more agricultural enterprises listed at stock exchanges than the established agricultural powerhouses Brazil and Argentina together. An increasingly high degree of 'financialisation' of the agribusiness sector in Russia is observed, which furthermore facilitates large-scale land acquisitions or land grabs by global investors.

The important question is whether this investment will be for the better or worse. On the positive side, the agricultural sector might receive an additional boost when investors introduce new technology to Russian farm enterprises. Foreign agricultural companies might set up new business standards in the agriculture sector in Russia. Gustav Wetterling of Black Earth Farming said that he 'does not think that it would be possible without foreign investments, without foreign companies that operate on Russian agricultural market, to achieve these results in agribusiness'⁴¹. Although a foreign company like this one, controlling 330,000 ha, has an important impact at a district or regional level, on a countrywide scale the predominance of foreign investors is restricted to some sub-sectors, such as poultry.

On the negative side, with growing numbers of domestic and foreign investors interested in agriculture, land dispossession and conflicts over land have risen as many (predominantly domestic) investors turned to illegal ways of acquiring land. While in Russia the 1990s represented the decade of struggle over property in industry and energy, in the first decade of the new millennium (2000–2010) attention for agriculture gradu-

ally increased, and the second decade (2010–2020) increasingly looks like the decade of struggle over land. Indeed, as Barnes (2006) pointed out in the quotation at Subsection 2.4.1 of this chapter, in the 1990s the property changes in agriculture still seemed underwhelming. Few investors from outside agribusiness (mainly domestic processors and among the foreign investors, former food importers to the Soviet Union) acquired land at that time. However, this research suggests that in quite a number of the illegal land grabs, farm directors, sometimes in cooperation with outsiders, already in the late 1990s and early 2000s paved the way for the land grabbing that became possible after the 2002 land law. In various cases, already in the 1990s meetings of shareholders and other documents were falsified to transfer land shares of the shareholders illegally to the charter capital of the farm enterprise (*de facto* to the farm director)⁴². Farm managers who forged documents in the 1990s cashed in on these early moves in the 2000s when they could sell the land for huge profits, while rural dwellers were left landless without compensation. In summary, there is a wide range of strategies that are being used by investors and oligarchs to get land, from within the existing Russian legislative framework, to outright use of pressure, violence and fraud.

It is likely that land acquisitions will proceed at a great pace in Russia. There is little indication that the latest laws and the increased enforcement of laws limiting land conversion and ‘ineffective use’ of land will seriously contribute to constraining semi-legal and illegal land acquisitions. In fact, they might even contribute to the reverse – namely, increased dispossession of land of rural dwellers, as in the discussion on legalisation by Peluso and Lund (2011: 674–675). They argue that rule of law often legalises and legitimates the dispossession of the powerless. Governments and large corporations frequently ‘operate with virtual impunity, while weaker actor may see rights whittled away’ in the name of formalisation (Peluso and Lund 2011: 675). In the Russian case, there is an urgent need for improvement of the impartiality of courts, and the improvement of governance by authorities (in particular the transparency of deals between authorities and large-scale agrohholdings). Without these measures and without stronger rural social movements defending the rights of the rural population, regulations and laws most likely will not reduce the risk of further land grabbing and dispossession.

The post-Soviet land reforms actually set the stage for the land grabbing that is taking place now, at least *de facto*, in the way, they were im-

plemented. Land basically remained under the control of the large farms during the reform period of the 1990s, despite the rhetoric of equal distribution of land shares. Also, part of the farm management together with the help of outsiders already changed legal documents to allow for quick accumulation of land shares, once the law ‘On Agricultural Land Transactions’ was introduced.

After the approval of this law in 2002, and with the rising profitability of agriculture, the large farm enterprises (and the agroholdings) are also acquiring *de jure* control over land, as they increasingly take over land through legal and illegal practices. However, *de facto* control of land by the LFEs should predominantly be understood as effective control *vis-à-vis* the rural population, whereas in relation to the state, their control remains insecure and depends on cultivating good ties with authorities. With recently introduced and proposed legislation giving the state more power over land, insecurity of land for rural dwellers, but also for LFEs, tends to increase. Only the largest agroholdings have such a financial power that the power balance between them and the state remains in favour of the agroholdings.

While it is shown that Russia is particular because it has huge land reserves, and therefore there would be a case to be made that ‘win-win’ land deals are possible, this availability of (unused) land thesis is undermined by the fact that much of the land reserve is available in areas that are not attractive for investors, and that where there is fertile land in better-endowed regions, an unequal power relations between investors and rural dwellers, and the weak legal framework (and enforcement of the law), leads often to unfair deals, dispossession and no or low compensation. In that sense, Russia should be considered as a ‘normal’ case in the global land grab debate.

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Notes

¹ Russia's population peaked in the early 1990s (at the time of the end of the Soviet Union) with about 148 million people in the country. Today, it is approximately 143 million. The United States Census Bureau estimates that Russia's population will decline from the current size to a mere 111 million by 2050, a loss of more than 30 million people and a decrease of more than 20% (Rosenberg 2012).

² The financial crisis led to temporary problems with access to finance in Russia; however, more fundamentally it stimulated, globally as well as in Russia, a major shift of capital towards the agri-food sector, and the primary sector more broadly.

³ The majority of interviews were conducted by N. Mamonova. In addition to this, the empirical analysis of this chapter was complemented with the data obtained from interviews with foreign investors conducted by M. Steggerda and O. Visser in the autumn of 2011 and winter of 2012. Finally, the paper uses data from interviews with domestic and foreign investors in agriculture conducted earlier by Visser in the Moscow, Rostov, Pskov and Saint Petersburg regions.

⁴ The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) is the republic of the former Soviet Union, which after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was renamed the Russian Federation.

⁵ Interview conducted on 23 September 2010, Moscow.

⁶ Peasant farm (or *kreŭst'jansko-fermerskie khoz'jajstvo*) is the official Russian term for private family farms, but contains a contradiction in itself. While 'peasants' are self-sustained small-scale farmers, who use family labour and produce for consumption, not for profit; 'farmers' produce for profit and often employ outside labour.

⁷ Interview conducted on 29 September 2010, Moscow

⁸ Interview conducted on 29 September 2010, Moscow.

⁹ This large gap between the number of unregistered and registered land shares/plots indicates that there is still widespread tenure insecurity.

¹⁰ Also, individual entrepreneurs account for about 1.5% of agricultural land. A small part of the land used by LFEs is still owned by the state.

¹¹ In 2010 the upward trend was temporary affected by the financial crisis. According to some estimates, the registered transactions in 2010 were almost a third less than during the same period before the crisis of 2008, due to problems of investors with financing land deals in context of the global financial crisis, which hit Russia hard.

¹² The Russian Far East concerns the easternmost parts of Russia, between Lake Baikal in Eastern Siberia and the Pacific Ocean. In Russia, the region is usually referred to as just the 'Far East'.

¹³ Disentangling the food, fodder and biofuel functions of agricultural production is sometimes difficult, as it consists in part of 'flex crops' which can be used for multiple purposes.

¹⁴ In addition, a probably unexpected motivation for biofuel production is the following: in Ukraine biofuel production is used as a means to generate value from the Northern area around Chernobyl, which due to the radioactive contamination can no longer be used for food and/or fodder production.

¹⁵ However, it should be noted that by the mid-2000s the national budget for the first time since the mid-1990s set aside a substantial amount of subsidies for household plots and private farms (Wegren 2007).

¹⁶ Interview conducted on 16 November 2011, The Netherlands.

¹⁷ Interview conducted on 16 November 2011, The Netherlands.

¹⁸ Interview conducted on 16 November 2011, The Netherlands.

¹⁹ Interview conducted on 16 November 2011, The Netherlands.

²⁰ In addition to an indication of aging in the countryside, it is also an indication of the difficulties of registering land for rural dwellers.

²¹ Interview conducted on 13 January 2012, Holten, the Netherlands.

²² The mayor did not agree with starting a new investment site further away from the village, and as a result the investor continued to search elsewhere. The investor could understand the position of the local authorities and mentioned their care for the rural inhabitants with some appreciation. The word 'mayor' is used here following the terminology of the interviewee (Interview conducted on 13 January 2012, The Netherlands).

²³ It should be noted that these strategies are mainly used by domestic agroholdings or ones that are offshore investment funds of Russian oligarchs.

²⁴ Also some deals which are within the framework of the law, such as a deal involving a farm director selling his land shares to an outsider, may have been preceded by a fraud in obtaining these shares from the rural population but with the legal period for filing a complaint on the early fraud expired.

²⁵ Interview conducted on 23 September 2010, Moscow.

²⁶ Based on interview with Tamara Semenova, one of the leaders of the rural social movement *Krestyanskiy Front*, discussing the case of the farm enterprise *Matveyevskoye*. Interview was conducted on the 29 September 2010 in Moscow, Russia.

- ²⁷ Report of Arbitration Court of Bashkortostan Republic 2008.
- ²⁸ The information obtained during the fieldwork of Spoor and Visser in the Moscow region in October 2011.
- ²⁹ *Dacha* is a Russian word for seasonal or year-round second homes often located in the exurbs of the country. It is estimated that about 50% of Russian families living in large cities have *dachas*.
- ³⁰ Interview conducted 29 September 2010, Moscow.
- ³¹ Interview conducted 29 September 2010, Moscow.
- ³² The name 'Rublevka' is derived from the name of Rublyovo-Uspenskoe highway. It is an unofficial name of a prestigious residential area west of Moscow, Russia.
- ³³ Interview conducted 29 September 2010, Moscow.
- ³⁴ Examples of food policy as a political weapon in Russian international relations have been the wine ban for Georgia and the 'milk war' with Belarus (Wegren 2009a, b, 2010).
- ³⁵ This is based on observations by Visser during a seminar on investment opportunities in the Agribusiness of Russia and Ukraine, held in Wassenaar, The Netherlands, November 2010.
- ³⁶ For instance, Visser had various conversations with Dutch businessmen who told him that they were offered agricultural land to start a farm by various regional authorities, on visits for business in other sectors.
- ³⁷ According to article 284 of the Federal Law N 136-FZ 'Land Code of Russian Federation' (2001).
- ³⁸ *Otkati* (in English, kickbacks) – a kind of bribe (money or gift) to authorities. Interview conducted 29 September 2010, Moscow.
- ³⁹ For more on the Soviet and post-Soviet mechanisms leading to 'virtual production' see Visser and Kalb (2010), and see Lindner (2008: 133-139) for a discussion of virtual accounting within agriculture.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with school director, Moscow region, 14 February 2011.
- ⁴¹ Interview conducted 23 September 2010, Moscow.
- ⁴² Whereas in Moscow region farm directors often did so with the perspective of selling it on to outsiders, in most other regions in the 1990s rising land prices were not (yet) anticipated and control over LFE seemed to be the main motivation.

3

State Marionettes, Phantom Organisations or Genuine Movements? The Paradoxical Emergence of Rural Social Movements in Post-Socialist Russia

Abstract

Of all the rural social movements in the world, those in post-socialist Russia have been considered to be among the weakest. Nevertheless, triggered by the neo-liberal reforms in the countryside, state attention to agriculture and rising land conflicts, new social movement organisations with a strong political orientation are emerging in Russia today. This sudden burst of civil activity, however, raises questions as to how genuine and independent the emerging organisations are. This chapter shows that many rural movements, agricultural associations, farm unions and rural political parties lack constituency, support the status quo and/or are actually counterfeits (what is called here ‘phantom movement organisations’). This study aims to explain the nature of social movements in the post-Soviet countryside and offer an original contribution to the theory and practice of rural social movements.

3.1. Introduction

Faced with the issues of rural poverty, globalisation of food markets, land grabbing and other contemporary rural problems, rural people around the world have organised themselves in social movements in order to challenge the negative effects of the neoliberal development. Land rights movements of Latin America and Africa, peasant organisations in Asia, and rural community associations and radical farmers’ groups in Europe, North America and Australia are working at village, regional, national and international levels to make sure that the voices of rural

people are heard at every level of decision-making (Edelman 2002, Woods 2008, Borrás 2010).

The Russian rural population, however, is rather passive in defending its own interests and is not eager to engage in collective practices of contestation. Rural society in Russia is traditionally seen as conservative, politically apathetic and phenomenally patient and enduring (Breshko-Breshkovskaya 2011). The Russian villagers' reluctance to engage in overt collective protests is often explained by: the legacy of the pre-revolutionary commune system in rural areas, which was based on mutual support and, therefore, reduced the vulnerability of individual households to adverse developments (Male 1971, Atkinson 1983); 70 years of socialism, when the expression of disagreement with governmental actions was at least heavily frowned upon, with serious protest leading to deportation in the labour camps of the Gulag during Stalin's reign or prosecution in later periods (Visser 2010); demographic characteristics such as ageing and the low density of rural population¹; and the contemporary authoritarian regime of Putin, which is able to repress, divide and demobilise undesired public protests.

In such circumstances, when the rural population is unwilling to engage in political actions and when there is little space for contestation, the significant increase in rural social movement organisations that have emerged in the last decade might be seen as surprising. The web searches and interviews that were conducted for purposes of this study indicate that nearly 9 out of 10 rural civil organisations, agricultural associations, farm unions and rural political parties were formed and registered in the period 2000-2012². These groups claim to protect the interests of rural dwellers, to fight against land grabbing and inequality in the countryside, and to create a favourable climate for the development of agricultural entrepreneurship in Russia. This sudden burst of civil activities has coincided with the economic recovery in agriculture, the increase in state subsidies to rural development projects, the rise of agroinvestments and the large-scale land acquisitions.

It is thus important to question the origins and actual aims of contemporary rural social movements. What is behind this sudden burst of civil activities, and to what extent does it reflect concerns among the rural population? Is it civil society's reaction to neoliberal developments in the countryside? If so, why did these rural social movement organisations not appear after the demise of the Soviet regime in 1991, or during

the agrarian crisis of the post-socialist transformation period, when there were ‘open moments’ for political actions? Why did they only emerge in the early/mid-2000s? Do they truly protect the interests of their members, are they state ‘marionettes’ or were they established for other reasons? Given the tendencies in post-Soviet Russia towards the creation of a quasi- and/or guided civil society (Duacé 2010, Fröhlich 2012), exploring the autonomy (or embeddedness) of these civil organisations and their real aims is essential to understanding the contemporary rural social movement in Russia.

Rural social movement organisations (hereafter referred to as RSMOs) are defined in this study as formal, civil (non-profit) organisations, which are established by or on behalf of rural dwellers and have specific programmes, policies and practices, but share a common goal of representing the interests of the rural population at local, regional and/or national levels. RSMOs thus differ from the broad understanding of civil or social organisations, the latter of which may or may not have a function in terms of representing their members politically.

This research is the first comprehensive study of RSMOs in post-Soviet Russia. Previous studies on post-Soviet rural politics have focused on the response strategies of the rural population to the state’s agrarian reforms, and have prioritised informal practices, social networks and hidden protests over formal organisations (Humphrey 2002c, Tauger 2005, Wegren 2005a). However, more formalised collective action through social organisations can provide resources and an institutional base to rural movements, structure mass protest, and carry the movements’ values and goals during periods of low mobilisation (Zald and McCarthy 1987, Taylor 1989). Studies of institutionalised civil organisations in post-Soviet Russia, which have been carried out on contemporary urban social movements, show the unexpected forms of collective action that can be discerned within the limited political opportunity structure³, once one goes beyond liberal and statist models of state-society relations (Henry 2006, 2010, Kulmala 2011, Chebankova 2012, Fröhlich 2012). These studies demonstrate that movements (i.e. environmental, animal rights and disability movements) often cooperate with the state while at the same time being able to preserve their autonomy. This position diverges from earlier academic work on post-Soviet social movements, which portrayed Russian civil society as underdeveloped and suppressed by an authoritarian regime (Janoski 1998, Salamon and

Anheier 1998, Hale 2002). This turn, from viewing civil society as a counterforce to the state to viewing it as a collaborator with the state, defines the recent changes in the studies of state-society relations in Russia and globally (Kröger 2011).

This chapter follows the emerging understanding of state-society relations and takes the limited political opportunity structure as the starting point. It analyses RSMOs in the 'Russian climate', where civil society organisations have close relations with the state while sometimes also contributing to the 'war of position', i.e. creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within the existing society (Chebankova 2012, Fröhlich 2012). Many arguments of this chapter are built upon assumptions drawn from contemporary urban social movement studies, therefore, it is important to acknowledge the existence of rural specificities, such as the aversion of rural dwellers to open group actions and highly politicised issues of land tenure in agricultural investments.

This study questions several assumptions in the theories on social movements and state-society relations, and aims to provide new insight into rural political actions. It contributes to understanding Russian civil society from the angle of RSMOs and broadens our view on contentious civil politics in rural areas in the post-Soviet context in particular, and under (semi) authoritarian regimes in general.

The next section (Section 3.2) provides an analysis of post-Soviet land reform and potential 'open moments' for collective political actions that appeared at the time. It is followed by the discussion on the current situation, which is characterised by the rise of large-scale land acquisitions, agricultural investments and increased state support of agriculture and rural development projects. This allows understanding of the context in which RSMOs have emerged. Section 3.3 is devoted to the analysis of RSMOs: it provides their classification and discusses state embeddedness, organisational affiliations, connection with the local population, and the authenticity (as opposed to a counterfeit existence) of these organisations. Five types of RSMOs are distinguished and discussed: grassroots organisations, professionalised organisations, government affiliates, politically oriented organisations/parties and phantom movements. Finally, the concluding Section 3.4 presents a discussion on the preliminary findings, and an outline of ideas for further analysis and theoretical interpretation. As such, this study aims to set an agenda for the study of RSMOs in Russia and the post-Soviet area at large (e.g.

Ukraine and Kazakhstan), one which is relevant to (semi)authoritarian and post-socialist contexts at a broader level.

This chapter is largely based on qualitative data derived from in-depth interviews with representatives of seven RSMOs and two political agrarian parties that emerged from RSMOs. The interviews were conducted in March 2011 in the Moscow region. In addition, this research benefits from interviews with local activists, local government officials and large-scale agricultural investors conducted in the Moscow region in 2010–2013. Data were further obtained from the websites of social movements and political parties, as well as from statistical sources of the Russian Ministry of Justice, Rosstat, and the Register of Public Organisations in Russia.

3.2. Post-socialist transformations in the countryside and ‘open moments’ for the emergence of social movements

3.2.1. Land reform and the harsh transition period

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia embarked on a course of reforms, which Goodman (2003) has called ‘shock therapy’, with the ultimate goal of preventing a return to socialism. The de-collectivisation of agriculture was pursued through the privatisation of collective farmland. *Kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* (collective and state farm enterprises), which possessed a majority of the agricultural land in the Soviet era, were forced to distribute their farmland by means of share-based certificates to their former employees. The Russian government conducted these reforms with the goal of creating a system of small and medium commercial family farms in the country. However, due to the absence of financial resources and extension services, the existence of fragmented and dysfunctional markets and institutions, and rural dwellers’ unwillingness to leave the collectives, the majority of land recipients did not become private farmers (Wegren 2005b, Visser and Spoor 2011). Instead, the land became accumulated in the hands of former *kolkhoz/sovkhoz* directors (or outside investors), who convinced land recipients to invest their land (and property) shares in reorganised farm enterprises in order to preserve the integrity of large-scale production. As Spoor et al. (2012) argued, the land reform did not fundamentally change *de facto* land ownership. The *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* were transformed

into private large farm enterprises (LFEs), while a large part of the rural population continued to practice subsistence farming on their household plots (Pallot and Nefedova 2003, 2007, Visser 2009). Thus, the private family farm sector that was envisaged in the early 1990s only emerged to a limited extent⁴.

The shift from a centralised to a market-oriented economy in the countryside was accompanied by price liberalisation and rising prices for agricultural inputs; the reduction of state support for agriculture, leading to the bankruptcy of many farm enterprises and growing unemployment; and the limitation or termination of the social functions provided by LFEs, which were formerly the responsibilities of *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*. All of these factors negatively affected life in rural areas. The post-Soviet transition period in Russia, as well as in many other post-Soviet countries, was characterised by the ruralisation of poverty (Spoor 2013). The monetary income of rural residents was only 50% of urban incomes per capita in the late 1990s. The peak of rural poverty was in 1999⁵, when 73.1% of rural dwellers had incomes lower than the subsistence level (Independent Institute for Social Policy 2002). Many rural dwellers, especially the young people, ‘voted with their feet’ and moved to cities. Those who remained in the villages experienced a declining quality of life and increasing social problems.

According to Gourevitch (1986), this situation should have become an ‘open moment’ for political actions. Gourevitch argued that crises could open a political system to new challenges and alternative policies, and create opportunities for mobilisation within a sector. Furthermore, the early post-Soviet period (1991–2000) was characterised by the democratisation of the society, expressed as strengthening freedom of speech and freedom of associations, which enlarged the political opportunity structure in the country. However, the civil society organisations that emerged during that time were largely urban, and many of them existed only on paper. Others were generally insignificant in terms of members (at most a few thousand people), organisationally amorphous or lacked clear programmes (Osokina 2009).

An important reason for the absence of open bottom-up mobilisation and resistance at that time is the fact that almost every rural family possessed a household plot of 0.2 ha on average (Visser 2003, 2010). The production of potatoes and vegetables on these land plots guaranteed the survival of the rural population in times of crisis (Pallot and Nefedova

2007, Ries 2009). Faced with economic difficulties such as wage arrears, rural dwellers did not collectively protest, but resorted to their household plots.

Another reason for the weak rural mobilisation is the demographic situation in the countryside. Nearly 20% of the rural population is older than 60 (Rosstat 2013b). Moreover, Russia faces a crisis of rural depopulation: 22% of rural settlements have less than 10 inhabitants, and 8% of villages are abandoned. The average density of the rural population in Russia is about two people per square kilometre (Yermolayeva 2010). The dispersed and aged rural population in Russia is not conducive to mobilisation.

Resistance did exist, but it was (and remains) mostly hidden. Nikulin (2003, 2010) considers villagers' gossiping, stealing and foot-dragging to be forms of covert unorganised protest against LFEs. These actions fall into the category of 'everyday resistance' and 'weapons of the weak', as described by Scott (1985). However, theft at LFEs is, in many cases, better qualified as a continuation of the Soviet principle 'everything is collective, everything is mine' (Humphrey 1983, Panchenko et al. 2012), and is an additional source of subsistence rather than an intentional act of disagreement.

The best-known rural social organisation, which emerged at that time, was (and is) *AKKOR* (Russian Association of Farmers and Agricultural Cooperatives). It was established top-down by an informal order of the Soviet Ministry of Agriculture in 1990 when the first leasehold family farms started to emerge (Kopoteva 2012). At that time, government subsidies and credits for private family farms were allocated via *AKKOR*, which gave it a great deal of power. After the subsidies to *AKKOR* were reduced, projects on the ground to support farmers were curtailed, while lobbying among, and cooperating with, governmental bodies was maintained, if not intensified. This association will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Another representative of the rural population during the early transition period was *Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii* (Agrarian Party of Russia). While not officially communist, it displayed many similarities with socialist ideologies. Also created in a top-down manner, it did not have close links with the rural population and lobbied the state on behalf of large collective farms. Makarkin (2004: 1) refers to the party as 'a collection of Soviet-type rural functionaries, who struggled to slow down the pace of

disappearance of collective agriculture'. In 2009, Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii merged with United Russia and terminated its activities for 3 years. It re-emerged in 2012 as a party that represents interests of large-scale agricultural business⁷. For a long time, these two top-down organisations were the only ones dealing with rural issues in Russia.

3.2.2. Rise of interest in land and agriculture and the appearance of RSMOs

The situation has changed since the early/mid-2000s – the time of the Putin regime and economic recovery in agriculture. The Russian government has turned its attention back to agriculture and revitalised the process of agrarian reforms, although now aimed at the development of large-scale industrial farming. The new Land Code (2001) aimed to modify property rights. It was followed by the adoption of the law 'On Agricultural Land Transactions' in 2002, which legitimised land transactions. This marked the establishment of an open land market in Russia and the commodification of farmland. Spurred by instability in financial markets, the global food crisis, and the large supply and low cost of Russian farmland, many domestic and foreign⁸ investors became interested in Russian agriculture and started to acquire farmland (Visser 2016). The land rush was accompanied by the reinforcement of large-scale mono-crop farming and, especially in sub-urban and fertile agricultural regions, the violation of the local communities' rights, i.e. the features that allowed Visser and Spoor (2011) to call this process land grabbing⁹.

Many villagers lost their rights to the land plots distributed during the first stage of the land reform. Land grabbing was carried out through different schemes ranging from the purchase of land share certificates at a very low price from each landholder to acquiring entire collective farm enterprises through forging statutory documents and bribing chairmen and local authorities (cf. Chapter 2 on legal, semi-legal and illegal land deals). This land rush resulted in the enlargement of LFEs and their incorporation in agroholdings, which control the whole agricultural value chain¹⁰.

Since the early 2000s, the state has stimulated agriculture through a range of instruments such as a debt-restructuring programme, the establishment of a state-financed agricultural bank, subsidised crop insurance programmes, simplified and lowered taxes on agriculture and subsidised loans for capital investment (Wegren 2007: 517). Whereas in the 1990s,

the state support for the agricultural sector was sharply curtailed, it has markedly increased under Putin (Shagaida 2012). Not only do agricultural businesses receive more state attention but many federal rural development programmes were also recently launched by the Russian government in order to improve the socio-economic situation in the villages¹¹. At the same time, local governments often remain underfunded, and their development projects are largely dependent on corporate social responsibility initiatives of LFEs, which provide significantly less support for the social infrastructure than did their collective predecessors. Overall, however, during the Putin era, the economic and infrastructural decline in many rural areas was halted and in some cases reversed.

As a result of overall economic recovery and the inflow of private and state money in the countryside, the poverty rate fell to 25.4% in 2003, further falling to 15.4% in 2006 (O'Brien et al. 2011). An extensive study by O'Brien et al. (2011: 24) shows that rural dwellers have become less depressed and more satisfied with their incomes and their country, while their satisfaction with life in their village communities declined.

Along with the socio-economic improvements in Russia, the last decade has also been characterised by the contraction of the political opportunity structure. After Putin's rise to power in 2000, the process of democratisation that set in during the early 1990s turned into the direction of a 'guided democracy', with a growing influence of the state on the political arena. Effective opposition was curtailed in many ways. The entrance levels for new parties were raised, several bureaucratic hurdles were created and the media, having become increasingly state-controlled, ignored or negatively portrayed opposition forces. Out of fear for the penetration of Western values and financial and organisational support that might stimulate protests and revolts similar to the colour revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, the Russian state imposed restrictions on the activities of foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social organisations with foreign funds (Ostroukh 2012).

The constitutional 'right to disagree' has failed to move beyond the letter of the law in contemporary Russia. The state's hostility towards criticism is often expressed through legal restrictions on collective action, such as limiting the locations available for pickets and demonstrations (Politgazeta 2012). Formally, the legal system offers the population opportunities to resolve civil disputes in courts (Saxonberg and Jacobsson 2012). However, when the dissent is related to a highly politicised issue such as

land grabbing, the courts seem not to work in favour of the rural poor (see Chapter 2).

The last decade has also been characterised by an increase in the number of RSMOs. The following analysis aims to reveal to what extent the appearance of new and the revitalisation of old RSMOs reflect the declining satisfaction of life in village communities. It examines how the recovery of agriculture, and limited political opportunity structures, influence the emergence of RSMOs, and what kind of relations RSMOs have with the state and rural population.

3.3. Rural social movement organisations in Russia

In mapping the current RSMOs in Russia, this study builds upon the categorisation of social movement organisations into (1) grassroots organisations, (2) professionalised organisations and (3) government affiliates, as developed by Henry (2006) in her study of the environmental movement in Russia. Furthermore, two additional categories were distinguished and included in the typology in order to capture the main types of actors working with rural issues. These are: (4) politically oriented organisations and (5) phantom movement organisations (see Table 3.1). Different groups of RSMOs are oriented toward different actors within the Russian political and economic environments and tend to pursue different varieties of civil activism. However, the adherence to a particular organisational type is not static: one type of RSMOs may transform into another over time.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of organisational types within Russia's rural social movement

| | <i>(Semi-)institutionalised grassroots organisations</i> | <i>Professionalised organisations</i> | <i>Government affiliates</i> | <i>Politically oriented organisations/parties</i> | <i>Phantom movement organisations</i> |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| Goals | Resolve local land disputes (often related to land grabbing) | Gather groups of similar interests, informational support and facilitation of their activities | Implement state programmes | Political representation of rural population, however, often used as an access to 'Big Politics' | Represent the interests of its creators/ fulfil promises of the parent-association/get access to particular information or networks |
| Target group | Former kolkhoz' and sovkhos' employees (land shareholders) | Special interest groups (gardeners, ogorodniks, fishers, etc.) | Commercial farmers, agro-companies, rural population | Rural and urban population | Sub-groups of rural population (youth, women) or rural (urban) population in general/in a particular region |
| Methods | Demonstrations, pickets, recourse to courts | Lobbying the state, informational support to their members | Cooperation with the state, informational support to their members | Networking with politicians inside parliament | Participation at conferences, social events |
| Scope | All-Russian | All-Russian | All-Russian | All-Russian | Local/All-Russian |
| Level of activism | Active | Moderately active | Active | Moderately active | Focal activism/Passive |
| Organisational affiliations | With political parties (i.e. social-liberal party Yabloko, social-democratic party Spravedlivaya Rossiya), and with other grassroots organisations | Are often members of Government Affiliates | With the United Russia, GONGOs | With United Russia | With local authority or political leaders /as a subsidiary of a larger social organisation or political party |
| Connection to local population | Interpersonal connections, social networks | Membership networks, not directly connected | Governmental networks, not directly connected | Through social organisations, not directly connected | Membership networks, not directly connected |
| Registration | Yes (as social movement) | Yes (as social organisation, professional union) | Yes (as social organisation) | Yes (as social organisation, with further transformation to a political | Yes (various forms) |

| | | | | party) | |
|--------------------|--|--|---|---|---|
| State embeddedness | Partial autonomy | Embedded | Embedded | Embedded | Embedded in the state via the parent-organisation |
| Source of finance | Sponsorship by private actors (i.e. businessmen, politicians), entrepreneurial activities | Small membership fees, state support | State support | Entrepreneurial activities, sponsorship by private actors (i.e. businessmen, politicians), membership fees | Source of finance |
| Sample | Krestyanskiy Front (Peasant Front), Narodniy Front v Zashchitu Russkoi Zemli (The Peoples Front of Russian Land Defence), Nasha Zemlia (Our Land), Sovet Initsiativnih Grupp (The Council of the action teams for the rights of land shareholders) | Soyuz Sadovodov Rossii (Union of Gardeners of Russia), Soyuz Arendatorov i Zemlepolzovateley (Union of Tenants and Land Users), Ob'edinenie Sadovodov (Union of Gardeners), Soyuz Ribolovetskih Kolkhozov Rossii (Union of Fishing Collective Farms of Russia) | AKKOR (Russian Farmers' and Agricultural Cooperatives' Association), Rossiyskoe Agrarnoe Dvizhenie RAD (All-Russian social organisation Russian Agrarian Movement (RAD), Rossiyskiy Zemelnyy Soyuz (All-Russian social organisation Russian Land Union) | Agrarii Rossii (Agrarians of Russia), Selskaya Rossiya (Rural Russia), Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii (Agrarian Party of Russia), Agro-Promyshlennaya Partiya Rossii (United Agro-Industrial Party of Russia), Vozrozhdeniye Agrarnoy Rossii (Russian agricultural revival) | Selskaya Rossiya (Rural Russia), Rossiyskiy Soyuz Selskih Zhenchin (Russian Union of Rural Women), Dvizhenie Selskih Zhenchin Rossii (Movement of Rural Women of Russia), Molodezhnoe Krilo Partii Agrarii Rossii (Youth Wing of the party Agrarians of Russia), Rossiyskiy Soyuz Selskoy Molodezhi (Russian Union of Rural Youth), Selskaya Molodezh (Rural Youth) |

Source: The table is developed based on the analysis of 30 RSMOs and agrarian political parties operating in Russia. The data was acquired from various internet sources and in-depth interviews with representatives of the analysed organisations during fieldwork in 2010-2011.

Table 3.1 clearly shows the embeddedness of the majority of RSMOs in the state. Classic social movement studies contend that movements have to choose between autonomy and subordination to the state (Meyer 2004). However, more recent studies on state-society relations have demonstrated that movements can be more efficient if they collaborate with the state, while still keeping space to protest (Abers 2000, Dagnino

2002, Auritzer and Wampler 2004, Dagnino et al. 2006). Chebankova (2012) argues that civil society organisations in Russia have to choose close relations with the state in order to pursue their politics. The majority of RSMOs are connected to the presidential party *Edinaya Rossiya* (United Russia). This connection guarantees access to necessary resources for RSMOs' operations (the possibility to raise funds and participate in state rural development programmes, and informational support), as well political space for their activities. Vasily Vershinin, one of the leaders of *Partiya Vozrozhdeniya Sela* (Party of Village Renaissance), calls the state-RSMOs relations 'a system of the "trough"'. He asserted that,

Where the trough is, there are those members. When the CPSU [the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] was in power, they were next to that party. Then we had a party called Choice of Russia, then Our Home – Russia, then something else, and then United Russia... And this entire crowd has been running from one party to another. Their integrity, their political orientation is worth nothing. Where the 'trough' is, there is a possibility of grabbing. Thus, they all are there¹².

The convergence of the state with RSMOs is often mutual: social organisations gain resources and access; the state gains a firm control and the possibility to use civil society as an instrument to improve state governance (Richter 2009: 42).

The popular expression of a Costa-Rican movement leader that 'there are two ways to kill an organisation, with repression or with money', used by Edelman (1999: 165) in his book *Peasants against globalisation*, is also applicable to the Russian case. Along with legitimate control, the state sponsors the social activities of the majority of RSMOs. Furthermore, the state establishes state-financed social organisations such as government-operated nongovernmental organisations (GONGOs), which, in fact, are an extension of the state apparatus. Many RSMOs have representatives in GONGOs.

There are other areas from which RSMOs can gain financial resources (such as entrepreneurial activities, donations, membership fees); however, they often generate insignificant revenues, thus limiting the scope of organisational activities. RSMOs' dependence on domestic donors leads to embeddedness with domestic elites, whose interests do not always reflect the interests of the rural population.

While various other Russian social movement organisations (environmental movements, for example) joined the global network of movements and transnational organisations in the 1990s, making them part of the larger global process (Henry 2006, 2010, Tysiachniouk 2010), RSMOs in Russia remain isolated from transnational movements¹³. In the past few years of the Putin regime, cooperation with international donors and foreign NGOs has been increasingly limited by the state's protectionist policy; therefore, an inflow of foreign concepts such as food sovereignty and the idealisation of the 'peasant way of life' as promoted by, for instance, Western or Latin American rural movements, is nearly absent in Russian rural social settings.

It is remarkable that the connection between RSMOs and the rural population is often vague. The closest relations with rural dwellers are seen in the case of (semi-) institutionalised grassroots organisations, which mobilise people for collective action. Others have only indirect ties with the rural population (through local authority offices and informational support centres in rural areas), or no ties at all.

The following subsections examine typical representatives of government affiliates, grassroots organisations, politically oriented organisations and phantom movement organisations. Professionalised organisations are not discussed separately because they are often embedded in other institutionalised organisations and have a tendency to fall into the category of phantom movement organisations.

3.3.1. Government affiliates

The typical representative of government affiliates is AKKOR. This organisation was already mentioned in this chapter. The state-embeddedness of this organisation can be observed throughout its history. It was established in 1990 by an informal order of the Soviet Ministry of Agriculture, for purposes of government subsidies and credit allocation for emerging private family farms. Later, when the state support to farmers was curtailed, AKKOR intensified lobbying among, and cooperating with, governmental bodies.

AKKOR participated in the Duma elections with different blocks (depending on what was the leading party at that time: in 1993 with Choice of Russia, in 1994 with Our Home – Russia and in 2010 with United Russia in developing the party's programme). The words of Ver-

shinin, quoted above, are suitable: ‘this entire crowd has been running from one party to another. Their integrity, their political orientation is worth nothing. Where the “trough” is, there is a possibility of grabbing...’

Representatives of AKKOR, however, insist that this state-embeddedness helps ‘the Association to lobby more effectively [for] farmers’ interests, to make amendments to laws and to achieve acceptance of the important decisions for [the] peasantry in Russian regions’ (Kopoteva 2012: 47). Indeed, AKKOR developed and lobbied for the inclusion of the *Russkiy Fermer* (Russian farmer) programme in United Russia’s political agenda in 2010. AKKOR’s active participation in government meetings drew the authorities’ attention to the problems of small-scale farming, which led to the initiation of several state programmes oriented towards rural development (AKKOR 2013).

However, small-scale farmers themselves have experienced a decline of support from AKKOR. In 2010, farmers of the Altai region appealed to president Medvedev in an open letter, complaining that AKKOR did not fulfil its direct task of protecting their interests (Regnun Novosti 2010). Alexander, a farmer from the Deulino village in the Moscow region, said in an interview about the help of AKKOR:

In order to help farmers, there is a need to be politically independent and unbiased and to have the courage to say a word against Putin’s government. And they [AKKOR] do not have this, unfortunately¹⁴.

Indeed, there is no any indication that AKKOR voiced views different from the official United Russia and Kremlin line (cf. Kopoteva 2012). The state-embeddedness of AKKOR is also indicated by an interview with Tamara Semenova, one of the leaders of the social movement *Krestyanskiy Front*:

I think AKKOR has somehow moved away from people... private farmers and rural population in general... AKKOR went into the officialdom, like all those agrarian parties, which had been created and created and dissolved in United Russia¹⁵.

Although the state-embedding gives the organisation an opportunity to pursue its activities, it decreases its autonomy and creates a gap between it and the rural population. The Russian state incorporates many RSMOs in order to create ‘state marionettes’ that support the current

national agricultural and rural development policy, thus reinforcing state power.

3.3.2. Grassroots organisations

The prominent representative of grassroots social movement organisations is the interregional social movement *Krestyanskiy Front* (Peasant Front). It is the antithesis of government affiliates in terms of organisation and approach to state-society relations. Whereas the majority of state-embedded social organisations are established top-down, Krestyanskiy Front emerged from the village level. Starting with the cooperation of several rural dwellers deprived of their land shares in 2005, Krestyanskiy Front had close to 25,000 members in 2010. It aimed to defend the rights of former collective farm workers and other small landowners, who lost their lands due to illegal/semi-legal land acquisitions.

The Front's leaders asserted their claims through approved channels and used the regime's policies and legitimating myths to justify their defiance. As a partly institutionalised form of contention, the Russian anti-land-grab social movement organised public events such as meetings, pickets and rallies within the legal framework. Through these events, it drew the attention of federal, regional and local authorities to the dispossession of rural dwellers and their property rights violations as a result of land grabbing. Krestyanskiy Front represented its members in courts and fought against land raiders by demonstrating in front of their offices and requesting statutory documents and public explanations. Due to the efforts of Krestyanskiy Front, hundreds of rural dwellers have been compensated for lost land plots.

Tamara Semenova, vice-chairman of Krestyanskiy Front, described her personal story of fighting land grabbing:

In the Soviet period our farm enterprise was called sovkhos Gorki-2; now it is Agrocomplex Gorki-2, Ltd. It is located on the most expensive land in the Moscow region – Rublevka, Zhukovka, Kolchuga, and Razdory. These days many oligarchs and nouveaux riches have houses there. Our director, a former chairman of sovkhos, called us [employees who were also land and property holders of the enterprise] for a meeting in 1998. He said that there was an investor who wanted to invest in Gorki-2 on the condition that we all invest our shares into the farm enterprise. He promised a beautiful future for us and our children. We used to believe our chairman. However, the will of the shareholders was not regis-

tered as required by law. Some of us did not have land-share certificates at that time yet! [...] Nevertheless, the investor acquired our sovkhoz. [...] They [investor in cooperation with the chairman] secretly organised an additional issue of shares, which were bought by the investor. We did not know about that. They forged a number of corporate documents and got full control over Gorki-2 and its lands. Since 2002, they launched bankruptcy proceedings. As a result, agricultural activities were terminated, we were fired, and the largest part of the land of Gorki-2 was built up with cottages. [...] For 5.5 years, we fought for the restitution of our land rights. I was the leader of the group of 600 deprived shareholders of Gorki-2. It was a difficult fight. During that time I was threatened, chased; they tried to give me a bribe. [...] First, we launched pickets, demonstrations in front of local, regional and federal authorities, wrote petitions to the prosecutor's office, and applied to courts. Authorities knew our problem, but did nothing. [...] Courts passed sentences over and over again not in our favour, although we had documents confirming that it was an illegal acquisition. [...] Then, we found a weak point: Rublevka is the street where many politicians drive daily. For two years, we almost did not leave this street. We stood with placards along Rublevka for 2 years 3 days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. And we kept writing to courts and prosecutors. [...] We received compensation for our lands in 2008¹⁶.

The contentious politics of Krestyanskiy Front somewhat resembles the 'rightful resistance' in the Chinese countryside, described by O'Brien (1996). However, in contrast with Chinese social movements, Russian legitimate protest is more limited. Under the Chinese regime's dominant (socialist) ideology, appealing to higher authorities when lower authorities misbehave can be an effective strategy. In contemporary Russia, applying to higher authorities is mostly to no avail. It is only occasionally successful, when combined with strong media attention and collective action.

Some actors in other social organisations and authorities were critical of Krestyanskiy Front's methods. In the majority of land disputes, Krestyanskiy Front demanded financial compensation for its members, not a restitution of their land rights on the disputed territories. According to a statement by Vasily Vershinin, one of the leaders of *Partiya Vozrozhdeniya Sela*, Krestyanskiy Front's staff got a certain share from the financial compensations their members received. This raises concerns over the motives of the Front's operations and its choice of particular

sites of land disputes. Valeriy Sarbash, head of the Department of Agriculture and Food Industry of the Dmitrov district in the Moscow region, who has worked with Krestyanskiy Front, criticised its 'commercialisation':

I do not respect this organisation because Krestyanskiy Front pursues its own interests. I already understood this last year. They were here [in the Dmitrov district]. They tried to organise something... But those farmers and rural residents who have problems with their land shares, they realised that it is better not to work with Krestyanskiy Front. The land issues cannot be solved in one day. It is better to work with authorities. The Front, you know, has a speculative attitude to these issues¹⁷.

It is not surprising that representatives of the state disliked Krestyanskiy Front's approach of mobilising rural dwellers. The dispossession of small-scale landholders is a process in which the state is seldom free of blame, with authorities either doing next to nothing to prevent it or secretly partaking in the process themselves (there being strong suggestions to the latter). However, it should be stated that in the case of this particular district, there are no indications of an involvement of authorities to the detriment of rural dwellers. The critiques of Krestyanskiy Front by other actors must be understood in the Russian context, in which people tend to distrust any political action and tend to assume hidden self-interests behind every form of collective action (Shevchenko 2008).

The money earned by the Front leaders was used to provide services to its members (hiring lawyers to represent rural dwellers in courts, providing free consultancy services to deprived land holders, maintaining organisational structure, organising pickets and demonstrations, etc.) and guaranteed its independence from donors and sponsors. According to McCarthy and Zald (2001: 533), social movements need to generate financial resources to be 'effective, because dissent and grievances alone will not generate social change'. For instance, Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) actively campaigned to get its representatives elected in senatorial positions in different states and asked these senators for sponsorship (Vergara-Camus 2009). As long as the generation of financial resources does not become the major goal of the movement, it should not be seen as a contradiction to its goals. However, resource mobilisation could shape the choice of the movement's methods, which might influence the outcome. Thus, by asking for

money, instead of land, as compensation for their members, Krestyanskiy Front did not fight depeasantisation in terms of land ownership, which contradicted its goal of preserving the Russian peasantry.

Nevertheless, Krestyanskiy Front can be considered a successful movement. It managed to receive compensation for deprived land-share holders, who were predominantly pensioners willing to sell and did not intend to cultivate land themselves. In comparison with Ukraine, where land dispossession of rural dwellers is similar to Russian cases but practically without overt resistance (Chapter 5), the Russian villagers participated in open contentious politics, organised by the leaders of Krestyanskiy Front. Of course, on one hand, this civil engagement could be considered opportunistic rational behaviour as described by Popkin (1979), where the financial compensation for land plots represents the incentive that stimulates Russian rural dwellers to act in a group-oriented way. However, the appearance of overt organised resistance in Russia could also be perceived as an indication of emerging political consciousness among villagers.

Since its foundation, Krestyanskiy Front underwent several bouts of reorganisations and changes in its top management. The increase in the Front's power, and its support from the rural population, influenced the transformation of its goals from the restitution of land rights of former workers of specific farm enterprises on a case-by-case basis, to demands for dismissing district and regional authorities and redirection of Russian agrarian politics in favour of small-scale farm producers (Mamonova 2014). However, since peasants' demands for financial compensation for their lost land plots were met, the desire of the Front's members to participate in contentious politics dropped dramatically, and other goals were never reached. Feeling unable to establish goals that would inspire rural dwellers to further actions, the leadership of Krestyanskiy Front decided to dissolve the organisation in 2013.

3.3.3. Political parties

One might expect that an increasingly contained political opportunity structure in Russia would lead to more apolitical methods of RSMO campaigning, which can be observed in the case of some environmental, disability or animal rights movements (Henry 2006, 2010, Chebankova 2012, Kulmala 2011, Fröhlich 2012). The RSMOs, however, are actually becoming more politicised, as a number of these organisations have set a

goal to transform into a political party. Our analysis of the political orientation of RSMOs suggests that this is not a by-product of successful mobilisation, as Walder (2009) states, but the initial goal of many RSMOs in Russia.

This trend can be seen as a shift to the ‘new game’, first discussed by Henry (2006) in her study of environmental social movement in Russia. Civil organisations have accepted their failure to change the current situation by acting as apolitical associations. Instead, they create alternative political forces critical of the current political regime, in order to ‘change the rules of the game themselves, [...] something only possible from inside the political process’ (Henry 2006: 120). Many RSMO leaders are of the same opinion. Mikhail Varaksin, a member of the association/political party *Selskaya Rossiya* (Rural Russia), stated:

A social movement or association cannot sufficiently protect the interests of the rural population. It does not have enough force to unite supporters around it; furthermore, it cannot use legislative measures to change the situation. A political party can do this. The party on behalf of rural residents can create laws that reflect the interests of rural citizens¹⁸.

Social movements with a political orientation predominantly target the state in their claims (McAdam et al. 2003). However, politically oriented Russian RSMOs tend to fall into state embeddedness, and avoid politically sensitive issues such as land grabbing.

Since the dissolution of Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii after its merger with United Russia in 2009, its niche in politics became available. Many political parties set out to occupy this niche. Some of them built coalitions with RSMOs. For example, the liberal party *Yabloko* (Apple) was involved in public demonstrations for the rights of rural dwellers, organised by *Krestyanskiy Front*. However, the description of *Yabloko*’s participation by Tamara Semenova suggests that its involvement was rather pragmatic. Leaders from *Yabloko* gave speeches at public meetings with clear visibility, but did not commit to more sustained cooperation¹⁹. The leader of the political party *Volia* (Will), Svetlana Peunova, commented on the attention of political parties for the rural population:

Public support is important to political parties registered in the Russian Federation only during the elections. In reality, none of them is concerned about the problems of the rural population²⁰.

The interest in political representation of the rural population is expressed by many social organisations. During the late 2000s, a number of RSMOs attempted to transform into political parties. *Agrarii Rossii* (Agrarians of Russia) and *Selskaya Rossiya* (Rural Russia) were among those which managed to do this.

The history of the social organisation *Selskaya Rossiya* began in 2009. It was established by Sergey Shugayev, a lawyer and one of the leaders of *Krestyanskiy Front* who left the Front after its brief union with the social movement *Nasha Zemlia* (Our Land). In 2007, *Krestyanskiy Front* and *Nasha Zemlia* made an attempt to unite, but the union fell apart after the unsuccessful attempt of *Krestyanskiy Front* to transform into a political party. It is worthy to note that the leader of *Nasha Zemlia*, Dmitry Larionov, criticised *Krestyanskiy Front* for its political ideas:

Nasha Zemlia believes that the decision of transforming *Krestyanskiy Front* into a political party is premature, opportunistic and does not match the current state of civil society in Russia²¹.

In 2008, *Krestyanskiy Front* attempted to form a political party, but failed when it did not receive the required number of signatures, and lost the support of *Nasha Zemlia*, which was its main partner in this endeavour. One year later, Larionov became a co-founder of the social movement *Selskaya Rossiya*, which later was transformed into a political party.

This example demonstrates the inability of Russian RSMOs to form coalitions, which decreases the power of the social movement and shrinks the political opportunity structure, according to Tarrow (1998a, 1998b). Henry (2006, 101, 107) explains the difficulties of coalition building between social organisations in Russia by arguing that their leaders, instead of searching for a consensus, prefer to spin off and establish movements/political parties that fit their personal political ambitions. This can explain the large number of RSMOs that never passed the stage of 'phantom movements', a trend that will be discussed in the next subsection.

The analysis of *Selskaya Rossiya*'s activities reveals that this organisation resembles an interest group²² more than a political party. Its membership consists of entrepreneurs operating in the Russian agricultural sector. The party acted as a mediator between producers, traders and consumers of agricultural products. Businessman Mikhail Varaksin, for example, head of the party's Moscow region office, joined the party in

search of new distribution channels and new business partnerships for his agricultural company: ‘through the membership in the party, I found new regional contacts for the supply of my products’²³. Revenue from entrepreneurial activities and personal contributions of its leaders covered the expenses of the party.

Since the re-emergence of *Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii* in 2012, *Selskaya Rossiya* has suspended its activities. Its leaders either joined *Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii*, which provided more support to agricultural business, or became members of other RSMOs. For example, the chairman of *Selskaya Rossiya* Dmitry Larionov became a member of the Ural-Siberian National Assembly, which was active in developing the state-supported rural project ‘New Village – New Civilisation’ in 2012–2013. The political party *Selskaya Rossiya* did not cease to exist, but rather became a ‘phantom movement’, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

Agrarii Rossii is another RSMO, which has transformed into a political party. It was established in 2002 by political activists and former members of *Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii* who did not agree with the take-over by United Russia. Initially, *Agrarii Rossii* focused on the rural population, relied on donations from its leaders and other interested parties, had a socialist ideology and openly disagreed with the politics of United Russia. Therefore, its activities were limited by political, legal and economic constraints. In 2011, while this RSMO was being transformed into a political party, one of its leaders, Vasily Vershinin, commented on their chances to get into politics:

The chance is very small. I give it a three to five percent chance that we will be able to register as a party. They [United Russia] will not let us. These days we have parties that are not what people want. That is all about the current government: if they allow it or not...²⁴

The Putin government did not allow this leftist party to enter Russian political circles. *Agrarii Rossii* had to change its political orientation from socialist to pro-United Russia, and the slogan ‘Vote for Putin!’ was adopted during the 2012 presidential elections (*Agrarii Rossii* 2012). A few months later, *Agrarii Rossii* was renamed *Partiya Vozrozhdeniya Sela* (Party of Village Renaissance) and was officially registered as a political party in 2013. The party leader, Alexander Zaveryukha, repeatedly stressed the non-oppositionist origin of *Partiya Vozrozhdeniya Sela*: ‘it is not an opposition, [...] it is created in order to fulfil the orders of the

government and the president' (Anticompromat 2013). Although the party received the green light from the Putin government at the expense of its autonomy, it did not manage to attract enough regional supporters to participate in Russian Election Day 2013²⁵.

The political activities of many contemporary RSMOs have little in common with setting the 'new game', suggested by Henry (2006). Even if RSMOs were initially aimed at creating alternative political forces critical of the political regime, they often failed under the pressure of the Russian government. As a result, RSMOs remain apolitical, while those who enter the political circles become 'state marionettes' who unconditionally follow the instructions of the ruling party and do not represent a political force that can make actual changes.

3.3.4. Phantom movement organisations

Phantom movement organisations are to be understood here as non-transparent, occasionally (at most) active social organisations that pursue goals often different from the ones officially declared – in particular, pursuing the aims of umbrella organisations and/or the leaders' personal aims instead of defending the interests of their declared constituencies. These movements have similarities with Latin-American ambivalent organisations studied by Junge (2012) and Edelman (1999).

The appearance of 'shadow pseudopublics', described by Junge in his study of grassroots communities and NGOs in Brazil, can also characterise the Russian case. Junge (2012: 407) argued that 'the changing relationship between state, private sector, and civil society has contributed to the destabilisation of the narrative of active citizenship hegemony in earlier years, implanting a market-oriented, individualistic ethos in its place'. Junge's concept of 'shadow pseudopublics', i.e. civil organisations acting as fronts for a 'secretive, undemocratic, and non-transparent source of power' (407) can be applicable to some RSMOs in Russia.

The opaque nature of many Russian RSMOs leads in some cases to their use as an umbrella for 'tertiary' goals. The scandal around the land of the Borodinskoe Pole Museum-Reserve in the Borodino village, Mozhaysk district, received wide publicity in 2010–2012. The reason for this was not only that 11,000 hectares of historical land were partly illegally converted into construction sites²⁶, but also the fact that Valeriy Myaukin, head of the Public Council for the Conservation of Historical and

Cultural Heritage of the Mozhaisk district, was the one who organised the illegal construction. The director of the museum, Alexander Gorbunov, who has been fighting against the acquisition of the museum's lands, said the following regarding Myaukin's organisation:

the Public Council exists only on paper and its head, Myaukin, uses the council's networks and credentials to transform the Borodino lands into cottage construction²⁷.

Apart from leading this Public Council, Valeriy Myaukin is also an agro-businessman, chairman of the agricultural committee of the Mozhaysk district, and a member of United Russia. His contacts with power-holders and his access to information about the museum's landholdings made him a very strategically positioned person to pursue land grabbing on the territory of the Borodino museum.

Remarkably, when several criminal cases were launched against the illegal constructions on Borodino lands in 2013, Myaukin did not appear in any of them. The head of the local administration, Maya Skluyeva, was imprisoned for 5 years for machinations regarding the historical lands. According to Sergey Kuznets, the head of the social movement *Komitet po Naslediyu* (Committee on Heritage) in the Sergiev-Posad district,

The imprisonment of Skluyeva was just a farce. They needed to find the 'scapegoat' in order to calm down the society. Skluyeva was, of course, engaged in this fraud, but there were much larger fish...²⁸

Phantom movement organisations appear in an authoritarian regime as a by-product of political party formation. Russian politicians used to create RSMOs because they were not able to meet the conditions of the Ministry of Justice on the minimum number of members requested for political party registration (Kommersant 2011). Since 2012, the procedure of a party registration was officially simplified²⁹. However, as it was observed based on the example of *Agrarii Rossii*, the actual decision of allowing one or another group into the country's politics rests with the Putin government. Those RSMOs that do not want to become state marionettes, suffer the fate of becoming phantom movements.

Many phantom movement organisations were active RSMOs previously, but have reduced their activities for one reason or another. Their inactive (sleeping) mode might be similar to the languid existence of 'imagined organisations', analysed by Edelman (1999). Edelman de-

scribes examples in Costa Rica less critically than Junge with his concept of ‘shadow pseudopublics’; however, the idea of the ambiguity and ambivalence is similar. According to Edelman (1999: 5), imagined organisations exist primarily in the minds of their leadership and donors, and can ‘undergo metamorphoses that lead to their re-emergence and reinsertion in a vital and genuine political practice’. Selskaya Rossiya, which has recently suspended its activities, was mentioned in the previous subsection. Recently, its leaders have changed their priorities and joined other active organisations, while keeping Selskaya Rossiya registered in the State Registry, apparently as a backup option for the future, in case they will need to engage in rural politics again.

Phantom movement organisations might be subsidiaries of other RSMOs, which are used to provide evidence of the accomplishment of proclaimed goals. For example, AKKOR argued for the protecting the rights of agrarian women, and thus established *Dvizhenie Selskikh Zhenshin Rossii* (Movement of Rural Women of Russia). Using the financial sources of its parent organisation, the movement does not go further than participating in conferences, mainly organised by AKKOR.

The existence of various phantom movement organisations in Russia demonstrates that the current political regime does not allow sufficient space for civil and political activism. State control over civil society organisations generally leads to the stagnation of local initiatives, and the emergence of pseudo-organisations run by powerful elites.

3.4. Conclusions

This chapter has addressed the question of why rural social movement organisations (RSMOs) in Russia have been so weak. From narrow, liberal and statist views of state-society relations, it is tempting to see the (increasingly) repressive regime as the overarching determinant. However, on closer inspection, this cannot be the sole, overarching argument, for various reasons. If we look more closely at the periodisation of the emergence of social movements in Russia, we see that the early post-Soviet period, which was characterised by the democratisation of society and deep rural poverty, did not generate significant ‘open moments’ for political group actions, as some expected (Gourevitch 1986). Only a few, rather top-down, civil society organisations dealt with rural issues at that time. The continued dependence of rural dwellers on their subsidiary

household plots and the demographics of rural society were discussed in this chapter among the factors that muted the potential for collective political action.

Contrary to the calm of the early post-Soviet period, the emergence of RSMOs occurred in the last decade, when the political space for contestations became heavily constrained by the Putin government.

This chapter explains the recent burst of RSMOs, both phantom and real, by the growing insecurity that villagers confront regarding their land rights, along with booming land investment and land speculation by Russian elites. This argument is in line with the deprivation thesis. Moreover, the mobilisation of rural dwellers over a bread-and-butter issue such as defending their land (and property) rights is easier in Russia than generating support among the population for more abstract issues such as food sovereignty, food imports, environmental protection, organic farming or a peasant lifestyle, which have been the basis for mobilisation of rural dwellers in other countries (e.g. Evans 2012).

Second, the state's attention to agriculture has increased (although it is still at a low level). During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the countryside more or less disappeared from the political agenda, as reflected for instance by the disappearance of the Agrarian Party. Since Putin came to power, political attention has started to rise, spurred by the increased economic importance of the sector. With the growing economic importance of agriculture, the state has had an incentive to become more involved in influencing, and/or establishing, RSMOs as a way to control rural society.

Third, from an interest groups perspective, an important factor is that, with the recovery of agriculture and state subsidies and private money entering the sector, it has become more attractive for different actors to establish (or join) RSMOs in order to receive benefits from agricultural and rural development projects and emerging businesses. The appearance of numerous phantom movement organisations and politically oriented RSMOs is rather difficult to explain, whether starting from their constituency's needs or from the stated aims in the organisations' statutes. However, the rise of RSMOs becomes less paradoxical once one approaches it from the angle of the narrow personal interests of their leadership.

The next major question this paper dealt with was the character of RSMOs in Russia and how genuine they are. Are they state marionettes, counterfeits or genuine movements? This question of authenticity touches upon several dimensions: their constituency (the link with the population), the degree of their independence (the relation with the state), and actual performance (the execution of their statutory objectives or other, hidden goals).

In answering these questions, it was necessary to distinguish between various types of RSMOs. As revealed in this chapter, there is a wide diversity of RSMOs (government affiliates, professionalised movements, politically oriented organisations, phantom organisations and grassroots movements), with a rather limited cooperation between them. The grassroots RSMOs are characterised by the highest autonomy from the state and the closest ties with the rural population. The bottom-up emergence of these RSMOs, and the bread-and-butter issues they are dealing with, allow them to mobilise villagers for open collective protest (against land grabbing, as in the case of *Krestyanskiy Front*). At the same time, the relative independence from the state restricts political space for their activities, and limits their access to necessary resources (fund raising possibilities, participation in state rural development programmes, informational support). Therefore, these RSMOs have to search for alternative ways to mobilise resources. The issue of raising money for RSMOs' activities is very sensitive in a Russian context in which people tend to distrust any political action and assume hidden self-interests behind every form of collective action³⁰. The grassroots RSMOs often act within the legal framework. They innovatively use laws, policies and other officially promoted values to defend the rights of their members and attack disloyal authorities and elites. In this sense, there is some resemblance to the Chinese 'legitimate protest' as conceptualised by O'Brien (1996). However, the political opportunity structure in Russia is more restricted than in rural China. The understanding of protest in Russia and, more broadly, post-socialist and (semi-)authoritarian settings, would benefit from future research on how a protest in these contexts resembles and deviates from 'legitimate protest'³¹.

On the other end of the spectrum are the phantom movement organisations (the opposite of grassroots RSMOs in terms of activeness) and state-oriented RSMOs such as the politically oriented organisations,

professional organisations and, of course, government affiliates (opposite to grassroots RSMOs in terms of independence).

The existence of phantom movement organisations in Russia reflects the state policy of constraining the room for civil and political action. State control leads to stagnation or shadowing in many local initiatives, and the appearance of pseudo-organisations set up by powerful elites. According to Edelman (1999: 5), despite the ambiguity and ambivalence of imagined organisations, they might be characterised by ‘the deepest and most selfless commitments to fundamental change and the greatest capacities for envisioning creative solutions to profound development dilemmas’. So far, there is little evidence that phantom movements are able to generate such creative solutions.

It might be tempting to see grassroots RSMOs as the only genuine movements, but according to some Russian scholars (e.g. Vorobjev 2009), the more state-oriented organisations correspond more with the population’s ideas on civil society; they should, therefore, certainly be classified as part of civil society, and perhaps even be seen as the genuine movements in Russia. This study does not take sides here, but instead argue that there is no one genuine type of movement/organisation. Moreover, it is important not to discard movements with strong state embeddedness too quickly as co-opted. Recent studies on Russian movements (Abers 2000, Dagnino 2002, Henderson 2011) have argued that social movement organisations can be more efficient if they collaborate with the state, while keeping space to protest. Those RSMOs which are close to the state are able to lobby for the interests of their members and gain necessary resources for their activities (as in the case of AKKOR). However, this chapter did not reveal a significant struggle of the state-embedded organisations to represent the interests of rural dwellers outside the state-legalised spaces. Any attempts to oppose the state openly and directly have been suppressed until now (as in the case of *Agrarii Rossii*). This brings to mind the formation of ‘state mario-nettes’.

Perhaps more productive than applying such labels as ‘state mario-nettes’ would be to attempt to analyse why these state-embedded RSMOs have not engaged in social and political struggles³². With the emergence of the RSMOs being such a new phenomenon, and as this contribution is the first study on the topic, this chapter can only indicate a few factors that play a role and require further investigation. The first

reason seems to be the power (or rather the lack of it) of the rural population in society. During the past few years, protests in large cities have grown in number (Evans 2012). The government tries to channel such discontent into arenas it can control to some extent. To give such initiatives legitimacy and attractiveness, the regime has to provide some room for voicing alternative views. With the rural population generally less economically significant, less politically engaged and more supportive of the regime, the government would feel less of a need to give leeway to such organisations. Second, RSMOs are rather young (with the exception of AKKOR) and, therefore, they might yet find the room to voice discontent and strategies of operation.

Whatever the exact reason for the strong state-embeddedness and lack of independence of RSMOs, these organisations pay a high price for it. The state affiliates experience a rupture in the already-precarious relations with the rural population (most aptly illustrated by the case of AKKOR). The tendency of state affiliates to drift away from their constituency and the existence of phantom movement organisations are likely to reinforce beliefs among the population that social movement organisations cannot be trusted, and that the leaders only follow their own political or economic interests.

Thus, overall, the contemporary RSMOs in Russia face a wide range of challenges, among which are their limited political space, inter-movement fragmentation, often counterfeit or state-dependent character and, most crucially, a weak link with the rural population. Nevertheless, some of them constitute genuine movements, in a rural setting where less than a decade ago they had been absent.

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Notes

¹ See Perrie (1972) about rural mobilisation during the Russian Revolution, and Visser (2010) on the present-day mobilisation problems.

² This finding was based on data collected from secondary sources and through in-depth interviews with representatives of rural social movement organisations (RSMOs). In total, this research analysed 30 RSMOs and agrarian political parties. A short summary is presented in Table 3.1.

³ The political opportunity structure is defined here as the relative openness or closeness of the institutionalised political system, influenced by state-elite alignments and the state's capacity and propensity for repression (Tarrow 1998a, 1998b).

⁴ In 2010, there were 261, 700 private (family) farms, which cultivated 11.4% of the agricultural land and contributed 8% of the gross agricultural product in Russia, and there were 16 million rural households which cultivated 5% of agricultural land and produced 45% of the gross agricultural product. The rest (nearly half of the gross agricultural product) was produced by LFEs, which control more than half of all agricultural lands in Russia.

⁵ A longitudinal study conducted by O'Brien et al. (2011) indicated that the poverty rate was 49.5% in 1999, while the peak of rural poverty occurred in 1993 when 69% of the rural population had incomes lower than the subsistence level. The difference in numbers can be explained by various techniques used to define income and subsistence levels.

⁶ In the Soviet Union, stealing from collective farms was institutionalised. Humphrey (1983: 136) discovered that the Soviet villagers used the 'word theft to refer only to stealing from one another'. People presented pilfering at the farm as 'recovering things that were rightfully theirs, either because they'd worked on those things (harvested corn, pulled potatoes, or collected fruit) for inadequate pay or because they had once owned the land for growing these things and they were not getting enough to live on' (Humphrey 1983, 136). For an account of how foot-dragging and mediocre work was institutionalised at collective farms, see Nove (1973).

⁷ The Agrarian Party of Russia re-emerged in 2012. Its re-emergence was caused by initiatives of some of its former members who did not want to continue the consolidation with United Russia. The newly emerged party refused the former left-wing ideology of agrarian socialism and moved to centrism. Currently, the party represents the interests of the agrarian elite and supports large-scale strong agricultural producers. We do not study this organisation in detail as it does not represent the interests of the rural population.

⁸ Foreigners are not officially allowed to acquire agricultural land in Russia. However, they do so by means of their Russian subsidiaries, which are considered Russian domestic companies under the Russian law.

⁹ Land grabbing is the large-scale acquisition of land or land-related rights and resources by a corporate, non-profit or public buyer for the purposes of resource extraction geared towards external consumers (whether external means simply off-site or foreign) (White et al. 2012). For more about land grabbing in Russia see Visser and Spoor (2011). The latter shows that land acquisitions take many forms, from deals within the framework of the law, to clearly illegal deals. See Visser (2013) for a critical examination of the Russian 'land rush' which markedly slowed down from 2009 onwards.

¹⁰ Many farm enterprises in suburban areas (especially those located close to Moscow and St. Petersburg) were artificially bankrupted and the status of their lands was transformed into land for construction purposes. Investment in land for (sub) urban development brings quick and high profits.

¹¹ For example, The Federal Programs: Social Development of the Village Until 2012, 2013, 2014; Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, 2014–2017 and for the Period Until 2020; The National Priority Project for the Development of an Agro-Industrial Complex (launched in 2006).

¹² Interview conducted in March 2011, in Moscow.

¹³ In 2010, a connection between the Russian interregional social movement *Krestyanskiy Front* and the international peasant movement *La Via Campesina* was forged by the researchers from ISS in order to generate a knowledge transfer and facilitate the internationalisation of *Krestyanskiy Front*, which would give the organisation more power in fighting land grabbing and protection of peasants' rights in Russia. However, the leadership of *Krestyanskiy Front* showed no interest in collaboration with the international movement, explaining this through the ongoing depeasantisation of the Russian countryside and the lack of rural dwellers who would share peasant values and a desire for food sovereignty and land ownership (see Chapter 6 on quiet food sovereignty in Russia). However, the disconnection from international movements is not only caused by the absence of discourse among the Russian rural population or the decisions of the RSMOs' leadership. The state prevents the internationalisation of social movement organisations. Furthermore, the Russian state is currently actively blocking some of the already internationalised social movements, such as RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North). In November 2012, Russia's Ministry of Justice ordered the closure of RAIPON, because of an 'alleged lack of correspondence between the association's statutes and federal law'. RAIPON was closed for six months to adjust its statutes, and in March 2013 was revitalised (Staalesen 2013).

¹⁴ Interview conducted in village Deulino, Sergiev Posad district, Moscow region, April 2013

¹⁵ Interview conducted in March 2011, in Moscow.

¹⁶ Interview conducted in October 2010, in Moscow.

¹⁷ Interview conducted in March 2011, in Dmitrov, Moscow region.

¹⁸ Interview conducted in March 2011, in Odintsovo, Moscow region.

¹⁹ Interview conducted in March 2011, in Moscow

²⁰ Interview conducted in March 2011, via email

²¹ Interview with Larionov, newspaper Klyuch, March 2008.

²² An interest group is virtually any voluntary association that seeks to publicly promote and create advantages for its cause. For more information about the differences between social movements and interest groups, see Meyer and Imig (1993).

²³ Interview conducted in March 2011, in Odintsovo, Moscow region.

²⁴ Interview conducted in March 2011, in Moscow.

²⁵ At Russian Election Day, which took place on 8 September 2013, *Partiya Vozrozhdeniya Sela* was not allowed to participate in regional parliament elections by the Central Election Commission, due to the Party's lack of registered regional offices.

²⁶ During the 2010–2012 period, an illegal development was underway at the Borodino museum reserve, where the Russian army fought Napoleon's troops in 1812. This area is considered a national heritage by Russians. The boundaries of the Borodino reserve have never been officially defined or registered due to lack of funds. This has also enabled corrupt officials to manipulate this 'no man's land'. Nearly 100 private houses were built on the Field of Borodino, a federal-level historical reserve, despite the challenge posed by law enforcement bodies and cultural protection agencies (Visser and Mamonova 2011). In 2013, the court considered two criminal cases against the former head of the Borodino rural settlement, Maya Sklyueva. According to investigators, Sklyueva had taken advantage of her official position and, from January 2007 to March 2008, used forged documents to acquire land in the field of Borodino from the towns of Kosmovo and Old Village. Sklyueva is condemned to five years and six months' imprisonment. The houses will be demolished.

²⁷ Interview conducted March 2011, in Borodino, Mozhaysk district, Moscow region.

²⁸ Interview conducted April 2013, in Sergiev Posad, Moscow region.

²⁹ Federal Law No. 28-FZ 'On Amending the Federal Law On Political Parties', which was adopted in April 2012, has significantly reduced the list of requirements for establishing a political party and simplified the procedure of its registration.

³⁰ At the same time, taking into account the political indifference of rural dwellers, providing individual economic rewards to staff and participants is perhaps the only method to involve people in social movement activity.

³¹ In the most repressive regimes, resistance is largely limited to the 'weapons of the weak', according to O'Brien (1996: 47). This chapter does not want to suggest that this is the case in Russia. There are various important differences from rural protests in China, such as the lack of a clear overarching state ideology that would enable framing the protests in legitimate terms, and the achievement of gradual, but fundamental changes in the system.

³² It should be noted that 'state marionettes' are not just present in authoritarian regimes and/or a sign of weak civil society. In the Netherlands, for instance, the country's communist party was established during the Cold War by the Dutch secret service to enable the monitoring and control of communist forces in society.

4

Naive Monarchism and Rural Resistance in Contemporary Russia

Abstract

This chapter applies the concept of ‘naive monarchism’ (i.e. the traditional peasant expressions of reverence for the tsar as their benefactor) to study contemporary rural politics in authoritarian Russia. While Russia is not a monarchy, and its rural dwellers are not traditional illiterate peasants, the veneration of its leader manifests itself in many rural grievances. Three types of rural politics, which have traits of naive monarchism, are analysed: written petitions to the president, rural pickets and delegations to the Kremlin, and geographical renaming in honour of Putin. Grievances, voiced in this way, are rarely subjects of repression from above, as they reinforce presidential authority and the existing order. This raises the question of whether rural dwellers faithfully believe in a benevolent president or intentionally exploit their subordinate position and Putin’s image as the present-day tsar. Whether sincere or strategic, these rural politics aim to enforce the existing state commitments. Although they are unable to challenge the status quo, they provide rural dwellers with a means to remedy occasional local injustices.

4.1. Introduction

In the summer of 2008, peasant delegates from 17 Russian regions left their villages and travelled to Moscow to participate in the ‘*Krestyanskiy Khod* (Peasant Walk) *for the salvation of the Russian village*’. The aim of the *khod* was to inform the president about the woes of the Russian countryside. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian villages have been experiencing hard times. The land reform hardly benefited the rural population: the land of former collective and state enterprises was grabbed by oligarchs and agrohholdings, collective agriculture failed, and

the social infrastructure – formally maintained by the collectives – crumbled (Visser and Spoor 2011). Being unable to adjust to the new capitalist system, the majority of the rural population fell into poverty and experienced social exclusion and high unemployment. Despite various state programmes of socio-economic development in rural areas, villagers have not experienced significant improvements. Large-scale agriculture has flourished, whereas the Russian village has been decaying. The *khodoki* (khod participants) intended to bring these and many other issues before the president, whom they dubbed the ‘keeper of the villagers’ hopes for a better life.’ People believed that the president could resolve their problems, if only he knew about them: ‘President, you are misinformed,’ the khodoki wrote on their posters. However, the dialogue between the peasants and the country leader never took place, as the president (then, Dmitry Medvedev) did not come to his Kremlin office on the day of the Kretyanskiy Khod.

The peasant behaviour of expressing reverence and devotion to the sovereign – whom they identified as their benefactor and intercessor, whereas all failures were ascribed to officials, who deliberately misrepresented and misinformed the country’s leader – is known in history as popular or naive monarchism (see Luebke 1997 on naive monarchism in early modern Germany; Sandall 2012 on sixteenth-century England; Field 1976, Perrie 1995 on tsarist Russia). Some scholars interpreted naive monarchism as the naive belief of illiterate peasants in the supreme power (Lenin 1960, Luebke 1997). Others considered it a political weapon of powerless groups, who framed their protests within the official hegemony to lessen the risks of insubordination (Field 1976, Scott 1990). Naive monarchism has declined with the emancipation of the peasantry and the democratisation of society in many countries; however, it seems to remain present in rural Russia today.

This chapter applies the concept of ‘naive monarchism’ to the study of present-day rural politics in Russia. This country is not a monarchy, and rural dwellers are no longer traditional illiterate peasants; however, the veneration of the country’s leader manifests itself in many rural grievances. Rural Russians write petitions to the Kremlin, hold pickets, or organise khody to persuade the president to intervene on their behalf in conflicts with local power-holders.

Vladimir Putin’s authoritarian regime provides limited opportunities for people to express their discontent in an open political manner (Hen-

derson 2011). On one hand, this suggests that peasant resistance in the name of the president is a strategic means for powerless groups to address their grievances while avoiding severe punishment – which Scott (1990:100) referred to as a ‘not-so-naive use of naive monarchism’. On the other hand, Putin’s patrimonial autocratic style of governing, with direct presidential intervention in a wide range of internal affairs, as well as his domestic popularity (89% of Russians supported Putin in 2015¹), might contribute to the people’s unfeigned belief in the president’s superior ability to solve their problems.

This chapter analyses three types of rural politics that have traits of naive monarchism: written petitions to the president (and some other top-governmental authorities²), rural pickets and khody to the Kremlin, and geographical renaming in honour of Putin. These actions are related to conflicts with local authorities or business elites, and concern the withdrawal of services (schools, hospitals, transport services, and infrastructure maintenance) and of access to land resources.

Although not all rural politics in the name of the president can be conceptualised as a conscious strategy of defiance, many activists deliberately exploit the gap between the rights promised by the president and the rights delivered by local authorities, demanding that the latter fulfil their obligations. This research demonstrates that rural activists often use Putin’s name to attract public attention and threaten local power-holders with possible presidential interventions, thereby holding them accountable. Voiced in this way, grievances are rarely subject to repression from above, as they reinforce presidential authority and the existing power structure. This chapter argues that naive monarchist politics are not able to challenge the status quo; however, they provide rural dwellers with a means to remedy occasional local injustices.

The topic of ‘naive monarchism’ in rural Russia arose in 2014 through my ethnographic research, which focused on rural resistance strategies in the Stavropol Krai (Southern Russia). Aside from a number of in-depth interviews with Stavropol rural residents, the research for this chapter included qualitative data from the longitudinal study of the rural social movement *Krestyanskiy Front* (Peasant Front) from 2010 to 2013. Furthermore, a qualitative thematic text analysis was conducted on a sample of 35 petitions written by rural dwellers to the Russian president (and some other top governmental authorities). These petitions were derived from the online petition platform www.change.org³ and fieldwork in the

Moscow region in 2013 and the Stavropol Krai in 2014. This analysis also includes an extensive set of secondary data obtained from internet publications, academic literature, and Russian statistical services.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section (Section 4.2) introduces the reader to the theory of naive monarchism in tsarist Russia, and discusses its core elements. It is followed by an argument that naive monarchism did not completely fade after the tsardom's collapse, but continued to be used in state-society relations (Section 4.3). After a short discussion of how Soviet peasants employed the regime ideology in their protests, Section 4.4 addresses the contemporary Putin regime and the power relations in the countryside. An analysis of various present-day rural practices with naive monarchist appearances is presented in Section 4.5. Finally, Section 4.6 discusses whether the detected phenomenon is an expression of true belief or a resistance strategy of subaltern groups.

4.2. The theory of naive monarchism

Naive monarchism derives from the contractual nature of the rule, which implied that domination was based on reciprocal obligations of the ruler with his/her people: in return for obedience and support, the ruler had to provide protection and guardianship (Luebke 1997). Although it was identified as a common belief in many monarchies (see Sandall 2012 on sixteenth-century England; Luebke 1997 on early modern Germany), naive monarchism became primarily associated with the Russian peasantry during the tsardom (Perrie 1995). Russian studies employ different terminologies and interpretations of this phenomenon. Lenin (1960: 216) called it 'monarchist illusions' to stress the utopian character of peasant beliefs. He argued that peasants 'naively and blindly believed in the *tsar-batushka*' (tsar-affectionate father/deliverer) and 'were only able to petition and pray'. Perrie (1995) called this behaviour 'popular monarchism' to emphasise the belief of the ordinary people (*narod*) in the tsar's benevolence. Field (1976) used the term 'naive monarchism' to problematize the notion of 'naivety' in this behaviour. In his analysis of sixteenth and eighteenth-century peasant revolts, Field argued, that, although many peasants ardently believed in the idea of a benevolent tsar, some of them intentionally used this myth in their protests. By demonstrating their "naivety" and "misguided" loyalty to the tsar, peasants obtained significant immunity from prosecution and managed to defy noblemen and reduce tributes and taxes.

Field distinguished two elements of naive monarchism: the ‘myth of the tsar-deliverer’ (a tsar-protector of deprived peasants) and the ‘myth of the loyal peasants’ (a submissive, tsar-loving *narod*). Peasants employed these myths in their grievances: they wrote petitions and organised *kbodiy* to complain to the tsar about ‘disloyal’ noblemen, who, in peasant (public) opinions, deliberately misrepresented the tsar’s will. Peasants asked for the tsar’s patronage and intervention. Although these peasant practices were formally outlawed, they were often encouraged by the tsar, as peasant appeals reinforced the tsar’s authority, diffused rural rebellious energy, and provided the tsar with alternative information about rural conditions (Palat 2001).

There are debates on whether the belief in the ideal tsar-peasants relations was a product of peasant cultural practices, or inculcated by the tsar (or pretenders to the throne) in order to guarantee the existing order or manipulate rural unrest in own interests (Perrie 1995, Scott 2012). Field (1976) argued that naive monarchism – either the peasants’ sincere belief or their strategic use of the myth for certain ends – was a result of autocratic power, which imposed a sense of peasant inferiority and subordination, and prohibited the peasants from manifesting their self-will and engaging in open politics. The myth of the tsar-deliverer was personally maintained by the tsar for the sake of social order. Symbolic acts such as ‘standing godfather to the child of a poor peasant’ or public instances of ‘humiliating or executing arrogant nobles and officials’ were practised by many Russian tsars, including Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great (Field 1976:5). The Orthodox Church also reinforced peasant obedience to power by portraying the tsar as God’s representative, whereas rebels were associated with evil forces (Dunning 2010).

While naive monarchism secured the tsar’s authority and existing order, it was also a catalyst for peasant rebellion. In her analysis of peasant wars in the Times of Troubles at the end of the sixteenth century, Perrie (1995) argued that numerous pseudo-Dmitrys (who claimed to be the *tsetsarevich* (crown prince) Dmitry) used the myth of the ‘true-tsar’ in order to mobilise peasants for a revolt against the ruling ‘false-tsar’. Similarly, peasants supported the ‘true-tsar’ myth during Pugachev’s rebellion in the 1770s, whose leader claimed to be the legitimate tsar Petr III (Field 1976).

Scott (2012: 49), however, argued that naive monarchism ‘was anything but a belief imposed by elites and the church in service of social

order, it was rather a cultural property of the peasantry as a class.' He asserted that the myth of the tsar-deliverer was a peasant vision of justice, and the means to realise this vision. He noted a remarkable 'plasticity of the myth in the hands of its peasant adherents' (Scott 1990: 97). The myth was used to resist local oppressors, who violated 'the good tsar's will' by imposing heavy taxes, conscription, and so on. When petitions failed and oppression continued, peasants used this myth to claim that a 'false-tsar' was on the throne, and justified their rebellions as loyalty to the monarchy. The myth of the tsar-deliverer was able to metamorphose into proactive resistance. Scott illustrates this by referring to the Ukrainian peasant rebellion of 1902 when peasants claimed that the tsar gave them permission to take grain from their landlords.

This not-so-naive interpretation of naive monarchism was used by Scott to analyse power relations in contemporary nondemocratic societies. He argued that subordinate groups use existing hegemony to their advantage: they make their appeals within the official discourse of deference, which lessens the possible risks of their insubordination. Subordinates purposely reinforce the hegemonic appearances in their grievances, which lead to the emergence of public (loyal) transcripts in dialogues with power, and hidden (disloyal) transcripts 'spoken behind the back of the dominant' (Scott 1990: xii).

O'Brien (1996) analysed how disaffected peasants apply official state ideology, rhetoric, and commitments in their grievances to interrogate power-holders for violating the rules by which they justify their authority, and to exploit divisions within officialdom (so-called 'rightful resistance' in China). Rightful resisters do not appeal to imaginary patronages, but use the legislative system in their dissents. O'Brien (2002: 54) argued that rightful resistance and naive monarchism are types of 'boundary-spanning contention,' which operate on the border between conventional civil participation and political resistance. These politics are difficult to dismiss, as they appear as nothing more than a 'scrupulous enforcement of existing commitments;' however, they can be 'an engine of change' (O'Brien 2002: 53).

Field (1976) asserted that naive monarchism declined on the eve of the Russian Revolution because the regime could no longer draw on it (the myth of the tsar-deliverer was false: officials - peasant enemies - were just executors of the tsar's orders). According to Lenin (1960), the Bloody Sunday of 1905, when the tsar's soldiers shot down participants

of a peasant khod, completely disillusioned the peasantry regarding the tsar's benevolence. However, peasants did not join the proletarians in their uprising against the tsardom, as Marxists had anticipated. The revolutions of 1905 and 1917 demonstrated that peasant revolts started independently and followed their own dynamic: contrary to the agitation of proletarians, peasants fought for land, not against the tsar (Shanin 1986).

4.3. Elements of naive monarchism in Soviet state-society relation

After the fall of imperial Russia in 1917, the new Soviet government aimed to create a class of rural workers by eradicating peasant features such as land property and family labour. The peasants' collectivisation into kolkhozy and sovkhozy (collective and state farms) in the 1930s was not only aimed at generating the resources needed for the country's industrialisation, but also at eliminating the 'naive' 'tsar-loving' peasantry as a class. However, the elements of naive monarchism continued to be used in state-society relations.

Although the Soviet state presented itself as a proletarian 'people's governance' – contrary to the overthrown monarchy – in practice, one autocracy was replaced by another (Hedlund 2006). Whereas the tsardom was harshly disparaged in the early Soviet period, Stalin's government revitalised the image of a 'stern but fair tsar' to promote a unified sense of Russian identity (as the proletarian ideology failed to stimulate), support the authoritarian regime, and justify the state's internal terror and external aggression (see Perrie's 2001 study on the cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia). The 'myth of the tsar-deliverer' was transformed into the cult of the immortal 'clever Lenin' and the cult of Stalin as the 'father of all peoples' (Bittner 2003). As during the tsardom, peasant petitions and khody were encouraged and used by the government to demonstrate the benevolence of the Soviet power 'by personally intervening on behalf of troubled citizens' and were a 'form of controlling bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption' (Bittner 2003: 282).

Soviet peasants frequently applied naive monarchist principles in articulating their grievances. Whereas open disagreement with governmental actions was repressed, the peasants' allegiance to the ruler and dedication to the official ideology in their grievances provided a means to deal with local bureaucrats' abuse of power. Fitzpatrick (1996: 260) argued

that peasants used the regime's 'sensitivity on the question of class enemies' to punish their oppressors by just labelling them '*kulaks*'. Written petitions to the country leader were complemented by letters to local newspapers, which appealed to 'higher authorities to intervene and correct the misbehaviour of lower authorities' (86). Despite their loyalty and socialist ideology, these appeals can be interpreted as disguised anti-regime rebellion. Alexopoulos (2003) discovered sarcasm and irony in peasant letters to Stalin: petitioners criticised the implementation of the orders and, indirectly, the regime itself.

In the later Soviet period, petitioning remained a rural practice, but became less subservient with the weakening of the repressive authoritarian regime. Workers' letters to Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Kosygin were more direct and critical, but contained the same elements: beliefs in an impartial ruler and complaints about unlawful local officials (Workers Force 2012). Gorbachev's memoir (2014) contains a number of such letters, which feature complaints, but also advice, empathy, and support. The policies of '*perestroika*' and '*glasnost*' provided subordinate groups with new tools to defend their interests, and personal petitions to the ruler resembled a rather informal state-society dialogue.

4.4. Contemporary rural Russia and the 'myth of the tsar-deliverer'

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the new Russian government initiated a course of reforms aimed at the de-socialisation of the country's economy and the democratisation of society. In the countryside, land reform was initiated to distribute the kolkhozy's and sovkhozy's land to rural dwellers by means of land share certificates for private farming development. However, due to the absence of financial resources and informational support, fragmented and often non-functioning markets, and the rural dwellers' unwillingness to leave the collectives, the majority of land recipients did not become farmers (Pallo and Nefedova 2007). The restructured kolkhozy and sovkhozy experienced severe financial difficulties in free market conditions. This led to increased rural unemployment and poverty. The peak of rural poverty was in 1999, when 73.1% of villagers had incomes lower than the subsistence level (Independent Institute for Social Policy 2002). Many rural residents, especially young people, 'voted with their feet' and moved to cities. Those who remained in the villages became highly dependent on

subsistence farming on their household plots, and experienced social exclusion and poverty.

However, the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, was not approached by rural dwellers as their intercessor and benefactor. This can be explained by Yeltsin's remarkable unpopularity: his approval rating was only 2% in 1999 (Moroz 2012). Yeltsin was viewed as someone who caused chaos rather than imposing order, and people, therefore, did not pin their hopes on him. The letter-writing, however, remain in use in a dialogue with power-holders. Nikulin (1999) analysed peasant letters from the Kuban region to the liberal political party leader Grigory Yavlinsky, who initiated this correspondence to engage directly with rural dwellers in his political campaign. In their letters, people complained about local injustices, blamed Yeltsin for rural scourges, and asked Yavlinsky for patronage (Nikulin 1999).

Putin's rise to power in 2000 changed the situation. The second Russian president reversed unpopular democratic transformations initiated by his predecessor. His 'guided democracy' is characterised by state control over political, economic, social, and civil institutions. The democracy is now used rather 'for decoration, than direction:' election results are predefined, the mass media is state-controlled, and court decisions follow the interests of the authorities (Dawisha 2014: 8). Anderson (2007) argued that Putin's regime is a restoration of the Soviet patrimonial authoritarian regime, albeit with weaker ideological foundations. This almost absolute presidential power relies on a small group of oligarchs, who hold key positions in state and business institutions. Putin's 'superpresidency' is characterised by direct presidential intervention in any political process and decision-making – a so-called '*ruchnoye upravleniye*' (hands-on state governance) which is often portrayed by the state-controlled mass media as the only efficient way to rule the country (Fortescue 2015).

Putin's policy in rural areas is aimed at developing large-scale agribusiness. Land sales were legalised in 2002, which brought oligarchic capital to the countryside. Russian oligarchs and foreign investors bought (or rented) large tracts of farmland, which led to the emergence and spread of large farm enterprises (LFEs) in agricultural regions (currently, 83.2% of farmland is controlled by LFEs) and the development of a real-estate business on former farmlands in suburban areas (Mamonova and Sutherland 2015). Land accumulation was often carried out in fraudulent

schemes that deprived the local population of land and property rights, which allowed Visser and Spoor (2011) to characterise this process as an instance of land grabbing.

Although Putin's rule is characterised by a general reduction of poverty, rural areas continue to experience serious socio-economic problems. Ineffective small-scale farm development programmes and LFEs' control over productive resources prevent the development of rural entrepreneurship. LFEs invested a great deal in the development of large-scale industrial agriculture, while needing significantly less labour than former *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*. Kalugina and Fadeeva (2009) estimated the real rural unemployment at 55% in 2009. The elimination of collective agriculture led to the decline of the social infrastructure, which had been formally maintained by the collectives. During the last 16 years, 34% of rural schools have been closed down, with the existing schools being overpopulated and in need of major overhauls; the majority of medical facilities require renovation and refurbishment, and have a 35% shortage of medical personnel; the existing road system is in a very bad state, leading to the isolation of many settlements from the outside world; 26% of rural housing is dilapidated, and only 9% has central heating (Kiseleva et al. 2013).

The fieldwork in the Stavropol Krai revealed that rural dwellers blame 'the government' for their households' woes and for the rural areas' problems. In their discourses about wrongdoings (such as the bankruptcy of *kolkhozy/sovkhozy*, the destruction of village infrastructure, land grabbing, etc.), people use the word 'they' to allude to the state-elite coalition. At the same time, president Putin is often seen in a positive light. The statement of Natalia, an old woman living in the *Rashevatskaya* village, is illustrative:

I support Putin. He is a good man. He increased our pensions... He makes it better for people, but you cannot be a warrior when you are alone in the field. He cannot cover everything. The local authorities are those who do things wrongly.⁴

Natalia's statement expresses the peasant belief in the benevolent president, whereas the local authorities are perceived as obstacles between Putin and his people, which explains why the 'noble' presidential orders do not have the desired outcome in rural areas. Nothing captures this position better than the old tsarist peasant adage: 'the tsar wants it,

but the *boyars* (noblemen) resist.’ How did the myth of the tsar-deliverer re-emerge in contemporary rural Russia? The explanation can be found in the existing power relations and the state’s neo-tsarist policy.

Rosow and George (2014:111) argued that ‘the old feudal order still exists in the countryside. It is just put on a democratic coat.’ Rural dwellers remain in the bottom ranks of Russian society and have hardly any economic or political power to influence the status quo. Rural socio-economic marginalisation has exacerbated the sense of inferiority and subordination among the rural poor. The fieldwork in the Stavropol Krai revealed that villagers often characterise themselves as ‘slaves’ or ‘hodges’ (the lowest social class of farm labourers) to stress their living conditions and powerlessness. This feeling of subjection is reinforced by the rural population’s substantial dependence on governmental support in the forms of social transfers and pensions, which leads to their obedience to state power (Ruzhkov 2012). Furthermore, according to MacKay’s (2002) study on utopia in slave and serf narratives, the belief in the tsar-deliverer gives the peasants a hope for future positive changes in their native place – changes, which the tsar would implement as soon he learned about the local problems. Seemingly, Putin became this tsar for many rural Russians. This is manifested in the interview with Sergei, who participated in an informal meeting with Putin during the president’s election campaign in February 2012:

We are khodoki appealing to the tsar. I know you are supposed to call Putin the President or Prime Minister these days. But to us, he is the Tsar. Not much has changed.⁵

Putin’s regime ably reconstructs the ‘myth of tsar-deliverer’ to justify its autocracy and to guarantee the existing order. Recent studies analyse Putin’s personality cult (Montefiore 2007; Canciani 2012). The president uses the traditional methods of Russian tsars to show his benevolence to ordinary people. He often acts as an intercessor for the deprived, demonstrating his will to intervene and solve local injustices. Fortescue (2009) describes how Putin visited the Pikalevo settlement after receiving a petition from its inhabitants about the greedy and anti-social behaviour of local businessmen. Putin arrived, reprimanded the businessmen, and re-established order. However, Fortescue suggests that Putin’s intervention was nothing more than a PR stunt and brought only short-term relief to the Pikalevo residents. Another tsar-like behaviour of Putin’s is

demonstrating his ‘closeness’ to the people – for example, when allowing ‘himself to be photographed shirtless on a fishing trip, he could have been channelling Peter the Great, who projected a virile style by posing as an ordinary sailor’ (Montefiore 2007). Furthermore, the annual question-and-answer session ‘Hotline with President of Russia Vladimir Putin’ demonstrates Putin’s will to interact personally with the Russian people and to solve their personal grievances.

The emergence of neo-tsarism in the Putin era is discussed by many Western scholars (Corum 2010, Canciani 2012). This emergence is related not only to a paternalistic autocracy, but also to the revitalisation of the image of the tsar. Similarly to Stalin’s rehabilitation of Ivan the Terrible’s figure in the Soviet period, Putin resorts to the tsarist legacy to develop patriotism and a unified sense of Russian identity, and to create positive historical parallels to justify the state’s policy toward internal opposition and external enemies. The propaganda of the tsardom is observed in such religious undertakings as the canonisation of the last tsarist family in 2000, and the construction of a cathedral in the centre of Moscow devoted to this family’s martyrdom in 2017. Moreover, the government is discussing a possible return of the heirs of the Romanov royal dynasty to Russia to help the country ‘return its global influence’ and restore ‘traditional Russian culture and pride’ (Perring 2015).

The Orthodox Church gained an important role in constructing a unifying ideology and loyalty to the country’s authoritarian leadership. Ruzhkov (2012) argued that the church replaced the Communist Party in the control and moral education of society: civil disobedience is portrayed as blasphemy or even a crime. Although loyalty and submission to the authoritarian power are imposed on all Russians, it is accepted differently by the rural and urban populations. Ruzhkov indicated that there are two Russias: the first one consists of a small progressive group of ‘modernist and European’ citizens of large cities, and the second – prevalent – consists of conservative residents of outlying provinces, small towns, and villages. Putin ‘aligned himself with the conservative Russia and initiated a war against the values important to the progressive Russia: freedom of speech and expression, the right of assembly, etc.’ Political opposition is repressed. Whereas civil disobedience occasionally manifests itself in large cities, rural areas and the periphery seem to be overwhelmingly loyal to Putin and his regime.

4.5. Application of naive monarchism in rural resistance

Although political protest is virtually undetected in the countryside, there are many instances of parochial grievances and contention. Many of them share the features of naive monarchism. This section analyses: (1) written petitions to the president (or top authorities), (2) group pickets and peasant khody, and (3) geographical renaming in honour of Putin.

4.5.1. Written petitions

This part of the analysis is based on 35 rural written petitions to the Russian president (or top state authorities) that were obtained from two sources: the online petition platform www.change.org (28 petitions) and fieldwork in the Moscow region in 2013 (7 petitions). The platform change.org provides a database of several thousand petitions, initiated by urban and rural Russians. For this research, 124 written petitions were selected using the words ‘villagers’ and ‘rural’ as search criteria. These petitions were further examined on urban/rural origin and addressee: only the petitions that were related to rural problems, written by rural dwellers, and addressed to top governmental authorities were selected. Twenty-eight petitions met these requirements, of which 26 were written by groups of rural dwellers, and 2 individually on behalf of rural communities. These petitions represent cases from different Russian regions, were initiated during 2008-2014, and were addressed to Putin (22 cases) and heads of republican and regional governments (6 cases). The petitions obtained from the fieldwork were group petitions, written to Putin (4 cases) and the Moscow regional governor (3 cases). The petition texts were entered in Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. The key themes were identified for every petition and clustered into seven categories based on the context of their claims and problem statements. The data-driven structural coding distinguished a number of codes, which occurred frequently across the themes. Table 4.1 presents the key themes and codes relevant to the purpose of this study, and their frequencies and co-occurrence.

Table 4.1
Key themes of the analysed petition texts

| <i>Key themes</i> | <i>Number of petitions (theme frequencies)</i> | <i>Codes</i> | | | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| | | <i>Alignment with state policy</i> | <i>Reference to constitutional rights and state laws</i> | <i>Inaction of local authorities</i> | <i>Reference to elections</i> | <i>Warning of resistance, bad times</i> | <i>Irony, sarcasm</i> |
| Need for renovation/construction of hospitals, schools, sports and cultural centres, churches | 12 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Bankruptcy of kolkhoz, misuse of kolkhoz's land | 8 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Absence of or irregular public transport connections, poor road condition | 7 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Illegal deforestation and waste dumping, and related ecological consequences | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | | 3 | |
| Mass slaughtering of pigs due to swine flu ⁶ | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Arbitrariness of local authorities | 1 | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Water supply problem | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the output of the codebook, generated by Atlas.ti for the analysis of rural petition letters.

Compared to urban petitions (which were excluded during the selection process), rural petitions contain more adages, allegories, and emotional expressions. Appeals to the president as 'the one who is capable of solving the problem,' in contrast to the local authorities who only 'feed [the people] with breakfasts' (a folk saying, which refers to unfulfilled promises of future actions), demonstrate the 'myth of the tsar-deliverer'. The key themes of the analysed petitions are related to local problems, such as: the absence of a rural school, a hospital closure, water shortages, the cancellation of train/bus connections between two villages, or the

unlawful acquisition of a kolkhoz. Some of them ask for money to renovate a rural church or sports/cultural facilities.

The petition reproduced below (hereafter, the example petition) is written by villagers from the Novgorod region about the cancellation of the train connection between several rural settlements. The recent state policy of fiscal decentralisation led to the reallocation of transport expenditures from federal to regional budgets, which in turn led to the underfunding and consequent cancellation of nearly 600 provincial train connections since 2012. These changes primarily affected rural residents, whose mobility depends on these trains. A brief analysis of this petition and an abstraction of common features with other petitions from the sample follow.

Respected Vladimir Vladimirovich,

We, residents of villages: Khvoynaya, Pestovo, Lubutino appeal to you. The reason is that from January 2014 all local trains between stations Khvoynaya–Budogosch and Khvoynaya–Pestovo are cancelled. The RZhD [Russian Railways] is boasting about new ‘Sapsan’ and ‘Allegro’ trains, while we, provincial residents, are cut off from the outside world. And this is happening on the backdrop of the programmes... your programmes, which are aimed at rural and agricultural development, the improvement of rural living conditions, the attraction of the youth to the countryside.

Our local and regional authorities did not inform us about their plans until the very last moment. Obviously, they were afraid of our appeals to higher authorities against these changes. The governor of the Novgorod region, S.G.Minin, is not concerned about trains on the edge of the region. Of course, he has a private car with a driver, and all roads are blocked every time he rushes to his office to perform his duties. But no one wants to think about us. [...]

To tell you that we are worried about what is going on with the railways, and what could happen with us due to this reformation, is to tell nothing. The wave of public anger and indignation grows every day.

They [regional authorities] say that we will not use these trains after the ticket price increases, and they do not intend to cover the losses because of us. The officials elected by us do not have money for us, taxpayers, the electorate. They remember us only during elections. [...]

Respected Vladimir Vladimirovich, we ask you to help our governor S.G.Minin with money (or to tell him where to get this money), as he is

unable to make ends meet in order to pay for the train connection between our villages. And to help the RZhD director V.I.Yakunin to understand that there are some important things in this life which are not-for-profit.

Sincerely grateful, villagers of Khvoynaya, Pestovo, Lubutino (submitted 28 December 2013, signed by 541)⁷

As many others, this example petition is written within the official discourse of deference. Petitioners describe the failure of local authorities to fulfil their official responsibilities and naively (or not) ask the president to remedy the situation.

Two purposes of such appeals can be distinguished. The first is a plea for help from the president; the second is a threat to local power-holders. Although Putin's interventions do not often occur, their probability is likely to keep local authorities accountable. For this reason, villagers send the original letters to the presidential office and copies to their oppressors. The example petition was forwarded to the president, the governor of the Novgorod region, and the RZhD director. Petitioners do not directly challenge the authority of local authorities, but accuse them of ignorance and inactivity.

The hidden critique of the existing power relations manifests itself through satire. Petition-writers often resort to irony and sarcasm in descriptions of local power-holders. The example petition ridicules the governor: 'he rushes to his office to perform his duties,' and it assaults regional authorities for neglecting local interests: 'they remember us only during elections.' The election theme appears in many petitions in the sample. Thus, petitioners from the Filino village (Ivanovo region) use Putin's elections as an argument in their request to build a rural school: 'we voted for you because we believed in you!' In this way, rural dwellers remind the country leadership about its dependency on the electorate.

Contrary to common assumptions about peasants' juridical illiteracy, the present-day petitioners are familiar with their rights⁸, and refer to state laws and regulations to support their complaints. "This territory falls within the scope of the federal law 'On specially protected areas'" - wrote villagers of Argunovo (Moscow region) against unsanctioned landfills on the communal land. Petitioners from the Nizhniy Baskunchak village (Archangelsk region) exploited their rights for free and accessible medical care in their objection to the closure of a rural hospital: 'the regional

government's attempts to save money on public health contradict Governmental Decree N932⁹. However, juridical literacy does not help villagers to obtain justice using the prescribed democratic channels of dispute resolution. Many petitioners went through numerous and unsuccessful appeals to various authorities and institutions. Thus, villagers of Shemetovo (Moscow region), who have been lacking hot water and heating for almost half a year, wrote to Putin:

We complained to the Shemetovo administration – they do not have money for new plumbing, we wrote to the Moscow region governor, but with no response, we sent letters to newspapers – no one listens to us! Winter is coming; we do not know to whom to address our problem. You are our last hope!

The former Soviet practice of letter-writing to newspapers appears to be inefficient, as it is no longer employed in the social control system. It is not encouraged by the government, and journalists are rarely interested in the 'little' problems of 'little' people. In order to emphasise the importance of their causes, petitioners link them with national (and international) policies. The example petition alludes to Putin's national policy: 'your programmes, aimed at rural and agricultural development...' Other petitions link to the Food Security Doctrine – such as the one written by the Katlino villagers (Leningrad region) who ask the president to prevent the bankruptcy of a local agricultural enterprise – or even to the Kyoto Protocol – mentioned by petitioners from the Argunovo village, who protest against unauthorised landfills.

Along with legalistic definitions of their grievances, villagers often refer to 'people say...' arguments. On one hand, this expression is a part of folk vocabulary; on the other, it demonstrates the growing discontent among the people. The example petition notes that 'the wave of public anger and indignation grows every day.' The petitioners from the Ilovka village (Volgograd region) warn about the return of the Times of Troubles when describing the ecological consequences of chemical factory activities:

The state tolerance towards the governmental halfwits caused this problem. The new Times of Troubles are coming! If we will not bring sturgeons back to the river – there is no future!

Although current rural discontent is unlikely to develop into uprisings in the name of the 'true-tsar,' as in the historical Times of Troubles,

these rebellious statements can be interpreted as peasant intimidation of the government.

The president's personal intervention in local conflicts is rare. Petitions are sent from the presidential office to federal, regional, or municipal petition commissions (according to the complaint topic). These commissions make resolutions and forward them to local level authorities for implementation (Lenta.ru 2013). A similar system, but without specialised commissions, is employed when petitions are addressed to regional top-authorities. In both cases, the outcome greatly depends on the motivation of local power-holders to remedy the situation. For instance, the authors of the example petition managed to preserve two trains between Khvoynaya and Budogosch, although trains between Khvoynaya and Pestovo were cancelled. However, some petitions work to the detriment of their authors. The procurement price of milk in the Grachevskiy rayon (the Stavropol Krai) is lower than the production costs peasants incur. The villagers reported that the local 'milk mafia' controls the milk collection and punishes those who dare to complain. Olga, from the Krasnoye village, shared the following story:

There was one woman with cows. The price is too low, you cannot survive. Her sister decided to help her. She wrote a letter to the governor about that... Well, the governor considered it, and sent it to the SMF [Stavropol Milk Factory] with an order to solve the problem. SMF ordered: no more milk to be collected from this woman. That was it... She tried to sell milk by herself, make cottage cheese, but nothing worked out. Finally, she had to slaughter her cows. No one wants to complain anymore.¹⁰

Not every petition from the sample could be traced to its final resolution. The 14 petitions for which the outcome is known suggest a higher probability of positive results from petitions addressed to the president (4 out of 10) than to other top-authorities (1 out of 4). However, no solid conclusions about the effectiveness of writing to the president can be drawn due to the small sample size. In addition, there is no indication that the key theme has a significant impact on the resolution. The outcome tends to depend on a combination of factors: the scale of the problem, local power relations, and the political situation. According to Sergey Kuznets, who has been fighting for many years against illegal construction in the Sergiev-Posad district, roughly 20% of written peti-

tions are successful. Although it does not seem a high percentage, it is, in fact, a significant share for Russia.

4.5.2. Peasant pickets and khody

The analysis of peasant pickets and khody is derived from my longitudinal study of the rural social movement Krestyanskiy Front during 2010-2013. In-depth interviews (6 with the leadership and 21 with members), participant observations of four pickets, three group discussions, and extensive document analysis constitute the empirical part of this section. Furthermore, participant observation data of three non-Front group pickets in the Moscow region during 2013 and nine in-depth interviews with their activists are also analysed. Transcripts of the interviews were coded according to the same methodology as the written petitions. The primary focus was on resistance strategies, goals and obstacles, and popular discourses regarding Putin, his regime, and local power-holders.

Similar to the written petitions, the group pickets and peasant khody inform the president (or a head of the regional government) about local injustices. Organised rural protests occurred around large cities during the first decade of 2000. Many of them were related to illegal acquisitions of former collective farmland. Villagers protested against the violation of their land rights, the artificial bankruptcy of collective farms, and the construction of country houses for urban middle and upper classes on former agricultural fields. Land use transfers from farming to construction purposes became a very profitable, often unlawful, business after the legalisation of land sales in 2002. Krestyanskiy Front was organised in 2005 by a group of former collective farm workers, who had lost their land shares due to the illegal acquisition of their farm. By 2010, Krestyanskiy Front had more than 25,000 members from 80 farm enterprises located in different regions of Russia. The movement defended its members' interests by applying to courts and organising pickets, demonstrations, and peasant khody to the president (Chapter 3).

The 'myth of the tsar-deliverer' is evident in the Krestyanskiy Front's appeals. In their public transcripts, protesters call the president the 'keeper of the villagers' hopes for a better life' and ask for his intervention in land conflicts (see the introductory description of the 2008 peasant *khody*). Similarly to the petition-writers, the Front activists are rarely able to get fair dispute resolutions from appellate institutions, and appeal to the president as a last resort. Maria Zharova, the head of the Moscow

regional branch of Krestyanskiy Front, stated the following in one of the interviews:

We have applied to local and regional courts, appealed to the prosecution office. The answer is always negative, although all our documents confirm that we are right. The corruption comes to the fore! Only the president has the power to rein in the court.¹¹

The judiciary is among the most corrupt public institutions in Russia (Global Corruption Barometer 2013). The Front activists oppose land investors, who often operate in coalition with local authorities and the courts. In such circumstances, the ‘rule of law’ does not work in favour of ordinary villagers. However, even though rural activists ask Putin to ‘rein in the court’, they do not share the belief in a benevolent and just president, who does not know, what is happening on the ground. This becomes evident in the interview with activist Taisia, who lost her land shares due to illegal land acquisition of the sovkhos ‘Serp i Molot’ and has been fighting for compensation:

Everything happened during Putin’s rule. Thus, it was his will. Courts are not fools, it was his order, I think. It is impossible that the master does not know what is going on in his country!¹²

Therefore, the goal of rural activists is not only to inform the ‘master’ about their problems, but also to make their appeals as loud as possible and publicly confront the president with local injustices. For this reason, Maria, an activist from the sovkhos ‘Serp i Molot’, registered her group petition for the ‘Hotline with President of Russia Vladimir Putin’:

I will raise our question and will see. The question will be addressed to him directly. Live stream. I think he will not avoid answering¹³.

Rural activists combine lawful tactics (e.g. petition-writing, applying to courts, seeking audiences with power-holders) with disruptive and loud campaigns (e.g. individual and group pickets, peasant khody, road blocking, distribution of flyers). These tactics attracted mass media attention, which, especially in the beginning, described peasant protests with enthusiasm. Krestyanskiy Front also published and distributed its own newspaper. According to Tamara Semenova, one of Krestyanskiy Front’s leaders, the diversified resistance tactics determined the initial success of the movement.

The ‘myth of the tsar-deliverer’ has gained remarkable plasticity in the hands of rural activists. They apply it in accordance with the addressee and the political situation. Thus, activists seek benefits from PR and election campaigns of the president and other authorities. Ekaterina, who fights the deforestation of the Pereyaslav Forest near the town of Sergiev-Posad (Moscow region), said that it does not matter which politician will use their problem in his/her election campaign, as long as the problem is solved. Similarly to the president, many politicians practice selective intercessions for the poor in their political campaigns. Being aware of this, rural activists plan their activities accordingly. Lilya, a protester from the sovkhoz ‘Leninskiy Luch’, identified the following main influencing factors on their decision to hold a picket:

We consider the weather and the political situation in the country. Now, for example, the election of the Moscow region governor is coming. Therefore, we are going to organise pickets more often. The weather is getting better too.¹⁴

In the land rights-related disputes, rural activists often resort to the services of lawyers and jointly collect money to pay for juridical consultations. Possible victory implies a financial compensation for lost land rights, which in some cases can guarantee a good life for the activist and his/her family. In addition to financial costs, the protest entails significant emotional and even physical costs. Tamara, a leader of 600 rural dwellers – former workers of the ‘Gorki-2’ sovkhoz – who had been fighting against the unlawful acquisition of their enterprise, said in an interview:

For 5.5 years, we had been fighting for the restitution of our land rights. It was a difficult fight. During that time I was threatened, chased; they tried to give me a bribe. My underage daughter was taken to the police; they wanted to shake out something from her. [...] Not many can handle such pressure...¹⁵

Expressions of loyalty to the president do not protect rural activists from the pressures of local power-holders. However, persistent protests, applying state laws and regulations, and gaining public attention allowed Krestyanskiy Front to win a number of disputes and be active during nine years, which is a long period for a Russian civil society organisation. Even such provocative actions as Krestyanskiye (Peasant) Khody were carried out without significant punishments from above. Sheltered by the

traditional peacefulness and loyalty of peasant khody, rural activists demanded a reformation of the judicial system and the implementation of civil self-governance in 2008. The Krestyanskiy Khod of 2011 appealed for the elimination of all taxes in rural areas, while participants of the 2012 Khod protested against Russia's accession to the WTO. None of the khody reached the president, and no request was met. The benefits to the authoritarian regime from a public presidential intervention were insignificant compared to the potential economic and political costs. However, the khody were not complete failures. The public attention surrounding these delegations and the presidential tolerance towards khodoki motivated some politicians to engage with the peasants' causes. Thus, after the 2008 Khod, Sergey Mironov, the chairman of the Federation Council, invited the khodoki to his office to develop a collective project aimed at revitalising Russian villages. Although no countrywide policy change followed, this project was implemented in several villages (predominantly the khodoki's residences) and positively influenced the social infrastructure, rural employment, and living conditions in the selected settlements.

4.5.3. Named after Putin

Recent rural practices demonstrate that it is not always necessary to appeal to Putin personally in order to solve local problems. One strategy is to invoke his name in public activism. A number of internet publications reveal the ongoing geographical renaming in Putin's honour, which became especially widespread in the countryside (Podrez and Prikhodina 2014, Baimukhametov 2007).

Thus, in 2007, local dwellers of the Kholodniy Rodnik settlement near Stavropol organised a movement to protect their local forest from urbanisation-driven deforestation. They initiated the renaming of the forest into 'Putin Grove' and attached Putin's portraits to every tree. Inna Bakulina, an activist in this movement, explained their actions in an interview to NEWSru.com (2007):

...we thought that our local authorities and constructors will not dare to touch Vladimir Vladimirovich [...] we do not have a copier, we multiplied his portraits in the city [...] They [construction workers] only cut the trees which are without Vladimir Vladimirovich. If his portrait is there – they are afraid. The truth and Putin are on our side!

The construction workers indeed refrained from cutting down the trees with Putin's portraits attached, and a few days later the court declared the deforestation and construction to be illegal (Kommersant 2007).

Podrez and Prikhodina (2014) describe a number of cases where a rural street was renamed in honour of the president. Thus, the residents of the small village of Kasatkino (Udmurt Republic) initiated the renaming of their main street into 'Putin Street' in 2008. They hoped it would stimulate local authorities to asphalt the road and more broadly improve the living conditions in the village. Tamara, a resident of the Kasatkino village explained: 'We are proud of our president; why should we hide it?! Moreover, if the street gets the name of Putin – it will be asphalted?' (quoted in Podrez and Prikhodina 2014). Although the asphaltting has not occurred yet, villagers indicated that the municipal snow blowers have cleaned the snow away from the village road every winter since the name change took place. Residents of the underpopulated village of Tyuli (Smolensk region) named their street after Putin in 2002 in order to attract new residents. One more 'Putin Street' emerged in the Kardailovo village (Orenburg region) in 2006. The renaming in Kardailovo was a form of rural protest against the unlawful actions of the local authorities, who did not want to delegate their responsibilities to a local village council in accordance with Putin's programme of self-governance empowerment (Podrez and Prikhodina 2014). As soon as a geographical feature receives the president's name, it attracts attention from the mass media and society, which motivates local power-holders to fulfil their duties and remedy local problems.

Some reorganised collective farm enterprises have also received the name of Putin. Thus, the former 'Kolkhoz of V.I.Lenin' in the Parfenovo village (Irkutsk region) is the 'Joint Stock Company of V.V.Putin' since 2006. A local entrepreneur in the Gornovka village (Altai Krai) similarly named his farm: 'JSC named after Putin' (Baimukhametov 2007). Galina Ivanova, a historian at the Russian Academy of Science (quoted in Podrez and Prikhodina, 2014), explains this renaming as follows:

As part of the Bolshevik tradition, the name of the leader was not only used as a talisman and amulet, but also as a way to convey local problems to the authorities [...] I would not attribute this to the people's love. You know, kolkhozy were named after Khrushchev during his lifetime. This

was done to attract the Party's attention to the kolkhozy's problems and to receive some help.

4.6. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the naive monarchist 'myth of the tsar-deliverer' is widely used in state-society relations in contemporary Russia. The traditional, culturally-embedded image of the benevolent ruler is ably inculcated by the authoritarian regime for the purpose of social control. President Putin increasingly adheres to tsarist paternalistic methods to express his 'benevolence' to the people, and promotes the tsarist legacy to develop a unified sense of Russian identity and to create positive historical parallels that justify his domestic and foreign policies. The principle of 'ruchnoye upravleniye,' which implies direct presidential intervention in any internal affair, creates the image of a supreme, just president, who is able to remedy every situation and defend deprived people. In this context, villagers' appeals to the president for help seem to be a matter of course. People write petitions and organise pickets and khody to persuade Putin – the 'present-day tsar' – to intervene on their behalf in conflicts with local power-holders. These ideal president-people relations could be an essential stabilising element of Russian regime, if the 'myth of the tsar-deliverer' would not be false. Similarly to the tsarist (and Soviet) governmental system, local officials are executors – rarely distorters – of the country leader's orders. Field (1976) argued that this was the reason why naive monarchism faded and peasants no longer supported their monarch in the late tsarist period. Will this be the case for Putin's Russia? Contrary to Field's assumption, this research revealed that peasants continued to frame their dissents within the official discourse of deference and express their loyalty to the ruler and the regime, even after the fall of the tsardom. Therefore, the second component of naive monarchism – the 'myth of the loyal peasants' – is essential.

Whereas the 'myth of the tsar-deliverer' is a myth, the rural loyalty to and obedience of the president reflect more ambivalence. This research revealed that many villagers sincerely believe in the figure of a benevolent president, on whom they pin their hopes for justice and security. This is a result of state propaganda and the economic, social, and political marginalisation of the rural population. However, the analysis of different rural grievances – which have traits of naive monarchism – demonstrates that many rural activists deliberately employ 'the myth of the

loyal peasants' to avoid accusations of political opposition and consequent repression, while 'the myth of the tsar-deliverer' helps them to exploit the gap between the rights promised by the president and those delivered by local authorities. Similarly to 'rightful resisters' in China, who refer to the state laws and regulations to justify their resistance and defy 'disloyal' elites (O'Brien 1996), rural Russians use the official legislation to accuse local power-holders of misconduct. However, if rightful resisters do not appeal to imaginary patronages but use legal channels of dispute resolution; Russian villagers, although being similarly 'rightful' in their claims, address their grievances directly to the president.

This research has revealed that rural activists went through many unsuccessful appeals to various authorities and institutions to remedy their situations. The Russian system formally provides citizens with 'democratic' methods of resolving disputes, but as a rule, the outcomes are not in favour of subaltern groups. Conversely, appeals to the president may lead to a successful resolution. Although presidential interventions on behalf of the poor are rather exceptional, their probability is likely to motivate local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities. This option is often intentionally exploited by rural activists, who forward petitions addressed to the president to their oppressors, and make their protests in the name of Putin as loudly as possible. The not-so-naive use of naive monarchism manifests itself in the myth's plasticity. Rural protesters intensify their activities during election periods, and their loyalty may shift from the president to other political leaders if the latter are willing to remedy the situation. Furthermore, rural public letters and missions to Putin express the villagers' allegiance to the president and the regime, while the critique is often spoken behind the scenes (such as in the interviews with group protesters). Therefore, this research suggests that the veneration of the president in expressions of rural grievances, while not fully fictitious, is less a demonstration of peasant reverence and devotion to Putin, and more a defence strategy of the subaltern population.

The alignment of the protesters' causes with state policies and ideology contradicts liberal and statist models of state-society relations, which view civil society as a counterweight to the state. Until recently, Russian civil society was considered underdeveloped and state-controlled. However, new studies have revealed that the state-embeddedness of many social movements and organisations should be interpreted not only in terms of a weakness, but as a strategy to perform and achieve discernible

results in a highly constrained political environment (Henry 2006). This study contributes to the latter discussion and looks beyond the liberal approach to state-society relations. It reveals that rural protests are more effective when they are framed within the official power discourse. Rural activists link their claims to state programmes in order to defy their local oppressors, and express their loyalty to Putin to lessen the risks of in-subordination. Whether sincere or strategic, these rural politics are unable to challenge the status quo; nevertheless, they provide rural dwellers with a means to remedy occasional local injustices.

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Notes

¹ Putin's approval rating has always been high, and has varied from 61% to 83% since 2001. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it rose to 86%, and reached 89% in June 2015 (Levada-Center 2015).

² The idea of the just, far-away supreme power that is benevolent to peasants – contrary to local power-holders – is detected in petitions to some other top authorities, which justifies their inclusion in the sample.

³ Change.org is a global non-profit petition platform established in 2007 in the USA, which became popular in many countries, including Russia. It provides a freemium tool for people to leave their personal and group petitions, and organize non-profit campaigns. Currently, there are more than 65 million users; popular topics are human rights, economic and criminal justice, the environment, health, and sustainable food.

⁴ Conducted 20-07-2014, Stavropol Krai.

⁵ Conducted in a rural school near Kurgan, published in Shuster 2012.

⁶ Regular swine flu affects the pork production of rural households (contrary to LFEs, villagers are not able to ensure the quarantine and overall vaccination of their livestock). Pig slaughtering in rural households is often perceived by villagers as 'a war against them' that is initiated by LFEs, which are interested in monopolising the pork meat market (Visser et al 2015).

⁷ The full text of this petition is available in Russian here: www.change.org/р/владимир-владимирович-путин-предотвратите-отмену-поездов-хвойная-пестово-хвойная-будогощь-хвойная-подборовье

⁸ Petitioners obtain the legalistic information from TV, newspapers, internet, urban relatives, and occasionally lawyers.

⁹ Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation N932 ‘The programme of state guarantees of free provision of medical care to citizens in 2014’

¹⁰ Conducted 15 July 2014, Stavropol Krai.

¹¹ Conducted 30 May 2013, Purschevo village, Moscow region.

¹² Conducted 30 May 2013, Purschevo village, Moscow region.

¹³ Conducted 30 May 2013, Purschevo village, Moscow region.

¹⁴ Conducted 20 April 2013, Krasnogorsk, Moscow region

¹⁵ Conducted 28 September 2010, Moscow

5

Resistance or Adaptation? Responses of Rural Communities to Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Ukraine

Abstract

While globally it is reported that peasants and smallholder farmers are fighting against land grabbing, Ukrainian villagers show tolerance and peaceful acceptance of land grab-related changes. This chapter analyses the “exceptional” case of non-resistance of the Ukrainian rural population and argues that it is not as exceptional as it seems at first glance. By studying various rural responses to the large-scale agricultural development in Ukraine and the resulting socio-economic transformations within rural communities, this study demonstrates that: the politics of dispossessed groups depend on the terms of inclusion in land deals; adaptive response strategies are common and can be advantageous for smallholders; and villagers are more concerned with personal gains from land grabs than with benefits for the whole community, which often leads to their acceptance of large-scale land acquisitions. This chapter challenges the dominant assumptions about rural resistance to land grabbing and calls for rethinking the nature of the contemporary rural politics worldwide.

5.1. Introduction

The assumption that resistance is an indispensable response of the rural poor to land grabbing is ingrained in the politics of many social movements, NGOs, and rural development groups (i.e. La Via Campesina, MST). A number of academic and non-academic studies have been launched to find ways of helping rural dwellers all over the world in their struggles against the development of large-scale industrial agriculture and for a redefinition of their ‘way of life’ (Quan 2000, Adnan 2011, Schnei-

der 2011). However, this focus on resistance suffers from simplification. Land grabs affect different rural groups in different ways, which creates a variety of reactions to them, from outright resistance to reckless enthusiasm or cautious acceptance.

This research challenges three major assumptions about peasants¹ responses to land grabbing, namely: (1) resistance is the only response of rural communities toward large-scale land acquisitions; (2) peasants and smallholder farmers are unable to adapt and coexist with large-scale industrial agriculture; and (3) ideological concerns about the ‘peasant way of life’, food and land sovereignty dominate in rural struggles. This chapter exposes these assumptions based on an empirical study of rural households’ response strategies to land grabbing² and the development of large-scale agriculture in Ukraine.

Ukraine was recently included by the World Bank in the list of resource-rich and finance-poor countries that became targets for land grabbing. The country possesses more than 25% of the world’s richest and most fertile soil, so-called Black Earth, and was the Soviet Union’s Bread Basket. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Ukraine launched a land reform aimed at breaking down kolkhozy and sovkhozy (collective and state farms) and distributing their lands to rural dwellers for private farming development. However, as all the necessary factors complementary to land (capital, know-how, upstream and downstream markets, the rule of law) disappeared with the breakdown of the collectives, rural dwellers could not make use of their new resource. Instead, the land became concentrated: first in the hands of rural elites, and later accumulated by large domestic and foreign investors that were motivated by the upswing in world food markets and the global land rush of the early 2000s (Visser and Spoor 2011, Plank 2013). To date, 60% of Ukrainian farmland is controlled by large farm enterprises (LFEs), whose size and scale are comparable with the largest latifundia in Brazil and Argentina (Visser and Mamonova 2011, Lapa et al., 2008). Similar to many other countries affected by land grabs, the large-scale land acquisitions in Ukraine are often carried out in “shadow” schemes, which deprive the local population of their rights (Visser and Spoor 2011).

The distinguishing feature of Ukraine lies in the near-absent overt protests³ of rural dwellers against large-scale land acquisitions (Visser and Mamonova 2011). Even the recent political crisis and the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, which created ‘open moments^{4c}’ for contestations, did not

stimulate rural dwellers to mobilise and resist the LFEs' domination. The lack of open resistance among post-Soviet villagers is usually explained by 70 years of socialism (a time when expressions of disagreement were prosecuted), an ageing rural population (24.1% of rural residents are older than 60), households' traditional dependency on large-scale farming, and a 'culture of repression' that limits the political consciousness of the post-Soviet population (see Visser and Mamonova 2011). That being said, although historical legacies and socio-political contextual factors are important variables in explaining the passivity of post-Soviet rural dwellers, they make up only one side of the coin.

This chapter explains the Ukrainian villagers' tolerance and peaceful acceptance of land grab-related changes by analysing 'terms of inclusion' of the rural population in land deals. The analysis distinguishes between illusive inclusion, subordinate inclusion, and competitive exclusion, and reveals the reactive behaviour of rural dwellers to each of these terms. The chapter also analyses the most and least adaptive response strategies of rural households and the subsequent socio-economic transformations in rural communities. It indicates that the adaptive response strategies often lead to more advantageous positions in the rural society, and, as frequent as non-adaptive strategies. Finally, this chapter shows that villagers are more concerned with personal gains from land grabs than with benefits for the whole community, which often leads to their acceptance of large-scale land acquisitions. This study aims to challenge our assumptions about rural resistance in the post-Soviet countryside, and calls for rethinking the nature of the contemporary peasant politics worldwide.

This research is largely based on fieldwork conducted during the summer of 2012 in two regions of Ukraine: the Letichevsk district (the Khmelnytsk region, Western Ukraine) and the Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskiy district (the Kiev region, Central Ukraine). These two regions are characterised by high soil fertility and a large number of LFEs operating there. The analysis of rural responses to land grabbing is drawn from 52 semi-structured in-depth interviews with inhabitants of the analysed districts (44 small-scale farmers and rural workers, 3 chief managers of LFEs, and 5 representatives of local authorities). The small-scale farmers and rural workers also participated in a household survey (see Appendix 1). The survey findings were supplemented by a number of all-Ukrainian surveys: the 'Socio-economic situation in the contemporary Ukrainian village' survey, conducted by the Gorshenin Institute in 2011, the 'Land

relations in Ukraine: sociological portrait of the situation' survey, conducted by the Centre of Social Expertise of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) of Ukraine in 2013, and the FAO Farm Survey conducted in 2005 (referred in the analysis as Gorshenin survey 2011, NAS survey 2013, and FAO Farm Survey 2005, respectively).⁵ Furthermore, various sources of academic literature, mass media publications, and statistical sources such as the State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics (Ukrstat), and World Bank reports informed the analysis.

This chapter is structured as follows. The next section (Section 5.2) discusses three major assumptions about peasant responses to land grabbing in academic and non-academic literature. Section 5.3 provides a historical analysis of Ukrainian agrarian relations, in order to characterise the level of socio-economic stratification within rural communities at the moment land grabbing occurred. Section 5.4 analyses the different processes of villagers' exclusion and inclusion in modern agricultural development that shape their attitudes toward land deals. Section 5.5 demonstrates the pros and cons of the Ukrainian rural households' adaptive and resisting response strategies to large-scale agribusinesses. Section 5.6 examines rural attitudes to land grabbing by using the attitude toward land sales as an indicator. Finally, Section 5.7 discusses the generalisability of the findings and their application in wider rural communities.

5.2. Three major assumptions about peasant responses to land grabs

In recent literature on land grabbing, rural dwellers are considered victims of large-scale land acquisitions whose traditional subsistence schemas are threatened by limiting their access to land and other natural resources (Quan 2000, Adnan 2011, Schneider 2011). Adnan (2011: 4) writes: 'the political responses of the dispossessed groups have involved resistance to land grabbing and dispossession as well as struggles for gaining possession or repossession of land'. The common assumption that **peasants and smallholder farmers inherently oppose large-scale land acquisitions** is applied by many anti-land grab social movements, such as La Via Campesina and MST (McMichael 2006). 'Farmers and civil society groups have strongly opposed land grabbing everywhere...' – stated La Via Campesina in its call for mobilisation at the International Day of the Peasant's Struggle (La Via Campesina 2013).

Meanwhile, according to the World Bank Group, large-scale land acquisitions can be, to some extent, beneficial to the local population. Indeed, there are many people being included or incorporated into the emerging enclaves of land-based investments, through a variety of schemes: contract farming, plantation workers, and so on. (Borras and Franco 2013). The critics of this ‘win-win’ scenario argue that this inclusion of rural dwellers is an ‘adverse incorporation’, i.e. the exploitation and subordination of incorporated groups in highly unequal power relations. According to Hickey and du Toit (2007: 21), this leads to the marginalisation of subordinated groups and their chronic poverty.

However, different academic studies show that even under adverse incorporation, rural dwellers manage to find advantages. Thus, many villagers benefit from the recent large-scale agricultural development in Kazakhstan by taking the jobs it creates. Rural Kazakhs, according to Petrick et al. (2013: 164), ‘due to the socialist tradition of industrialised farming operations [...] regard themselves primarily as workers and not as land owners’, and therefore, do not struggle for autonomy, and accept work at the new latifundia. Smalley and Corbera (2012: 1050) found that the attitude to land investments varies across different rural groups in Kenya. Their interviews with farmers indicated the ‘vision of development through jobs’ and the ‘desire for agricultural development projects’ as the reasons behind the support of land deals; in contrast, the majority of the interviewed pastoralists opposed land acquisitions, referring to ‘fear of eviction or lost access’. Consequently, for some rural groups and sectors, land grabbing does not necessarily bring negative changes.

The peasants’ attitude to land grabbing critically depends on the ‘terms of inclusion’ of local population in land deals (McCarthy 2010). According to Witcher (2003: 7) ‘terms of inclusion’ are derived from ‘societal relationships and criteria for access prioritised by whichever dominates’. Therefore, understanding the political economy of the new social structures and the labour regimes that emerge from them is highly important for analysing various rural responses to land grabbing.

The second popular assumption is that **peasants and smallholder farmers are unable to adapt to and coexist with large-scale industrial agriculture**. This revitalises the long-standing debate on the persistence and disappearance of the peasantry (see Araghi 1995, Boltvinik 2012). Populist social movements redefine the ‘peasant way’⁶ in opposition to a globalised neo-liberal corporate-driven model of agricultural

production in order to mobilise peasants against land grabbing (McMichael 2006, Desmarais 2002). Class-based theorists, on the other hand, observe how the peasantry disappears under the competitive pressures of modern corporate agriculture, and see the ongoing rural unrest as a class struggle (Bernstein 2004, Adnan 2011).

These positions largely overlook the ability of small-scale food producers to adapt to and coexist with industrial agriculture, and become active participants, not protesting victims. The possibility of combining large-scale agriculture with peasant farming is advocated by the World Bank. The Bank suggests that, at low levels of population density, large-scale investments in land are appropriate, and ‘voluntary land transfers that make everybody better off are possible’ (World Bank 2010a: 55). Olivier de Schutter (2011: 259-261), a former UN Special Reporter on the Right to Food, criticised the Bank’s position for ‘simplification’. However, he acknowledged that the ‘coexistence’ scenario is possible, if the existing rights of land users are clearly defined, and the markets where peasants and large agriculturalists operate can remain highly segmented - for instance, when all the production of large-scale agriculture is shipped abroad, while the food security in the home country is guaranteed by small-scale producers.

Analysing market niches where rural households and large-scale agribusiness operate, as well as the structural changes in the peasant mode of production, is highly important for understanding rural response strategies to land grabbing.

The third assumption about peasant struggles is that **peasants and smallholder farmers are concerned with the ‘peasant way’, food and land sovereignty, and economic and ecological justice, when they adopt strategies to respond to land grabbing.** This position is centre-stage in the works of many academics (Kay 2012, Rosset et al. 2011), and grounds the programmes of rural social movements defending peasants’ rights for food and land sovereignty (McMichael 2006).

Meanwhile, Pye (2010) identifies the frequent mismatch between the global campaigns of civil society and rural social movements, and the local concerns of villagers in the context of Indonesia. For example, while biofuel debates are globally framed in terms of biodiversity conservation and climate justice, local concerns focus on land rights and employment conditions. As Pye argues, the complaints of palm oil smallholders and plantation workers are conspicuously absent at the

international level of civil society and social movement campaigns (Borras et al. 2010). Boyer (2010) studied the failure of the global food sovereignty campaign of La Via Campesina in post-war Honduras, and came to the conclusion that the transnational agrarian movement ignores local peasant understandings, needs, and organisations. According to the author, La Via Campesina's food sovereignty programme was associated by Honduran peasants with the powers of nation states, while the concept of food security resonated with deeply held peasant understandings of security for their continued social reproduction in insecure social and natural conditions. Edelman and León (2013), in their analysis of land grabbing cycles, noticed that, contrary to the fact that palm oil plantations are often linked with land grabbing, the rural population in Honduras is very positive about this crop and is willing to engage in contract farming agreements⁷ with large private investors despite heavy criticism from Honduran civil activists. Mamonova (2013) analysed the mismatch between the demands of the 'Defenders' social movement in the Moscow region (who clamoured against the grabbing of historical land in Radonezh), and the local rural population (who was more concerned with access to the forest and river, which were blocked by the land grabbers).

Placing the land and food sovereignty concepts in the centre of peasant struggles and romanticising peasants' motives for land grab resistance might bring us to the wrong conclusions, and, consequently, to the development of wrong policies and programmes for the protection of smallholders' rights.

The following analysis of the contemporary everyday rural politics in Ukraine is an attempt to look beyond the common assumptions on rural resistance toward land grabs.

5.3. Ukrainian agrarian relations and socio-economic stratification before land grabs

In order to understand the nature of rural responses to land grabbing and transformations within rural communities, it is important to address the pattern of agrarian evolution and the level of socio-economic stratification in Ukraine at the moment land grabbing occurred.

Traditionally, Ukrainian peasants, like many peasants in the Russian Empire⁸, belonged to communes, which were responsible for collective

decision-making, tax payments, and the periodic redistribution of land among peasants⁹. The Stolypin land reform (1905-1915) aimed to break down the commune system and create private land ownership. The emerging system of private agriculture caused an increase of agricultural yields and sown area in Ukrainian provinces; however, it only lasted a short period (Malienko 2010). The socialist revolution of 1917 and the establishment of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1919 ended the prospects for private property. Leninist ideologies consider private property as the basis of class exploitation and the dependency of employed workers on a privileged group of owners. The Soviet goal was to abolish 'immoral' capitalist private property and to create a class of rural labourers who would share the socialist values of common ownership and equality between people (Zemstov 1991).

The socialist agrarian reforms of 1919-1921 revitalised the commune system and launched *podrosladka* (a campaign of confiscating grain and other agricultural produce from the peasants for a fixed price). The socialisation of agriculture and the subtractive policy of the Soviet state caused mass peasant revolts in Ukraine. These uprisings, along with other threats to Bolshevik dictatorship, forced Lenin to reconsider his economic policy. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was implemented in 1921-1927 and was primarily a new agricultural policy (Cohen 1980). It established a mixed socialist market economy, which allowed private landholdings, and substituted *podrosladka* with *prodpodatok* (a tax on the peasants, payable in the form of raw agricultural product). This allowed small-scale producers to keep their surplus, which positively affected their productivity and caused an increase in gross agricultural production.

Stalin, who became the USSR leader in 1928, saw the NEP as a return to capitalism and launched the Collectivisation campaign (1929-1933), which aimed to consolidate individual land, property and labour into *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* - and therefore eliminate independent small-scale agricultural producers. The Soviet leadership was convinced that these measurements would increase agricultural productivity and create the grain reserves needed for the country's industrialisation. Although the increase in agricultural productivity was rather unfeasible and accomplished predominantly by violent measures like harvest expropriation and *dekulakisation*¹⁰ (leading to famines in 1931-1932 in Ukraine), the relative equalisation of rural dwellers was indeed achieved by the collectivisation (Humphrey 2002a). Throughout the Soviet period, the state

exercised total control over the stratification of rural communities by regulating household incomes and equalising the size of household plots (Wegren 2005b).

The 'Soviet peasant'¹¹ lost the peasant-like features of 'autonomous, property-conscious economising', but retained 'corporatism' and 'egalitarianism' (Humphrey 2002a). Despite the proclaimed proletarianisation of society, Soviet villagers did not completely become rural labourers. Even though nearly all Ukrainian peasants had official jobs at kolkhozy and sovkhozy, they also conducted subsistence farming on their household plots of 0.4 ha on average, which villagers had been allowed to have since the late 1930s. This highly productive small-scale agriculture was 'outside the state planning and procurement system' (Wegren 2005b: 8). Even the 'state war against personal subsidiary farming'¹² launched by Khrushchev in 1958-1959 did not eradicate this form of production (although it minimised the amount of livestock held by the rural population). The Brezhnev government (1966-1982), instead, stimulated self-food provisioning due to the failure of the centrally planned economy to provide enough food for the population. Therefore, despite the Soviet anti-smallholders policy, Ukrainian rural dwellers preserved important elements of the peasant mode of production, i.e. family-based subsistence agriculture and land possession.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine launched a land reform aimed at revitalising peasant agriculture. During the first stage of land reform (1990-1999), former collective lands were distributed to rural dwellers by means of land-share certificates for private farming. Consequently, in addition to household plots, rural dwellers gained the right to use land plots (average 4 ha), which were located usually at a distance from villages. Ownership of the distributed lands could occur if the certificate-holder underwent the process of land registration and privatisation, or devoted his or her share to the authorised capital of the reorganised collective farm. Contrary to the expectations of the reform developers, land recipients did not show much interest in leaving the collectives to establish individual family farms. Only 3% of certificate-holders registered their land rights by 1995 (Lerman et al. 2007).

A common explanation for the failure of this stage of the land reform has been that exit costs for individual workers were too high (in terms of finance and equipment), and emerging markets were still largely geared toward large collective successor farms (Mathijs and Swinnen 1998).

Some authors refer to the rural population's possession of household plots as a reason for the unsuccessful collective land distribution. Wegren (2005a: 19) indicated that 'at the onset of market reforms some 97% of rural households already had [household] land plots, and most households had limited human capital. Therefore, the expansion of landholdings through privatisation would be attractive or feasible to a relatively small percentage of rural households'.

Lerman et al. (2004: 149) argue that farm managers, who were seen as 'omniscient community leaders', were interested in the preservation of large-scale organisation as a way to keep their power and perquisites – and, therefore, used their authority to manipulate information about the land reform. A 1997 World Bank survey shows that only a few Ukrainian rural dwellers knew about the possibilities of establishing private farming on the distributed lands, while the majority of the rural population (80%) was informed that they could "invest" their land shares back to farm enterprises (Csaki and Lerman 1997). This concentrated the collective lands in the hands of the rural elites, who 'gained de facto ownership of land and with it, the autonomy and economic incentive to persist in their new roles as leaders in a quasi-feudal system' (Allina-Pisano 2002: 314). Those few private farmers¹³ that emerged in the post-1991 period were almost always either former Party-connected functionaries or rural elite, who had known how to organise business under the Soviet rule. The majority of the post-Soviet rural population had lost the historical memory and cultural tradition of entrepreneurship due to a 70-year reign of socialist principles and socialist ideology (Petrick and Carter 2009, Visser 2010).

The first stage of the land reform was accompanied by a sharp reduction of state subsidies in agriculture and the price liberalisation of agricultural products. This led to the bankruptcy of many collective farms and the abandonment of collective farmlands (Visser and Spoor 2011). This in turn induced a rapid growth of rural unemployment, a drastic decline in the livelihood conditions and living standards of many rural families, a lack of social security, and a rising psychosocial tension caused by little hope for the future (Borodina 2009). In order to guarantee their subsistence, many Ukrainian villagers became largely dependent on subsistence farming on their household plots. Von Braun and Lohlein (2003) observed a significant increase in the share of agricultural land devoted to subsistence production and the number of rural dwellers engaged in subsistence farming during the period of 1990-1999. At the time, in-kind

income from subsidiary plots accounted for 44.4% of the total rural household income, while wages and social transfers made up 16.3% and 13.4%, respectively (Moroz 2010).

The first stage of the land reform had, indeed, revitalised peasant agriculture in Ukraine; however, it created a large group of small traditional subsistence cultivators, instead of individual family farmers. On the eve of massive land grabbing in Ukraine, the stratification within rural communities was minimal: a first, very small group, was that of the rural elites (5% of the population, according to Wegren 2005b), who had maintained their ruling positions since the Soviet Union; the second group (in fact, the main rural population) was represented by impoverished smallholders – who did have some small incomes from wage work but were largely dependent on subsistence farming on their household plots.

5.4. Large-scale land acquisitions and ‘terms of inclusion’ of rural population in land deals

Large-scale land acquisitions by domestic and foreign investors started in Ukraine with the beginning of the second stage of the land reform (1999 to present) (Borodina 2009, Plank 2013). The 1999 Presidential Decree forced the collective agricultural enterprises to distribute the land shares in kind to rural dwellers. Since then, nearly 7 million rural residents have become official owners of physical land plots (not just paper-based certificates), and about 65% of the arable land is physically owned by rural individuals (Lerman et al. 2006). In 2001, the Land Code came into force, which legally guaranteed land titles and imposed a moratorium on land sales until 2005. The moratorium has already been extended several times (until 2008, 2012, 2013, 2016), and was shelved indefinitely after the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution¹⁴. Although the moratorium aims to protect land ownership of the rural population, in practice, it only serves as a formal prevention of land deals (Plank 2013, Visser and Spoor 2011).

The rise of global food prices and the relative stabilisation of the investment climate in Ukraine brought new players to the Ukrainian land market. Many domestic and foreign investors gained control over Ukrainian farmlands through various leasing schemes, and in some cases through fraudulent purchases, despite the land sale moratorium (Visser and Mamonova 2011). As a result, export-oriented LFEs emerged in Ukraine. Their size and scale are comparable with the largest latifundia in

Brazil and Argentina. To date, the 18 largest LFEs control 1.7 million ha of agricultural land, which constitutes approximately 11% of all farmland controlled by large and middle-size private farms of Ukraine (Lapa et al. 2008). The leading position is held by ‘agroholdings’ (vertically and horizontally integrated groups of affiliated and associated agroenterprises), which has become a customary term to characterise the Ukrainian agricultural development. Agroholdings contribute up to 20% in total agricultural production (Kobuta et al. 2012). These operators expand much faster than the average farm producers and are often associated with land grabbing (Rylko 2009).

The rapid development of large-scale industrial soil-intensive agriculture put Ukraine on the list of the major agricultural exporters in the world. In 2008–2009, Ukraine was the third largest exporter of grain worldwide. Even the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution and consequent civil war did not affect the country’s leading position in food exports. In 2014, Ukraine ranked second among exporters of sunflower seed, fifth for barley, sixth for rapeseed and corn (maize), and ninth for wheat (IndexMundi 2014).

But what has happened to Ukrainian rural dwellers? One might expect a rise of rural resistance to large-scale agricultural development, as occurred in many other countries affected by land grabs (McMichael 2006). Instead, Visser and Mamonova (2011) reported incredibly weak rural opposition to large-scale land acquisitions in Ukraine. Even the ‘open moments’^{15c} for contestations, which occurred during the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, did not trigger rural rebellion against the system of LFE’s domination¹⁶.

According to McCarthy (2010), the peasants’ attitude to land grabbing depends on the ‘terms of inclusion’ of the local population in land deals. He argues that the way land tenure systems and informal land markets work, the type of land investments, and the implementation of small-holder development schemes in villages are critical factors that influence the exclusion or inclusion of local people in land deals.

Below three different terms, upon which Ukrainian rural dwellers are incorporated in land deals, are distinguished and discussed. These terms largely influence rural attitudes to land grabbing.

5.4.1. Illusive inclusion

The term ‘illusive inclusion’ is borrowed from poverty and inequality studies. The illusive inclusion occurs in social settings when ‘inclusion is ensured but the outcome is not different from that of being excluded’ (Joseph 2012: 6). The illusive inclusion of Ukrainian villagers in land deals started with the titling programme in 2001. Although rural dwellers received titles on the distributed land plots, they were hardly able to derive substantial benefits from them. At the time, 95% of the title recipients were of retirement and pre-retirement age, and were unable to cultivate the given lands (Koteneva 2010). According to Bondarchuk (2011: 1), ‘this process was just a farce, aimed at showing the “fairness” of land distribution and led to the concentration of Ukrainian black soil in the hands of rich rogues’.

Nevertheless, the land titles allow their holders to lease the distributed land plots to LFEs and receive a ‘*pai*’ (from the Ukrainian word for ‘share’, a word used by the local population to name annual monetary or in-kind compensation for leased land plots). The current average size of the *pai*, reported by agricultural enterprises, is 500 UAH (equal to 47 Euros) per land parcel of 4 ha (NAS survey 2013). In practice, many enterprises pay the *pai* in-kind in shares of 5% from the crop harvested on the leased lands, which is less than the declared average price (estimations derived from the fieldwork interviews). Many villagers are dissatisfied with the low price they get for their land shares. The *pai* accounts for up to 4.2% of the average household income (Lerman et al. 2006). In cases when rural families hold livestock, the in-kind *pai* becomes an additional feed source.

The *pai*-system is, in fact, the continuation of the former kolkhozy and sovkhozy support of households. In the Soviet times, ‘households were allowed to use a whole array of collective facilities, from obtaining young livestock from the collective to letting private cattle graze on collective pastures, using kolkhoz machinery, and selling their produce through the sales networks of the collectives’ (Visser 2010: 289). Furthermore, collective farms regularly supplied their production to their workers as a compensation for meagre wages. Previously, this support was informal. It has currently become formalised through contractual transfers, but has also shrunk to only crop sharing. Nevertheless, the formalisation of support has made rural dwellers feel included in the

distribution of benefits from land use. Maria (65) an inhabitant of the village Rysanivtsy said:

Formerly, kolkhoz brought grain to our road with a truck – take as much as you want... Now they [agroenterprise] pay us the *pais*. I receive 800 kilogrammes of wheat for my land plot of 3 hectares. It is not as good as in the Soviet Union, but it is at least something. [...] I feed my chickens with it¹⁷.

Most of the elderly rural population welcomes large-scale land investments in Ukraine. LFEs are seen as successors of Soviet collective farms. Elderly villagers still call them ‘kolkhozy’ and ‘sovkhozy’. The persistence of old terms not only expresses the habits of colloquial speech, but also demonstrates the actual and perceived continuity of the dual system of agricultural production: large-scale “collective” agriculture versus small-scale subsistence farming. Visser et al. (2014), based on the example of Russian agriculture (which underwent a transformation roughly similar to the one in Ukraine), argued that there was no significant redistribution of farmland during the post-socialist land reform: kolkhozy and sovkhozy have been transferred into LFEs, while the rural population continues subsistence farming at their household plots. Nikulin (2011) even applies the term ‘post-kolkhoz’ to contemporary LFEs to stress the continuity of collective farming. This continuity influences villagers’ emotional expectations of their relationships with LFEs. Furthermore, the use of Soviet language in contemporary speeches demonstrates the rural population’s strong nostalgia for the Soviet past. Heady and Gambold-Miller (2006), for instance, demonstrate in one of their case-studies how villagers welcome the revitalisation of an abandoned kolkhoz by a new investor, hoping to return to the ‘good old times’.

Therefore, the continuation and formalisation of some Soviet practices meets the emotional expectations of elderly villagers and creates a positive attitude towards the ongoing large-scale land acquisitions in Ukraine. These *pai*-recipients feel included in the land deals, although on a smaller scale than they wish to be. Furthermore, the elderly people do not have sufficient labour resources to cultivate the distributed lands, which results in a lack of competition for lands between these rural dwellers and LFEs.

5.4.2. Subordinate inclusion

The fieldwork data indicate that the majority of working-age rural dwellers see large-scale land acquisitions as an opportunity for wage work. The use of the distributed land plots for family farm business is highly constrained by a number of factors: the pro-large scale agricultural policy of the Ukrainian state, the LFEs' control over the agri-food value-chain, the erosion of peasant entrepreneurial features during the Soviet period, and rural poverty. According to the 2005 FAO Farm Survey, 96% of the Ukrainian rural population did not want to start individual farming (Lerman et al. 2006). In the meantime, 24% of rural respondents to the 2011 Gorshenin survey indicated a strong desire for a job at LFEs.

The post-Soviet legacy of industrial farming largely defines the rural demand for wage work (Petrick et al. 2013). However, villagers prefer the work at agroholdings to employment at individual farms or kolkhoz-style LFEs. This might be explained by their rational cost-benefit calculations from the subordinate inclusion in the new form of farming. Agroholdings, as a rule, provide decent wages to their employees and offer higher labour standards (Lapa et al. 2008). To date, the average monthly salary in agriculture is about 1,960 UAH (equal to 187 Euros) (Ukrstat 2014). The field research for this study indicates that the workers of agroholdings receive 2-3 times more.

This causes a struggle for incorporation into large-scale agriculture in subordinate positions (subordinate inclusion) among rural dwellers. According to Viktor Prikazhnuk, the director of the 'Obry' agrocompany (a subsidiary of a large American agroholding), more than 30 people are on a waiting list for the position of a combine driver. However, agroholdings require skilled workers without 'bad habits' (i.e. drinking, unreliability), which is often missing in Ukraine (Lerman et al. 2007). According to the FAO Farm Survey (2005), 40% of LFEs complain of a rural labour shortage, despite high rural unemployment.

The last decade of large-scale agricultural development in the Ukrainian countryside is characterised by the reduction of overall rural poverty. The share of rural households with average per capita monthly expenses below the living wage decreased from 82.6% in 2000 to 63.9% in 2006¹⁸ (Moroz 2010). Furthermore, there is an increase in the wage-work share in household income: from 16.3% in 1999 to 23% in 2012 (Ukrstat 2014, NAS survey 2013). At the same time, however, the rise of salaries in ag-

riculture is accompanied by declining employment rates. The rapidly expanding agrohholdings strive to achieve economies of scale and apply labour-saving technologies. This caused the decrease in the rural labour force from 8.9 million people in 1999 to 8.3 million people in 2005, a 6.7% decrease (Moroz 2010).

5.4.3. Competitive exclusion

A negative attitude to LFEs is inherent among private family farmers. Many of these farmers are the former Soviet rural *intelligentsia* and elite (agronomists, accountants, chairmen of reorganised kolkhozy and sovkhozy), who managed to detach their land plots during the land reform and accumulated additional lands by leasing them from their neighbours. The average size of the lands cultivated by these farmers is 175 ha (NAS survey 2013). Currently, these farmers account for 5% of the gross agricultural product of the country (Ukrstat 2014).

Farmers have to compete with LFEs for leased lands and are forced to pay a *pai sum* equal to the share paid by regional agroenterprises, which is usually beyond farmers' financial capacities.

Furthermore, LFEs, especially agrohholdings, are major recipients of indirect and direct state subsidies, such as cash transfers, grants, tax credits, and low-interest loans. According to Volodymyr Lapa¹⁹, the general director of the Ukrainian Agribusiness Club, 60% of the total national agricultural subsidies in 2012 were obtained by LFEs. Moreover, the vertical integration of the agrohholdings allows them to control the value-chain and exclude other agricultural operators from it (Plank 2013). These factors create the competitive exclusion (i.e. exclusion through competition) of private farmers from agribusiness and consequently from land markets in Ukraine. Farmer Nikolay (45) described the unequal competition with agrohholdings:

Agrohholdings! Who are they? They are bandits! They evade taxes. They do not pay taxes at all! [...] Moreover, they receive millions in state subsidies. No farmer, no *odnoosibnik* [independent peasant] has received any *kopeyka* [cent] from the state. Furthermore, they export the grain. They have access to foreign markets. They export it at a good price. Meanwhile, the resellers grab my grain at the lowest price...²⁰

Due to such unfair competition, many private farmers go bankrupt. The Ukrainian State Committee for Statistics declared a slight decrease in

the number of private farmers: from 43,000 in 2006 to 40,800 in 2013 (Ukrstat 2014). The Committee explains this through farm consolidations and the global financial crisis. However, Kropivko (2012) suggests that, in reality, this decrease is much larger. The fieldwork for this research identified that many farmers are bankrupt or on the brink of bankruptcy, but remain registered in the State Register of Legal Entities. In fact, they are subsistence farmers – producing just enough to guarantee the subsistence of their families, or being hired by LFEs to work the field with their private machinery.

The three above-mentioned terms upon which Ukrainian rural dwellers are incorporated in land deals refute the assumption of peasants' outright opposition to large-scale agricultural development. The land tenure system in Ukraine allows the large group of elderly pai-recipients to benefit from the activities of LFEs by engaging in land leasing relationships with them. The absence of smallholder development schemes in Ukrainian villages, as well as the absence of entrepreneurial features among many working-age villagers, prevents them from establishing individual family farms, which leads to their desire for wage-work at LFEs. Only when the rural dwellers and LFEs operate in the same markets and compete for the same land (as in the case of private farmers) is the resistance to large-scale agribusiness unavoidable.

5.5. Household response strategies and socio-economic stratification

As shown in Section 5.3, the stratification in rural communities on the eve of land grabbing was minimal. Therefore, I accept the relative homogeneity of the rural society as the starting point of analysis, and do not disaggregate different rural strata in advance. However, I do agree that demographic characteristics, occupation, and slightly different access to production resources in Ukrainian villages in the late 1990s influenced the choice of households' response strategies.

Table 5.1 summarises the arguments presented in this chapter about rural attitudes to land grabbing, terms of inclusion, different response strategies, and consequential stratification within rural communities. This table is based on the household survey developed and conducted for the purposes of this analysis (see Appendix 1). The rural households were sampled through a random process, except for the category of family

farmers, which was selected based on purposive sampling in order to increase the observations-to-variables ratio for this category. The sample size met the requirements of the ‘Rule of 5’ (the number of observations is no lower than five per variable); therefore, this sample size is large enough to define the differences between the five groups.

Table 5.1

Household response strategies to land grabs and their outcomes in Ukraine.

| <i>N</i> | <i>Household response strategies</i> | <i>Terms of inclusion</i> | <i>Outcome</i> | <i>Consequential rural stratification</i> | <i>Attitude to land sales</i> | Number of respondents |
|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| S1 | Competition with LFEs | Competitive exclusion | Bankruptcy | Farmers, peasant-workers, subsistence farmers | Negative | 5 |
| S2 | Taking a free market niche | Illusive inclusion | Coexistence, semi-independence | Oдноосібники | Negative | 13 |
| S3 | Employment | Subordinate inclusion | Semi-proletarianisation | Peasant-workers | Positive | 6 |
| S4 | Rural out-migration | Illusive inclusion | Social exclusion | Jobless | Positive | 7 |
| S5 | Indifference | Illusive inclusion | Dependence on social transfers (pension) | Pensioners-subsistence farmers | Negative | 7 |
| | | | Social exclusion | Marginals | Positive | 5 |

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

The ‘household response strategies’ were defined by analysing the daily activities and the main income source of households. The various ‘terms of inclusion’ were distinguished based on how the rural dwellers managed the distributed land shares and gained access to the products of their own labour. The category ‘outcomes’ was derived from the analysis of changes in income, occupation, and relations to the means of production (land, labour, and capital). The agrarian transformation theories were used to construct the ‘consequential rural stratification’ category. ‘Attitude to land sales’ refers to the villagers’ opinions about the moratorium. The last column presents the number of respondents per category.

5.5.1. Competition with LFEs (strategy S1)

The 'competition with LFEs' strategy conducted by Ukrainian private farmers was partly discussed earlier in Subsection 5.4.3. The present section is devoted to the analysis of the farmers' efficiency and resilience, as well as prospects for private farming.

Private farmers constitute less than 1% of the rural population. The core business of Ukrainian farmers was (and is) grain production, which is threatened by agrohholdings that became dominant in this market segment (Kobuta et al. 2012). In comparison with large-scale agribusiness, small farmers in the fieldwork area have lower yields per hectare. Thus, farmers from the Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi district harvest 20 centners²¹ of wheat per ha, while the Ukrainian-British agrohholding 'Niva Pereyaslavschiny' operating in the same region harvests twice as much because of its intensive use of fertilisers. The board chairman of this holding, Olexander Yaroschuk, said about the farmers' choice for competition with large-scale agriculture:

I do not understand what they [private farmers] are doing in this business! They do not know how to be efficient; they do not know the technologies. They cannot compete with us. I do not understand why they keep on growing wheat and reject the idea of planting... strawberries, for example, which is much more labour-intensive and does not require economies of scale!²²

Repositioning to another market niche requires significant financial investments, which are often unavailable to farmers. Commercial farmers are less flexible and adaptive (than subsistence-oriented rural households) to changing environments as they do not control their resource base (more than 50% of their lands are leased), often use hired labour, and have fixed obligations to suppliers and counterparts (e.g. leasing storage facilities). Furthermore, the labour-intensive farming sector is occupied by rural households, who manage to produce these products at lower costs (see Subsection 5.5.2).

Unequal competition and farmers' reluctance (and inability) to adapt to large-scale agricultural development, as well the absence of state programmes supporting private farmers, lead to the gradual disappearance of commercial family farming in Ukraine. Lapa et al. (2008) expect that, in the coming years, large agrohholdings will squeeze the majority of pri-

vate farmers out from the agriculture sector, and that those who will remain will only hold single niches in agricultural production.

5.5.2. Taking a free market niche (strategy S2)

The majority of agroholdings in Ukraine specialise in export-oriented intensive monocrop production that brings quick profits. Meanwhile, less profitable, more time-consuming and labour-intensive farming (such as the production of potatoes, vegetables, fruits, and milk) was left outside the focus of large agribusiness (Prokopa and Borodina 2012). The adaptation strategy of the majority of Ukrainian households consisted of abandoning the grain production sector (where they had been present before the year 2000), and specialising fully in labour-intensive farming.

Table 5.2 outlines such changes in the production of three major farm products: wheat, potatoes and milk (so chosen because they characterise the division of market niches between rural households and large agribusiness). The period before the year 2000 is characterised by a drastic decline in the production and share of agricultural enterprises in total agricultural output, and a rise in commercial family farming. With the expansion of LFEs after the year 2000, the market division occurred.

LFEs became specialised in wheat production, producing more than 80% of the total wheat harvested. According to official statistics, the share of households has not changed. However, the fieldwork observations showed a drastic decline of wheat production in rural households compared to previous years. This mismatch between the official data and the actual situation can be explained by calculating the household production based on household consumption, which in the case of wheat is supplemented by the in-kind payment received from LFEs (which is not reflected in official statistics).

The reverse is observed in the milk production sector. The share of dairy farm enterprises has decreased by 30% from the year 2000 to now; in contrast, rural households continued increasing milk production and have become dominant in this market segment. Currently, rural households contribute up to 81% of the milk produced and up to 67% of the milk marketed in Ukraine (Tarassevych 2005). Potato production is less indicative, as households were always the major potato producers, and, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, their share in potato yields has

been increasing. LFEs are not interested in potato production, even though domestic demand for this farm product is high. This demand is met by potatoes from rural households. Today, rural households contribute up to 98% of the total harvest of potatoes in the country. Furthermore, they produce 86% of the vegetables and 85% of fruits and berries. In total, 52.7% of the gross agricultural output is produced by rural households (Ukrstat 2014).

Table 5.2

Production (and share in total production) of wheat, potatoes, and milk per agricultural producer (mil tonne).

| | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2004 | 2007 | 2009 | 2012 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Wheat | | | | | | | | | |
| Agr. enterprises ²³ | 30,2 (100%) | 15,7 (97%) | 9,2 (90%) | 18,7 (88%) | 17,1 (83%) | 14,6 (83%) | 11,5 (83%) | 17 (83%) | 12,7 (82%) |
| Households | 0,1 (0%) | 0,5 (3%) | 1 (10%) | 2,6 (12%) | 3,5 (17%) | 2,9 (17%) | 2,4 (17%) | 3,8 (17%) | 3,1 (18%) |
| Total | 30,3 (100%) | 16,2 (100%) | 10,2 (100%) | 21,3 (100%) | 20,6 (100%) | 17,5 (100%) | 13,9 (100%) | 20,9 (100%) | 15,8 (100%) |
| Potatoes | | | | | | | | | |
| Agr. enterprises | 4,9 (29%) | 0,6 (4%) | 0,2 (1%) | 0,3 (2%) | 0,2 (1%) | 0,3 (1%) | 0,4 (2%) | 0,4 (2%) | 0,7 (2%) |
| Households | 11,9 (71%) | 14,1 (96%) | 19,6 (99%) | 17 (98%) | 16,4 (99%) | 20,5 (99%) | 18,7 (98%) | 19,2 (98%) | 22,5 (98%) |
| Total | 16,8 (100%) | 14,7 (100%) | 19,8 (100%) | 17,3 (100%) | 16,6 (100%) | 20,8 (100%) | 19,1 (100%) | 19,6 (100%) | 23,2 (100%) |
| Milk | | | | | | | | | |
| Agr. enterprises | 18,6 (76%) | 9,4 (54%) | 3,7 (29%) | 3,6 (27%) | 3,5 (24%) | 2,5 (19%) | 2,2 (18%) | 2,2 (18%) | 2,4 (20%) |
| Households | 5,9 (24%) | 7,8 (45%) | 9 (71%) | 9,8 (73%) | 10,7 (76%) | 11,2 (81%) | 10,1 (82%) | 9,4 (82%) | 8,9 (80%) |
| Total | 24,5 (100%) | 17,3 (100%) | 12,7 (100%) | 13,4 (100%) | 14,1 (100%) | 13,4 (100%) | 12,3 (100%) | 11,6 (100%) | 11,3 (100%) |

Source: Author's own compilation based on Ukrstat 1990-2013.

In their study of the post-Soviet rural adaptation, O'Brien et al. (2004: 474) argued that 'those households that have made a more successful adaptation to a developing market economy by growing and selling more food would also receive a higher proportion of income from that source'. Indeed, Ukrainian villagers who took the free market niches became relatively independent (the largest income share comes from sub-

sistence farming and selling their products at local markets). These rural dwellers are called ‘*odnoosibniks*’ (independent peasants).

Oдноosibniks are largely reminiscent of the middle peasants, who have a self-controlled resource base, derive their income wholly or mainly from their own labour, and exhibit a degree of self-sufficiency (Deere and de Janvry 1979). According to the fieldwork observations, every small village of 40 households has at least 1-3 odnoosibnik families. The southern regions of Ukraine feature even larger concentrations of these independent peasants. Typical odnoosibniks are middle-aged and older married couples who hold livestock, cultivate household plots, and engage in local market relations, but produce just enough to meet the pressures of simple reproduction. Although not every subsistence farmer is called ‘odnoosibnik’ by their fellow villagers (due to their being of retirement age, or the death of one of the spouses), this study distinguishes 13 rural households (out of the 43 participants) which adopted the ‘taking a free market niche’ strategy. These small-scale agricultural producers out-compete commercial family farmers due to their capacity for ‘self-exploitation’²⁴ (increasing labour inputs at the expense of leisure) that allows them to produce at lower costs and adjust to market changes. Odnoosibnik Luba (54) describes the impact of market price fluctuation on her family’s labour:

We are like slaves, working from sunrise until late at night. What did my children see? No vacation, nothing. We have to pay for everything: for milk certification, for feed, for a place at a local market... And then they [buyers] say: “your milk is too expensive²⁵, it costs 8 hryvnias in a supermarket, and you sell it for 10”. We have to sell for 8, what else can we do...?²⁶

The labour-intensive type of niche farming operated by rural dwellers and the lack of productive resources to expand their households at the expense of former-collective land plots prevent any competition between rural households and LFEs at this stage of agricultural development. Villagers’ occupation of market niches free from large agribusiness guarantees their subsistence and makes the coexistence scenario possible. However, for how long? Olivier de Schutter (2011: 261) argued: ‘the coexistence scenario will likely be short-lived: it will simply be a slow motion path to the transition towards a rural economy dominated by large production units, in which small-scale farming will be marginalised

and subordinated to the large production units and in which further rural migration will be encouraged’.

5.5.3. Looking for employment opportunities (strategy S3)

The struggle for incorporation into large-scale agriculture on terms of employment was already mentioned as one of the rural strategies. This subsection discusses means of subsistence and persistence of this rural stratum. Wage-work accounted for 41% of the rural family income, with at least one family member employed by an agroenterprise (FAO Farm Survey 2005); subsistence farming on household plots remains the second source of subsistence for such families. The combination of wage work with subsistence farming created the basis for the ‘peasant-worker’ label. This rural stratum of semi-peasants, semi-workers is not unique. In the American colonies, slaves were forced to grow some part of their own subsistence (Mintz and Price 1973), in Zanzibar rural dwellers received small food plots in exchange for a rent in labour (Cooper 1980), and in colonial Sumatra plantation coolies were assigned unused estate fields to cultivate consumption crops in their ‘spare time’ (Stoler 1986).

The Ukrainian case might be seen differently, as the peasant-workers are often landholders who lease their lands to LFEs. Farmer Olexander (41) calls this situation ‘the Ukrainian land paradox’, under which ‘the bourgeoisie leases lands from its proletariat’²⁷. Indeed, many farm workers are owners of land shares cultivated by the enterprises that employ them. However, the shareholders’ engagement in corporate decision-making is rather nominal, and these relations remain characterised as ‘illusive inclusion’ in land deals.

According to class-based theory, the ‘peasant-worker’ is a temporary formation: the capitalist class would tend to subordinate small landowners by reducing them to dependent labourers (Paige 1975). In contrast, Stoler (1986: 43) argued that the combination of wage-work and subsistence farming is a stable mode, and represents ‘a state of “flux equilibrium” advantageous to management and labour alike’. LFEs in Ukraine make no efforts to have the lands in ownership and are satisfied with a long-term lease, as it does not require huge capital investments. For rural dwellers, the employment at LFEs increases the family monetary income, while also allowing land ownership and a peasant mode of production. As a result, this rural stratum has the lowest poverty risk, according to Vlasenko’s (2008) estimations.

5.5.4. Rural out-migration (strategy S4)

During the economic recession that came after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many people moved to rural areas, as it was easier to survive by relying on private subsistence economies. During 1990-1999, Ukrainian villages gained more than 350 thousand people²⁸ (2% increase of the rural population) due to the in-migration of former rural residents. These in-migrants had moved to the cities prior to the economic crisis of the 1990s, but were now forced to come back due to limited employment opportunities in urban areas (Skryzhevskaya and Karacsonyi 2012).

The direction of the migration flow reversed with the emergence of large-scale land investments. Since 2002, rural out-migration has outpaced in-migration. During 2002-2011, more than 2 million people (15% of the rural population) left the countryside (Ukrstat 2014). The incomers did not compensate this decrease, and the net migration was – 265,000 people (or – 1.6% of the rural population) during the last decade. The escape from villages can be seen as a population response to large-scale land acquisitions. The reluctance to adapt to capitalist agriculture made some rural dwellers move to the cities (or abroad). The out-migration was stimulated by the short-term possibility to sell land shares (through various exchange schemes that were not forbidden by the moratorium at that time²⁹), which provided some rural dwellers with the money to leave the countryside.

However, the out-migrated rural dwellers are not able to compete with urban residents for well-paid jobs due to the low quality of rural education. As a result, rural dwellers accept low-paid and often informal work in the cities, or join the ranks of the urban unemployed (Skryzhevskaya and Karacsonyi 2012).

Since 2005, the rural net migration outflow has been slowing down: the out-migration remains the same, while the in-migration has increased. The return of many rural dwellers to villages was caused by urban 'push factors' (i.e. high costs of living, demand for qualified labour, urban unemployment). Contrary to the population return in the transition period when the land rights were still secured, current in-migration does not guarantee the subsistence of those who are coming back to the villages. The absence of household- and land plots made these people bound for miserable living conditions. The fieldwork data shows that many of the returning rural dwellers experience social exclusion, and

later find employment in a (non)agricultural sector or join their parents (or relatives) in household farming.

5.5.5. Indifference (strategy S5)

The rural residents who showed no changes in response to land grabbing were elderly widows and working-age villagers who are not able/willing to adapt to socio-economic changes. While the indifference of elderly widows can be explained by the guaranteed income from social transfers (pensions) and the lack of labour resources for taking free market niches, the second group depicts the inability of a few people to adapt to market conditions, which often leads to their social exclusion³⁰ and marginalisation.

The elderly widows represent about 12% of the rural population (NAS survey 2013). They continue household cultivation at the scale they used to do before the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to distinguish this group from those who have chosen the ‘taking a free market niche’ strategy, because elderly widows also produce labour-intensive farm products, which are included in the total agricultural output of rural households in statistics. However, their agriculture-derived income is much lower than that of *odnoosibniks*, and the major source of their living is their pension, which provides a small but stable income (Vlasenko 2008).

The above-mentioned rural household strategies demonstrate that the least adaptive strategies (i.e. competition, migration, and indifference) are more likely to lead to poverty. The resilience to changes often results in lower income, social exclusion, and socio-economic dependency. Meanwhile, the adaptive strategies (i.e. taking a free market niche, and searching for employment) are less risky and practised by nearly half of the survey respondents³¹. This demonstrates the ability of many rural households to adapt to and coexist with the capitalist agriculture. Thus, under the present conditions, the development of large-scale industrial agriculture in Ukraine does not lead to the disappearance of the peasant mode of production and the creation of landless rural labour. Instead, it stimulates the appearance of self-provisioning small-scale rural households and creates peasant-workers (reminiscent of the ‘Soviet peasant’), who, although they have wage-work, remain dependent on subsistence agriculture.

5.6. Personal gains from land grabbing versus community benefits

The villagers' choice between pursuing self-interests and the interests of the whole community, and their concerns over material rather than immaterial benefits from land deals, became demonstrable in their talks about the cancellation of the land moratorium.³² Although the opening of land markets will only formally legalise the ownership of LFEs, which are already *de facto* landholders in Ukraine, rural dwellers express a negative attitude toward land sales. According to the 2011 Gorshenin survey, 70% of villagers are convinced that farmland should not be sold as a commodity. Petro (76) from the village Trebukhovtsy forecasts negative consequences for rural communities from land sales:

As soon the moratorium is eliminated, bandits will grab all the lands. People will not get the *pai* anymore, nobody would care about villagers, nobody would need them. The Ukrainian village will disappear, it will die...³³

Despite these negative predictions, Petro plans to sell his land plot and move to a city. The personal benefits seem to outweigh community interests.

The 2013 NAS survey indicates the desire to sell land among 23% of the rural population; 12% have not decided yet. The share of those who would not sell the land after the moratorium's cancellation has been decreasing. In 2010, the share of rural dwellers who wanted to continue leasing their land plots to LFEs after the moratorium's cancellation was 84%; in 2011, they accounted for 80%; and in 2013, their number has dropped to 65% (NAS survey 2013). This could be explained by an ageing rural population (24.1% of rural residents are older than 60), and their unwillingness to see their offspring working on these lands and/or living in the countryside (40% of the respondents of the 2011 Gorshenin survey answered that they want their children to live in urban areas). Therefore, a number of elderly villagers are intending to sell their lands in order to improve their material standing or help their children in cities. Maria (69) from the village Rusanivtsy explains her choice in favour of land sales:

I will sell my land plot. Why do I need it? I am already an old woman. I will not farm it. If they give me at least a kopeyka [*cent*] for this land... I

need to help my children. One of my sons lives in poverty. I will sell my land and give the money to him. Maybe he will get out of his troubles...³⁴

The villagers' preferences for personal benefits despite the negative consequences for the whole community can also be inferred from their reaction to the soil degradation caused by large-scale agricultural development. In the in-depth interviews for this research, rural dwellers criticised the LFEs' monocrop agriculture and fertiliser usage; however, no one was intending to withdraw his or her shares from their tenants, even though they violate environmental standards. The rent price was the factor that made a difference, while environmental sustainability played a minor role. Only 5% of rural dwellers are concerned about ecological problems in their villages (Gorshenin survey 2011). In fact, LFEs often entice villagers from more eco-friendly private farmers by offering larger pais for leasing their lands.

When choosing between possible tenants for their land plots, rural dwellers are also guided by the prospects of social support from LFEs. Apart from the formalised support (pai-payments), LFEs frequently pursue corporate citizenship programmes, which allow them to gain the sympathies of the local population; this, in turn, ensures their control over farmlands. Viktor Prikazhnuk, the director of the 'Obry' agrocompany, describes his idea of corporate social responsibility:

Formerly, kolkhozy helped rural dwellers a lot. People expect the same from us. We have to help, otherwise, they could lease their lands to someone else [...] People ask us to buy equipment for the local hospital, or to repair the roads. We allocate money for this... There was a case of fire in one rural house. The inhabitant asked us to help. We gave him some money and cypher to repair the roof.³⁵

Furthermore, rural households get some assistance with household plot cultivation and seeds from LFEs (FAO Farm Survey 2005). According to the fieldwork, this support is the major argument of villagers against land sales; meanwhile, concerns over land sovereignty or land ownership do not play a part. Tamara (55) from Hreblya village is convinced:

If we will sell our lands, the new owners will do nothing for rural dwellers. The renting gives us a possibility to control them, to ask for assistance...³⁶

These arguments contradict the assumption of many rural civil society organisations, which believe that peasant resistance to land sales comes in protest to the ecological unsustainability of large-scale industrial agriculture, the destruction of the ‘peasant way’ of life, and the deprivation of rural community interests. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that the rural attitude toward land deals and large-scale agriculture largely depends on the personal gains villagers receive from land leases versus sales (which outmatch community interests), and that material benefits (such as social support and *pai* size) take precedence over more ideological concerns (i.e. about environmental sustainability and land sovereignty).

5.7. Discussion of the research findings’ generalisability

This chapter has presented an analysis of various rural response strategies toward large-scale land acquisitions and industrial agricultural development in Ukraine, and investigated socio-economic transformations within rural communities as a consequence of smallholders’ adaptation to these processes (as opposed to resistance). The study went beyond the common assumption of peasants’ outright opposition to land grabbing. It critically looked at the post-Soviet villagers’ attitudes to land deals, on-going changes in rural household activities, and popular arguments for or against land sales.

This analysis provides an empirical confirmation of McCarthy’s (2010) argument that the peasants’ attitude to land grabbing critically depends on the local population’s terms of inclusion in land deals. The ‘illusive inclusion’ of the Ukrainian rural population in land deals is done through the formalisation of LFEs’ support to households (*pai*-payments and corporate social responsibility programmes), which, together with the continuity of the dual system of agriculture (large-scale versus small-scale) creates a positive attitude among many original landholders. Some villagers’ sympathy toward large-scale land acquisitions is achieved through the option of ‘subordinate inclusion’ by employment at LFEs. In a context of high rural unemployment, low salaries in agriculture, and a lack of material and cultural stimuli for creating independent family farming, subordinate inclusion is seen as a desired option and leads to the struggle for incorporation of rural dwellers in large agribusiness. Only when the villagers and LFEs operate in the same markets and

compete for the same land is the rural resistance to land grabbing unavoidable.

This chapter has demonstrated that rural households' response strategies toward large-scale agricultural development influence the socio-economic stratification in the countryside. The more adaptive responses lead to more advantageous positions of households in rural communities, while the least adaptive strategies cause villagers' social exclusion and increase their poverty risk.

Furthermore, this study questions the idealisation of the peasantry. The empirical data demonstrates that Ukrainian rural dwellers respond to land sales based on their estimation of possible material benefits derived from the lease, sale, or cultivation of their lands, while concerns with land sovereignty, the 'peasant way' of life, and environmental sustainability are largely absent in the countryside. Moreover, despite collectivist features of the post-Soviet population, villagers' self-interest in land deals often outweighs the importance of community interests.

However, how generalisable are these findings?

Because of high land availability and low rural population density in Ukraine, land grabbing is pursued without the physical displacement of the local population. This factor might be seen as a point of difference in comparison with many "typical" cases of land grabbing. However, recent scholars have noted a shift from land grabbing to *land control* grabbing, which is not always accompanied by land purchases and peasants' relocations (White et al. 2012). The various forms of acquiring control over land and related resources include purchase, lease, contract farming, forest conservation, and so on. In his analysis of expansion of sugarcane and oil palm plantations in Guatemala, Alonso-Fradejas (2012) gives an example of lease schemes and contract farming agreements, which resulted in the disenfranchisement and impoverishment of the local population. Wilkinson et al. (2012) analyse land grabs for soy cultivation in Brazil where some agricompanies apply models that are based on land leases and complete responsibility for the management of agricultural production, turning the landowner into a mere 'rentier'. Thus, the Ukrainian example does not seem to be an exceptional case.

Another fact, which could influence the general application of the findings, is the exclusion of Ukrainian villagers from the distributive land reform in its early stages. The land distribution process did not make the

official landowners dependent on their lands, and therefore, the loss of control over their property does not endanger their subsistence. However, voluntary transfers of land ownership are common even in countries where peasants had a chance to farm their lands before land grabbing. Thus, in Chile, lack of access to loans for land reform beneficiaries and the existence of agrarian debts prevented them from investing in the emerging fruit and vegetable activities. Consequently, most peasants sold their lands to entrepreneurs, who could invest in these profitable activities (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2002).

Certainly, there are a lot of country-specific factors that influence rural responses to land grabbing. The moratorium on land sales and the official landownership by rural population is not a common practice in the countries affected by land grabbing. However, the prohibition of open land sales is just a formal ban for agrohholdings, who are *de facto* landholders in Ukraine (Spoor and Visser 2011). Furthermore, the degree of population ageing is very high in Ukraine and is significantly higher than in other counties affected by land grabs: 24.1% of Ukrainian rural dwellers are older than 60 (Skryzhevska and Karacsonyi 2012). As a comparison, the number of rural inhabitants in this age group constitutes 7% of the rural population in Ghana (which is among the highest in Africa), and 7.5 in rural India (Chuks 2004, CensusIndia 2010). Among the other country-specific factors are: the Soviet history of collective agriculture, the erosion of peasant-like features such as ‘individualism’ and ‘property consciousness economising’, and the abandonment of farmlands previous to land grabs. However, how significant is the influence of these factors on rural responses to large-scale land acquisitions?

This study argues that the common assumptions about rural politics in large-scale agricultural development should be reconsidered. The rural propensity to adapt and find benefits even in land grabbing can play an important role in shaping policies of rural social movements and developing recommendations to governments and investors in regard to large-scale land acquisitions. Moreover, taking into account the specificity of the Ukrainian case, the new insights on smallholders’ decision-making and their response strategies to land grabbing should be integrated into the land grab academic debates. This study indicates the need for further research on rural communities’ responses and differentiation in the context of large-scale land acquisitions.

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Notes

¹ This study uses the terms: 'rural dwellers', 'villagers', 'rural households' or 'smallholders' when talking about post-Soviet small-scale food producers and rural workers (see the discussion on the peasant (agrarian) question in Chapter 1). However, the vast majority of literature on rural resistance to land grabbing employs term 'peasantry'. Therefore, the terms: 'peasant' and 'peasantry' are occasionally used in this chapter when discussing other contexts or general assumptions.

² It should be noted that there are on-going debates on how to interpret the current process of large-scale land acquisitions in Ukraine (and in the former Soviet Union at large). Some authors argue that it is a land grabbing process, which might jeopardise the subsistence of small-scale farmers and lead to irresponsible land use (Visser and Spoor 2011, Plank 2013). Others are convinced that it is a development opportunity, when more efficient large-scale agricultural producers substitute less efficient former collectives and small- and medium-scale farming (Lapa et al 2008, Petrick et al. 2013). The latter position is often supported by the fact that large-scale land acquisitions are predominantly taking place on former collective lands; although distributed to rural dwellers during the land reform, these lands were not used for private farming and were abandoned for a decade. This latter position sees land deals as investments, not grabs. Although in this chapter I analyse the on-going land acquisitions within a land grabbing framework, I do acknowledge the less dramatic character of this process in the case of Ukraine (and in the former Soviet Union at large); therefore, I generally refer to it as 'large-scale land acquisitions', and only use the 'land grabbing' term in the most extreme situations, when land deals were done with violation of rural dwellers' rights and jeopardised their subsistence.

³ This research purposely overlooks covert forms of rural politics toward land grabbing. According to Scott (1985), peasant resistance acts often remain hidden in social settings where open rural protest is restricted by political and economic factors. There is an on-going debate on whether gossiping, stealing, and foot-dragging should be classified as: the post-Soviet villagers' covert resistance, a 'parasitic symbiosis' between households and large farm enterprises, or just hooliganism (see e.g. Chapter 2). That being said, hidden politics do not repre-

sent a significant force of change in the current post-Soviet countryside, no matter what they are referred as (Spoor and Visser 2004).

⁴ Political crises can open the political system to new challenges and alternative policies, creating what Gourevitch (1986) terms ‘open moments’ for contestations. State failure can politicise the citizenry and fragment elite unity, potentially prompting the re-examination of both government policy and political alliances.

⁵ The results of the Gorshenin survey are available (in Ukrainian only) at: http://institute.gorshenin.ua/researches/81_Sotsialnoekonomichne_stanovishche_.html; the results of FAO Farm survey are presented in Lerman et al. (2006); the results of the NAS survey are available (in Ukrainian only) at: http://www.dazru.gov.ua/terra/control/uk/publish/article;jsessionid=4A3099EDFB03CBDA0B75C604240F01B2?art_id=144665&cat_id=130839;

⁶ The concept of ‘peasant way’ is characterised as ‘involving a subsistence family economy, stem family arrangements and a highly localised cultural and co-operative system’ (Siocháin 2003: 1).

⁷ The contract farming model was proposed by large private palm oil investors in Honduras. According to this model peasant households produce raw African palm fruit and assume all production risks, while the large private plants process and market the palm oil, and, therefore, accrue the value added in processing. Although this model is not beneficial to small-scale palm fruit producers, it transcends simple economics and engages with the cultural meaning of African palm oil plantations, which evoke images of a better life and success.

⁸ The majority of Ukraine was incorporated into the Russian Empire after the second partition of Poland in 1793, while the remaining section (the principality of Galicia) remained part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until World War I.

⁹ Households mostly did not have fixed entitlement to the land they cultivated. Land was frequently redistributed anew among the villagers’ households according to the needs (and capacity) of the households (e.g. depending on changes in household size).

¹⁰ Dekulakisation was the Soviet campaign of political repression, including arrests, deportations, and executions of millions of the better-off peasants and their families in 1929-1932. The richer peasants were labelled *kulaks* and considered class enemies.

¹¹ The ‘Soviet peasant’ terminology was used as an official social category, evolving through the 1930s-1940s, the 1950s-1960s, and peaking in the Brezhnev period of the 1970s-1980s (Humphrey 2002a).

¹² Nikita Khrushchev believed that the low agricultural production at *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* was caused by the population’s personal subsidiary farming. In 1958 he initiated a policy directed against private households. Since then it was

forbidden to keep livestock at rural households. The state offered rural dwellers the option to sell their livestock to kolkhozy and sovkhozy at a fixed price. However, this caused a mass slaughtering and led to a significant reduction in livestock and poultry in the country (Taubman 2004).

¹³ Private family farms are often referred as *selhans'ke-fermers'ke gospodarstva* (peasant family farms) in official Ukrainian documents. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the term 'peasant family farming' contains contradiction and can lead to misunderstanding. In order to prevent the association of this commercial farming with the peasant mode of production, this chapter uses terms 'family farming' or 'individual commercial farming' to refer to this type of agricultural production.

¹⁴ According to the State Service of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, the moratorium on farmland sale will not be lifted earlier than in 2018. However, there is the Law Proposal N2791, which suggest extending the moratorium until 2020.

¹⁵ Political crises can open the political system to new challenges and alternative policies, creating what Gourevitch (1986) terms 'open moments' for contestations. State failure can politicise the citizenry and fragment elite unity, potentially prompting the re-examination of both government policy and political alliances.

¹⁶ 'During the revolutionary events, the rural population participated in the protests very little, because it is initially more passive and elderly. The typical active participants in the protests are relatively young city dwellers with higher education. In general, the revolution had no impact on the activities of rural households. They keep doing the same things they used to do. The new government has not made any significant changes in agricultural policy until this moment'(interview with Andrey Martyn, head of the Department of Land Use Planning of the National University of Bioresources and Nature Management of Ukraine. Interview was conducted by email on 18 June 2014).

¹⁷ Interview conducted in the village Rusanivtsy (Letichevsk district, Khmelnytsk region); 29 July 2012.

¹⁸ In rural areas near cities, rising income might partly be caused by the rural dwellers' increased employment in the cities, or by their engaging in non-agricultural activities.

¹⁹ Interview conducted in Kiev; 22 July 2012.

²⁰ Interview conducted in the village Hreblya (Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky district, Kiev region); 1 August 2012.

²¹ 1 centner = 0.1 ton (centner is a unit of weight often used in Ukraine)

²² Interview conducted in the village Pereyaslavskoye (Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky district, Kiev region); 1 August 2012.

²³ State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics does not distinguish LFEs from commercial family farmers in its reports, and calculates ‘agricultural enterprises’ production as a sum total of the LFEs and farmers’ production.

²⁴ The concept of ‘self-exploitation’ was developed by Chayanov in *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (1925).

²⁵ Meanwhile, the milk prices in Ukraine are very low, especially according to international standards, which allows resellers to make a profit on it (see Van Der Ploeg (2009) about the Parmalat corporation’s imports of Ukrainian milk to Italy)

²⁶ Interview conducted in the village Hreblya (Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky district, Kiev region); 2 August 2012.

²⁷ Interview conducted in the village Yerkivtsi (Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky district, Kiev region); 1 August 2012.

²⁸ It should be noted that migration is not the major component of the rural population change in Ukraine. The natural decrease has been (and remains) very high in Ukraine, which is the major reason for depopulation in the countryside. During 1991-2011, the mortality rate exceeded the natality rate and produced a natural decrease of 2 million people, which accounted for 14% of the rural population.

²⁹ During 2002-2004, the option existed to exchange land plots for other properties, which did not contradict the moratorium on land sales. In such a way, many rural dwellers “sold” their lands. Later, these exchange operations were forbidden by the new version of the moratorium (Yurchenko and Miroschnichenko 2006).

³⁰ Social exclusion is a process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities, and resources, which are normally available to members of society and which are key to social integration (Silver 1994).

³¹ The least adaptive strategies (competition, migration, and indifference) are practiced by 24 households out of the participating 43, while the adaptive strategies (taking a free market niche, and searching for employment) are practiced by 19 respondents. Taking into account the fact that the sample for private farmers was chosen according to the purposive selection method, the proportion of those who adapt and those who do not adapt might be approximately the same at the population scale.

³² The fieldwork interviews were conducted in the summer of 2012. At that time, the moratorium on land sales was expected to be cancelled in January 2013. It was a very important topic for the rural population, and they actively discussed the pros and cons of the coming changes.

³³ Interview conducted in the village Trebukhovtsy (Letichevsk district, Khmel-nitsk region); 28 July 2012.

³⁴ Interview conducted in the village Rusanivtsy (Letichevsk district, Khmelnitsk region); 29 July 2012.

³⁵ Interview conducted in the village Trebukhotsy (Letichevsk district, Khmel-nitsk region); 28 July 2012.

³⁶ Interview conducted in the village Hreblya (Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky district, Kiev region); 2 August 2012.

6

'Quiet Food Sovereignty' as Food Sovereignty without a Movement? Insights from Post-Socialist Russia

Abstract

What does food sovereignty look like in settings where rural social movements are weak or non-existent, such as in countries with post-socialist, semi-authoritarian regimes? This chapter presents an analysis of a divergent form of food sovereignty, based on the example of Russia. Being inspired by the concept of 'quiet sustainability', this study distinguishes and investigates a dispersed, muted, but clearly bottom-up variant of food sovereignty – 'quiet food sovereignty'. In 'quiet food sovereignty', the role of the very productive smallholdings is downplayed by the state and partly by the smallholders themselves. Those smallholdings are not seen as an alternative to industrial agriculture, but subsidiary to it (although superior in terms of sociality and healthy, environmentally friendly produce). As such, 'quiet food sovereignty' deviates from the overt struggle frequently associated with food sovereignty. This chapter discusses the prospects of 'quiet food sovereignty' to develop into a full food sovereignty movement, and stresses the importance of studying everyday rural politics within the food sovereignty framework.

6.1. Introduction

What shape does food sovereignty take in settings where rural social movements are weak or non-existent, such as in countries with post-socialist and (semi)-authoritarian regimes?¹ Food sovereignty is generally seen as something tightly connected to social movements, which are able to formulate a food sovereignty discourse and follow it up with collective action.

The expanding studies on food sovereignty have until now focused on the Global South and the West but have left Eurasia's post-socialist states – such as Russia, Ukraine, the Central-Asian states, and China, accounting for a large share of the world's countryside and population – out of the picture. Russia and most of the former Soviet Union's other major agricultural producers (i.e. Ukraine and Kazakhstan) constitute an area where the discourse on, and practices of, food sovereignty strongly diverge from the global understandings of it as defined by Via Campesina and the Nyéléni forum. Although the Global South and West already feature varying definitions and approaches to food sovereignty (Patel 2009), this study contends that the Russian take is radically different from the basic premises of the food sovereignty variants studied until this time². Therefore, a closer look at the post-Soviet space – and Russia in particular – may contribute to the critical examination of food sovereignty, which is registering a global rise in popularity.

With no study conducted on food sovereignty in Russia until now, and virtually none in the post-socialist area³, the first question that arises is whether food sovereignty exists at all as a concept or practice in the country. Food sovereignty is hardly used in government policy and media in Russia, and even then it is mostly as a synonym for 'national food security' (e.g. Super 2012). Government policy is focused on food security and in particular national food self-sufficiency, through the development of large-scale farming. Although food sovereignty rarely figures in Russian debates in its literal translation (*prodovol'stvennyy suverenitet*), the concept is certainly not irrelevant.

This chapter argues that a kind of food sovereignty does exist in Russia, but in a less pronounced form – as it practically thrives without any organisations that could formulate outspoken discourses or coordinate actions. However, some of the actions and implicit ideas related to the concept are widespread among the population and clearly emerge bottom-up. Inspired by the concept of 'quiet sustainability', as introduced by Smith and Jehlička (2013), this study distinguishes and investigates a dispersed, muted, but clearly bottom-up variant of food sovereignty, which is called here 'quiet food sovereignty'. This study demonstrates that food sovereignty in practice plays an important role in Russia, with smallholdings producing a large share of the food consumed, in or near their local places of living, and in a largely ecologically friendly way. These elements match well the vision of food sovereignty advocated by global social

movements. This chapter reveals that a rights discourse, which is an important element in the food sovereignty concept (Claeys 2013, Nyéléni 2007), is rather implicit in ‘quiet food sovereignty’. Moreover, the agricultural and environmental importance of Russian smallholdings – which produce, for instance, more potatoes than all the commercial farmers in the US and the UK put together (Ries 2009) – is grossly overlooked and downplayed by the government. Even more strikingly, it is also partly overlooked by the smallholders themselves. The following analysis will demonstrate that this extraordinary productivity and ‘quiet food sovereignty’ are primarily linked to: first, longstanding concepts and practices of household security and self-reliance, which date back to the Soviet era food deficits; and, second, the symbiosis between LFEs and smallholdings, which consisted of LFEs providing smallholders with large farm assets, and the smallholders’ pilfering from LFEs.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 6.2 introduces the limited political opportunity structure and the level of rural civil society development in Russia. Section 6.3 sketches the theoretical (and methodological) approach for studying settings with weak or non-existent movements. Section 6.4 explains the weakness of rural social movements in Russia. Section 6.5 describes the Russian food system and the symbiosis between large-scale and small-scale farming. Section 6.6 deals with the discourses and practices of Russian smallholdings, and explains how they constitute ‘quiet food sovereignty’. Section 6.7 discusses the implicit political dimension of quiet food sovereignty. Section 6.8 discusses the perspectives for the emergence of a genuine food sovereignty movement. Section 6.9 presents the conclusions and discusses the wider relevance of ‘quiet food sovereignty’.

6.2. Rural social movements in Russia

In Russia, the policy space for social movements is very limited. In the Soviet era, virtually all social organisations were established top-down. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, it became legally possible to establish social movements. However, due to 70 years of socialist reign without genuine social movements, the population starkly distrusted new collective endeavours and ideologies and lacked the experience of grass-roots collective action. In addition, it was too distracted by the ‘shock-therapy’ reforms of the 1990s, with their sudden price liberalisation, widespread privatisation, and drastic reduction in state spending. Faced

with such a context, Russians did not mobilise to resist changes collectively, but instead coped with (food) shortages by intensifying the Soviet practices of smallholder farming and informal exchange networks.

As a consequence, in the 1990s, only a limited number of social movements emerged in the cities, and virtually none in the countryside. This chapter uses the term 'rural movements', although some of them also include urbanites with smallholdings. From the mid-2000s onwards, some rural movements emerged (see Chapter 3). However, due to increasing constraints imposed on civil society organisations by the Putin regime, practically all these movements became either strongly state-led, with very weak links to their supposed constituency, or 'phantom movements', without substantial activities. The only movement that remained closely connected to rural dwellers was the countrywide movement *Krestyanskiy Front* (Peasant Front), which defended rural dwellers faced with land grabbing. However, due to mounting constraints by the state and the lack of social will to mobilise, the movement was disbanded in 2013. Thus, it is hardly an overstatement to characterise rural social movements in Russia as extremely weak or virtually non-existent. Moreover, it is increasingly problematic to call these organisations social movements: they are weak in terms of both their lack of popularity among the population and their lack of power (see Chapter 3 for further details).

6.3. Studying food sovereignty without a movement: analytical tools

Food sovereignty is generally seen as something tightly connected to a social movement, which is able to formulate, promote, and execute a food sovereignty discourse, and convert it into collective action. The emergence of food sovereignty in the global policy arena is clearly strongly connected to the rise of *Via Campesina* as a transnational social movement, and various other peasant and farmer associations and networks (such as members of the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty). The study of food sovereignty, aside from being (among others) a response to the limitations of the food security studies, is very much a branch of social movement studies, with its focus on discursive aspects (discourses, visions on farming) and organisational issues (leadership, transnational alliances, and open/massive collective action).

Recently, some studies have explored food sovereignty beyond the node of social movements. Particularly relevant here are the studies that have gone beyond the ‘global summitry’ of large social movements, by looking at localised forms of resistance against the global food system (Ayres and Bosia 2011). But so far, the localism of such micro-encounters ‘is still overshadowed by protest summitry and large-scale mobilisations’ (Ayres and Bosia 2011)⁴. Even with the growing attention for the various actors operating beyond social movements and the study of actors (or scales) in food sovereignty issues as ‘multiple sovereignties’ (McMichael 2009), the social movements still remain the touchstone of analyses. This raises the question of what food sovereignty looks like (or might become) in settings where social movements are extremely weak or non-existent. Does food sovereignty exist in (semi)-authoritarian states where social movements are mostly forbidden (such as in China) or heavily restricted (as in Russia)? For settings such as Russia as well as other post-socialist and/or semi-authoritarian settings with weak or non-existent movements, additional analytical tools are necessary to study food sovereignty. This study suggests paying more attention to the level of everyday practices and customs (including the interconnections between large and small farms), ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985), as well as ‘muted discourses’ (Ardener 1975). This chapter advances these tools in contrast to the existing focus on outspoken discourses such as public speeches and declarations, and concepts from the social movement literature that are frequently used in the food sovereignty literature, such as ‘framing’, ‘mobilisation’, and social movement strategies (e.g. Claeys 2013, Desmarais 2007, Torres 2003).

The research on food sovereignty was initially very much a study of the framing, mobilisation, and genealogy of the transnational movement *La Via Campesina* (Desmarais 2007, Torres 2003). This is, of course, fully understandable, taking into account the crucial role of the movement in defining and propagating – though not inventing (Edelman 2014) – the concept. A focus on customs and everyday practices instead of social movements enables another approach to rights and entitlements. In the food sovereignty literature, the term ‘right’ appears frequently. The Nyéléni food sovereignty declaration (Nyéléni 2007: 1) defines food sovereignty as:

...the *right* of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their *right* to define their own food and agriculture systems. [emphasis added]

However, it is debatable whether this is about strict rights in the juridical sense, or about entitlements which would, for example, have a more social, informal character. Hospes (2014), for instance, argues that the choice of 'peoples' instead of 'humans' (individuals) as actors seriously complicates the conversion of food sovereignty claims into legally recognised rights, such as human rights (a more optimistic evaluation is provided by Claeys, 2013). As the legal impact of food sovereignty is (still) weak, it seems relevant to include 'entitlements' under the label of rights. Following up on Hospes' (2014) call for more attention to legal pluralism within food sovereignty, this chapter will draw upon work in legal pluralism and anthropology (von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2006), and view rights (for instance in the sphere of property) as multi-layered. Von Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006) propose the analysis of property on four levels; ideology, legislation, social norms/customs, and (everyday) practices. The literature on property focuses mostly on the first two levels (which often fall together), while ignoring the latter two (von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2006). Applying this multi-layered analysis helps us to uncover the symbiosis between Russian smallholders and LFEs, which exists underneath the ideological and legal divergence between the two groups, and which is an important element for understanding 'quiet food sovereignty'. As mentioned above, this concept is inspired by the 'quiet sustainability' concept by Smith and Jehlička (2013). They argue, based on research in post-socialist central Europe, that healthy and environmentally sound agriculture can also be reached without explicit discourses and social movements, and therefore, they call it 'quiet'. The concept does not incorporate a political dimension, as there is no mention of rights and entitlements. This chapter will contend that quiet food sovereignty does include a political dimension – although a rather implicit one. In analysing this implicit political dimension, this study will draw on the earlier mentioned anthropological work on property relations and the concept of 'everyday resistance' (Scott 1985).

Aside from interviews with rural social movement leaders (see Chapter 3), the data collection for this article consists predominantly of qualitative interviews and observations among the rural population and dacha cultivators. In total, 60 interviews were used in this analysis. Most of

them are conducted in Vladimir and Moscow region during October – November 2013. This study also benefits from the interviews with smallholders and state and agribusiness officials, conducted by Visser in the Belgorod region during winter 2013.

Before elaborating on (quiet) food sovereignty, this chapter will describe Russia's large- and small-scale agriculture (and their interconnections), loosely based on the above-mentioned property relations framework.

6.4. Post-socialist agrarian reform and the soviet legacy of symbiosis

Large-scale agrarian reform started in Russia after the Soviet Union's demise in 1991. Farmland privatisation took place through a 'share-based' land distribution, as opposed to the 'plot-based', physical land distribution conducted in most Central and Eastern European countries. The rural population could choose to keep their shares in the privatised successors of the collective and state farms, or take out their paper shares and convert them into real land plots in order to establish a family farm.

Few rural dwellers established private farms, and the growth of such farms already stagnated by the mid-1990s due to insecure property rights, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of market access (Pallot and Nefedova 2007). As a result, LFEs, successors of the collective and state farms, stayed largely intact. The number of LFEs, with an average size of several thousand hectares, remained remarkably stable. Moreover, so-called agroholdings emerged in the course of the 2000s – companies that consist of various integrated LFEs and/or other firms in the food chain. Rural dwellers largely remained employees in LFEs, while simultaneously expanding (more than doubling) their 'subsidiary household plots' (Rosreestr 2012).

Two opposing forms of production existed in the Soviet agriculture: on one hand, the highly mechanised and subsidised, but inefficient, state and collective farms; on the other, the small, but highly productive, semi-private parcels of their employees. Although they only represented 5% of the total farmland (Rosreestr 2012), the rural population – using manual labour on their tiny plots (of 0.10 – 0.25 ha) – nevertheless accounted for an astonishing 22% of the total agricultural production value of the Rus-

sian Soviet republic in 1989 (World Bank 1992). Moreover, many households had (and still have) their *dachas* (summerhouses with a garden around the cities); as *dachniks* (dacha owners), they cultivated several fruits and vegetables for own consumption and exchange. Currently, every second family has a dacha plot, with an average size of about 0.01 ha; 47% of them cultivate half or more of this land (Nefedova 2008).

The impressive production on the household plots (further enlarged by dacha cultivators) was seen as a strong indication that – once Soviet-era restrictions on private production would be lifted – rural dwellers would establish fully independent farms. This expectation was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the existing (informal) property relations.

Although, on the ideological and legislative levels, the state/collective farms and the household plots were opposite and fully separated, on the level of rural norms and daily practices, they were interlinked in a so-called symbiosis (Nikulin 2003, 2009, Visser 2006). Household plots could produce relatively large amounts of food because they were allowed to use a whole array of collective facilities: from obtaining young livestock and letting private cattle graze on collective pastures, to using machinery. As a result, households were able to ensure their own food security and get extra revenue through sales or exchange. The chairmen of the collectives were also interested in providing such support, as it was a way to motivate their low-paid workers. Finally, aside from the support provided to households, there was also a wide practice of goods being *taken* (pilfered) by the households.

The boundaries between the collectives and household plots were thus permeable – a situation which largely continued in the post-Soviet era (Visser 2006). An LFE decline set in during the 1990s, and farm wages began not being paid for months. In reaction, rural households enlarged their plots and intensified pilfering from the collective. In the course of the 2000s, with some recovery in LFEs and improved wage payment, households somewhat declined the intensified smallholder production, though it remained at a high level⁵. While towards the end of the Soviet era (1989) the Russian household plots produced 22% of the agricultural output value, in 2012 this was estimated to be 43.2% (Rosstat 2013b). In sum, land reforms unintentionally led to a continued co-existence of LFEs and (intensified) smallholder production.

6.5. Quiet food sovereignty: discourses, importance, and quietness

Although rural (and some urban) households are a fundamental part of the Russian food system, producing a large share of total agricultural output, their role in the pursuit of the national food security and sovereignty is overlooked or consciously ignored. This section will examine the state and agribusiness discourses on small-scale farming, discuss smallholder productivity and sustainability, and smallholders' own discourses.

6.5.1. Discourse on smallholder farming by state and agrobusiness

The Russian government and the agribusiness elite regard the large-scale industrialised sector in a positive light, despite such social and environmental risks of large-scale, industrial farming as soil degradation (due to mono-cropping) (Nikulin 2009). The smallholder sector is largely depicted in negative terms – at least where it's agricultural and economic functions are concerned. Descriptions like 'backward', 'relic of the past', 'without long-term perspective', 'low hygiene standards' abound. This statement by the vice-president of the Russian Grain Union, Alexander Korbut, illustrates this view:

The reduction of the share of personal subsidiary farming is a normal process, because this farming is inefficient. And in the light of the forthcoming accession of Russia to the WTO, their fate seems pretty dismal⁶.

Western scholars have also frequently described the post-Soviet increase of the smallholders in such negative terms as 'muddling through transition with garden plots' (Seeth et al. 1998). Pallot and Nefedova (2007: 202) correctly state that, in Russia, 'people's farms have been portrayed as the official "other" of the agri-food system'. They are seen as the opposite of the supposedly modern and efficient LFEs.

However, while smallholders are construed as backward and inefficient, and get little direct state support, they provide a substantial share of Russia's basic foodstuffs. Households produce 93% of the country's potatoes, 80% of the vegetables, 51% of the milk, and 54% of the meat (Rosstat 2013a). It should be noted that smallholdings (especially dacha plots) are sometimes seen as positive by the state, but then as a 'healthy life style' (in terms of working with nature and consuming fresh produce)

or 'recreation', and rarely in terms of its productive function and its role in the agri-food system.

6.5.2. Productivity, sustainability, and localness

Food self-provisioning in Russia is quite productive and resource-efficient (in terms of material inputs). Table 6.1 presents the yields of the most essential crops.

Table 6.1
Yields of LFEs and rural households (tonne/ha)

| | 1991 | 2001 | 2012 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Large Farm Enterprises (LFEs) | | | |
| Grain* | 1.44 | 1.83 | 1.69 |
| Potatoes | 9.24 | 9.95 | 16.64 |
| Vegetables | 13.59 | 13.58 | 21.44 |
| Rural households | | | |
| Grain* | 2.67 | 1.80 | 1.37 |
| Potatoes | 11.52 | 10.86 | 12.63 |
| Vegetables | 15.96 | 15.40 | 19.90 |

Source: Yields calculated based on output and cultivated land data (by producer and crop) from Rosstat (2013a).

* - Includes legumes.

The table shows that rural households are currently nearly as productive (in terms of yields) as LFEs, having been even more productive until recently. The productivity of LFEs is primarily achieved through state support, use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and machinery. Households have comparable yields, with essentially no direct support from the state and with largely traditional methods⁷.

Those traditional methods result in environmentally friendly agriculture. Organic fertilisers (manure, compost) are used instead of agrochemicals, and fuel input is minimal as tractors are rarely used (occasionally for ploughing) and much work is done by using animal traction (Pallot and Nefedova 2007, Visser 2009). These environmentally friendly practices do not emerge from wider concerns about sustainability or contributing to an environmentally sound or localised agricultural system.

They arise mostly from the desire to grow healthy food (especially among dacha cultivators), the inability to buy expensive inputs, and self-interest in cultivating the small plots in a way that ensures longer-term fertility. The following quote by Tamara Semenova, a representative of the rural social movement 'Peasant Front', describes how the self-interest of smallholders brings about favourable environmental results:

They are interested in maintaining the fertility of their land. [...]. Peasants use predominantly organic fertilisers. They maintain the fertility of the land through the use of green manure. They also use crop rotations [...]⁸.

A 61-year-old inhabitant from Vladimir region said in the interview for this study:

Potatoes we plant for ourselves [...] not to buy the potatoes from the store! Look at those [latter] potatoes. They are 5 years old and still look gorgeous, clean, no rots, nothing! [...] It tells us that there are so many pesticides in those potatoes! And in the potatoes we plant – there is nothing.

Although the benefits of smallholder farming are not uncontested, globally, there is an increasing body of work arguing that smallholder farming is more ecologically sustainable (e.g. Altieri et al. 2011). Relevant here is the fact that, while aversion of fertilisers (and in particular pesticides) is widespread in Russia, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the millions of smallholders do use chemical inputs. In a survey conducted in 2001–2002 among 43 LFEs, 12% of them indicated their provision of pesticides to households (Visser 2009). This figure (as is the one for fertiliser) is much lower than that for other forms of support, such as ploughing plots (98%), fodder provision (79%), and use of pastures (53%). Overall, the intensification of household production from the early 1990s onwards was mainly achieved by expanding the small plots and, above all, by putting in much more labour (Visser 2009).

Finally, smallholder production in Russia is highly localised, with a short food chain and distance from field to fork. Both the production and the wider food chain of these smallholders are rather sustainable. A large portion of the smallholders' produce is simply consumed by them and/or exchanged with fellow villagers. The sale of produce occurs within the district at market places, along roadsides, or via itinerant traders (Pallot and Nefedova 2007). Much of the households' surplus, how-

ever, is exchanged via networks of relatives and acquaintances, and represents a sociality that is highly valued and has a long cultural history in the Soviet era (Zavisca 2003).

6.6. The 'quiet' discourse of smallholders themselves

The discourse of the smallholders themselves is less pronounced and more implicit (with many adhering to the official view, but also some deviations), but it is also widespread. Essentially, they see their smallholdings as a means of survival when wages are not sufficient, or when one suddenly loses one's job – hence, responding to insecurity. The same holds for dacha cultivators. This study follows the position of Ries (2009: 200), who argued that the aspect of a fall-back option, a means to survive in times of sudden economic crisis or personal misfortune, trumps other elements such as recreation, health, and ecological values (Zavisca 2003). A dacha cultivator interviewed by Reis (Zavisca 2003) stated:

You can trust that, if everything really falls apart, you have the skills and habits to survive.

A rural dweller from the Prokuzino village of the Vladimir region, who currently cultivates only half of his plot, said in the interview for this study:

If there will be a year of famine, we will cultivate all our 10 sotkas [0.1 ha] with potatoes⁹.

There is a remarkable paradox that smallholdings are so important, in terms of both economic and ecological value, while at the same time the rural population is rather 'quiet' about these facts, and see them simply as a coping strategy. With the silencing of the smallholdings' role, the term 'quiet food sovereignty' – as inspired by the 'quiet sustainability' concept (Smith and Jehlička 2013: 148) – would probably be the best way to characterise this muted, diffuse form of food sovereignty. The 'quiet' food sovereignty would then be one oriented towards coping with insecurity (also featuring a subsidiary function, as will be shown below), instead of aspiring to a role as an independent mode of farming. As for the overlooked smallholding benefits to the environment (partly due to lack of income to buy fertilisers, herbicides etc.), the concept of 'quiet sustainability' seems apt. The concept of quiet sustainability was devel-

oped based on research in Poland and the Czech republic, and, therefore, it is important to acknowledge the major differences between Central European Countries and (post-)Soviet countries regarding socialist agriculture and post-socialist land reforms (to name but a few). Particularly between Poland and Russia, an important difference is that the symbiosis between LFEs and smallholders is hardly found in Poland, where few state farms were established and independent farmers remained the mainstream. However, and most importantly for our argument, the countries do share a common post-socialist setting and a widespread practice of urban and rural dwellers engaged in smallholdings. Smith and Jehlička (2013: 148) have described ‘quiet sustainability’ as follows:

This novel concept summarises widespread practices that result in beneficial environmental or social outcomes and that do not relate directly or indirectly to market transactions, but are not represented by their practitioners as relating directly to environmental or sustainability goals.

The practices are ‘quiet’ in terms of sustainability because ‘the concern is with the state and quality of the food rather than the environmental impact of the food system per se’ (Smith and Jehlička 2013: 155). And they constitute:

not a programme to be implemented, a future ambition for society or an exceptional contrast to the norm. Rather it is a quiet but purposeful parallel to the market economy of food. (Smith and Jehlička 2013: 155)

In Russia, the quiet and parallel nature of smallholder production is clearly indicated by the widespread adherence of the rural population to the official categorisation of rural smallholdings. As in the Soviet period, the smallholdings of the population are called ‘subsidiary household plots’. The absence of terms like ‘farm’ or ‘agriculture’ is telling. The term ‘household’ has connotations of household chores (much of the work on the household plot is done by women, and seen as an extension of housekeeping).

Furthermore, the term ‘subsidiary’ is also crucial. In the Soviet Union, with its principle of full employment, rural smallholdings indeed functioned as a subsidiary income and food source, secondary to collective farm employment. However, during the slump in agriculture, with widespread wage arrears that came after the demise of the Soviet Union, smallholdings quickly rose in importance. Rural dwellers intensified

smallholder production (and urbanites did likewise on dacha plots) (Visser 2009). Even with a slight decrease in their share in the total agricultural production since 2009, these plots still constitute the main source of income for a substantial part of the rural population, and an important source of food and saved expenses for many urbanites (Visser 2009). Thus, while the term 'subsidiary household plot' might have been appropriate during the Soviet period, it is now a stark understatement of its actual role in both agriculture and rural incomes.

However, as mentioned above, rural households still adhere to the idea of the subsidiary nature of their plots vis-a-vis LFEs.

While the personal smallholding is seen as crucial for survival, and few would do away with it completely, few rural dwellers actually aspire to expand their plots if they can get a salaried job that provides them with sufficient income (Nefedova 2008). A considerable share of the rural households would in fact decrease production (although not fully). Furthermore, few rural dwellers (or dacha cultivators) would see their smallholdings as a viable alternative to the large-scale food system. On the contrary, rural dwellers have strong nostalgia for the Soviet past and welcome the revitalisation of former kolkhozy and sovkhozy (Pallot and Nefedova 2007). The striking fact is that the state and agribusiness' negative view on smallholders partly resonates among the latter themselves¹⁰. While this is mainly the result of the longstanding subsidiary role of household plots, it is also caused by the longstanding stigmatisation of rural dwellers (Ries 2009), and reinforced by the official media discourse. However, while smallholders often expect a decline in the importance of smallholdings in agriculture, this study did not encounter smallholders who expect their complete disappearance.

6.7. The political dimension of quiet food sovereignty

Many authors argue that the political dimension of food sovereignty is key (Claeys 2013, McMichael 2009, Patel 2009). Desmarais (2007), for instance, speaks of 'a collective struggle to define the alternatives to the globalisation of a neoliberal, highly capitalised, corporate-led model of agricultural development'. Elements of the political dimension are: a clear vision to shift the control of productive resources to farmers, their subsequent claiming of rights, and finally their struggle (against state and/or agribusiness) to achieve those rights.

In Russia, at a first glance, the political dimension seems to be absent. There are no outspoken food sovereignty visions and claims. There is hardly any open struggle for food sovereignty. Could we then classify the Russian case as food sovereignty? In other words, in addition to quiet sustainability, can we call it quiet food sovereignty?

In terms of aims and claims, proponents and researchers of food sovereignty often state that it is, first a drive to roll back the mainstream large-scale food system (in terms of what it is against) and, second, a desire to gain democratic control over food production (and consumption) by establishing autonomous smallholder production (in terms of what it is in favour of) (Desmarais 2007, McMichael 2009, Nyéléni 2007, Patel 2009). This section discusses the relevance of these two aims for the Russian case.

Regarding the first point, it should be stressed that, whereas in many countries food sovereignty is inspired by the threats of the large-scale system for smallholders, this has not been the case in Russia. Russian rural dwellers have traditionally experienced numerous benefits of the large-scale food system as rural workers and citizens (full employment, good social services, and support for their smallholdings have all been connected to their workplace in LFEs). As consumers, rural and urban dwellers' major concern constituted the frequent deficits of fresh and varied food. Long queues in front of half empty food shops became iconic images of this failure of the system. Thus, whereas elsewhere the dominance and pervasiveness (in terms of outcompeting other food options) of the large-scale food system is the main concern, in Russia the lack of pervasiveness and the resulting food insecurity have traditionally been the concern.

Second, are claiming more control by smallholders and striving for full autonomy essential criteria for acknowledging Russian practices as a form of food sovereignty? This study argues that the Russian smallholders see cultivating their own food as an important right. However, this right is implicit. It is hardly expressed as it is a longstanding tradition, and a substantial degree of control over their own production is seen as the natural order of things. Why would smallholders state the obvious?

Moreover, the right to cultivate (a part of) their own food does not necessarily mean that the right for autonomous food provision is

claimed. As defined by the Peoples' Food Sovereignty Network (2002), food sovereignty is:

the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; [...] to determine the *extent* to which want to be self-reliant. [emphasis added]

For Russian smallholders, a parallel existence of smallholdings next to LFEs seems to be the appropriate cultural form, with a symbiosis between LFEs and households preferred over full self-reliance.

As long as the right to produce their own healthy food is not threatened, smallholders will not have much of an incentive to protest. Rural dwellers 'have the core land resource, the household plot, in their inalienable property' (Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 203), and this resource is hardly threatened as the plots are too small for LFEs. The access to LFEs' resources, however, has always been informal, and here 'the legal basis for their claims is often tenuous or non-existent' (Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 106). Access to these resources seems to be based on an implicit social contract in which rural dwellers keep quiet as long as the symbiosis between LFEs and smallholdings is maintained by the former, or at the very least the smallholders are not restricted.

As the rights discourse is so implicit in quiet food sovereignty, it raises the question of whether the rights discourse is muted or in fact absent. In other words, does quiet food sovereignty have a potential for political struggle or is it intrinsically apolitical?

It seems that people will claim their rights and engage in struggle when the implicit social contract of LFEs and smallholders' symbiosis (or at least co-existence) is threatened. A strong indication of this is the smallholders' fierce reactions to the state policy aimed at fighting swine flu in the autumn of 2013. After the outbreak of the disease in the swineherd of a household in the Belgorod region, the governor decided to slaughter all the pigs held by the households in the region and to pay them compensation. This policy triggered a widespread response: letters to newspapers, demonstrations, roadblocks, and even the emergence of a small social movement ('Kolos') to counter it. The state policy was frequently interpreted by smallholders as a pretext to eradicate smallholdings – to the benefit of LFEs. As a smallholder stated;

Initially, pigs will be liquidated, then chickens, other birds. [...] In the end, by hook or by crook, the last peasants will be eliminated. (Park 2013)

Furthermore, the current pilfering of farm assets by rural dwellers could be seen as a struggle in the form of ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985). It is not a form of resistance against LFEs as such, as rural households can hardly imagine a future without them; but it can be classified as resistance against the tendency of LFEs to curtail their support to smallholders in order to cut costs (Nikulin 2003, 2009) – in other words, as resistance against the erosion of the ‘implicit social contract’ of symbiosis (cf. Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 124).

These examples show that quiet food sovereignty is not apolitical. This study agrees with Pallot and Nefedova (2007: 106) that:

...rural Russia has been the scene of a muted, but real, contestation of market reform on the part of the population intent on defending their access to resources and services to which they believe they are still entitled.

That active claim making and open struggle have been rare is caused first of all by the fact that, by and large, people are able to engage in producing and consuming ‘healthy and culturally appropriate food’ as they wish.

6.8. Preconditions for an emerging food sovereignty movement

To gauge how likely it is that a food sovereignty movement would emerge out of ‘quiet food sovereignty’, it is necessary to discuss various obstacles and opportunities.

One cognitive obstacle for a food sovereignty movement is that the rural population associates sovereignty exclusively with the state level (such as the ‘sovereign’ or ‘guided’ democracy propagated by the Putin regime, or the national food self-sufficiency – for which food sovereignty is occasionally used as a synonym. The rural dwellers’ own food practices and narratives are mainly concerned with a secure food provisioning – control over food production is only a means to that end. At this point, it is possible to draw some parallels with the situation in Honduras (Boyer 2010), where Via Campesina’s food sovereignty campaign failed because it did not take into account the understandings of the Honduran peasant. The latter associated food sovereignty with the powers of nation states, and the concept of food security with their deeply held peasant understandings of, and desire for, security in terms of their

continued social reproduction in insecure social and natural conditions. This resonates with the Russian case, with its tradition of food deficits and smallholder farming as a vital survival strategy for coping with that.

Another obstacle is the low potential for mobilisation among the rural population. This is related to the fragmentation of Russian rural society (with, for instance, numerous divisions between private farmers, household plot holders, and dacha cultivators (Pallot and Nefedova 2007: 36–38), in addition to a demographic composition which is strongly skewed toward the elderly and economically inactive (Nefedova 2008). Furthermore, there is a generally low proneness toward collective action (as described in Chapter 3).

Another major hindrance is the earlier discussed symbiosis between LFEs and household plots. This symbiosis, while favourable to the smallholders, at the same time hinders the further growth of independent family farming. What is more, it reinforces the status quo of the dominance of LFEs. More generally, this symbiosis precludes a more assertive, rights-based stance toward farm enterprises and the state, which could hold the seeds of a food sovereignty movement. When salaries or land rents are not paid, when a crisis strikes, the ingrained reaction is to seek refuge at the household/dacha plots. As a Russian farm director, interviewed by Visser in 2002, stated (cf. Ries 2009: 201 on dacha cultivators):

In France, farmers take to the streets to protest, but in Russia, rural dwellers remain quiet because they can always get by on their household plots.

However, when the symbiosis is threatened, one might expect instances of sudden mobilisation, as indicated by the earlier mentioned example of the smallholders' response to the state's swine flu policy. The ongoing modernisation (read: further industrialisation) of agrohholdings, the sharpening of sanitary standards, and the rising influence of foreign agribusiness through Russia's recent accession to WTO might put additional pressure on the continuation of this symbiosis, and subsequently, create incentives for a Russian mobilisation around food sovereignty issues.

6.9. Conclusions

Normally, one would expect to find food sovereignty within rural movements; in Russia, genuine rural movements are extremely rare and weak. The food sovereignty term is rarely used in Russian debates in its literal translation.

However, the food sovereignty concept is neither irrelevant nor fully absent. Food sovereignty in its Russian guise is a more implicit, but widespread approach and clearly emerges bottom-up. This type of food sovereignty without a movement is called ‘quiet food sovereignty’ in this chapter and was conceptualised based on recent insights regarding ‘quiet sustainability’ (Smith and Jehlička 2013). This study demonstrated that food sovereignty in practice plays an important role in Russia, with the rural and urban population as smallholders being able to produce a significant share of the food consumed, in or near their local places of living, in a largely ecologically friendly and healthy way. Furthermore, the exchange of food from those smallholdings generates a sociality that is generally highly valued, and has a long cultural history (Ries 2009), which presents a purposeful parallel to market exchange in agribusiness. These aspects match the vision of food sovereignty put forward by global social movements rather well.

However, at the same time, the productive and environmental importance of such smallholdings is grossly overlooked and downplayed by the Russian government, but even more strikingly, also partly by the smallholders (cf. Kitching 1998, Pallot and Nefedova 2007). Quiet food sovereignty does not challenge the overall food system directly through its produce, claims, or ideas, but focuses on individual economic benefits and ecological production for personal health, as well as a culturally appropriate form of sociality, generated by the exchange of self-produced food.

Furthermore, a rights discourse – which is so central in food sovereignty – while not absent, is rather implicit. It is grounded in the long-standing tradition of self-provisioning, and taken for granted.

Quiet food sovereignty is yet too diffuse to be classified as a genuine food sovereignty movement. Some emergent rural social movements do exist in Russia. However, for a national food sovereignty movement to take shape, there are many hindrances to overcome such as: the divergent understandings of food sovereignty and security among the Russian

smallholders, and the low potential for mobilisation among the rural population (due to, for instance, social fragmentation). The symbiosis between smallholdings and LFEs also impedes resistance; however, when this symbiosis is threatened – it might trigger sudden mobilisation.

This chapter contends that the Russian case is relevant for the wider food sovereignty debate and movement. Some media sources even heralded Russian smallholdings as offering a model that might be the key to feeding the world (NaturalNews.com 2012). This study suggests that food sovereignty as an everyday practice and discourse is more widespread in post-socialist and semi-totalitarian settings than one would suspect by evaluating food sovereignty by the presence of food sovereignty movements. Acknowledging this would further the global reach and inclusiveness of the food sovereignty movement, and build new transnational linkages with parallel struggles in non-democratic contexts.

Viewed critically, some might wonder whether considering 'quiet food sovereignty' a form of food sovereignty makes for a slippery slope, with the risk of weakening an already broad concept. It is important to acknowledge this risk, and recognise that the inclusion of 'quiet food sovereignty' will be a major challenge, both conceptually and practically, for network building in settings without strong movements. However, the definition of food sovereignty has never been static over the past two decades, and the ambition to incorporate new local experiences to achieve 'a fine balance' between 'local realities and global actions' (Desmarais 2007: 135) or visions is key to keep food sovereignty vital. Furthermore, this chapter argues that – for food sovereignty to constitute the global movement it claims to be – it should be inclusive of the large numbers of rural (and urban) people in non-democratic settings who in many ways practice the ideal of food sovereignty, even if they are less vocal in doing so.

Finally, this chapter argues that the finding that 'quiet food sovereignty' has not (yet) turned into a solid social movement should not only be seen as a shortcoming. In fact, in less than democratic settings with limited open space for contention, the implicit practices and narratives, the strong orientation toward co-existing with large-scale farms, and the hidden or ad-hoc struggles of 'quiet food sovereignty' might be more effective than full-blown movements. Russia's 'sovereign' or 'guided democracy' approach does not offer much space for social mobilisation. It is very likely that a sizeable food sovereignty movement would face state

opposition and restrictions, as is currently happening with various urban NGOs and emerging rural movements. Alternatively, the Russian government might take up the concept if food sovereignty would become more popular, but would likely do so in a tightly controlled manner. It might do so, for instance, by moulding the concept ingeniously – taking out the elements that challenge the status quo – as it has previously done with various rural and urban movements and their notions, by creating state embedded civil society organisations (Chapter 3). Thus, it would be less likely for a Russian food sovereignty movement to be close to the term's global understanding (in the vein of a social movement like *Via Campesina*), and more likely for it is something of a state-captured '*Via Kremlina*'.

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Notes

¹ This applies also to urban food movements.

² For varying definitions, see e.g. Desmarais (2007), Edelman (2014), Nyéléni (2007), Peoples' Food Sovereignty Network (2002).

³ An exception is DeMaster (2013).

⁴ Alternatively, some argue more recently that food sovereignty is becoming too locally focused (Iles and Montenegro 2013).

⁵ Furthermore, though they mostly continued offering some support to household plots, LFEs gradually reduced the range of goods and/or beneficiaries (Nikulin 2003, 2009, Visser 2009).

⁶ See: Subsidiary farming – a relic of the past or the reality of the Russian countryside? <http://altapress.ru/story/80477>.

⁷ Some of the state support to LFEs may 'leak' to the plots through the symbiosis between the two; but this would be a small percentage, especially as the monitoring of large farm property became more strict from the late 1990s onwards (Visser 2009).

⁸ Interview conducted 21 October 2010, Moscow.

⁹ Interview conducted 5 November 2013.

¹⁰ There are also differences between regions and households, with the small group of somewhat larger, commercial household plots likely to be more positive. For a slightly more positive view on smallholdings, see Alekhin (2012); for negative views, see Kitching (1998), Pallot and Nefedova (2007: 205).

7

What Do We Learn From This? Research Implications, Generalisability, Limitations and Future Directions

This doctoral dissertation aimed to rethink some predominant assumptions in critical agrarian studies, by positioning post-Soviet post-socialist rural politics within the context of global agrarian debates. At the same time, it challenged the common understanding of contemporary transformations in the post-socialist countryside by bringing fresh insights from the critical agrarian studies literature. It demonstrated that land grabbing and the development of large-scale industrial agriculture are often accepted by post-Soviet villagers, who – contrary to rural people in other parts of the world – do not necessarily resist, but rather work to be incorporated into large-scale agriculture. This study also shows that small-scale subsistence farming can coexist with large-scale agriculture, due to the continuation of the Soviet dual agricultural system and the symbiotic relations between large and small farms. The analysis of rural resistance and mobilisation in post-socialist post-Soviet settings reveals that social movements and activists are more effective when they cooperate with the state and employ official regulations, norms and rhetoric in their politics, rather than openly opposing the regime. Finally, the study indicates that the rights to culturally appropriate food and defining one's own food system are not alien to the post-Soviet population. However, these ideas are not accompanied by public discourses and open mobilisation, thus, representing a 'quiet' form of what can still be seen as food sovereignty.

This concluding section addresses the issue of generalisability of the study results and shows common features in rural politics within the post-socialist region. It is followed by an overview of how the research findings could transform the predominant discourses in critical agrarian studies. The discussion of the theoretical implications is followed by an

analysis of possible policy implications of the dissertation's results in Russia and Ukraine. And finally, this chapter recognises and discusses some limitations of this research and indicates several ideas for future studies.

7.1. Generalisability of research findings within the post-Soviet post-socialist context

The generalisation of qualitative research results is considered as irrelevant and even impossible by (neo)positivist scholars, who are committed to scientific methods and quantitative research (Jonassen 1991, Sobh and Perry 2006, Creswell 2007). They argue that qualitative studies represent the researcher's subjective interpretation of the phenomenon, and that the same actions or circumstances have different meanings to different individuals. Therefore, the extension of the results of qualitative research to a wider population or to different contexts is considered inappropriate. Constructivist scholars, on the contrary, argue that generalisation is possible in qualitative studies; however, it is less expressive and deterministic than in quantitative research (Payne and Williams 2005, Stake 1980, Popay et al. 1998). Payne and Williams (2005: 296) proposed a type of limited generalisation in qualitative studies, so-called 'moderatum generalisations', which constitute 'the modest, pragmatic generalisations drawn from personal experience which, by bringing a semblance of order and consistency to social interaction, make everyday life possible'. Stake (1980: 69) introduced the concept of 'naturalistic generalisation', which is a 'partially intuitive process arrived at by recognising the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context'. Popay et al. (1998: 348) advocated in favour of logical generalisations, which allow 'a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probabilistic generalisations to a population'. This section presents the discussion about the generalisability of research findings, largely following the perspective of Popay et al. (1998), and reveals how similar types of phenomena can be detected within and outside post-Soviet and post-socialist settings.

Before putting forth some generalised claims regarding the post-socialist context, it is important to assess whether these research findings can be logically generalisable throughout Russia and Ukraine. In terms of geographical scale, this study is limited to the analysis of rural politics in suburban areas (the Moscow and Kiev regions), fertile agricultural re-

regions (the Stavropol Krai and the Khmel'nitsk region), and a more marginal, but still central part of Russia (the Vladimir region). Despite the multi-sited fieldwork, the primary data does not reflect the ethnic diversity, unequal economic development, and diverse natural and climatic conditions of the analysed countries. Thus, by focusing on the central European part of Russia, this study overlooks processes in the Northern and Asian regions of the country, which could demonstrate different pathways of development. For instance, Nakhshina (2012) revealed open resistance and mobilisation of indigenous fishermen in the Murmansk region (the North-Western part of Russia) against restricted access to aquatic resources due to the activities of large industrial fishing companies. Zhou (2015) analysed agrarian transformations in the Russian Far East, caused by the inflow of Chinese migrant farming population. These regional differences and many other place-specific processes were not reflected in this dissertation. Similarly, the ethnographic study in two Ukrainian regions clearly does not account for all rural politics that take place in the country.

However, the goal of this study was not to cover all forms of socio-geographic diversity in Russia and Ukraine, but to investigate and reveal the key rural politics in detail and from various perspectives. Despite the geographical boundaries of primary qualitative data, this analysis is not limited to any particular place and time. Many other academic studies reflect analogous processes in different parts of Russia and Ukraine, which support the arguments of this dissertation. For example, Visser (2008) revealed a perseverance of productive symbiosis between large and small farms in the Pskov and Rostov regions of Russia¹. Kuns (2016) discussed rural abilities to adapt to unfavourable conditions in his study of smallholders' strategies in the Kherson region of Southern Ukraine. The empirical chapters of this dissertation engage with an extensive set of post-Soviet literature and include national statistical data and survey results, which confirm and compliment the qualitative research findings, and, therefore, allow for making more generalised claims at the country level.

In order to evaluate whether the research results can be generalised to post-socialist settings at large, we need to return to the discussion of 'post-socialism' and the comparability of different phenomena in the post-socialist region (initiated in Chapter 1). The term 'post-socialism' can also be applied to China, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba and several other

countries that share a history of socialism. However, this research follows a more narrow understanding of post-socialism, which is defined as a socio-economic transition from socialism to capitalism in the region of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (see Humphrey 2002a, Matkowski 2004, Gudeman and Hann 2015). Until recently, post-socialism was understood as a temporary formation, which inevitably should come to an end when a complete transformation to capitalism occurs (Matkowski 2004, Stenning 2005a). Matkowski (2004) assessed the transformation to capitalism in 27 post-socialist countries of Europe and Asia, and clustered them based on macroeconomic performance and social welfare. The first group² consists of the lower-middle income countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia that are lagging behind in terms of transition to capitalism. The South-Western former Soviet Union (FSU) and South-Eastern European countries³ were referred to by Matkowski (2004) as the upper-middle income states, which went through a privatisation of former collective assets, but still experience significant state interventions in the economy; whereas post-socialist East-Central Europe⁴ represents a high-income group that is the most advanced in the privatisation process and development of market relations.

According to Humphrey (2002a: 12), the comparison of these countries is essential for understanding the transformation processes in this region. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, description of different situations in various countries and then applying calculations does not make sense as ‘there is X here, but not there; there is Y here but not there’ (Humphrey 2002b: 12). Thus, the generalisability of this dissertation’s results for post-socialist settings is discussed for every detected phenomenon and by using the wide field of ‘post-socialisms’ for comparison.

Despite somewhat different schemes of agricultural de-collectivisation,⁵ many post-socialist countries followed similar trajectories of agrarian transformation. Thus, as stated by Gudeman and Hann (2015: 11) in their study of Eastern European agricultural development, ‘capitalised family farming in the Western manner still remains an exception on the post-socialist countryside. Successful entrepreneurs (often the old power-holders in a new guise) depend on personal links to national elites and access to EU subsidies’. This corresponds to Burawoy’s (2001) concept of ‘transition without transformation’, which was used in

Chapter 1 to discuss Russian and Ukrainian post-socialist transformations. The former socialist power structures remain largely unchanged in many post-socialist countries. Individuals who occupied important positions under socialism, benefited from land distribution and agriculture subsidies, while the majority of the rural population became dispossessed and highly dependent on subsistence farming on their household plots.

In their pilot study of land grabbing in post-Soviet Eurasia, Visser and Spoor (2011) argued that the three largest post-Soviet agricultural producers – Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan – experience similar patterns of land investments. The legacy of industrial agriculture, abandonment of farmland after the collapse of the FSU, and uncertain land rights of the rural population lead to a remarkable resemblance in the processes of large-scale land accumulation in these countries. This, in turn, caused similar responses among rural communities. Thus, this dissertation draws a parallel between Ukrainian and Kazakh villagers, who prefer working at LFEs to running a private family farm due to the socialist legacy of industrial farming, which resulted in the societal acceptance of large-scale land deals (Chapter 5). The socialist structures remain vital in Belarus and define the process of land grabbing, which proceeds through international investments into (primarily state-owned)⁶ former kolkhozy and sovkhozy (Farmlandgrab 2014). This suggests that the process of land and capital accumulation follows a similar trajectory in a number of post-Soviet middle-income countries that are exposed to agrarian capitalism, but demonstrate strong legacies of socialist agriculture.

Low-income Central Asian countries⁷ have been much slower in transforming former socialist farm structures. In Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan the state retained ownership of farmland and continues to control agricultural production (Hofman and Visser 2014, Veldwisch and Bock 2011). Here, ‘agrarian structures have not crystallised yet, in contrast to most other FSU states where agrarian structures have more or less stabilised after two decades of independence’ (Hofman and Visser 2014: 5). However, uncrystallised agrarian structures do not restrain, but rather facilitate land grabbing and the dispossession of the rural poor. Processes of land acquisitions by domestic and foreign investors were detected in a number of studies on agrarian transformation in Central Asia (Lerman 2012, Hofman and Ho 2012, Visser and Spoor 2011).

Generalised claims can be made in terms of advocacy, rural politics and state-society relations in many authoritarian countries of the FSU. Thus, similarly to Putin's patrimonial governance, Belorussian president Lukashenko's public image of '*bat'ka*' (father of people) and his 'flamboyant autocratic style finds favour with a vast constituency of rural and elderly voters still nostalgic about the communist era' (Silitski 2005: 85). Lukashenko's use of the 'tsar-deliverer' myth for socio-political control in the country is very similar to what was discussed in Chapter 4 on naive monarchism and rural resistance in Russia. Furthermore, neopatrimonial power mechanisms characterise authoritarian governance in many countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia (Paiziev 2014). Do rural dwellers in these countries – similar to Russians – derive benefits from their subordinate positions and employ the myths of 'the tsar-deliverer' and 'of loyal peasants' in their grievances? Complaint letters to higher ranked authorities or newspapers were a common form of peasant defiance in the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick 1996) and continue being practised today. Thus, farmers in Tajikistan often write letters of complaint to higher authorities, called '*ariza*' (Mandler 2012). Mandler (2012: 18) argued that *ariza* 'may do more harm than good as it provokes a response from lower level authorities, who are themselves integral components of the local elite system', and, therefore, may 'jeopardise village *tinji* [village peace]'. In comparison to Russian complaint letters, *ariza* might be less effective because the 'vertical power structure' and principals of 'hands-on/manual management' (see Chapter 4) are less profound in Tajikistan.

Some parallels can be made in regard to organised social movements in a politically constrained post-socialist environment. As argued in Chapter 3, a number of rural social movement organisations in Russia have emerged as an extension of the state apparatus or with the purpose of fulfilling the hidden goals of their creators. In a study of civil mobilisation and protests in Central Asia, Radnitz (2010) discovered that many rural protests in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were organised and led by domestic elites, who used rural discontent for their personal interests to gain power and resources. By studying Kyrgyzstan's 2005 'Tulip Revolution' from this perspective, Radnitz (2010) argued that the clientelistic relations between elites and local communities were the 'weapons of the wealthy'. However, he overlooked the possibility that this clientelism can be the means to mobilise the apolitical post-Soviet rural population, what would challenge some of his arguments about the Tulip Revolution.

Studies on small-scale farming of the post-socialist population constitute an entire field in post-Soviet and post-socialist studies.⁸ Kaneff and Leonard (2002) revealed that food self-provisioning is commonly practised in post-socialist Eastern Europe, East Asia, and the FSU. This small-scale food production is often discussed as a fallback option in times of crisis, societal transformation around food practices, and as a cultural identity of the post-socialist populations (see Gudeman and Hann 2015, Cash 2015, Smith and Jehlička 2013). The concept of ‘quiet food sovereignty’, proposed in Chapter 6 to study Russian people’s farming, was developed under the influence of Smith and Jehlička’s (2013)’ theory on ‘quiet sustainability’ in Poland and the Czech Republic. This dissertation argues that practices of ‘quiet food sovereignty’ can be observed in many countries of the post-socialist region (and even beyond it) – in places where people grow healthy and culturally appropriate food, but without attaching great importance to this process or engaging in public discourses and mobilisations around these issues.

7.2. Contributions to the critical agrarian studies debates

Chapter 1 situated this doctoral study within the critical agrarian studies debates. It applied agrarian (and particularly, peasant) studies frameworks to explain the contemporary rural politics in the post-socialist post-Soviet settings. The present section attempts to initiate a discussion on how the study’s results could enhance or contest some core concepts and theories of the agrarian studies literature. It does not make hard assumptions, but rather offers avenues for rethinking rural politics and agrarian transformations across the world.

Most of the literature on land grabbing concurs that the process of large-scale land accumulation for purposes of extracting resources in favour of external actors is not a new phenomenon. White et al. (2012: 623) wrote about the continuity of land grabbing: ‘in many regions of the Global South, land was first grabbed by pre-colonial rulers in chronic territorial wars with each other, then by colonial governments and increasingly by foreign or domestic corporations’. The history of land grabbing is still shaping how and where land grabbing is happening today. Among the main ideas that justify and facilitate land grabs throughout the centuries, Franco et al. (2013: 10) distinguished: ‘(1) the efficiency of seizing land and securing it as exclusive “property” through legal means, (2) the utility of justifying which lands “can” be grabbed us-

ing the discursive device of “vacant” or “empty” land, and, (3) the value of establishing an overriding legitimacy in taking over someone’s land for reasons of “public purpose” or “public interest”.

This dissertation similarly reveals that the recent land rush in the former Soviet Union is deeply shaped by past practices and historical legacies. The mechanisms and ideologies that justify large-scale land accumulation and its social impacts are largely influenced by the legacy of socialist agriculture. A contribution of this study to the land grab literature is that it applied the discussion on the longevity and path-dependency of contemporary large-scale land acquisitions to the analysis of post-socialist agrarian transformation. This study demonstrated that the neoliberal agricultural model makes very little difference if we focus on class dynamics in the countryside: the socio-economic structures remain rather unchanged. In fact, Burawoy’s (2002) concept of ‘transition without transformation’ applies to these regions. The re-emergence of the Soviet dual agricultural system (large- versus small-scale farms and their productive symbiosis), albeit in a neoliberal guise, begs the question: what are the fundamental qualities that make socialist and post-socialist phases different enough to warrant deploying the land grabbing concept? The answer to this question is as follows. Land grabbing did not provoke significant transformations of long-established power relations in the post-Soviet countryside. Nevertheless, this process of land accumulation should be seen as part of a global land grabbing trend that emerged with the global food price crisis of 2007-2008 and the more general crisis of capitalist accumulation, and triggered by international flows of capital, goods, and ideas across borders (see Margulis et al. 2013 on links between globalisation and land grabbing, and McMichael 2013 for a discussion about the relation between land grabbing and the global agrarian crisis).⁹

Land grabbing is a politically loaded concept and often reflects the author’s political position in the debate over neoliberal agriculture versus peasant farming. Many post-Soviet studies – especially those written in the FSU countries – reject the term land grabbing and employ ‘large-scale land investments’ instead, while others refer simply to ‘land deals’. They arguably do so based on a high-modernist ideology, and guided by the fact that post-Soviet land transactions are not usually accompanied by the displacement of the rural poor (see the discussion about ‘land grabbing’ and ‘large-scale land investments’ terminology in Chapter 5).

By discussing the case of the post-Soviet large-scale land acquisitions within a land grabbing framework, this study expands the notion of land grabs to situations where land deals are socially accepted and even (sometimes) welcomed by rural communities. Contrary to mainstream assumptions about peasant resistance to land grabbing, this research reveals various forms of rural responses: from outright resistance to adaptation and struggles for incorporation. It follows McCarthy's (2010) argument that peasant attitudes to land grabbing critically depend on the 'terms of inclusion' of the local population in land deals. This dissertation distinguishes various conditions under which the rural population is incorporated into industrial agricultural development. These conditions are largely influenced by the socialist legacy of productive symbiosis between large and small-scale farms, the existing land tenure that makes many rural dwellers the official owners of agricultural land, and the response strategies by rural households. This study argues that any romantic illusions about small-scale farmers should be set aside when analysing the impact of land grabs on rural communities. It reveals that post-soviet rural dwellers often act individualistically, putting their own interests above those of the rural communities in their reactions to industrial agricultural development. Therefore, this study asks critical agrarian scholars to look beyond the dichotomy between 'bad land grabs' and 'good peasant struggles'.

Another theoretical contribution of this study is its analysis of state-society relations. It follows the call of Hall et al. (2015) to look beyond the simplistic dualistic perspective on the state as either a weak 'target' state (which cannot resist the pressures of foreign and domestic agricultural businesses), or as a 'host' (which facilitates land accumulation by providing large firm enterprises with infrastructure and financial support). In particular, this study turns to the Weberian tradition to analyse the merger of economic elites with the state apparatus and patrimonial governance. It also uses class analysis to explain state politics in the countryside. This study argues that big business and the state are so strongly interwoven that the latter does not only serve capital accumulation (as the classical Marxist school of thought would argue); it represents the business at its core, as the state authorities (or federal oligarchs) are the owners of large agricultural enterprises. This study demonstrates the importance of seeing the state as a mix of various actors, factions and interests, many of which are in direct competition for power re-

sources (i.e. economic, bureaucratic-administrative, coercive and ideological resources).

Furthermore, this dissertation reveals a number of historical parallels regarding state governance and the role of national leaders. Similar to Tsarist and Soviet governance schemes, patrimonial rule defines the entire system of social hierarchy in contemporary Russia under Putin. In this context, the top governmental authorities use state resources in order to secure the loyalty of lower authorities. Moreover, administrative personnel are only answerable to the ruler. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the image of the Russian president as the 'present day tsar' fits so well with the popular image of the state. This study discusses the application of 'naïve monarchism' in state-society relations, and thus contributes to the debates on boundary-spanning rural contention in less-than-democratic regimes. It engages with O'Brien's theories on 'rightful resistance' and Scott's writings on the resistance of subaltern groups. Thus, it argues that contemporary rural resistance is deeply rooted in historical forms of domination and subjugation, but at the same time includes modern ideas on rights and uses progressive means to address complaints to the president (e.g. online petition platforms, mass media, election campaigns). Similarly to Chinese 'rightful resisters', Russian rural activists refer to official laws and regulatory frameworks to legitimate their causes and demand that local authorities meet their obligations. However, 'rightful resisters' tend to use authorised channels of dispute resolution, and, for the most part, do not hold illusions of patronage ties to the head of state (O'Brien 1996). Russian villagers are rarely able to obtain fair dispute resolutions from appellate institutions when they face powerful business interests (due to the corruption of the judicial system), and therefore appeal to the president as a last resort. This dissertation furthers critical discussion on whether naïve monarchism is a sincere rural belief or a conscious strategy applied by rural activists to shield themselves from state repression and punish their oppressors – the 'disloyal' local elites. O'Brien (2013) also raised the question of sincere versus strategic rural behaviour in his recent work 'Rightful Resistance Revisited'. Similarly, he did not have a definitive answer. Whether sincere or strategic, such within-the-system rural protests provide rural dwellers with a means to remedy occasional local injustices in less-than-democratic regimes.

In the same vein, this study discusses institutionalised rural social movements and their relationship with the state. It demonstrates that an alliance with the state's discourse, norms and policies is a more effective and less dangerous strategy than a direct confrontation with the state. This falls in line with the general shift in understanding civil society – from viewing it as a counterforce to the state, to viewing it as a collaborator. This study argues that although there are many state marionettes in state-controlled civil space (as is the case in Russia), civil society organisations should not automatically be viewed as co-opted when they collaborate with the state. Instead, this dissertation argues that collaboration with the state provides political, economic and social resources to social movements, which are necessary for conducting the movements' activities. Thus, social movement organisations are effective when they cooperate with the state, while at the same time being able to preserve their autonomy.

Another contribution of this dissertation is that it takes the 'food sovereignty' concept out of its comfort zone. In a sharp counterpoint to activist dispositions on food production and consumption – which galvanise each other with transformative zeal – this study displays the concept's more mundane, domesticated side. It explores what food sovereignty looks like in an authoritarian political context, with a limited political opportunity structure and a soviet legacy of industrial agriculture – elements that hinder the emergence of more conventional food sovereignty movements. It shows a form of 'quiet food sovereignty', drawing on Smith and Jehlička's (2013) concept of 'quiet sustainability'. It reveals that Russia features many hidden and ad hoc strategies, which preserve the autonomy of small-scale farming and protect people's rights to healthy and culturally appropriate food. Therefore, this study asks scholars and/or activists not to write off peasantries that do not necessarily see themselves as part of a social movement. It argues, instead, that the principles of food sovereignty are widely adaptable to a variety of political contexts, including those where direct action, formal organising, and other common tactics of the food sovereignty movement may not be politically productive.

Finally, this study demonstrates that the prefix 'post-' in post-socialist and post-Soviet studies should not be associated with processes of lagging behind. Instead, they should be seen as an indication of alternative

transformation pathways, which provide an original angle to critical agrarian studies debates.

7.3. Discussion on policy implications of research findings, and engaged research practices

Early studies on peasant politics and agrarian transformation were primarily preoccupied with broad trends and the generation of broad theories (i.e. Lenin 1964, Chayanov 1966, Wolf 1969). In the 1980s, the focus of agrarian studies moved toward more micro-level research next to a political economy approach. Colburn (1982: 438) argued that this transformation ‘offer[ed] possibilities for theory building that may help not only to integrate individual experiences into a body of knowledge, but also to assist those working in the design and implementation of development policies and projects’. The ‘critical’ approach to agrarian studies has somewhat blurred the line between academic researchers, development practitioners, and civil society activists (see Borrás 2016 on land politics, agrarian movements and scholar-activism). Besides furthering academic knowledge on post-socialist rural politics, this study has aimed to have practical implications that can contribute to more fair rural development in the FSU and beyond. This section presents a discussion on the implications of the research findings and the results of engaged research practices.

This study demonstrates that small-scale food production in the post-Soviet context is a resource-efficient, ecological, cultural form of farming, and is as productive in terms of yield as LFEs, not to mention more sustainable in the long-term (Chapter 6). However, due to the generalised belief ‘big is beautiful’ and state capture ‘from inside’, the state policy of national food security is primarily based on unsustainable large-scale industrial agriculture. Nation states should recognise that peoples’ farming is not backward and inefficient, as it has been commonly perceived – but is actually resource-efficient, highly productive, and entails social, economic, and ecological benefits for the population as a whole. Therefore, it should be supported and promoted by the state. However, this scenario seems not only infeasible in the short and medium term, but might bring more disadvantages than advantages to smallholders.

As discussed in Chapter 1, post-Soviet states respond to the interests of large businesses. It is unlikely that federal oligarchs and state-owned

LFEs would allow for the implementation of policies aimed at the development and expansion of small-scale farming at the expense of large industrial agriculture. Such a shift in state policy seems improbable without a political regime transformation, resulting in the breakdown of the state-elite marriage. It also could be the result of pressure from large-scale rural social movements and civil society. However, as this study demonstrates, post-Soviet social movement organisations are inconsistent, dispersed, and lack support from the rural population. Moreover, rural dwellers do not attach great importance to their farming; therefore, they are unlikely to defend their lifestyle in an open political manner. Meanwhile, the recent Russian ‘foreign agent’ law (2012)¹⁰ constrains, in part, the inflow of international ideas on food sovereignty and the peasant way of life, which could generate discourse and recognition of the importance of small-scale farming among the post-Soviet rural population (see Chapter 4 on rural social movement organisations).

If, however, the Russian or Ukrainian state would decide to support smallholders, then how could one guarantee different results from those witnessed in the early post-Soviet transition period? After the collapse of the USSR, the newly emerged countries anticipated the development of commercial family farming on the ruins of collective agriculture, not taking into account the specificity of household production and symbiotic relations between small and large farms. This dissertation has demonstrated that the post-Soviet rural population does not strive for independence in its farming, but prefers a level of symbiosis and coexistence with LFEs.¹¹ In order to empower smallholders, it is important to understand the rules and norms that govern their food production and distribution. Thus, many food practices are carried out informally through personal networks (see Chapter 6). Official recognition and registration of these practices will most likely lead to their dissolution or emergence of shadow/hidden practices. For example, the recent proposition of the Ukrainian government to register rural households engaging in market sales as commercial entities created discontent among the rural population, and would possibly lead to a decrease in market sales if this policy is adopted (Kuns 2016).

This study demonstrates that the peasant identity is underdeveloped, and Soviet nostalgia about collective farming still dominates in the post-Soviet countryside. The majority of rural dwellers consider employment at LFEs to be the best solution to their problems. Therefore, the princi-

ples and guidance for responsible investment in agriculture,¹² which are largely based on the coexistence scenario between large and small agriculture, can be beneficial for Russia and Ukraine under the present circumstances. However, these principles are voluntary and have a recommendatory character, which makes them less efficient in protecting the interests of the poor. Even if these guidelines were to be obligatory, their implementation is problematic in countries such as Russia and Ukraine, where the *de facto* dominates the *de jure*.

However, this does not mean that nothing can be done to improve the situation in the analysed countries. Knowledge is a powerful weapon, which is often used by critical scholars and activists. Engaged research practices encompass different ways in which academic researchers meaningfully interact with their informants and other members of the non-academic community, which ‘generate benefits, changes and/or effects for all participants as they develop and share knowledge, expertise and skills’ (Holliman and Holti 2014: 2). This study devotes quite some attention to knowledge exchange with the analysed rural communities and other interested (academic and non-academic) actors. Besides publication of the research findings in leading academic journals, several empirical chapters were transformed into popular articles and published with open access. For example, Chapter 5 was rewritten for the volume ‘Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2015’¹³ organised by the Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), and later adjusted for publication in the issue of ‘The Land’ magazine¹⁴ devoted to the theme of ‘Equality in the Countryside’. Chapter 2 became a chapter of the Russian Academy of Science book ‘*Land accumulation in the beginning of the XXI century: global investors and local communities*’¹⁵ – the first publication on land grabbing in the Russian language. Furthermore, this research project includes the writing of web-blog posts (<http://landgrabfsu.blogspot.com/>) that include discussions on intermediary research findings and share the latest news on land grabbing in the FSU. The study results are also published online at the university’s institutional repository and/or at the ERC webpage, according to the Open Access Guidelines for the ERC-funded research.

The engaged research practices also included collaboration with rural activists and social movement organisations in the post-Soviet setting. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge various synergies and tensions between academic researchers and rural social movements. Edelman

(2009: 245) argued that ‘one of the most useful contributions of academic researchers to social movements may be reporting patterns in the testimony of people in the movement’s targeted constituency who are sympathetic to movement objectives but who feel alienated or marginalised by one or another aspect of movement discourse or practice’. Indeed, many post-Soviet rural activists were enthusiastic about participating in this research, hoping that it would spread their story and create public awareness about injustices in the countryside. This was especially important for ‘naive monarchist’ activists, who use publicity as a means to force authorities to meet their obligations. However, as Edelman (2009: 251) reminded us, the ‘activists’ expectation that academic research will be immediately applicable to their struggle’ leads to a disappointment, as ‘academics, unlike journalists, are socialised in the universities to write slowly’. Although much of these research findings were published relatively quickly and with open access, the analysis often came too late or in a form that is less relevant to activists’ purposes. In order to mitigate this shortcoming, several conferences and workshops¹⁶ were organised or co-organised within the research project, of which this study was part. These events gathered academics, rural activists, land investors and policy makers and generated a mutually productive dialogue between them. In addition, the Eurasian Agrofood and Land initiative (EURAL) was established by the ERC project that hosts this study, in order to exchange knowledge between academics and social actors.

7.4. Limitations of the study and topics for future research

Among the limitations of qualitative analysis are: its reliance on people’s subjective views and judgements, the involvement of a relatively small number of participants, and the inability to confirm its findings with hard numbers, which leads to a likelihood that its results will be taken less seriously by other academics or policy makers (Griffin 2004). Although this study integrates a wealth of quantitative data into its analysis, it remains primarily qualitative. Meanwhile, the combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ techniques would make many of this dissertation’s arguments stronger. For example, the concept of ‘quiet food sovereignty’, which is largely developed based on interviews with small-scale food producers, would also benefit from quantitative data and the use of environmental science tools. Laboratory tests (such as chemical soil testing and plant analysis) could provide further insights on the environmental sustainabil-

ity of small-scale food production, while input-output calculations for different households would help to develop the argument about the economic self-sufficiency of smallholders. Furthermore, large-scale survey data might reveal undetected trends and relations, and would challenge, confirm, or expand the research findings. For example, it could be interesting to conduct a factor analysis to determine which factors have significant impacts on different rural response strategies. Survey data can also reveal how differences in legal frameworks (such as a moratorium on farmland sales in Ukraine versus a relatively free land market in Russia) influence the LFEs-smallholder symbiosis. Another interesting phenomenon to investigate is the correlation between the national identity, patriotism, and ‘quiet food sovereignty’, which might lead to compelling results, especially in the case of Ukraine, where strong nationalistic movements are currently taking place.

Although this study was designed to analyse rural politics in various geographical and socio-economic areas, the impact of place-specific factors – such as the environment, local political configurations, path-dependency, location, ethnicity and ‘culture’ – was not clearly identified. For example, further research should be done to reveal whether ‘naive monarchism’ described in Chapter 4 is equally developed across regions and, if not, which factors influence its uneven development. Another query would be: how does product specialisation of large farm enterprises affect the symbiosis between large and small farms (described in Chapter 6)? Similarly, how does it affect rural dwellers’ attitudes towards land investors and state policy? This dissertation tends to treat space as a stage upon which macro-level processes are played out. The specifics of a particular place are not given an active role in shaping the trajectory of the considered region. Very different paths are being carved out in rural Russia, each in a different relationship with the country’s centre, other regions, and other countries. Further research should reveal what distinguishes the experiences of the particular places considered in this study from what the existing literature can tell us about other regions not included in the dissertation.

While focusing on small-scale food production in the countryside, this dissertation does not give sufficient attention to the farming activities of urban dwellers at their *dacha* (second country home) plots. According to different estimations, between 40 and 80% of the post-Soviet urban population are engaged in *dacha*-based food practices (Treivish

2014, Nefedova 2013). *Dacha* gardening is the focus of the so-called ‘*dacha* studies’, which investigate these activities in relation to Soviet nostalgia and memories of hardship, a source of food security, or a societal countermovement to capitalism (Zavisca 2003, Caldwell 2011). Chapter 6 offers an original glance at post-Soviet urban gardening, by analysing it within the concept of ‘quiet food sovereignty’. *Dacha* gardening is also briefly mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3 as a trigger for land grabbing. However, this phenomenon offers much more for critical agrarian studies. *Dacha*-driven land grabbing deserves special attention due to its accelerating rates and severe impact on rural communities and landscapes in suburbia. During the last decade, the number of *dachas* has doubled, occupying five times as much land (Mamonova and Sutherland 2015). Some 85% of newly built *dachas* are constructed on former agricultural land (Agureyeva 2010). In some rural settlements, the number of *dachniks* (*dacha* owners) exceeds the amount of traditional rural inhabitants, which leads to drastic socio-economic transformations (Nefedova 2011). Furthermore, as was also revealed in Chapters 2 and 3, the *dacha*-driven land use change is accompanied by deprivation of the land rights of many villagers and triggers rural resistance and mobilisation. Further research should be done to reveal mechanisms, trajectories, and socio-economic consequences of contemporary *dacha*-driven rural (and also suburban) development. The *dacha* phenomenon is not only a post-Soviet characteristic. Trevisi (2014) observed similar processes in many countries of Europe and North America that have a tradition of second homes. The analysis of *dacha*-related processes within a broader agrarian studies framework will be an important contribution to understanding rural transformations worldwide.

This study does not address gender and generational dynamics, while these are important dimensions of rural politics. This omission is the result of the overall purpose of this study that has to do with general trends of agrarian transformation and the insufficiently explored field of rural politics in the FSU. That required a number of questions to be addressed before exploring the impact of gender and generations on the processes analysed in this study. This is also a limitation of many present-day agrarian studies – which, despite the explicit calls from different research societies and academics for gender and generation-sensitive studies – often remain silent about these dynamics (see Hall et al. 2015). Only a few works deal with gender and generational issues related to

agrarian capitalism and rural politics (see for example Doss et al. 2014, Julia and White 2012, White et al. 2014, White and Park 2015). Hall et al. (2015: 482) revealed that ‘women and men respond, both individually and collectively, in diverse ways to the promises and threats of land deals’. Therefore, in order to understand rural politics, gender issues should be addressed.

Although ‘*zhenskij vopros*’ (the question of women) is routinely raised in post-soviet studies, it is often reduced to an analysis of folklore or gender inequality in education and other social services, in regard to the discussion on gendered roles in the countryside (Olson and Adonyeva 2013, Silova and Magno 2004). Meanwhile, different roles of men and women in agrarian transformation go largely unnoticed (with some notable exceptions such as Wegren et al. 2010, Wegren et al. 2015, who studied workplace gender inequality during the post-soviet transition period). Gender analysis is important for a better understanding of everyday rural politics, as women have ‘informal power’ in everyday life and decision-making processes at the household level and in rural communities (Denisova 2010). Women are also the main actors in ‘quiet food sovereignty’ practises, as their desire for high-quality organic food for themselves and their families, means they are more likely to engage in food self-provisioning (Rogozin 2013). Furthermore, the image of an active ‘Soviet woman’¹⁷ is still present in the post-Soviet countryside, and manifests itself in advocacy rural politics – whose participants are predominantly women. These facts point towards a need for a gender-sensitive analysis, which will help to increase the understanding of underlying drivers of post-soviet post-socialist rural politics.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out before the Ukrainian Euromaidan revolution and Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The empirical chapters of this dissertation were updated based on interviews with Russian and Ukrainian experts and post-fieldwork correspondence with informants. However, the current crisis brought a number of changes in official politics in Russia and Ukraine, which is a call for future research. For example, the embargo imposed by Russia on European food imports in retaliation for Western sanctions against Russia over the crisis in Ukraine, should, according to the Russian government, stimulate domestic food production. Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev asserted that blocking imports, protecting domestic markets, and providing state support to agriculture would lead to the emergence of new commercial fam-

ily farms and encourage rural entrepreneurship (Interfax 2014). However, the number of private farmers increased only by 2.6% during 2014-2015 (Vedomosti 2015). Meanwhile, the 20% increase in domestic agricultural production during 2014-2015 was achieved due to colossal state subsidies given to LFEs. Moreover, despite the current economic crisis and food sanctions, the Ministry of Agriculture has proposed new legislation aimed at limiting the amount of poultry and livestock in rural households (Kretsul 2015). This legislation was proclaimed to make a clear distinction between commercial family farmers (which have to be registered and pay taxes) and personal subsidiary farming. In reality, it will jeopardise the subsistence of many rural households. Will these amendments become an incentive for rural resistance and mobilisation around rights to food and to farming? Further research should be carried out to investigate the impacts of the geopolitical crisis and the food import ban on agrarian transformation in Russia, and to study how rural dwellers respond to the new challenges brought upon them by the economic crisis and their own government. It is important to understand whether a shift from state policy oriented towards large-scale farming – yet which tolerates (or ignores) small-scale farms – to a policy actively curtailing small-scale farms would generate more rural resistance.

The recent political change in Ukraine did not bring many changes in the rural politics of the state. Yanukovich's government fell during the Euromaidan revolution in 2014, followed by a civil war and confrontations with Russia. However, the state agricultural policy continued in its orientation towards large-scale agricultural development. The new government of Poroshenko, although proclaiming its support for small- and medium-scale farmers, did nothing, in fact, to support them (Kuns 2016). Land grabbing by state-affiliated oligarchs has continued. The Euromaidan revolution did not change the state system: the oligarchic clan of Yanukovich – the so-called 'family' – was replaced by the oligarchic clan of Poroshenko, while the principles of a state-oligarch merger remain unchanged (Müller 2014).

The new Ukrainian government declared integration with the European Union as the main goal of its domestic and foreign policies¹⁸. The vexed question of liberalisation of the Ukrainian land market was raised again – and this time, the moratorium on farmland sales will most likely be lifted. International observers have advised the Ukrainian government to cancel the moratorium 'in a phased manner' with the application of

the ‘Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests’ (Tonchovska and Egiashvili 2014). However, even if the moratorium’s cancellation is carried out in accordance with international standards, ‘due to the economic crisis and the civil war in the country, the majority of Ukrainians have no money to purchase the relatively cheap land’, which would lead to land accumulation by state-affiliated oligarchs and large agricultural companies – including foreign investors (Plank 2015: 76). However, this will not cause a drastic change in land use, as LFEs and oligarchs already control the majority of Ukrainian farmland. The moratorium cancellation will mainly ensure land property rights of current land users. However, this legislative change might break down the symbiosis between LFEs and rural households. Future research should be conducted to study the impact of land sales on the productive symbiosis and coexistence between large and small-scale farming.

Furthermore, post-fieldwork correspondence with Ukrainian informants indicated an increase in the dependence of the population on the small-scale subsistence farming on household and dacha plots in order to cope with the economic crisis and political uncertainty. Meanwhile, official statistics demonstrate an unchanged picture: in 2014, households produced as many crops as they did a year ago before the revolution and civil war started, and even decreased their livestock production by 5% (Ukrstat 2016). Imprecise official statistics or exclusion of Crimea from calculations could be among the explanations for this unpredicted trend. Further research should investigate the survival strategies of rural households during the current economic crisis in Ukraine. It will be critical to engage with the post-war, post-conflict studies literature to understand socio-economic transformations in contemporary rural Ukraine. In addition, it will provide important insights in the (temporal) dynamics and resilience of post-socialist small-scale farming.

This study demonstrates the importance of the post-socialist region for critical agrarian studies debates. It reveals the diversity and dynamic nature of rural politics in Russia and Ukraine, and demonstrates how the analysis of post-socialist rural processes can support, complement, and at times contest mainstream assumptions about contemporary agrarian transformation. This brings us one step closer to a better understanding of what is occurring in rural areas, in particular, when land deals hit the

ground, and how, in general, neoliberal agricultural development changes the lives of rural people.

Notes

¹ The Pskov region is located at the Western border of Russia, while the Rostov region is in the Southern region of Russia.

² Matkowski (2004) included in this group: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. He also included Moldova, however, it is not located in Central Asia or Transcaucasia.

³ These include Albania, Ukraine, Romania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Croatia (Matkowski 2004).

⁴ These include Poland, Estonia, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, according to Matkowski (2004).

⁵ In the Baltic and some countries of central and Eastern Europe, de-collectivisation of agriculture was carried out through land restitution to the original owners of the land (see Chapter 2); whereas in many countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia state remain the major farmland owner.

⁶ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Belarussian government implemented a course of land reforms aimed at privatization of kolkhozy and sovkhozy' land and assets, however, this reform was later curtailed. Currently 80% of agricultural enterprises are owned by the state (Fritz 2007).

⁷ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

⁸ Humprey 2002b, Gudeman and Hann 2015, Cash 2015, Smith and Jehlička 2013, Visser 2008, Pallot and Nefedova 2007 among others.

⁹ In Ukraine, the influence of global investors is much larger than in Russia, but even among domestic Russian investors, the distance between the investment headquarters and the farm sites invested in, became larger.

¹⁰ The Russian 'foreign agent' law is officially law № 102766-6 "On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent," adopted in 2012.

¹¹ These findings are supported by the household survey results of Nefedova (2008), conducted in the Kostroma region in 2008. According to this survey, nearly 50% of the respondents argued that they will continue their (semi-) subsistence farming at the same scale with a hypothetical increase in household in-

comes, 25% would decrease their food production, and only 14% will expand their farming and, possibly, establish a commercial farm.

¹² These include: the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI) of the World Bank; The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) developed by FAO; the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment that Respects Rights, Livelihoods and Resources (PRAI), which was developed by the Inter-Agency Working Group composed of FAO, IFAD, UNCTAD and the World Bank; the Voluntary Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains of FAO and OECD.

¹³ Mamonova, N. 2015. Quietness and adaptability: Ukrainian peasants' responses to land grabbing and agribusiness expansion. In *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2015 'Peoples' Nutrition Is Not a Business'* FIAN International. Available at: http://www.rtfn-watch.org/fileadmin/media/rtfn-watch.org/ENGLISH/pdf/Watch_2015/RtFNWatch_EN_web.pdf.

¹⁴ Mamonova, N. 2016. Co-existence in Ukraine. The Land magazine, issue 19, February 2016. Available at: <http://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/back-issues>.

¹⁵ Visser, O., Mamonova, N. and Spoor, M. 2012. Инвесторы, мегафермы и «пустующие» земли: крупные земельные сделки в России. В книге: *Земельная аккумуляция в начале XXI века: глобальные инвесторы и локальные сообщества*. М.: Издательский дом «Дело» РАНХиГС, 2012.

¹⁶ The international conference 'Land Accumulation in the FSU and beyond: Global investors and local communities' (Moscow, October 2011); international workshop 'Food, farmland and forests in transition: The Eurasian countryside 25 years after' (November 2014, Bucharest).

¹⁷ The socialist propaganda on gender equality was aimed at creating 'the image of a socially active Soviet woman, taking care of the orderly running and daily life of their families, neighbourhood and workplace' (Scheide 2001: 17).

¹⁸ This affiliation with the European Union, according to Kramer (2013), would protect property interests of Ukrainian oligarchs and give them access to loans from the International Monetary Fund.



Appendices

Appendix 1

The questionnaire for Household Survey conducted in Ukraine in 2012 (translated into English, originally written and conducted in Russian or Ukrainian)

| |
|---|
| Household no: Date: |
| Village: |
| Age of the respondent:..... |
| Gender of the respondent: [] Male; [] Female |
| Interview is administered to the household head []; to a family member [] |

A. HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

A1. Number of household members

| A2. | A3. | A4. | A5. | A6. |
|--------------------|--------------------|--|---|--|
| N of family member | Gender | Age category | Occupation | Engagement in personal farming |
| | 1.Male 2.Female | 1.Infant (<17) 2.Adult (working age) 3.Pensioner (>65) | 1.Study at school/university 2.Employed at LFE 3.Employed in non-agricultural sector in the countryside 4.Work in urban areas 5.Conduct household farming 6.Commercial farmer (family farming) 7.Non-agricultural self-employment 8.Unemployed 9.Pensioner 10.Other (<i>specify</i>) | 1.Full time (more than 8 hours per day) 2.Part-time (less than 4 hours a day) 3.Eventually during planting and/or harvesting |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| ... | | | | |

A7. Has any of your family members ever lived in another place for three or more months at one time?

- yes, in another village
- yes, in another town/city
- no

A8. Why did he/she move here? (*tick as much as relevant*)

- to study
- to look for job
- to get married/establish a family
- to start own entrepreneurship (including commercial farming)
- other (*specify*).....

A9. If he/she came back, what were the reasons? (*tick as much as relevant*)

- finished the study
- were unable to find a job
- were unable to support himself/herself financially
- homesick
- he/she was needed at the household/farm back home
- other (*specify*).....

A10. How would you characterise yourself:

- peasant
- rural worker
- farmer
- villager
- other (*specify*)

B. FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL RESOURCES OF HOUSEHOLD

B1. What are the main income sources of your family/household? (*mark 1 – important, 2 – less important, 3 – least important, 0 – none*)

| | Importance |
|---|------------|
| 1. Farm income from household plot (food production for family consumption) | |
| 2. Sales of farm products | |

| | |
|--|--|
| 3. Salaries from agricultural employment | |
| 4. Salaries from non-agricultural employment | |
| 5. Income from non-farm self-employment (private entrepreneurship) | |
| 6. Social security benefits, including retirement pensions, unemployment insurance, veterans' benefits, etc. | |
| 7. Payments of LFEs for renting your land plot (<i>pai</i>) | |
| 8. Remittances from relatives | |
| 9. Credit | |
| 10. Other (<i>specify</i>) | |

B2. Which of the following products/goods/services you...

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. produce yourself (within your household) 2. buy at market/shop/supermarket 3. buy from neighbours and acquaintances 4. receive as gifts from friends and relatives 5. buy from LFEs or commercial farmers 6. receive for free from LFEs or commercial farmers 7. receive from LFEs or commercial farmers as a payment for renting your land plot 8. don't use/need at all |
| 1. Vegetables, potatoes, eggs, greenery | |
| 2. Fruits and berries | |
| 3. Meat and fish | |
| 4. Milk and milk products | |
| 5. Grain for self-consumption (including flour) | |
| 6. Grain to feed animals | |
| 7. Bread, bakery products, confectionery | |
| 8. Fertilisers (and other input for farming) | |

| | |
|--|--|
| 9. Young animals | |
| 10. Assistance with land cultivation (machinery) | |

B3. How did you change your production during the last 10 years?

| | |
|---|---|
| | 1. started growing/producing 2. significantly increased 3. increased 4. no changes 5. decreased 6. stopped growing/producing |
| 1. Vegetables, potatoes, eggs, greenery | |
| 2. Fruits and berries | |
| 3. Milk and milk products | |
| 4. Meat | |
| 5. Grain | |
| 6. Other (<i>specify</i>) | |

B4. What were the reasons for the change? (*tick as much as relevant*)

- unequal competition with LFEs
- increase decrease in market demand (and market price) for this type of products
- increase decrease in the state support to small-scale producers (incl. subsidies, certification, market place)
- we have more less family members
- we can't afford/too expensive to buy these products in shops/market
- we lost get more farmland
- increase decreased in the size of *pai* and other support from LFEs
- other (*specify*) _____

B5. What is the most important for you when you decide to rent (and to whom) your land plot? (*mark 1 – important, 2 – less important, 3 – least important, 0 – none*)

| | Importance |
|--|------------|
| 1. The size of <i>pai</i> (in kind and cash) | |
| 2. Tenant's support to my household (with ploughing, fertilisers, seeds, etc.) | |
| 3. Tenant's support to my village (reparation of roads, schools, etc.) | |

| | |
|--|--|
| 4. The type of agriculture the tenant does | |
| 5. Environmental impact of tenant's activities | |
| 6. Other (<i>specify</i>) | |

B6. What do you think about the moratorium on farmland sales?

- farmlands should be bought and sold as commodities – it will improve Ukrainian agriculture
- cancellation of moratorium will be bad for the village (*specify how*).....
.....
- I look forward to sell my land plot, as I need money
- I want to buy additional lands when moratorium will be lifted
- I have no opinion about this

C. CIVIL ACTIVITIES AND PROTEST

C1. How do you learn about the local news? (*tick as much as relevant*)

- local television channels
- radio
- at village meetings
- from neighbors
- other (*specify*) _____

C2. Which injustices would motivate you to join an organised group protest in front of the village authority office (*mark 1 – definitely join; 2 – will think about; 3 – not join; 0 – it is useless to protest about such issues*)

| | Response |
|---|----------|
| 1. Closure of rural hospital | |
| 2. Appointment of a new head of village authority, which I don't like | |
| 3. Non-payment (or underpayment) of pai by LFEs | |
| 4. Ecological problems | |
| 5. Other (<i>specify</i>) | |

Appendix 2

Example of an information sheet, which was distributed to all participants of the research (translated into English, originally distributed in Russian or Ukrainian)

INFORMATION SHEET:

Dear Sir, Dear Madam,

You are invited to participate in a research project by the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Hague. This project is carried out in collaboration with the Institute of Geography [this central institute in Moscow and/or a regional institute with we cooperate will be mentioned here]. It is funded by the EU (projectnr. 313871).

This research project investigates global investments in land and agriculture in Russia, and the consequences for and reactions by local communities. It aims to study the motivations and nature for such investments as well as effects and responses.

For your participation in this research, the following points are important:

1. Participation in this research occurs on the basis of informed consent. It is voluntary and can be refused.
2. Withdrawal from the research is possible at any time, without further notice.
3. In order to protect your privacy, research data will be dealt with confidentially. Which means that statements made by you will be transcribed using synonyms, to make sure you are not identifiable. You can also indicate that you have no objection to the untranscribed use of your identity.
4. At your request recorded material in which you figure can be made available to you.
5. The data will be securely stored under the responsibility of the principal investigator. After the end of the 5-year project, the most sensitive data will be destroyed, the rest will be securely stored at the ISS, The Hague. The raw data will only be used for academic purposes. Access to the data by academic researchers, beyond the research team is dependent on a strict evaluation by the ethical committee of the ISS in which confidentiality is key. No other persons or institutions will have access to the data.

6. Results of the research will be published in academic publications, and on the blog of the research project. All publications and dissemination will occur with strict adherence to the above-mentioned privacy procedures.

For more information on this research you can contact / turn to:

Locally: Natalia Mamonova, Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of Social Studies, Russian phone number: + 7905-757-25-19, e-mail: mannova@iss.nl

The project's Principal Investigator, Dr Oane Visser, in the Netherlands at the Institute of Social Studies, P.O. Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, tel. +31 (0)70-104-081-164, visser@iss.nl

Appendix 3

Fieldwork photos



Above: Mykolay was formerly a tractor driver, and Maria a veterinarian, as part of the kolkhoz in the village of Rusanivtsi. Today, they are self-sufficient subsistence farmers, keeping two cows, geese, and chickens. In the photo, they are shown returning home with hay, which they had mown from abandoned farmlands (Letichiv district, Khmelnytsk region, Ukraine. Photo by S. Donati). **Below:** Ludmila with her two grandsons, who stay with her during the summer school holiday (Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi district, Kyiv region, Ukraine. Photo by S. Donati).





Above: Petro and Nadezhda at their rural house, where they live most of the year (they only live in their city apartment for a few months in the winter). They cultivate nearly the entire household plot of 0.2 ha and follow the rural lifestyle. **Below:** Nadezhda is preparing breakfast for herself, her husband, and unexpected but warmly received guests (Trebukhovka village, Khmel'nitsk region, Ukraine. Photos by N. Mamonova (above), and S. Donati (below)).





Above: Larisa has gathered some apples to treat the research team. The apples, as well as other self-grown food, are used for self-consumption, given away to friends and family, sold on local markets, and preserved for the winter. **Below:** The remaining preserves from the previous year (Bar village on the border between the Khmelnytsk and Vinnytsia regions, Ukraine. Photos by S. Donati (above) and N. Mamonova (below)).





Above: An official food market in Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi, where rural dwellers sell their products. They have to pay for a spot and, if necessary, for veterinary-sanitary tests (Kiev region, Ukraine. Photo by S. Donati). **Below:** An ‘impromptu’ (unofficial) market on the side of the road (Khmelnytsk region, Ukraine. Photo by N. Mamonova).





Above: Commercial family farmer Mykolay with his daughters and sons-in-law. Formerly, Mykolay was an agronomist at a collective poultry farm. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was one of the few who managed to withdraw land shares for private farming. Currently, his family cultivates 250 ha (the majority of which they rent from fellow villagers) and produces wheat and buckwheat. **Below:** Lyudmila (odnoosibnik) with one of her 6 cows. She runs her household together with her husband, youngest son and daughter-in-law. She travels to Kiev once a week to sell their milk products at a farmers' market (Hreblya village, Kyiv region, Ukraine. Photos by S. Donati).





Above: Note-taking during the interview with Ivan, a former kolkhoz tractor driver, who is now one of the two men living in the Rusanivtsi village. He tells that only 6 of the village's 30 houses are inhabited, primarily by elderly widowed women (Khmelnysk region, Ukraine. Photo by S. Donati). **Below:** The first day of official visits in the Pereiaslav-Khmelnyskyi district. In the photo: researcher with received gifts, local rural authorities, and representatives of the district government (Kiev region, Ukraine. Photo by S. Donati).





Above and Below: An abandoned cowshed from a former kolkhoz in the Letychiv district. Livestock production has collapsed after the fall of Soviet Union, and until now remains less attractive to large-scale investors. Most animal products are produced in households (Khmelnitsk region, Ukraine. Photo by S. Donati).





Above: A modern grain elevator close to the Bar village. The locals mentioned that it was built by a foreign investor, although the elevator's management did not confirm this information. **Below:** Workers at a former kolkhoz in the Letichiv district, which is currently the subsidiary of a large American agroholding. The farm enterprise preserved its Soviet name, structure, and many of its former employees (Khmelnitsk region, Ukraine. Photos by S. Donati).





Above: Combine harvesters on the field of a former kolkhoz, which is now the subsidiary of a large American agroholding. In the Soviet times, this kolkhoz cultivated 4,000 ha, ran 2,000 head of cattle and 50,000 of poultry, and employed 240 people. With the new investor, the farm became specialised in monocrop wheat production and expanded its landholding to 16,000 ha. It currently provides 120 permanent and 15 seasonal jobs in the district. 60% of its employees are former kolkhoz workers. **Below:** one of the guards monitors harvesting (Khmelnitsk region, Ukraine. Photos by S. Donati).





Above: A bust of Lenin at the entrance of the JSC kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin', in the village of Arzgir. Although this kolkhoz was transformed into a joint stock company after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it preserved its old name and symbols. The diversity of its agricultural production, however, has declined; the enterprise became largely specialised in monocrop wheat production. **Below:** Svetlana, chairwoman of the kolkhoz's trade union, proudly shows the rich history of the kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin' in the kolkhoz's museum (village of Arzgir, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: Andrey is a combine harvester driver at the JSC kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin' in the village of Arzgir. Both of his parents used to work at this kolkhoz; he sees no other way of life than continuing in his parents' footsteps. Although Arzgir is a large village, there are few employment opportunities beyond those provided by kolkhoz. He does not have the resources to start a private family farm, but neither does he want to take a risk in that direction, as he has recently become a father. **Below:** One of the modern combine harvesters at the JSC kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin'. In total, the kolkhoz has 48,000 ha, including 24,000 ha of arable land and 14,000 ha of grassland. It employs 370 people (village of Arzgir, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: Mikhail is a tractor driver at the JSC kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin'. He used to work at the same kolkhoz before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, when the kolkhoz experienced severe difficulties, he was dismissed on grounds of redundancy. After that, he was jobless for a while, and then worked as a long-distance truck driver. He was happy to be hired again at the kolkhoz in the early 2000s. **Below:** Preparing lunch for the workers at the cafeteria of the kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin' (village of Arzgir, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: Beef cattle breeding at the JSC kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin'. This kolkhoz is one of the few large-scale meat produces in Stavropol Krai. However, the meat production is unprofitable, and only maintained to keep up employment. In the near future, the kolkhoz will consider terminating this activity. **Below:** One of the cowsheds of the JSC kolkhoz 'Named after Lenin' (village of Arzgir, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: An abandoned greenhouse from a former kolkhoz close to the village of Krasnoye. The kolkhoz no longer exists. Some of its greenhouses are used by Chinese farmers to grow vegetables. **Below:** Ludmila, a retired teacher of Russian language and literature at a rural school in the village of Krasnoye. She was a gatekeeper for the fieldwork conducted in the village of Krasnoye (Grachyovsk district, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photo by N. Mamonova).



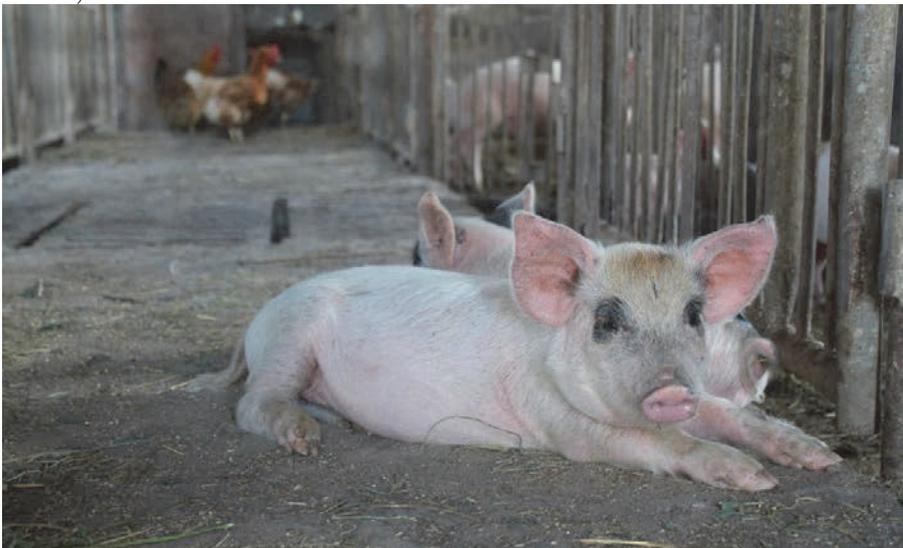


Above: Olga is watching her 5 cows returning home after grazing. 17 households in the Krasnoye village keep livestock (approx. 2-4 cows per household, 66 cows in total). They jointly organise the grazing: based on a rotation principle, every household provides a herder with a horse for a week to take the herd to pasture. **Below:** Alik is leading the village herd back from the pasture. Villagers have to graze their cows in areas unsuitable for grazing (roadsides or rocky terrain), because the new investor, which acquired a bankrupted kolkhoz, turned all the grassland into arable land (village of Krasnoye, Grachyovsk district, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N.Mamonova).





Olga and Michail are self-sufficient small-scale food producers. They keep 3 cows, a dozen pigs, chicken, geese, and cultivate the entire 0.34 ha household plot. Several years ago, they wanted to withdraw their land shares from the local large farm enterprise to start a commercial family farm. However, the enterprise's management denied their multiple requests, and only agreed to give them their land shares after they applied to a local court. Their land parcel was allocated at some distance from the village, and in a rocky desert area, which was inappropriate for agriculture. Olga and Michail did not accept the plot, and left their land shares under the local farm's administration (village of Krasnoye, Grachyovsk district, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: Maria is watching her pigs, which she will have to slaughter when the new law for limiting the livestock of rural households comes into force. Maria, her husband, and mother-in-law cultivate 3 household plots. They financially support their three sons, who live and study in the city (village of Rasshevatskaya, Novoalexandrovsk district, Stavropol Krai, Russia). **Below:** Commercial farmer Alexander and his son at their watermelon field. Alexander worked as a chief secretary for the village Communist Party. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was one of 3 people in the village who managed to withdraw land shares and establish farms. Today he is the only farmer in the village; the other two went bankrupt (village of Krasnoye, Stavropol Krai, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: Nadezda moved with her husband and daughter from a city to a village 10 years ago, when her husband's carpentry business was bankrupted by the local mafia's extortions. Since then, they follow the rural lifestyle. They kept livestock for some time, but had to slaughter them when her husband became ill (village of Davydovskoe, Kolchugino district, Vladimir region, Russia). **Below:** A view from a rural house on the household and field. Many rural houses are used by urban dwellers as dachas – i.e. summer country houses (village of Prokudino, Kolchugino district, Vladimir region, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: I am helping my father to dig the vegetable plot close to our dacha. My family, like many other Russian families, has a dacha plot of 0.06 ha for recreational activities and for cultivating fruits and vegetable for family consumption. **Below:** My father being proud of his cucumbers.





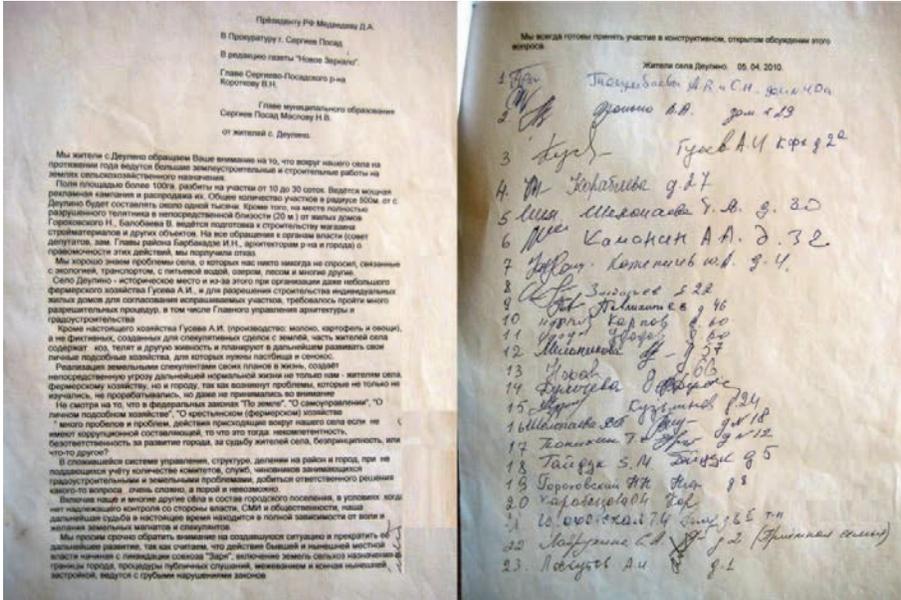
Above and Below: Protest of deprived land shareholders of the sovkhos ‘Serp i Molot’. 180 former sovkhos workers lost their land shares due to the illegal acquisition and deliberate bankruptcy of the sovkhos. They are members of the rural social movement ‘Krestyansky Front’ and have been protesting for more than 10 years. The texts on their posters say: ‘Privatisation in rural areas only benefits tricksters, what about the peasants?’ and ‘LJSC “Serp i Molot”, give us our land back!’ (village of Purshevo, Balashikha district, Moscow region, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: Protest of deprived land shareholders of the sovkhos 'Leninskiy Luch'. This sovkhos used to supply Moscow with milk products; it was illegally acquired and bankrupted, and its farmland was used for the construction of prestigious houses for the new Russian elite. The protesters are dissatisfied with the offered compensation of 10,000 USD per share (the market price of one land share of 4 ha is about 800,000 USD). **Below:** A meeting between civil activists and a representative of the Moscow regional government (Krasnogorsk, Moscow region, Russia. Photos by N. Mamonova).





Above: A petition letter to the Russian President from the Deulino villagers, who complain about the unlawful acquisition and bankruptcy of their sovkhos, and the construction of country houses on its land (village of Deulino, Sergiev-Posad district, Moscow region, Russia). **Below:** A newly built dacha settlement for middle-class urbanites; the crossed out graffiti on the fence reads: ‘the land of Radonezh is grabbed’. The illegal acquisition of the Radonezh land sparked a huge public scandal due to this area’s religious and historical heritage, and the fact that this conflict was used in political campaigns by several regional politicians (village of Antipino, Sergiev-Posad district, Moscow region, Russia). Photos by N. Mamonova).





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