Cotton, control, and continuity in disguise: The political economy of agrarian transformation in lowland Tajikistan

Hofman, I.

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Cover image: Photographed painting on a wall of a former *sovkhoz* in the district of Konibodom, Sughd region, Tajikistan. Artist unknown.

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Irna Hofman

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Glossary of terms

Note on transliteration: This thesis is written in English (U.K.) spelling. Russian and Tajik terms are transliterated following the BGN/PCGN romanisation system. Places and names are not always transliterated; I have decided to use the most common English terms (e.g. Tajikistan and Gorno Badakhshan instead of Tojikiston and Gorno Badakhshon).

Agroprom	Agricultural department (of the district authorities)
Amliak	Form of land tenure in pre-Soviet times
Bek	Native noble, wealthy landlord (in pre-Soviet Central Asia)
Bey	Native noble, wealthy landlord (in pre-Soviet Central Asia)
Bobo	Grandfather
Brigade	A production unit within the *kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz*; today the term is still used to refer to production units within large (cotton) producing farms
Brigadier	Manager of a brigade
Dastarkhon	Table cloth
Dehqon farm (in full: *khojagi dehqoni*)	Commercial farm established on former *kolkhoz*/*sovkhoz* farmland after restructuring of the former Soviet farms. A *dehqon* farm can be a collective, private, or individual entity
Gorno Badakhshan (*Autonomous Oblast*) (GBAO)	Autonomous region in (north)east Tajikistan
Hukumat	District/city authorities/administration

Iftar	The (shared) meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan
Jaloliddini Balkhi	District in southwest Tajikistan (the Khatlon region); one of the case study sites (earlier called "Kolkhozobod" and "Jaloliddini Rumi")
Jamoat	Lowest-level administrative unit of the state (municipality)
Kelin	Daughter-in-law
Khatlon	Region in southwest Tajikistan
Kolkhoz (*kolkhozes,* also *kolkhozy*)	Collective farm enterprise (in the Soviet Union)
Kolkhozobod	Town in southwest Tajikistan (the Khatlon region); centre of the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi
Konibodom	District in northern Tajikistan (the Sughd region)
Mahalla	Self-governed local institution; a neighbourhood
Mulk	Form of land tenure in pre-Soviet times
Nohiya	District (in Tajik language)
Oblast	Region/province (in Russian language)
Pripiski	On paper figures, "add-ons"
Qarz	Debt
Qarzi zamin	Land debt (indebted farmland)
Raion	District (in Russian language)

Raions of Republican Subordination (*RRS*)	Districts under direct central rule, surrounding the capital city (Dushanbe)
Rais	Chief, director
Raisi	Chief, director of ….
Ramadan	The ninth month of the Islamic calendar; Muslims observing *Ramadan* abstain from drinking and eating during the day that month
Semechki	Sunflower seeds
Shahritus	District in southwest Tajikistan (the Khatlon region)
Sharia	Islamic canonical law
Sovkhoz (*sovkhozes*, also *sovkhozy*)	State-owned farm enterprise (in the Soviet Union)
Sughd	Region in northwest Tajikistan
Tinji	Peace, quietness
Tovarnii kredit	Commodity credit
Vakhshstroi	The Vakhsh (river) Valley project
Vanj	District in northeast Tajikistan, in Gorno Badakhshan
Wacf	Form of land tenure in pre-Soviet times
Yanga	Sister-in-law
Yovon	District in southwest Tajikistan (the Khatlon region); one of the case study sites
Zamin	Land

Zamini presidenti	Presidential land

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
BICAS	BRICS Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies
BRICS	Brazil Russia India China South Africa
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DfID	(British) Department for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the United Nations)
FPSP	Farm Privatisation Support Project
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GAO	Gross Agricultural Output
GBAO	Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ GmbH); German Society for International Cooperation, Ltd.
GNI	Gross National Income
ICG	International Crisis Group
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency

LDPI	Land Deal Politics Initiative
LFE	Large Farm Enterprise
NBT	National Bank of Tajikistan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBOR	One Belt One Road
ODA	Official Development Assistance
RRS	Raions of Republican Subordination
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNWFP	United Nations World Food Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Acknowledgements

This has been a very long journey. I started my Ph.D. research in 2012, under a different supervisor, with a different focus. In 2013, I decided to shift the focus and study the political economy of agrarian change in Tajikistan, something which fascinated me enormously. This focus brought me back to my earlier research on Uzbekistan, which I, very unfortunately, had never been able to complete. I have worked with passion on my thesis and at the same time, I hope I contribute in some way to the lives of the people in Tajikistan who shared their stories with me.

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Irna Hofman

Summary

What constitutes the political economy of agrarian transformation in post-socialist Tajikistan? How and to what extent does capital accumulation in the agrarian economy occur? These are the principal questions of this thesis, which is inspired by neo-Marxist theories on rural capital accumulation and extraction.

The focus is southwest-lowland Tajikistan, where the Soviet heritage continues to shape the agrarian political economy. To examine the agrarian question in 21st-century Tajikistan means taking into account both agrarian production relations and dynamics at the micro-level of rural households, and macro-level developments such as the arrival of foreign agri-businesses and the currents of international labour migration.

Theoretically this thesis has been informed by critical peasant studies, including agrarian political economy and rural livelihood analyses. In particular, this thesis addresses property rights, the anthropology of debt, and the logic of cotton production in order to understand the continuity in agrarian production relations and local land politics. Regarding property relations, I contend that we cannot understand actual, effective control over land if we do not unpack ownership as a bundle of rights, and untangle formal property from access and ability to exploit a resource, which, in this context, implies land. "The concept of control" (Burawoy 1985, 26) is central to my analyses, i.e. "whom or what is being controlled, for what ends, how, and by whom" – in line with Bernstein's (2010) questions on the agrarian political economy. In so doing, the aim is to contribute to theories on agrarian transformation both within as well as outside the former Soviet and post-socialist realm. Innovative in terms of its analyses, this thesis firstly not only focuses on domestic state-society relations, but also on the way in which international financial institutions and foreign donors interact with the state. Secondly, unlike most studies informed by agrarian political economy that tend to pay little attention to nature and geography, this thesis explicitly looks at the way in which altitude, remoteness, and crop specificities interact with the political economy. These issues are examined in an introductory chapter, four separate articles, and a concluding chapter.

Among other conclusions, I contend that sheer access to arable land in Tajikistan alone is no guarantee for rural well-being. Arable land has little value when actors lack the capability to make effective use of it. In this regard the context of Tajikistan diverges from global dynamics in which financial institutions, (domestic) elites, transnational companies, and financial institutions increasingly buy up (or grab) farmland, as they (re)discover agricultural land as a highly lucrative asset. Furthermore, I conclude that Tajikistan's pathway of agrarian change is characterised by a strong continuation in terms of relations of production; hence the title of this research work: cotton, control, and continuity in disguise. This has been the case in spite of the opening up and liberalisation of the economy, the ensuing exposure to the world market and the forging of transnational relations. Many actors in Tajikistan itself are unaware of this striking continuity, in part because reform statistics only focus on "progress" and "change." Relations of dependency have continued, and that is why I refer to Burawoy's (2001b) "transition without transformation": under capitalist relations of production —a new order— we can observe continuity. Agrarian

production relations carry a stamp of serfdom, as rural dwellers continue to be tied to land and are unable to build up an independent rural livelihood.

Genuine rural development and an improvement of rural wellbeing in Tajikistan can only be realised when farmers' and rural dwellers' autonomy is achieved. This entails decision-making power and control over farmland and farm revenues. It would require a thorough alteration of power relationships within the agrarian economy.

Samenvatting

Katoen, controle, en vermomde continuïteit:
De politieke economie van landbouwtransformatie in laagland Tadzjikistan

Welke actoren en factoren structureren de politieke economie van landbouwtransformatie in postsocialistisch Tajikistan? Hoe en in tot in welke mate vindt kapitaalaccumulatie plaats in de landbouweconomie? Dit zijn de centrale vragen van dit proefschrift, dat geïnspireerd is door neomarxistische theorieën over de accumulatie en het onttrekken van ruraal kapitaal.

Geografisch ligt de focus op Zuidwest-laagland Tadzjikistan, waar het nalatenschap van de Sovjet Unie nog altijd de politieke economie van de landbouw vorm geeft. Een onderzoek van het landbouwvraagstuk (the "agrarian question") in de 21ste eeuw in Tadzjikistan in de 21e eeuw betekent dat agrarische productierelaties en dynamiek op het microniveau van plattelandshuishoudens in ogenschouw genomen moeten worden, als ook ontwikkelingen op macroniveau zoals internationale arbeidsmigratie en de intrede van buitenlandse agrobedrijven.

Theoretisch is dit proefschrift geïnspireerd op kritische boerenstudies ("peasant studies"), waaronder de agrarische politieke economie en analyses van vormen van levensonderhoud op het platteland. Meer in het bijzonder richt dit proefschrift zich op eigendomsrechten, de antropologie van schuld en de logica van de katoenproductie om de continuïteit in agrarische productierelaties en plattelandspolitiek te begrijpen. Met betrekking tot eigendomsrechten beargumenteer ik dat we daadwerkelijke controle over landbouwgrond niet kunnen begrijpen als we eigendom niet zien als een bundel van rechten. Ik stel dat we onderscheid moeten maken tussen formeel eigendom, en toegang en mogelijkheid om een hulpbron te exploiteren. Het concept van controle (cf. Burawoy 1985) staat centraal in mijn analyse, met andere woorden: "wie of wat wordt gecontroleerd, waarom, hoe, en door wie." Dit is gerelateerd aan Bernstein's (2010) vragen in de agrarische politieke economie.

Mijn doel is om bij te dragen aan theorieën op het gebied van landbouwtransformatie zowel binnen als ook buiten de voormalige Sovjet en postsocialistische sfeer. De analyse in dit proefschrift is innovatief, allereerst omdat het niet alleen gericht is op binnenlandse relaties tussen de staat en de maatschappij, maar ook aandacht heeft voor de interactie tussen de staat en internationale financiële instituties en buitenlandse donoren. Ten tweede, dit proefschrift geeft expliciete aandacht aan de manier waarop hoogte, geografische afstand, en karakteristieken van landbouwgewassen articuleren met de politieke economie. Deze thema's worden behandeld in vier op zichzelf staande hoofdstukken (artikelen), een introductie en een conclusie.

De belangrijkste conclusie van dit proefschrift is dat toegang tot landbouwgrond *an sich* in Tadzjikistan geen garantie is voor welzijn op het platteland. Landbouwgrond heeft weinig waarde wanneer boeren niet in staat zijn effectief gebruik te maken van landbouwgrond. In die zin onderscheid de context van Tadzjikistan zich van recente ontwikkelingen elders waarin landbouwgrond in toenemende mate opgekocht wordt door overheidsorganen, elites, bedrijven, en financiële instituties. Deze actoren hebben landbouwgrond (her)ontdekt als zeer lucratief

bezit. Daarnaast concludeer ik in dit proefschrift dat Tadzjikistan's traject van landbouwhervormingen gekarakteriseerd wordt door een sterke continuering van productierelaties, wat ook de titel van het proefschrift verklaart: "Katoen, controle, en vermomde continuïteit." Dit is het geval ondanks de liberalisering en het openstellen van de economie aan de wereldmarkt en het smeden van transnationale relaties. Veel actoren in Tadzjikistan zelf zijn zich niet bewust van deze geprononceerde continuïteit, onder andere omdat statistieken alleen gericht zijn op vooruitgang en verandering. Afhankelijkheidsrelaties duren voort, en daarom refereer ik aan Burawoy's (2001b) "overgang zonder transformatie": onder kapitalistische productierelaties – een nieuwe orde – kunnen we continuïteit observeren. Agrarische productierelaties dragen een stempel van lijfeigenschap, omdat plattelandsbewoners nog altijd gebonden zijn aan landbouwgrond en niet in staat zijn onafhankelijk een vorm van levensonderhoud op te bouwen.

Daadwerkelijke plattelandsontwikkeling en verbetering van de leefomstandigheden op het platteland in Tadzjikistan kunnen alleen plaatsvinden wanneer de autonomie van de boeren en plattelandsbewoners gegarandeerd wordt. Dit betekent zelfbeschikkingsrecht over de manier waarop landbouwgrond gebruikt wordt, en over productieopbrengsten. Hiervoor zullen machtsverhoudingen binnen de landbouwsector moeten veranderen.

1. Introduction

This is a study on the political economy of post-Soviet[1] agrarian transformation in Tajikistan. It seeks to understand the way in which capitalism entered Tajikistan's countryside and how it has subsequently developed. This study, rather than pointing at "winners" or "losers" of transformation, focuses particularly on the politics of agrarian change, and also aims to provide understanding of the consequences of post-socialist transformation in Tajikistan. It does so by analysing the trajectory of agrarian change in two distinctive sites in southwest-lowland Tajikistan, the powerhouse of commercial cotton production in Tajikistan, which is the mainstay and export crop of the country. The cases that are analysed point to divergences of local political economies within a seemingly homogenous geography, namely the lowlands.

1.1. Background

> *Pakhta boigarii davlat ast*
> Cotton is the state's wealth

This saying has been an important mechanism of power. As the Tajik government declared: "Cotton is not only an important crop for our Republic; it is entwined with our history and with the lives and future of our people" (Government of Tajikistan 2007, 4). The fact that the crop's white bulbs appear on Tajikistan's national emblem (portrayed below) exemplifies the crop's longstanding importance for the nation. Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian transformation has been built on a political economy of cotton. The state's and elites' vested interests in the country's cotton sector have resulted in various, though highly interrelated, regimes of exploitation and regimes of accumulation, that together constitute the *cotton regime of capital accumulation*. Cotton comprises around 13.5 per cent of Tajikistan's export earnings and has cumulatively added up to over 30 per cent of the state's tax revenues (World Bank 2012b).[2]

Figure 1.1 The national emblem of post-Soviet (left)[a] and Soviet (right)[b] Tajikistan

Sources:
[a] Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan http://vkd.tj/index.php/tj/ramz-oi-davlatii-t [Accessed 30 November 2018];
[b] White 2014, 307.

Note:
In the Soviet emblem, the hammer and sickle take a central position; in the emblem of post-Soviet Tajikistan these have been replaced by a crown, with a lectern on the bottom. In both emblems a circlet surrounds the emblem, decorated with cotton on the left, and sheaves of wheat on the right. The similarity between the emblems exemplifies the continued importance of cotton in the agrarian economy.

After the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 there was widespread support from Western countries to liberalise the economies of the former socialist states. Some have equalled the change that was applied to the newly independent states as "shock therapy" (cf. Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Wegren 2005). While poor and arable-land scarce Tajikistan may be an exception, in most former Soviet countries (particularly Russia), agrarian reform was expected to result in the emergence of highly productive capitalist farms.

Yet the early 1990s were harsh in the former Soviet bloc. Throughout the former Soviet states disorganisation was ubiquitous and nationwide populations faced economic hardship. A "demonetisation and reagrarianisation" (Kandiyoti 2003, 251) took place in many countries in the early post-Soviet years, including in Tajikistan. Household plot production appeared to be more resilient and productive than the newly established farms, as household plot production had always outperformed the collective farms in terms of productivity. Collective structures either did not disappear, or only gradually disappeared.

With the dismantling of Soviet socialist agriculture, the "agrarian question" regained attention, that is, the question of the way in which capitalism transforms pre-capitalist agrarian societies. This agrarian question was reworded to fit the post-Soviet context, and was particularly popular among sociologists and anthropologists (see for instance the contributions in Hann 2002a; 2003a; Small 2007). Over time, many scholars pointed to the fact that the Western perspective of agrarian reform, the notion of "the establishment of small scale agriculture [as] a necessary precursor to the evolution of the larger scale capitalist agriculture typical of the West" (Small 2007, 29), proved inapplicable in the former Soviet Union in a relatively short time frame. Agricultural sector performance in the post-socialist realm "disappointed" in the 1990s (Lerman 1998).

Over the course of post-socialist transformation many social scientists steered attention towards the diversity in post-socialist social and agrarian change, and rightly questioned the teleological thinking of Western policy advisors who had entered the former Soviet bloc in the early 1990s. Russia's initial reforms, for instance, were based on the Western thought that privatisation of land would improve productivity and solve inefficiencies; Boris Yeltsin, Russia's president in the early years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, tried to "create 'capitalism by design'" (Nickolsky 1998, 196); which evidently proved much harder than expected.

Among the post-socialist states, the transformation of Tajikistan's agrarian economy has remained largely underexplored, even though Tajikistan appeared relatively open in the post-conflict years of the early 2000s. Scholarly research on post-Soviet Tajikistan was mainly devoted to political science in the late 1990s until the late 2000s. Political scientists focused on, for instance, statehood and nation building in the aftermath of the Tajik Civil War (see for instance Akiner 2002; Heathershaw 2009; Markowitz 2012; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2009; 2014).

In (critical) agrarian studies, Tajikistan remained largely out of the picture until very recently. In studies focused on post-socialist farm restructuring, Tajikistan's post-Soviet agrarian transformation was mainly analysed on a macro-level until the mid 2000s (see for instance Spoor and Visser 2001; Lerman 2001). In those studies, and in comparative analyses of agrarian change in the former Soviet Union (FSU), the country was regularly grouped together with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, as "laggard" (cf. Lerman 2001), as Tajikistan resembled Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan's patterns of production and also patterns of reform (see for instance Spoor and Visser 2001), i.e. transformation with only latent signals towards liberalisation. Over the last few years more studies on Tajikistan's agrarian economy have emerged (Boboyorov 2012; 2013; 2016; Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018; Mandler 2016; Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2018).

1.2. Research questions, aim, and objectives

1.2.1. Research questions

Discussing the agrarian question through a political economy lens means questioning: by whom is agriculture undertaken; what is produced and in which ways; and what is done with the surplus production (cf. Bernstein 2010)? The focus of this study is on agrarian dynamics: land politics; patterns of surplus extraction and capital accumulation; and, on reform consequences. Hence, this study's main research question is:

What constitutes the political economy of agrarian transformation in post-socialist Tajikistan, and how and to what extent does capital accumulation in the agrarian economy occur?

It sub-questions:

1. *How do agrarian politics shape farm structures and rural livelihoods in lowland Tajikistan?* (Chapters 2, 3 and 4)
2. *How are agrarian production relations transformed under capitalism?* (Chapters 2, 3 and 4)

3. *What are the dominant ways of surplus extraction and capital accumulation in the agrarian economy of lowland Tajikistan, and which actors are in charge of this process?* (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5)

"Surplus" is here understood as excess production, farm income, or labour (i.e. beyond the amount necessary for reproduction). The appropriation of surplus points to "social relations of *exploitation*" (Bernstein 2010, 21, emphasis in original). Inherent to capitalism is the "appropriation of surplus labour for purposes of productive accumulation" (Bernstein 2010, 23). "The labourer receives […] the value of labour power […] Everything else is appropriated as surplus value" (Harvey 1982, 43). Surplus value can be converted into capital, and capital accumulation takes place as money and use values are converted and put "into circulation in order to make money, to produce [ever more] surplus value" (Harvey 1982, 20-21).

1.2.2. Research aims and research rationale

The overall aim of this research is to conceptualise Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian transformation and to understand the changes in agricultural production relations as a result of capitalist transformation. It is essential to interrogate what is beneath the veneer of macro-level and policy "transition," by looking at the transformation of everyday life.

Agrarian capitalism entails the commodification of the means of production (land and labour), and is most often accompanied by a (partial) withdrawal of the state from the agrarian economy and an increased role of private actors (cf. Q.F. Zhang 2015; Wegren 2005). This research seeks to unravel the contours of agrarian change and the dynamics at play in the little explored context of Tajikistan in post-Soviet Central Asia. Its objectives are to (1) shed light on the politics of agrarian change, looking particularly at the contestations over access to farmland; (2) contribute to insights on evolving farm types; (3) shed light on agrarian production relations and on farm and social differentiation in the process of decollectivisation;[3] and, (4) provide insights into processes of capital accumulation in the countryside.

How does a study on small, arable-land scarce, "underdeveloped" and poor Tajikistan, a post-Soviet country on the global as well as the Central Asian periphery, contribute to scholarly insights into (post-socialist) agrarian change? Tajikistan is the poorest republic of Central Asia, land-locked and bordering war-torn Afghanistan. It has weak transport corridors that have been impacted by the country's civil war, and has few economic assets. Arable land comprises only around six per cent of the country's overall surface (UNDP 2012), and Tajikistan's economy rests on three main pillars: aluminium exports, cotton, and labour migration. Industrial sectors are poorly developed.

I argue that posing the post-socialist agrarian question in Tajikistan still has relevance today, even after more than 25 years of post-socialist transformation. As noted above, Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian transformation has remained underexplored to date, as only few studies exist that concentrate on the first years of post-Soviet independence and the early 2000s. The dearth of studies on the rural economy in the 1990s and 2000s leave many questions unanswered. For instance: How does agrarian transformation unfold in such a peripheral locality where economic

assets are scarce? I contend that the post-socialist Tajik context is important for several reasons, among them to better our understanding of agrarian change.

First: It is an interesting fact that in Tajikistan, agrarian production relations seem to showcase apparent continuities in terms of production relations, even 25 years after the initial post-socialist transformations. Numerous social scientists pointed at striking continuities in (agrarian) production relations in the post-socialist countries in the 1990s up to the mid 2000s, particularly in the countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Spoor and Visser 2001; Lerman 2001), in which some equalled the post-Soviet farm with a feudal-like hacienda (Nikulin 2003; Miller and Heady 2003). As a result it is relevant to question what has changed and what has remained the same, in everyday life at the farm level in Tajikistan. This will be discussed in all subsequent sections and chapters. I will demonstrate that in Tajikistan, even today, after almost three decades of agrarian transformation, and in the current era with global circuits of capital, transnational corporations, and "land grabbing," one can witness a continuation of Soviet-style production relations. It (also) seems as if post-socialist agrarian structures still have not crystallised in Tajikistan, in contrast to most other former Soviet Union (FSU) states where agrarian structures have more or less stabilised after two decades of independence. The agrarian question seems unresolved in Tajikistan where there is an ongoing redefinition of property relations, and foreign advisors continue to press for far reaching property reforms.

In this way, a very important aspect is that my study is situated in a different period than, for example, earlier anthropological studies on post-socialist transformation (see for instance the contributions in Hann 2002a; 2003a; Verdery 2003). In those early years the world was less globalised than it is today. Foreign actors pushing for economic transformation (predominantly advocates of economic liberalisation and privatisation) entered the former Soviet bloc as external advisors in the early 1990s (Wedel 1998). Whereas most of them were active in the former Soviet bloc for a decade (such as in Russia) (Wedel 1998), strikingly, in Tajikistan, these foreign advisors have continued to play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of economic reform, from the mid 1990s up until today. For that reason, this thesis (also) pays attention to the influx of international and foreign actors, such as multilateral donors. A study on agrarian transformation in the contemporary era also differs from earlier "transition studies" in that by now, foreign (corporate) investors have become active in (some) former Soviet republics (Visser and Spoor 2011; Petrick *et al.* 2013). This was not the case in the 1990s and early 2000s. While in Tajikistan, (foreign) private sector investment in the agrarian sector has remained largely absent, Chinese investors entered in 2012, which I will describe in Chapter 5. In so doing I aim to address the fact that domestic economies are enmeshed with global forces and actors, so I concur with Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009a, 5) that of course we cannot remove the agrarian question "from the world-historical context within which it is situated." Indeed, agrarian change does not occur in a vacuum; rural dwellers do not live in isolation from the outside world, that is, "from wider social and economic forces that are outside their control" (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009a, 3).

Importantly, Central Asia is not as isolated as one may think; while it is true that foreign private investment remains limited in Tajikistan, and that, apart from cotton production, Tajikistan's *dehqon* farmers produce primarily for local markets, "the Republic of Tajikistan is very much part

of […] new global politics via [for instance] specialised political and economic assemblages" (Heathershaw 2011, 148). For instance, Tajik elites are actively engaged in offshore networks to siphon money from domestic industries (Heathershaw 2011; Heathershaw and Cooley 2015) in which "economic assets are based largely on trading mineral and agricultural resources on now-globalised markets" (Laruelle 2012, 308). The fact that migrant remittances from international labour migration are highly significant in Tajikistan also indicates that the Tajik economy, while being geographically isolated, is not at all disconnected from global flows of money and labour. Almost every (urban and rural) household has transnational ties through migrating family members.

Second, while small and peripheral in geographic terms, disentangling Tajikistan's pathways of agrarian change is interesting to better understand the implications of complex state-and-society relations in relation to resource endowments, for agrarian transformation. Tajikistan's economy is unique in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union (as will also be described in Chapter 2): unlike the other two cotton-monoculture neighbouring economies of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan is relatively resource poor. The unique juncture of characteristics in Tajikistan (mountainous, relatively resource poor, and a strong reliance on cotton for the national economy) has had important ramifications, particularly in terms of state-society relations, for the way in which agrarian transformation has been set in motion. As will become clear later in this thesis, the Tajik state has become an arena of contestation in which particular foreign societal actors (international donors) have competed with domestic societal actors (elites) over state functioning and policy implementation. Besides elites, other domestic societal actors have largely been absent.

So, contrary to its resource-rich neighbours, the Tajik state lacked the resources to abstain from international pressure to reform the economy. At the same time, Tajikistan contrasts with its resource-poor neighbour Kyrgyzstan in its high reliance on cotton for the national economy. Tajik elites have held significant vested interests in the rural economy; unlike in Kyrgyzstan, where reform of the rural economy began in earnest in the early 1990s, and where economic assets have been more dispersed among elites (cf. Radnitz 2010; Laruelle 2012). As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the unique combination of assets (and lack of them) in Tajikistan has made the agrarian economy a politically sensitive sector. Domestic elites are only interested in keeping the cotton sector afloat. This, in turn, has shaped the process of farm reform until the present. The differences in Central Asian countries' resource endowments are displayed in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Natural resources in the Central Asian economies in perspective[4,5]

	Agriculture/ GDP (%)[1**]		Cotton/ GDP (%)[2]		Resources	Gas/ GDP (%)[1]		Oil/ GDP (%)[1]		Remittances/ GDP (%)[1]		
	1995	2015	1995	2011		1995	2015	1995	2015	1995	2010	2015
Kazakhstan	12.3	4.7	0.5	0.1	Oil, gas, mineral resources	0.4	0.8	5.2	6.7	0.6	0.2	0.1
Kyrgyzstan	40.7	14.1	1.7	1.2	Mineral resources	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.1	26.4	25.3
Tajikistan	36.7	21.9	9.7	4.7	Mineral resources	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	n.a.	35.8	28.8
Turkmenistan	16.2	9.3	24.8	2.5	Oil, gas, mineral resources	23.5	15.0	7.2	5.0	n.a.	0.2	0.0*
Uzbekistan	28.0	16.6	18.2	4.8	Oil, gas, mineral resources	6.6	6.5	2.2	0.7	n.a.	7.3	4.6

Sources: Author's compilation based on:
[1] World Bank 2018.
[2] Shamsiev 2012

Notes:
* I highly doubt the figure of zero in the case of Turkmenistan, but other data was not available.
** The figures include agriculture, forestry and fishery

Third and related to the second point, it is notable that Tajikistan has a highly diverse geography. This has, as I contend (in Chapter 2), consequences for the way in which post-Soviet agrarian change has unfolded. The aspect of geography entails differences in altitude, remoteness, and crop specificities.

1.2.3. Societal relevance

The policy relevance of this research is to provide understanding of the outcomes of agrarian change, in terms of its implications for rural livelihoods. Tajikistan was – and still is – the poorest of the Soviet republics (ranking very low at 129 on the Human Development Index) (UNDP 2016). Yet agriculture is of utmost importance in Tajikistan, even though arable land is scarce.[6] Over 70 per cent of the Tajik population resides in the countryside and around 50 per cent of the rural population finds work in the agricultural sector, even though revenues remain very low. Hence, the agrarian economy occupies a central position in Tajikistan.

At the same time, while a large part of the population is engaged in farming, the paradox is that only 24 per cent of the rural population is food secure; countrywide over 30 per cent of the people are undernourished (UNWFP 2018) and more than 30 per cent of the population lives under the

national poverty line (World Bank 2016). Poverty results from the country's lack of decent employment and quality education, and environmental degradation of land and water resources (UNDP 2012). However, I will argue that rural poverty is not just a result of the limited natural resource base, but *highly related to the agrarian political economy*, as the pressure to grow cotton has severely hindered the development of viable rural livelihoods and food crop production. The average income is below 150 US dollars per month (TajStat 2015c), but as will be noted in Chapter 4, wages in agriculture are three times lower than the average income in the country (FAO 2014). In 2009, in the two principal agricultural regions (Khatlon and Sughd) over 50 per cent of the rural population lived below the absolute poverty line (UNDP 2012). "The valley farmers who produce Tajikistan's cotton had both the highest levels of rural poverty and the lowest rate of rural poverty reduction [between 1999 and 2003]" (World Bank 2012e, 1).

Decollectivisation has led to a substantial reconfiguration of rural livelihoods. Instead of the agricultural or urban sectors, international labour migration has become a core livelihood in Tajikistan. Whereas the agrarian economy contributes to around 20-25 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), migrant remittances contributed to over 50 per cent of Tajikistan's GDP in 2013 (World Bank 2016) (with which Tajikistan ranked highest worldwide). While the stagnating Tajik economy pushed migrants abroad, the fact that the Russian economy was booming implied an important pull factor. Migration has increased to extreme numbers and exceeds the role of agriculture in the national economy, which indicates that post-socialist transformation has pushed out both old and young people of a working age. Transformation of the agrarian economy has not been accompanied by industrial development. Importantly due to the recent Russian economic crisis[7] and the fact that migration regulations have become stricter for Tajik migrants in Russia (for instance they now have to pass a language test), the contribution of remittances to the GDP has fallen below 30 per cent (World Bank 2017b).[8] The importance of labour migration is highlighted in all following chapters.

1.3. Context and conceptualisation

1.3.1. The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic

1.3.1.1. What was socialism?

> What is the definition of socialism?
> The longest and most painful route from capitalism to capitalism.
> (Verdery 1996)

Socialism and capitalism are often seen as two antagonistic ideologies. Indeed when seen as ideal types, socialism and capitalism differ in important ways. In state socialism, the means of production, that is land, labour, and capital, are the state's monopoly. Production is planned, and is not used for capital accumulation, but for redistribution in society (Kornai 1992; Verdery 1996). As Verdery (1996, 25) explained, "[s]ocialism's inner drive was to accumulate not profits, like capitalist ones, but distributable resources." The Soviet socialist state had a paternalistic role, and this undergirded people's dependency on it. In socialism "distribution is […] the main role of social justice. In the area of *production*, its role is limited to ensuring the higher social utility of

production" (Bockman *et al.* 2016, 407, emphasis in original). In capitalism, in contrast, surplus is extracted privately for the purpose of profit, i.e. capital accumulation.

As a result there is a specific "rationale of accounting" that distinguishes socialism from capitalism. Capitalist enterprises are supposedly driven by demand and budget constraints are hard. Risks of bankruptcy are real. In socialism, on the contrary, farms (and firms) are driven by supply and operate with soft budget constraints, implying that losses cannot lead to bankruptcy. At the same time, companies and the state bargain over production plans and quota. Since supplies seem endless while production quotas are always uncertain, enterprises are incentivised to heighten input demands and hoard inputs for future use. It results in endemic shortages. The Soviet economy has therefore been defined as a shortage economy (cf. Kornai 1980; 1992). "*[P]lan fetishism* […] dissociates what is produced from what is needed" (Burawoy 1985, 160, emphasis in original). As Kornai (1992, 233) explained, a shortage economy means that

> shortage phenomena are (1) general, that is, found in all spheres of the economy [...]; (2) frequent, and not only exceptional or sporadic; (3) intensive, making their influence felt very strongly on the behaviour and environment of participants in the economy and the traits and results of the economic processes; and (4) chronic, applying constantly, not just occurring temporarily.

The political-economic systems of feudalism, socialism and capitalism can each identify with a particular mode of production: the feudalist, socialist, and capitalist mode of production, respectively (Marx 2010[1894]; Burawoy 1985).[9] These modes of production differ in the relations between the unit of producers and the unit of surplus appropriation (Burawoy 1985; Braverman 1974). Burawoy (1985) distinguished relations *in* production from relations *of* production, as the latter included the mechanisms in which the product of labour is appropriated. As Burawoy (1985, 15, emphasis mine) explained,

> [w]hereas the relations *of* production uniquely define a mode of production, the same relations *in* production – the same labour process – may be found in different modes of production. Hence we refer not to the capitalist labour process but to the labour process in capitalist society.[10]

> [A]ll the evidence we have from state socialist societies suggests a striking similarity between their labour processes and those in capitalist societies. If there is no obvious "socialist labour process," I argue […] that there is a distinctive state-socialist mode of *regulating* the labour process (Burawoy 1985, 15, emphasis in original).[11]

One should thus distinguish the labour process from the wider "*political apparatuses of production*" (Burawoy 1985, 87, emphasis in original).[12] An example of similar labour processes in distinct economic regimes is the fact that Taylorism and Fordism were popular among the Soviet leadership. Soviet leaders attempted to integrate these labour processes in the Soviet economy (including in large-scale farming; American experts were recruited by Soviet leaders in the early 1930s to assist in the building of successful large-scale farms (Leigh Smith 2014)).

Notably socialist and capitalist relations of production can co-exist within a typically broader political economic regime. Under Soviet rule, as mentioned further below, private capitalist production on household plots thrived alongside the socialist relations of production that

characterised the large-scale farms. And, as, for instance, the case of China shows, a socialist government and a (neo)liberal economy can intertwine (Pieke 2009).

1.3.1.2. The Russian conquest of Central Asia

In order to contextualise post-Soviet Tajikistan, I will briefly describe the pre-Soviet and Soviet setting with specific regard to state-society relations and agrarian production relations.

Contemporary Tajikistan did not exist before the foundation of national borders by the Soviet regime in the 1920s. Before the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s, the area later defined as Tajikistan was divided between two different political-administrative units: Kokand Khanate and the Emirate of Bukhara. Sedentary peasant communities and semi-nomads dominated in the mountainous and steppe areas (Abashin 2015; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014). Peasants held land through religious endowment or through tenancy arrangements on lands belonging to authorities such as the Khanate's Emir, so-called *beks* or wealthy landlords (*bey*) (Abashin 2015; O'Neill 2003; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970; Zanca 2010).[13] Water and land rights were tightly connected, as water, as a source for production, was essential (O'Neill 2003). Power over water was so important that it "often was key in maintaining power and privilege" (Zanca 2010, 51).

In both sedentary and nomad communities hereditary kinship was important, but in the former the "key feature of identification" was "place of domicile" (Akiner 1998, 4). Ties to localities were of utmost importance. "The 'pyramid' groupings were based on regional/administrative divisions, extending upwards from the village settlement […], through the district and provincial levels to the over-arching state formation" (Akiner 1998, 4-5).

After the conquest by the Russian Tsarist regime, significant parts of Central Asia were transformed to feed the Russian economy. The most impressive change by the Russian rulers was the commodification of Central Asian agriculture, primarily seen in the substantial intensification of cotton production, predominantly in the northern Turkestan province, the province that was created in 1867. This "laid the foundations for the [cotton] monoculture of the Soviet period" (Akiner 1998, 10). The Russian empire wanted to achieve cotton autarky, so as to become less dependent on cotton imports from the United States.[14] In order to achieve their goals, the authorities introduced "upland American cotton" (O'Neill 2003, 66). Yet according to Penati (2013), the expansion of cotton in Central Asia under Tsarist rule was not a mere result of top-down policies and of coordinated, effective planning; there were important macroeconomic factors and incentives that pushed the native Muslim population to sow more and more cotton. It resulted in a real "cotton boom." Turkestan was called "the cotton colony of Russian capitalism" (Beckert 2015, 347). According to O'Neill (2003, 67):

> In 1887, emboldened by the success of the new American cotton and determined to encourage "native" cotton production, the Russian government increased the tariff on foreign cotton imports, thus presaging Central Asia's total economic dependence on Russia. In 1893, a cheap freight rate for wheat shipped from European Russia was introduced. The consequent fall in the wheat price forced yet more people into cotton production.

"All land [except the built environment, and orchards] was declared crown property" (O'Neill 2003, 64). But as Sartori (2010, 51) noted: "[T]he rule that all Turkestani rural lands were state property existed only on paper. In practice, the colonial government had allowed the Muslims to legally dispose of their land as they saw fit." Land was transferred to those who effectively cultivated it, and "[h]enceforth the peasants had the right to sell and mortgage their land" (O'Neill 2003, 64). Hence "the old mode of production between the [*bey*] and the *dehqon*" (Zanca 2010, 54, emphasis in original) was transformed. The possibility to mortgage land had important implications. Private ownership over land became delicate since cotton production, interestingly, was based on a futures system (in fact similar to what was seen later in the post-Soviet years) in which cotton harvests functioned as collateral. When individual farmers could not produce the contracted amounts, the system resulted in farm debts, and a rapid transfer of land, in which farmland quickly changed hands (Abashin 2015; Zanca 2010). We could argue that the world market had arrived in the Central Asian village in earnest (O'Neill 2003). "Much of [the] initial expansion [of cotton production] was financed by credit provided by Russian businessmen to local peasants, who then became locked into a cycle of debt dependency" (Akiner 1998, 10). The futures system and the cotton debts resulted in numerous cases of land loss: "By 1912, approximately 30 per cent of the peasants in Ferghana and […] in Transcaspasia were landless" (O'Neill 2003, 67). Yet, as O'Neill (2003, 67) noted, "[t]he peculiarities of both irrigation agriculture and cotton cultivation meant, however, that many landless peasants stayed on their 'own' land as sharecroppers." Hence peasants became tied to their land; they became enslaved; in fact, "much as they had been under the 'traditional' system" (O'Neill 2003, 67).

The Tsarist regime sought to map localities accurately, but mountains formed physical barriers that complicated accurate topographical classification, and Russian surveillance only gradually penetrated. As a result state power was uneven, as particular pockets of state and agrarian order existed, whilst elsewhere, in more isolated localities, rural dwellers experienced more freedom to practise their traditional livelihoods. The power of the colonisers was manipulated, and hampered by physical barriers and as a result anything but totalitarian; there was still substantial room for manoeuvre (Abashin 2015). The state was significantly constrained in capacity and its autonomy was also challenged since the colonisers could not completely alter networks of power. This was caused mainly by a lack of knowledge of the grass roots situation and the Tsarist regime had to rely on local powerful figures to "facilitate colonial rule" (Bichsel 2011, 72). The reliance on local powerful figures and the state's inability to penetrate the countryside also meant that an important part of people's economic activities was not observed and not taxed, such as the marketing of vegetables produced on household plots and cattle breeding (Abashin 2015).

1.3.1.3. Building the cotton economy: the state and agrarian development in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic

After the arrival of the Bolsheviks in Central Asia in 1917, the early 1920s was a period of instability and conflict in the area later defined as Tajikistan (Tajikistan became a Soviet Socialist Republic only in 1929). The Soviet's Red Army had to reconquer the East Bukharan region and fight against the Basmachi (the local "mounted raiders," "meaning 'bandit'" (Marshall 2003, 5)) (Penati 2007; Kassymbekova 2016). In 1921 the New Economic Policy was introduced in the Soviet Union. Private enterprise development was encouraged and "among the [Muslims] [in Central Asia] much

power was restored to the traditional village power hierarchy of mullahs and [bey], and traders and craftsmen prospered" (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970, 27). Meanwhile, even in those early years of Bolshevik rule the Soviet regime sought to increase cotton production:

> [I]n 1923 the Bolsheviks conceived a further political tool to unseat the *Basmachi* by forcing the peasants to grow cotton. The principle was simple: corn, normally prohibitively expensive to the country [*dehqon*], was offered on the condition that it was only for food and not for sowing, and that the peasants planted only cotton (Marshall 2003, 16, emphasis in original).

So, political control and land governance fused. One way in which the government penetrated the village was through supervision of water authorities: "Using the threat of withheld water supplies as a sanction, [the government was] able to force compliance with what was becoming a 'command' agricultural policy" (O'Neill 2003, 72). And, whereas earlier the traditional village power hierarchy was reinstituted, in later years, by "'atomising' the Central Asian rural unit […] it was hoped that the traditional "lateral" ties of the peasant (to his neighbour, village, clan, tribal chief), once destroyed, could be replaced by 'vertical' ties to the state" (O'Neill 2003, 70). From the later 1920s onwards the Soviet regime started to resettle groups of people (Penati 2007), which was clearly related to the Soviet regime's wish to increase cotton production.

> The connection between cotton and resettlement is clear, for agriculture was restructured in favour of cotton plantations as a result. For instance, 75 families from the Samarqand district were sent to Tajikistan in 1926 to teach the local workforce how to grow cotton. "Cotton-oriented" resettlement, though, meant first of all the transfer of population to the lower valleys between 1917 and 1928 (Penati 2007, 529).

As a result of these changes, Soviet rule meant more of a rupture than the changes instigated by the Tsarist regime (Abashin 2015). However, Giehler (2017) and Akiner (1998) argued that it would be wrong to regard the pre-Soviet and Soviet state as entirely different.

> [C]loser study indicates that, slogans and institutional apparatus apart, there were several parallels between them […]. On a conceptual level there was […] sufficient overlap between the old and the new systems for there to be a perception of continuity rather than of total rupture, of a change of terminology and presentation rather than of content (Akiner 1998, 17).

It was under Stalin that forced collectivisation really took off and cotton growing substantially augmented from the 1930s onwards. Forced collectivisation and resettlement of people from mountainous localities to lowlands resulted in large-scale farming structures throughout the cotton-producing valleys in northern and southwest Tajikistan. Many large-scale (cotton) farms were literally built from scratch. Collectivisation and the introduction and intensification of cotton production changed the rhythm and organisation of rural life, but at the micro-level, families remained important as the core unit of production (Trevisani 2010). Between 1913 and 1940 cotton output increased more than three-fold in Tajikistan (Gleason 1990). As Rakowska-Harmstone (1970, 38) noted:

> By 1940 the country's economy had been transformed from one of primitive subsistence agriculture to one of specialised agriculture with a single technical crop, cotton, and grain, fruits,

> and livestock products as subsidiary commodities. Economically the two major features introduced by collectivisation, conversion to cotton and irrigation, complemented each other.

The total area sown with cotton in Central Asia increased rapidly "while grain was gradually shifted to marginal and dry land" (Khan and Ghai 1979, 472). Cotton became the Soviet state's strategic crop and Tajikistan became the third cotton producer of the Soviet Union (after Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). As noted by Kalinovsky (2018, 33): "'People will be wearing short pants,' Khrushchev [leading the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964] supposedly said, 'if we don't get cotton.'"[15]

According to Soviet statistics, between 1940 and 1980 the cotton production increased almost five-fold (Gleason 1990). "During the 1980s [cotton produced in Tajikistan accounted] for more than 10 per cent of the Soviet Union's raw cotton production and more than 25 per cent of its fine-fibre cotton" (Lerman and Sedik 2009, 303). According to Khan and Ghai (1979, 474), the Central Asian republics achieved "the highest yield per hectare of all the significant producers of cotton in the world," and Rakowska-Harmstone (1970) noted that cotton yields in Tajikistan (from 1947 and – at least up to 1965) were highest in the Soviet Union.[16] Manufacturing of cotton into textile mainly took place elsewhere in the Soviet Union and because of that industrialisation of the Central Asian economies remained largely absent (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970; Gleason 1990).[17]

The expansion of cotton production since the 1930s had two important (local) implications. First, it meant a change in structures of power. The power of Soviet farm chairmen increased over the course of the years when Soviet district authorities dealt directly with collective farms for cotton growing; all production was procured by the state (Abashin 2015). Soviet farm chairmen bypassed village chairmen in terms of power. After the 1950s there was less often a shift in local leadership, since there were strategic alliances to fulfil goals of cotton production (Abashin 2015). As a result the intensification of cotton affected local social stratification. Authority was personalised, but at the same time the importance of extensive irrigation systems, that were required for farming in the arid region, necessitated central administration in the lowlands.

Second, the introduction and intensification of cotton production changed the organisation of the local economy. In the early years the production of cotton required persuasion: As opposed to work in food crop production, people could not be paid in kind. As a result, the surge in cotton production entailed a monetisation of exchanges. The Soviet regime had difficulties enticing people to work in the cotton fields and only after procurement prices were raised, did cotton production really augment (Khan and Ghai 1979).

From the late 1940s onwards, and in the post-Stalin period, cotton production was to be increased through, for example, an increase in the mechanisation of farming and the introduction of new seed varieties, as a Soviet modality of the green revolution (Abashin 2015; Gleason 1990).[18] Yet farm leaders were incited to postpone technological revolution because *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* received their allocations based on the numbers of employees (Gleason 1990). As a result of the relatively large labour force, labour productivity remained low (Gleason 1990). Moreover, as

Gleason (1990, 69) noted in 1990: "[I]f the mechanisation of cotton is carried out now, as a real introduction of the market would demand, the amount of work for the available hands will be sharply reduced."[19] It was, as I will also note later in the concluding chapter, expected by Western demographers that massive mechanisation of cotton farming could bring societal unrest and even "transformations of revolutionary proportions" (Gleason 1990, 84). The Soviet leadership gave priority to political stability, at the cost of economic development and agricultural modernisation (Gleason 1990).

Forced resettlement of communities and collectivisation in already sedentary peasant communities lasted until the 1960s. Importantly, resettlement was not only driven by the demands for labour in the lowlands: it also "offered the possibility of transforming not just where people lived but how" (Kalinovsky 2018, 186). In the lowlands it was relatively easy to control people, and resettlement was "a way to bring people into modernity and operate the welfare state more efficiently" (Kalinovsky 2018, 186). As noted before, most lowland (cotton) farms which were literally built from scratch (Nourzhanov and Bleuer 2013; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970; Roy 2000).[20] As a result, there was a significant difference between collective farm communities in terms of people's pre-Soviet ties to land. Many people were taken out of their "ecological niches" (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 3). Before the Second World War, resettlement took place through family migration. After 1945, Soviet leadership started to transfer entire brigades or even whole communities. "This new approach allowed for larger-scale transfers as well as for the preservation of social and professional groups. Under such conditions each transferred community could maintain its internal dynamics and therefore better adapt to its new workplace" (Ferrando 2011, 41). As a result, there were differences in the way in which the newly built farms were set up. Resettlement resulted in partially homogenous *kolkhozes* where entire "segments fitted in with an entity which had already been a solidarity group before the Revolution" (Roy 2000, 87). In other places, the newly created *kolkhoz* "was itself constituted as a solidarity group" (Roy 2000, 87). There were also instances of "ethnic intermixing" (Roy 2000, 87) in which different groups were resettled within one newly created *kolkhoz*. These newly created societal structures had lasting implications for community cohesion, trust and people's ties to the community.

Alongside intensified cotton cultivation rural dwellers continued to conduct their own economic activities (Abashin 2015). As Giehler (2017) also noted, in Soviet Tajikistan private farming, that co-existed with large-scale collectivised agriculture, was essential to supplement the income obtained from work on the large-scale collective farm. While the Soviet leader Khrushchev (leading the USSR from 1953 to 1964) campaigned against private sector development (Giese 1970), private household production increased in importance. Hence, paradoxically the maturing of a cotton monoculture took place in tandem with a thriving black market. According to Giehler (2017) private farming really thrived under Brezhnev's rule (the later Soviet period, from around 1970 to 1980). Private production on household plots was especially oriented on the production of vegetables, fruit and animal fodder (Giese 1970; Khan and Ghai 1979). *Kolkhoz* workers were able to earn a significant surplus to their income by marketing their produce, such as dried fruit, also far outside Tajikistan. Households' specialisation in (perishable) vegetable production appeared to be a profitable enterprise and formed a niche, particularly given that the centralised procurement and marketing system of Soviet large scale farms were not well-suited for dealing

with perishable food crops (Khan and Ghai 1979). In Tajikistan, over 60 per cent of fruit and vegetables produced came from household plots. According to Giese (1970), the relative importance of household plots elsewhere in the Soviet Union was less significant in those years.

The above highlights the fact that the Soviet regime was not as totalitarian as sometimes portrayed and state presence was highly uneven. Throughout the Soviet Union, in some remote localities, private forms of farming persisted whilst elsewhere large swaths of land were collectivised (Hann and Sárkány 2003; Meurs and Begg 1998). What is more, viewing the Soviet period as one coherent whole omits the fact that modes of governance, control and state intervention shifted over the years (for a critique see also Kassymbekova 2017; Abashin 2015). Whereas the early Stalinist period was chacterised by severe force and coerced collectivisation, in later periods power was exerted in a subtler way.

At the same time the Soviet regime tended to turn a blind eye to nature, as production was to be achieved regardless of geographic differences. As Khan and Ghai (1979, 473) noted, for grain production in the Soviet Union:

> [P]rocurement pricing is an instrument for the reduction of inter-regional inequality. […] The lowest price is offered to the Krasnodar zone where natural conditions are best and the cost of production lowest. The highest price is paid to the producers in the far eastern zone where natural conditions are worst and cost highest.

According to Ioffe *et al.* (2006, 27) this was "to ensure the survival of farms that were basically unprofitable." The same applied to cotton production, where procurement prices were lower in the fertile Ferghana valley, and higher in semi-arid zones in western Uzbekistan (Khan and Ghai 1979). However, regions with great economic promise in terms of agricultural or industrial output were privileged. In the cotton-growing areas collectivisation was early accomplished, while this happened later in areas that were of less interest to the state, and less important for the state's budget (Abashin 2015). Hence there was a political geographic dimension to collectivisation; it differed between highlands and lowlands in terms of pace and thoroughness.[21] This discrepancy was also reflected in Soviet statistics on *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*; the Soviets' main interest was control over the population and over prominent crop production; household food production, which was an important source of income for most rural dwellers, was not accurately included in statistics – or purposively ignored by Soviet statisticians – neither were aspects such as livestock and artisan work (Abashin 2015).

The prioritisation of particular localities over others resulted in highly uneven development in Soviet Tajikistan. In the southwest region, the Vakhsh valley became irrigated with the construction of the Vakhsh Valley project (*Vakhshstroi*). While the project was not without problems, according to Rakowska-Harmstone (1970, 55), the Vakhsh Valley project resulted in irrigation of "about 60,000 hectares of former desert. In the early 1950's the valley produced 40 per cent of all [Tajik] cotton, most of it long fibre variety." The northern (at that time) Leninobod *oblast* was most densely populated and "also had five out of the nine […] cities and most of its industrial plants" (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970, 48). It "accounted for 40 per cent of the industrial production of the republic, one-fourth of its cotton acreage, two-thirds of its production of silk

cocoons, and two-thirds of all its orchards and vineyards" (Rakowksa-Harmstone 1970, 54). It was also this region where the population was better educated than elsewhere in Tajikistan, and (perhaps) unsurprisingly this region provided all Tajik First Secretaries of the Communist Party from the 1930s to the late 1980s (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014). The southwestern Khatlon region remained primarily agrarian with little urban and industrial development.

One could thus argue that there were specific pockets of agrarian order, in areas which were deemed highly important to the Soviet state. In this regard, there are similarities in the extent to which colonial empires established their rule in the densely populated lowlands and the remote highlands respectively. Hirschman (1981) explained how differences in strength of colonial rule in Indonesia affected land use patterns. In Java, sedentary rice growers could be forced into sugarcane production, whereas the mobile highland cultivators who engaged in slash-and-burn practices were much more difficult to control. More recently Li (2014) described how in highland Sulawesi, colonial rule was light because colonial powers experienced difficulties in penetrating remote localities.

1.3.1.4. The "homo Sovieticus" and a Soviet peasant moral economy?

There has been ongoing debate about whether or not Central Asian (including Tajik) society has changed under the Soviet system or whether local groups coopted the state. As Heathershaw (2011, 155) noted: The emergence of Tajikistan as a state in the Soviet Union was a time "when state and society were understood in quite different terms, not as exclusively bounded but, to a large extent, as mutually inclusive."

Importantly, capital accumulation was not the only goal of the Soviet regime, as noted before. With the establishment of collective and state farms the Union's leadership sought to eradicate nomadism and civilise the ideal Soviet people: the "homo Sovieticus." The Soviet regime sought to instil new markers of identity, where previously "clan, tribe, region and, when confronted with non-Muslims, religion" (Akiner 1998, 11) had been at the core of Central Asian identities. Yet in many cases structures of hierarchy and management overlapped with indigenous relations of power in which religion, i.e. Islam, also played an important role (Abashin 2015).

Poliakov (1992) maintained that the Sovietisation of Tajik society was only thin, and that society upheld its traditional (Asiatic) mode of production. His insistence on this continuity has been opposed in various later works. Roy (2000; 2002) and Kandiyoti (1996; 2002b) contended that there was rather an interpenetration of tradition and Soviet rule in Soviet Central Asia, and that Soviet rule and collectivisation did transform local traditions. Roy (2000, 87) argued that "[c]ollectivisation […] in all cases involved a systematic territorialisation of solidarity groupings within the framework of the *kolkhoz*" (emphasis in original). Yet as Akiner (1998, 14) noted: "[C]ollective farms may well have perpetuated kin-based networks, retaining the old structures and merely relabelling them […] [but] in areas where there had been large-scale deportations […] some restructuring of the networks was inevitable." "[T]he inner face, less visible and less accessible, was able to preserve, in spirit if not in precise detail, its principal features" (Akiner 1998, 18). Abashin (2015, 316) conceptualised the way in which Soviet rule articulated with indigenous modes of governance as a "mosaic" with elements of tradition and modernity.

According to Collins (2006, 67) "the colonial-like dynamic between Soviet central policies and local politics preserved and even fostered Central Asia's clan-based social structure." In her seminal work on Russia's Buryatia, Humphrey (1983) showcased how the local culture, traditions and social structures in Buryatia, such as kinship, articulated with the socialist command economy and patterns of production. Traditions and ritual modes of exchange were transformed but did anything but disappear.

Tying into peasant study debates, Giehler (2017) argued that the Soviet rural economy was a moral economy[22] in which local social bonds, notions of reciprocity and protective patron-client relations were remarkable. In this regard, Giehler argued that *kolkhoz* workers upheld certain pre-Soviet traditions and relations of production. Yet according to Abashin (2015) it is difficult to talk of a moral peasant economy in the Soviet context since there was no autonomous peasant culture. There was a clear intermingling since people used the state as a resource to achieve their goals, while the state also continued to strengthen its power over the citizenry.

All said, the interpenetration of traditional institutions and Soviet rule did not mean that the Soviet ideal of the collective farm did not perform as it should; on paper it complied with what the state demanded. Yet the way in which the state functioned depended in large measure on its interaction with societal actors; local relations of power could significantly challenge the state's autonomy to function according to orders stipulated from above.

1.3.1.5. Post-colonial Central Asia

The Tsarist, but also the later Soviet empire, has been conceptualised as a colonial empire (Kalinovsky 2018; Akiner 1998; Chioni Moore 2001; Gleason 1991; Heathershaw 2010; Kandiyoti 2002b; for a discussion see also Abashin 2015; Kassymbekova 2016; 2017). The scholarly debate on this matter often concerns the question of whether Soviet Central Asia was post-colonial after the period of Tsarist rule, or whether it is post-colonial today, after 70 years of Soviet rule.[23]

The Soviet regime used a type of "anti-colonial rhetoric" (Kalinovsky 2018, 24) and attempted to disavow an appearance as an imperialist empire. Yet there remained obvious inequalities within the Soviet Union which could be associated with colonialism. The Central Asian region served primarily for resource extraction (Gleason 1991; Kandiyoti 2002a). According to Gleason (1991, 342), "[e]ven the term 'plantation' (*plantatsiia*) [was] widely used in the USSR to refer to Central Asia's cotton producing areas" (emphasis in original).[24] While Soviet leadership (particularly from the 1950s onwards) sought to industrialise the Tajik economy, it was unsuccessful in moving people from the countryside into towns and cities, and efforts to transform them from "peasants" into factory workers failed (Kalinovsky 2018). The Central Asian republics remained predominantly agrarian societies in which a large part of the population resided in the countryside, depending on land as a source of livelihood.

> Tajikistan sent most of its raw cotton to Russia to be processed so that the Tajiks were forced to buy back material and clothes at prices far above those they received for the raw cotton. […] The whole system of production, coupled with that of turnover taxes, meant that Central Asia, one of the poorest regions of the FSU, in effect subsidised the richer manufacturing areas […] (Harris 2000, 71).

Yet throughout the Soviet Union the agricultural sector was a site of primitive socialist accumulation. This entailed, as Khan and Ghai (1979, 471) described,

> extracting a large surplus from the agricultural sector by imposing on it unfavourable terms of trade through the use of the monopsonistic power of the [Soviet] State as the buyer of agricultural goods and the monopolistic power of the [Soviet] State as the seller of non-agricultural goods.

While this indeed applied to the Soviet Union at large, rural wages in Central Asia were lower than those in a country such as Lithuania. According to Gleason (1990, 75) Soviet Central Asians "believe[d] that the amount of funds spent on public health, or other social services, on infrastructure, and on preservation of the environment [was] much less in their region than in other parts of the country."[25]

Khan and Ghai (1979) argued that the Soviet state contributed significantly to Central Asian collective and state farms. According to them, "[t]he chief explanation for the material progress *of agriculture* was the specialisation in cotton" (Khan and Ghai 1979, 483, emphasis mine). I agree with Kandiyoti (2002b, 288) who rightly noted that it is difficult to conceptualise

> Soviet rule as a clear-cut case of colonial domination because it exhibited many contradictory features: a diversion of capital to less developed areas that are difficult to justify on strict economic grounds, on the one hand, and the centralising practices of the Soviet state and dominance of the Russians, on the other.

State investments, such as construction of schools and healthcare facilities (also in remote localities) resulted in improvement in rural living conditions (Kalinovsky 2018). Because of such characteristics and the state's efforts to "bring people into modernity" (cf. Kalinovsky 2018, 186) some have argued that the Soviet state can also be seen as a modernising state[26] (on this discussion see also Heathershaw 2010; Kandiyoti 1996; Kassymbekova 2016). Kassymbekova (2016) convincingly argued to go beyond seeing the Soviet state as either a modern state or a colonial empire. Such rigid views "are somewhat misleading, as they treat both as separate and unrelated systems of governance, as if they developed historically on opposite premises; these studies ignore the systems' complex interrelationship in historical and analytical terms" (Kassymbekova 2016, 15).[27] I will return to this discussion in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

1.3.2. And what comes next? Post-socialist Tajikistan

1.3.2.1. Post-Soviet agrarian transformation

With the dismantling of the iron curtain, the post-Soviet countryside quickly attracted growing attention from social scientists (see for instance Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Verdery 2003; Stark 1996; see also the contributions in Hann 2003a). Economists, sociologists and anthropologists focused (all on their own terms) on the way in which former socialist property was transformed and redefined in the 1990s.

The transformation from socialism into "something else" (as argued by Veldwisch 2008a, 21, in the context of Uzbekistan) began in earnest in the early 1990s, but outcomes differ widely across

the post-Soviet realm. Verdery (1996) challenged the very idea of a triumph by capitalism after Soviet socialism and questioned: "a transition from socialism into feudalism?"

1.3.2.2. The post-socialist agrarian question

Understanding land politics and the processes of agrarian extractivism and capital accumulation brings us to the original agrarian question, that is, Kautsky's *Die Agrarfrage*: "[W]hether and how is capital seizing hold of agriculture, revolutionising it, making old forms of production and property untenable and creating the necessity for new ones?" (Kautsky 1899, 12 in Watts 1998, 152).

Yet the post-Soviet agrarian question is different from the original agrarian question. With Soviet collectivisation many rural dwellers were dispossessed and joined the ranks of the proletariat, albeit in the rural setting. These Soviet *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* workers confronted a transition to capitalism in the early 1990s. In this regard, the socialist backdrop as a precursor of capitalist farming is different from other pre-capitalist (such as feudal) structures. Hence Kautsky's original question could be reworded for the post-socialist condition into:

> How was socialist agriculture in its myriad forms – state farms and centralised marketing institutions, peasant cooperatives, collective enterprises, private plots – to be subject to privatisation, decollectivisation and the introduction of new forms of property rights? How was capital seizing hold of socialist forms of production and property and creating new ones? (Watts 1998, 154).

In other words: what has the transformation from socialism into capitalism (or something else) meant for the Soviet farm worker, or in other words: for the rural population, which some would term the peasantry?

This post-socialist agrarian question and the class dynamics of post-Soviet agrarian change have been prominent in discussions among scholars in peasant and development studies since the late 1990s (see for instance Kitching 1998b; Kuns 2017a; 2017b; Small 2007; Swinnen and Rozelle 2006; Wegren 2005). Marxist-Leninist frameworks provided important foundations to unravel the complexities of post-socialist agrarian change (Kitching 1998b; Kuns 2017a; 2017b; Watts 1998; Wegren 2005).

Of course, regardless of whether or not having stemmed from a Soviet past, the 21st-century agrarian question is different from the one posed in the 19th-century that was at the core of debates among Kautsky, Marx and Lenin (on this discussion see Bernstein 2006; 2009b; Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009a; 2009b), as "globalisation challenges the assumptions of the classic agrarian question" (Bernstein 2009b, 240). We cannot simply "ahistorically transfer research questions from one historical and social complex to another" (Araghi 2009, 120). Precisely because nation-state borders have become permeated by global capital, and rural livelihoods throughout the world undergo capitalist restructuring (cf. Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009b), the contemporary agrarian question requires "moving beyond the nation-state and the home market as the unit of analysis" (Araghi 2009, 118). Indeed, as Burawoy (2001a, 1116) also contended, "[i]t is difficult to

talk of independent national or regional capitalisms […] when the global order is so interconnected."

Indeed, in the contemporary agrarian question there is increasing attention for global food empires (Weis 2007; van der Ploeg 2010b; Kuns 2017a) and the "classes of labour" (cf. Bernstein 2006; 2010). These classes of labour refer to the people who are straddling divides between urban and rural jobs and dwellings. In fact, also in Tajikistan, post-socialist agrarian change has increasingly pushed many people from the agrarian economy into uncertain migratory livelihoods. As will be noted throughout the following chapters, migration has become a core source of livelihood and over 40 per cent of the labour force currently migrates. In this regard, the agrarian question of capital may be as important as the agrarian question of labour, in which "agrarian labour [is] becoming 'decoupled' from capital accumulation" (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009b, 322; on the agrarian question of labour see Bernstein 2006; 2009b). One cannot include everything in a thesis, and I have been unable to delve into this issue, but hope to pay more attention to the importance of migration in relation to rural capital accumulation in future work.

Hence the contemporary agrarian question deals with a more complex, globalised world today, in which world markets have become the mode of ordering (van der Ploeg 2010b; Weis 2007; Bernstein 2006), and agricultural production systems have advanced to exhibit industrial characteristics. Scholars in critical agrarian studies (Bernstein 2009b; 2010; van der Ploeg 2010a; 2010b; Borras and Franco 2012) are increasingly occupied with the fate of peasants who have become subordinated to giant food empires, who "grab land" and penetrate the global countryside where they "exert a monopolistic power" (van der Ploeg 2010b, 99; on corporate control see also Weis 2007; McMichael 2013) and increasingly subcontract or displace smallholders and peasants.

Indeed smallholder farmers, whether one would term them peasants or not, still farm the fields in many countries across the globe (van der Ploeg 2010a; 2014), against Lenin's and Marx's expectations that the peasantry would be ousted with the penetration of capitalism in the countryside, and some even observe a "repeasantisation" (cf. van der Ploeg 2010a; 2014). At the same time, given the disproportionate power of global food empires, one may question whether many farmers in both the Global North and South, who often produce pre-specified varieties of crops through complex contract farming schemes and thus have become highly dependent on upstream markets, are peasants in any sense, or whether they rather belong to a rural proletariat, as they have, to some extent, become divorced from the means of production. As van der Ploeg (2010a, 18, emphasis in original) noted,

> [i]t is becoming difficult, if not often impossible, for farmers (cooperatives and small and medium enterprises) to sell food ingredients *independently* from the circuits controlled by the different food empires or for consumers to buy food from outside these circuits.

At the same time, one must note that smallholders in Tajikistan are largely focused on local and national markets; outside the cotton economy, foreign capital and monopsonistic agribusinesses have hardly entered the country. Hence agrarian livelihoods in Tajikistan have little exposure to world market fluctuations with regard to their food crop production. However, global economic

dynamics penetrate the Tajik countryside indirectly. This occurs, first of all, (as noted before) through farmers' engagement in cotton production. Even though cotton prices are suppressed, cotton serves as "the primary integrator between villagers and global capital" (as noted by Zanca 2010, xxv on Uzbekistan's cotton sector, something which equally applies to Tajikistan's *dehqon* farmers). I will discuss interlinkages between the export and "peasant" subsectors in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Secondly, Tajikistan is linked to global food markets since it is highly import-dependent, particularly with regard to grains. Wheat is a primary staple crop in Tajikistan, and a large part of consumption need is met by the import of wheat and flour from Kazakhstan.

1.3.2.3. Peasants and post-Soviet peasants?

The question of the survival of the peasantry (in capitalist societies) goes back to earlier work of the Russian scholar Chayanov (1966[1925]), and seminal work regarding the peasantry in the pre-Soviet Russian setting comes from the pen of Shanin (1988). Chayanov (1966[1925]) argued that peasants exhibit resilience, which he explained by their ability and willingness to self-exploit. Where capitalist farm enterprises may risk bankruptcy after a severe drought and failed harvests, peasants can survive by decreasing consumption and intensifying their labour on their (small) plot, with which they repress real wages. Chayanov argued that relative peasant wellbeing depends on demographic cycles and the consumer/producer ratio of a peasant household.

The peasant style of farming is often associated with locally grounded production systems; yet what is more characteristic of the peasantry, is, according to van der Ploeg (2010a, 11), their ways to "govern, adapt, and change the balance of commodity and non-commodity relations." In this way farmers can resist full subordination and subsumption. The notion of the peasantry was earlier debated among scholars, such as Scott (1976), Popkin (1979) and Friedmann (1980). While Friedmann (1980) critiqued the term as such, as she argued that "'peasant' production is negatively defined as resisting commoditisation, and nothing can be deduced about reproduction or class relations" (Friedmann 1980, 158), Scott (1976) and Popkin (1979) disagreed in particular about the thesis of peasants' "moral economy," which was, as I noted before, conceptualised by Scott (1976). According to Scott (1976) peasants' subsistence ethic determines their livelihood choices. Popkin (1979) opposed this thesis. He maintained that peasants are anything but risk-averse and not devoid of ambitions to engage in capitalist relations of production. Moreover, Popkin (1979) argued that peasant conservatism must be explained by power relations. It is patron-client relations that hamper innovation, in which the patron tries to "prevent the client's acquisition of any skills that might lead to different balances of power" (Popkin 1979, 27).[28]

In analyses of Tajikistan's post-Soviet agrarian economy the notion of the peasantry is sometimes used arbitrarily (see for instance Lerman and Sedik 2009; Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018). Some scholars insist on using the term "peasantry" to denote post-Soviet rural dwellers and farm households, as Zanca (2010, 32) argued, "the tillers of the Uzbek soil remain in a position similar to the one occupied by their ancestors, part of a line extending back nearly 120 years vis-à-vis their relationship to their overlords." Yet as Humphrey (2002c) accurately noted, the application of the term peasantry is problematic in the post-Soviet setting. Soviet farm workers comprised a

rural proletariat that also relied on household plot production for survival. So one cannot equal Soviet rural dwellers to peasants, who faced a transformation towards capitalism in the 1990s.

I am (therefore) cautious to use the term "peasantry," in both the post-Soviet and the general sense, not least because agrarian societies throughout the world have become enmeshed with global capital streams. I follow Bernstein (2009b, 249) who argued that

> nothing is gained, and much is obscured, by characterising social formations in the South today as peasant societies, or temporary classes of petty commodity-producing small farmers as peasants. The use of such terms typically resonates a notion of deep continuity with past worlds: the persistence or survival of some essential precapitalist social category or form that is emblematic of most of recorded history into the era of current globalisation or imperialism.

1.3.2.4. The global "land rush" in the former Soviet Union

The previous section has highlighted that one cannot analyse a country's pathway of agrarian change in isolation. This is demonstrated in this thesis, firstly, by paying due attention to the influence of transnational donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) on the functioning of the Tajik state, and secondly, by looking at the entry of a foreign, in this case Chinese, investor in Tajikistan's agrarian economy. In this regard, as noted before, analysing post-socialist agrarian transformation nowadays differs from the post-socialist context in the early 1990s when foreign private capital was much less mobile and globalised, and interest in farmland was largely absent.

Today worldwide, agricultural land has increased in popularity as a source of investment, with large conglomerates in powerful positions (van der Ploeg 2010b). The heightened popularity of farmland as site of investment has started in the late 2000s due to a string of financial, environmental and climate crises, and agricultural land and production have gained traction as a site for capital accumulation. Land is now regarded as profitable and useful to diversify investment portfolios. As a result there has been a strong renewed focus on farmland as a lucrative asset.

These heightened interests in land have attracted a new wave of scholarly research into the dynamics surrounding the politics of "land grabbing" (see for instance Peluso and Lund 2011; Hofman and Ho 2012; Borras and Franco 2012; Visser and Spoor 2011; Scoones *et al*. 2013). Attention to the global "land rush" initially focused mainly on "land grabbing" by state and private capital in the Global South, even though in particular parts of the former Soviet Union "the world's largest agricultural land reserves [are] at stake" (Visser and Spoor 2011). Nowadays media and scholarly attention is also paid to large-scale land investments in the former Soviet republics with large agrarian sectors (particularly Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan), as these countries were also discovered by (foreign) private capital (Visser and Spoor 2011; see also Petrick *et al.* 2013). In these former Soviet republics large parts of land have become abandoned after the dismantling of the Soviet Union. Former *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* have contracted in size and have limited their land under cultivation in the past two decades (Swinnen *et al.* 2017), and people who received shares after farm restructuring have appeared reluctant to actualise their farm share (Mamonova 2015).

1.3.2.5. Trajectories of the emergence of capitalism

Studying the post-Soviet agrarian question in Tajikistan in the 21st-century means that one needs to look at the various ways in which capitalism emerges and substantiates in the agrarian economy, and the concomitant regimes of capital accumulation in agriculture, in other words: the inroads of capitalism into Tajikistan's agrarian economy and countryside. The Central Asian states "commodified their very territory to extract economic and political benefits" (Cooley 2012, 11) and this has enabled various actors, both domestic and foreign, to benefit from the proceeds of extractive industries, among which farming. Indeed the state has a principal role in the process of capital accumulation, and in instigating particular agrarian production relations.

In the original debate on the agrarian question, deductive analyses of agrarian change often built on two distinct pathways of capitalism. Even though today's context substantially differs from that in the late 19th-century, "the idea of two paths of capitalist development [characterised as reactionary and progressive respectively (Bernstein 2009a; Lenin 1977[1908]] in the countryside has proved to be a lasting and powerful one" (Byres 1996, 6). "The transition from the feudal mode of production is two-fold. The producer becomes a merchant and capitalist […] This is the really revolutionising path. Or else, the merchant establishes direct sway over production" (Marx 2010[1894], 219). These two ways were later identified in agrarian transformation by Lenin (1977[1908]), who distinguished a trajectory of capitalism "from above," as was the case in Prussia, in which a landlord class transformed into capitalist farmers, juxtaposed to the pathway of capitalism "from below" as it happened in the (North of the) United States, i.e. the endogenous transformation of farming through differentiation among the peasantry (see also Byres 1996; 2016; Bernstein 2010).

Lenin (1977[1908]) and Byres (1996) argued in their analysis of the Prussian pathway that capitalism "from above" pre-empted a trend of capitalism "from below." That notwithstanding, Lenin (1977[1908], 33) recognised that "of course, infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible." The recent studies on China showcase that capitalism "from above" may conjoin capitalism "from below" (Yan and Chen 2015). Hence there may be more than one answer to the agrarian question within one country.

The existence of a multitude of agrarian questions (or at least two) was in fact also the case in the United States, where the South experienced agrarian capitalism "from above" seen in the transformation of slave-based plantations into capitalist farms (based on sharecropping), while in the North, capitalist farming emerged "from below" (Byres 1996). Like Chayanov (1966[1925]) argued, the agrarian question is in fact a geographic one; local geography and local political histories structure reform outcomes. Agrarian capitalism may take shape in a variety of forms.

1.3.3. Redefining property rights

1.3.3.1. Post-Soviet property transformation

The redefinition of socialist property (i.e. the privatisation of property) has been at the core of debates and studies on the (post-Soviet) agrarian question and post-Soviet transformation (Allina-Pisano 2008; see also Stark 1996; Verdery 2003; the contributions in Hann 2003a). With post-socialist transformation the factors of production, most importantly land and labour, were to be

commodified and privatised. Post-Soviet privatisation could take two forms: private property creation, in cases where private ownership had not existed prior to the Soviet arrival, and property restoration, where collectivisation had meant the dispossession of private property. In Tajikistan, the main form of privatisation has been the creation of private property. This seems reasonable given that collectivisation lasted for more than 60 years, and particularly because, in parts of the lowlands, people were never deprived of land. As noted above, many farms in southwest Tajikistan were built from scratch by the Soviet regime. Yet in some parts of the lowlands, and in the Tajik highlands, collectivisation had entailed the loss of land (Zevaco 2014; Abashin 2015).

The early generation of scholars working in the former Soviet bloc focused on this initial process of property redefinition and revaluation, which leaves the question open as to how redefined property consequently developed, i.e. the trajectory that proceeded: how land became used and how it was reused, and the politics of the transformation of property relations. In this thesis, I will look at the unfolding of private property creation and the way in which production politics evolved with specific regard to the current globalised era in which the Tajik economy is interlinked with foreign economies and transnational capital. This is particularly important since the initial process of property redefinition started more than 25 years ago, and like Verdery (2003, 11) noted, "upon inspection we often find that what might look like legacies are better seen as responses to quite contemporary processes" (see also Burawoy 2001a, who also stresses the importance of looking at the present-day context to understand post-socialist dynamics).

1.3.3.2. Property, power, access, and ability

The abstract definition of property as "an enforceable claim to some use or benefit of something" (MacPherson 1978, 3), obscures more than it reveals. In the Soviet Union, ownership and user rights were differentiated. Administrative rights were prominent in socialism to decide who would do what, and what would be done with the surplus produced. Hence ownership, control and user rights were separated. This differentiation seems to mirror the observations by Gluckman (1965) in African Barotse communities. Gluckman (1965) conceptualised the layers of rights and control with "estates of administration" and "estates of production," in which a primary estate of administration had superior power over a secondary estate, while a secondary estate of administration controlled a tertiary estate, etc. As a result persons with "administrative rights" allocated user rights to actors lower in the hierarchy[29] (as also observed by Verdery 2003 in post-communist Romania). One should therefore be sensitive to layers of ownership. As argued by Verdery (2003, 56): Answers to questions of property, "come more readily if we stop asking about ownership per se, which is far from the only way of organising property, and look at the distribution of various kinds of rights and relations, as well as at patterns of actual use" (Verdery 2003, 56). In this way one can grasp power relations, as it is

> the range of powers – embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes, and social relations – that affect people's ability to benefit from resources. These powers constitute the material, cultural, and political-economic strands within the "bundles" and "webs" of powers that configure resource access (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 154).

We should therefore unpack ownership and question whether a title to (for instance) land really means "the ability to benefit from [it]" (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 153). Only by looking at *concretised*

property (i.e. the way in which a property right is or can be exercised) and not merely at *categorical* property (i.e. the formal label of property) we can understand the unfolding of property rights relations, and why some actors prosper over others, even though they may not be the owner of the object in case. One must go beyond looking only at "who owns what" (von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2006; Ribot and Peluso 2003). Ability and access, power and authority are recursively related (Sikor and Lund 2009).

1.3.3.3. Land, liabilities, and debt

The ownership of farmland and farm assets has been at the core of post-socialist agrarian transformation. Farmland was one of the primary assets that was to be (re)distributed. Importantly nowadays, in many settings across the world, farmland has become the "main collateral" that enables farmers to obtain credit (van der Ploeg 2010a). While credit may extend farmers' capacity to develop their enterprise, at the same time land obtained on credit can limit farmers' autonomy, as van der Ploeg (2010a, 4) noted, when land "increasingly [becomes] a link in longer chains that [ties] the farmer to exogenous and often more powerful interests and projects."

That land can also be a liability, in a way that obligations may come along with ownership, is not always recognised. Land as an asset is meaningless and can even have only negative value (i.e. a liability) when it is not accompanied with the ability to make effective use of it. Anthropological literature on post-socialist transformation, however, did pay attention to this fact, and also pointed at various other liabilities of Soviet farms (see for instance Trevisani 2007; 2010; Verdery 2003). This attention (i.e. attention by anthropologists) has led to advances in understanding the implications of obligations of ownership. Based on research in post-communist Romania, Verdery (2004) argued that user obligations may accompany ownership, and may even imply that ownership becomes a burden rather than benefit. As Verdery (2003, 20) observed, "property restitution, obtaining rights proved far less important than controlling the context in which those rights could be exercised and value obtained." Hence liabilities are not only financial; as Humphrey (1983) described in her seminal work on Buryatia. Soviet farms were "total social institutions" which catered for local communities and had more functions than merely generating agricultural output. The Soviet farms were responsible for, for example, workers' employment and basic services such as healthcare and education, while often also providing cultural entertainment. These aspects, in particular, have often been ignored by neo-institutional economics scholars. With their advice to restructure large-scale Soviet farms they dismissed the societal importance of these (former) Soviet farms.

In the Central Asian context in which irrigation is essential for agricultural production, the maintenance of farm-level irrigation infrastructure is one prominent example of a liability (Bichsel 2011). In this regard it is also interesting to refer to biophysical degradation, for instance soil salinisation (which is significant in parts of Central Asia), which can turn farmland into a liability. Another example of obligations and liabilities is the requirement to commit to environmental standards and rules (Sikor 2006). In Europe, farmers have been facing an increasing number of regulations over the past couple of decades, which specify how land can be used. Even though it may seem as if farmers have relative autonomy over their production practices, their specific

handlings are strictly regulated. It exemplifies that access and property are related but not identical. For one, an actor can have access to a resource, and derive benefits from it without holding formal property rights. At the same time, an actor endowed with formal property rights, can be constrained in effectively exercising that right (Sikor 2006).

Chapter 3 will focus on one specific liability, in the form of debt. In the socialist era, as touched upon before, farms functioned with soft budget constraints and financial liabilities mattered little. Indebted farms were bailed out time and again. Debt of large Soviet farms was more or less an accounting nuance and through creative book keeping farm debt could be shifted to a second year. This also concerned the payment of workers' wages (Abashin 2015).

Interestingly, according to van der Ploeg (2010b), farm debt has become intrinsic to today's global food economy, in which large agribusinesses are strongly tied to rural banking schemes (see also McMichael 2013). In contemporary capitalist societies, among economic means and market mechanisms, debt is most often seen as regulating access to resources and may lead to a situation in which people are dispossessed (from land, or other property). In "perfect markets," such economic means (also including credits and land rents) may provoke a change in land ownership, squeezing out farmers who cannot keep up with the competition. In India, farm debt has become highly associated with farmer suicide (Mohanty 2005; Weis 2007).

In this thesis, I will point to debt as a means to regulate access to, and use of, landed property. While the causes of indebted land in Tajikistan may seem to have socialist roots, the upholding of debt is a clear response to contemporary dynamics: the regime's effort to preserve a means of extracting agricultural revenues despite pressure by international financial institutions (IFIs) to loosen its grip on the agrarian economy. Importantly, the debt described in Chapter 3 is unique: a policy promulgated in 2003 redefined farms' cotton debt into indebted hectares. In this way, farmland was given a negative value. In Chapter 3 I will discuss what this entailed for the individual farmer: By accepting a debt, farmers were compelled to continue cultivating land. With the pressure of the authorities to plant cotton, debt safeguarded the production of that particular crop. In this way debt did not entail a risk of bankruptcy, as farmers did not risk losing their farmland – something which one may expect when debt functions as a purely economic means – but farmers lost control over their own labour. Debt became an essential component of the agrarian order.

Hence at the core is that property is a composite. "*[C]ategories* of property rights are assumed to inform people's behaviour and to affect resource allocation […] while actual property relations remain largely unnoticed" (von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2006, 25, emphasis in original). There is more to property than only its single legal definition; property is a bundle, as there are gradations in control over resources. Furthermore, the way in which property is defined, and the idioms and claims that are used, are context specific (see also Gluckman 1965; Verdery 2003; Humphrey and Verdery 2004). Differentiating property rights is thus imperative; there are nuances in rights to access and ability to benefit from property: not only who owns the land, but who controls the effective use of land rights. A debt can make property (of land, or another asset) basically hollow, when debt takes primacy in determining access to and use of the asset in question.

1.3.4. Understanding the state and theories on state-society relations

1.3.4.1. The state-in-society framework to analyse agrarian change

A thorough analysis of agrarian reform cannot omit the role of the state in the process of transformation (cf. Das 2007; Byres 1996; Fox 1993). The state has an important role in sustaining production systems and relations of production, often favouring dominant classes whilst disadvantaging others.

As I noted before, rural livelihoods do not exist in isolation, and "it is necessary to understand the relationships of peasants to their social superiors, to each other, in their families and in their communities on the basis of gender, age and kinship, to the state, and to the operation of the product and labour markets they may use" (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009a, 3). An analysis of the state is particularly important in the case of Tajikistan, where the role of the state is so contradictory and unevenly experienced throughout the country. This study does not endeavour to undertake an anthropological analysis of the state, but understanding the complexity of the Tajik state and its role in the agrarian economy and rural sector is essential. Highlighting the role of the state, to unpack the "black box," helps to understand the implications of state functioning for agrarian developments and change, and how the state's actions affect different segments of the rural population.

This research builds on the state-in-society framework as developed by Fox (1993) and Migdal (2001). The state-in-society framework differs from statist approaches (cf. Weber 2013[1978]; Skocpol 1985; Evans *et al.* 1985), which take the state as a unitary, autonomous actor, and regard the state as instrumental, isolated from society. The statist approach ignores the agency, identity and power of politicians and officials who make up the state, and influence the state's effectiveness (for a critique on the state-centred framework see for instance Jessop 2008). The state-in-society framework also differs from society-centric approaches, which assume that the state acts only on behalf of the dominant classes in society.

The latter approach (society-centric) is dominant in Marxist works by, for instance, Poulantzas (2000[1978]), Gramsci (1971), and Jessop (1990; 2008).[30] Jessop (1990; 2008) elaborated on Poulantzas' (2000[1978]) notion of the state as a social relation,[31] and developed a strategic relational approach to analyse the state. As Jessop (1990, 10) noted:

> Particular forms of state privilege some strategies over others, privilege the access of some forces over others, some interests over others, some time horizons over others, some coalition possibilities over others. A given type of state, a given state form, a given form of regime, will be more accessible to some forces than others according to the strategies they adopt to gain state power.

Hence "[s]tates do not exist in majestic isolation overseeing the rest of their respective societies but are embedded in a wider political system (or systems), articulated with other institutional orders, and linked to different forms of civil society" (Jessop 2008, 6). Pieke (2004; 2009) argued that

> thinking of the state as merely interacting with society reveals the remnants of a way of thinking that continues to be predicated on the idea of a state-society dichotomy, thereby implicitly assuming that the state is somehow qualitatively different from all other social institutions. Instead, we should think of the state *as* society: the state is not merely in society, the state is society (Pieke 2009, 13, emphasis in original).

Yet while the society-centric framework goes beyond an instrumentalist take on the state, it is particularly the state-in-society approach (Migdal 2001; Fox 1993) that allows one to explain how the state can act differentiated, as non-unitary across different geographies within one and the same country. As Heathershaw (2011, 152) noted: "This is not to deny the possibility of autonomous decision making by state actors but to draw attention to the societal basis for the constitution of autonomous agency and 'the national interest.'" The state-in-society approach thus attributes particular attention to the fact that the state does not always and only act on behalf of dominant actors in society, and as a result, one may observe unevenness in the state's capacity and autonomy to act.

In Fox's (1993) analysis, the interactive state-society approach is analysed by looking at state action under influence of internal societal actors. "[O]nly a fully interactive approach that analyses conflicts, constraints, interests, and identities in state *and* society can capture both the limits and possibilities of state action" (Fox 1993, 20, emphasis in original). The state does not (and cannot) act without society. "Some suggest that the effective exercise of state power requires the unity and autonomy associated with insulation from external influence" (Fox 1993, 9). According to Fox (1993, 9): "This situation often holds for state bargaining in the international context, where decision making is highly centralised". Yet I contend, in this study, that the Tajik state is not at all insulated from external influence as it is strongly tied to conditional development aid. I attend to the role of external actors (e.g. international financial institutions (IFIs) and foreign governments) in the state-in-society framework. Tajikistan's state-building, and not least changes in the agrarian sector, have been propelled to a large extent by external actors, such as the IFIs and foreign governments. Chapter 2 will look at the pressure of external actors on the state's autonomy and capacity to act. International donor aid[32] and foreign direct investments are feeding the economy. Bilateral loans and investments by the Chinese state and private actors are prominent nowadays.[33] As a result the Tajik economy is extremely dependent on foreign dynamics and actors. Downturns in these foreign capital injections can have significant implications at the state, and equally important, at the household level, as mentioned before: The Tajik economy depends to a large extent on migrant remittances. In fact, in the Tajik setting, both in terms of international relations as well as the domestic setting, "state capacity depends in large measure on society's response" (Fox 1993, 9).[34]

Understanding the state through a state-society lens is often done by studying the state's autonomy and capacity (Migdal 1988; 2001; Fox 1993). The distinction between autonomy and capacity can shed light on the degree of policy implementation, i.e. why reforms get implemented, or not. Chapter 2 will particularly look at the autonomy and capacity of the Tajik state. Chapter 3 will further point out the severe flaws in policy implementation, which suggests a strong degree of autonomy of local rule; a disjuncture between policies made in the centre and policy implementation at the local level. The state-in-society framework further helps to understand the

role of societal actors, in terms of society's autonomy and capacity to pressure the state. Migdal (2001, 36) conceptualised the state as a

> web or mélange, rather than a pyramidal structure with the state's rule-making mechanisms at the apex. [This] […] allows one to think about society in terms of multiple rule-making loci and the hidden and open conflict among these multiple centres seeking to exercise domination.

Just like the state is fragmented, so is society, and this certainly concerns Tajik society, which, as a legacy of the Tajik Civil War, is largely divided along regional lines (discussed later). Certainly, the concept of "civil society" has been contested in the Soviet,[35] as well as in the post-Soviet sphere (cf. Akiner 2002; Hann 2002b; Kandiyoti 2007; Mamonova and Visser 2014; Roy 2002). In Tajikistan, domestic societal actors seem to lack both the capacity to pressure the state, as well as the political opportunity, as the authoritarian regime severely restricts any mobilisation from below.

1.3.4.2. Classifying the Tajik state

To classify the Central Asian state (and society), scholars have drawn on various concepts including hybrid regimes; clientelism; neo-patrimonialism; patronal presidentialism; clan politics; and, regionalism (Boboyorov 2012; 2013; Collins 2006; Jones Luong 2002; Laruelle 2012; Sehring 2009; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2009; 2014). All these concepts, which exhibit quite some overlap, draw attention to the fact that the separation between the state and regime and the public and private sphere is thin, and that networks of different kinds are quintessential of the Tajik regime. Indeed, "[t]he heuristic distinction between regime and state which is deployed in order to explain forms of political order which do not conform to the neo-Weberian model is not empirically sustainable for the study of the state (in Tajikistan)" (Heathershaw 2011, 152), and "[t]he state seems at once omnipresent and perennially absent, both omniscient and powerless, both omnific and wholly lacking in productive capacity" (Heathershaw 2014, 30).

The notion of hybrid regimes has become a catch-all applied to many post-colonial states, including those in Africa and Latin-America, and it has also been used to characterise the Central Asian republics, where it was expected that "democracy would flourish," and where perverse clientelism would disappear in the course of independence (McMann 2006, 174). The Central Asian regimes appear hybrid in the sense that patron-client relations are prominent and co-exist with a modernised governmental structure (with a Weberian bureaucracy) (Boboyorov 2012; 2013; Veldwisch and Bock 2011). In hybrid regimes, elements of democracy and authoritarianism are combined, which also implies a "hybridity between the two logics of domination and legitimacy" (Laruelle 2012, 302-3). In these contexts, societal actors tend to lack the economic autonomy; and, "[w]ithout economic autonomy from the state, individuals will not engage in the civic activities that enable institutions to function democratically" (McMann 2006, 183). The logic of hybridity forms an umbrella under which regimes are further defined, for instance as neo-patrimonial, patronal, and clientelistic.

Similar to the notion of hybridity, the concepts of clientelism and neo-patrimonialism are often used to conceptualise post-colonial and also post-Soviet (Central Asian) regimes, including the Tajik regime (see for instance Sehring 2009; Laruelle 2012; Ilkhamov 2007 on Uzbekistan).

> Clientelism involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange, a nonuniversalistic quid pro quo between individuals or groups of unequal standing. It implies mediated and selective access to resources and markets from which others are normally excluded (Roniger 2004, 353-4).

Clientelism and patron-client relationships thus involve relations between two actors: the patron, as the superior, and the client, as a subordinate actor, which can comprise an individual or a group.

Neo-patrimonialism was first conceptualised by Eisenstadt (1973) and is derived from Weber's (2013[1978]) notion of patrimonialism:

> We shall speak of a *patrimonial state* when the prince organises his political power over extrapatrimonial areas and political subjects – which is not discretionary and not enforced by physical coercion – just like the exercise of his patriarchal power (Weber 2013[1978], 1013, emphasis in original).

In neo-patrimonial systems, relations of domination based on personal authority are interwoven with a (modern) legal-bureaucratic government (Eisenstadt 1973). Veldwisch and Bock (2011) explained how patrimonialism differs from neo-patrimonialism, as in the latter, access to the (supposedly modern) state bureaucracy plays a role, and "[p]atrons offer access to resources and consequentially income, but by acting as an intermediary between clients and the 'state,' they also offer social welfare and protection" (Veldwisch and Bock 2011, 588).

Neo-patrimonialism thus entails the importance of personal authority; the absence of an independent bureaucracy; significant rent-seeking; and, dependency and loyalty to acquire state posts (Eisenstadt 1973; Ilkhamov 2007; Laruelle 2012). It seems a meaningful concept to understanding the workings of the post-socialist Tajik state, which has deepened in authoritarian rule in the past two decades (Heathershaw 2011; Laruelle 2012; Marat 2016), being captured by a select group of people who came to control the state apparatus. Essential positions within the government are given to the president's in-laws, and the regime frequently reshuffles seats of local and regional authorities in order to pre-empt the building of local support. Privileges can be revoked without clear reason. Importantly, the neo-patrimonial modality of rule in Tajikistan is not a "post-something" feature "(-totalitarian, -communist, -socialist)" (Sehring 2009, 47), as there is a certain path dependency in the way in which the Central Asian regimes have formed over the past few decades; certain features are carried over from pre-Soviet modes of rule. As Sehring (2009, 47) noted: "[N]eopatrimonialism in […] Tajikistan is composed of path-dependent structural-historical legacies as well as of new phenomena of the immediate context of transformation."

While the notion of neo-patrimonialism has explanatory power to understand the functioning of the Tajik state, at the same time, its weakness is that it takes the regime as one coherent whole while paying little attention to oppositional elite voices and possibilities of "subversive clientelism"[36] (cf. Radnitz 2010). It lacks explanatory power for variations, particularly at the local level, for instance in understanding the differences in contexts described in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.[37]

Neopatrimonialism and patronal politics relate to clan politics, which is itself a highly ambiguous concept, and which has also been used to characterise the Central Asian state (see for instance Collins 2006). As Collins (2006, 60) argued:

> Clan politics, while not sufficient to explain the whole of the transitional process, is critical to explaining post-transition regime convergence – why and how elites and their reform programs are constrained, and why and how new regime institutions, of whatever type, are penetrated and transformed so that they fail to serve the ideological or bureaucratic purposes of the state.

Akiner (1998) stated that pre-Soviet clans retained their importance under Soviet rule and strategically reshaped their clan, and "[t]hese regional clusterings rapidly colonised the new Soviet structures, creating, in effect, covert fiefdoms in which, as previously, they held the monopoly of power and patronage" (Akiner 1998, 18). However, others have rejected the notion of clans to understand Central Asian regimes (see for instance Trevisani 2007; 2010; Laruelle 2012), and as Radnitz (2010, 127-8) stated: "Clan and tribe were in fact powerful bases of social and political organisation in Central Asia historically, but generations of Russian and then Soviet rule, along with purges, collectivisation, and industrialisation, have made social life in the region much more complex." And importantly as Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014, 68) noted, "[t]he use of the term 'clan' […] conflates many different types of relationships."

Neopatrimonialism, clientelism and clan politics all touch on the aspect of networks. The networked nature of the Tajik regime is particularly addressed by scholars who stress the regionalised character of the Tajik state and its regime (see Jones Luong 2002 on Central Asian regimes; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014). Indeed, as Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014, 50) observed, "even after three generations, [Tajiks] identify with the region of their paternal grandfather's origin." As a result, even people from the same ethnic group "differentiate themselves through dialect, traditions, and customs" (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 50). Importantly, Soviet policies have had an important role in strengthening regionalism in Central Asia (Jones Luong 2002; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014).

I also observed throughout my fieldwork that the Tajik people's regional identity remains of importance even when they move elsewhere, but this is rather a product of the Tajik Civil War, with which regional identities have become (even more) pronounced. As Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014) described, regionalism is not a cause of the Tajik Civil War; it is rather an effect. Yet regional ties were strong in the Soviet era, in which "political and economic benefits and opportunities required status within officially established regions. This created incentives for elites to adopt regional identities" (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 55). At the same time, Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014) addressed the fact that the logic of regionalism has its shortcomings in conceptualising the Tajik regime, as she noted that "it […] does not explain how [individuals] act together and cooperate" (2014, 74). In the concluding chapter of this thesis I will return to the classification of the Tajik state.

1.3.4.3. A spatial dimension to the state: the Tajik Civil War

The various conceptualisations used for the Tajik regime have also come to the fore in explaining causes of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) (Scarborough 2016; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014). Importantly, as Heathershaw (2011, 153) noted, the state has lost legitimacy in the post-Soviet years, as people have held "massively reduced expectations about the role of the state since the end of the Soviet

Union and the civil war." The legacy of Soviet resettlement policies became pronounced in the war. Regional identities were reinforced as people were placed in competition with each other, depending on their original "ecological niche" (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 3).

I attribute importance to the Tajik Civil War particularly because, within a political economy framework, this research will look at the variation in state and society presence throughout the country in relation to geography. Understanding state-society relations and the spatial variation in state presence, requires attention to present-day geographic variety within Tajikistan, but also to the political history of the country. A brief account of the Tajik Civil War cannot do credit to the complex and difficult developments in Tajikistan in the early 1990s. Epkenhans (2016), Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014), Scarborough (2016) and Nourzhanov and Bleuer (2013) have thoroughly analysed and described the origins and characteristics of the Tajik Civil War. In May 1992, tensions, triggered by the economic collapse after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, escalated into a five-year long civil war between two main factions, which were divided along political/regional lines: the Popular Front (the Kulob/Leninobod coalition) and the United Tajik Opposition (comprising groups from the Rasht valley and the population of Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast). Approximately 50-150,000 people were killed, and around one million people were displaced (Epkenhans 2016; Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014; Scarborough 2016). The most violent conflicts were concentrated around the capital city, and in the southwestern Khatlon region.

The Popular Front's presidential candidate, a former Soviet farm chairman, Emomali Rahmon was appointed in 1992 (and later re-confirmed in 1994) and rules the country to this day. The conflict was especially violent in the first two years and the final signing of a peace agreement took until 1997. The oppositional group was given 30 per cent of the seats in the national parliament (but in 2015, the only opposition party that existed was banned). There remains a remarkable silence in Tajik politics about the war, and clashes between the regime and former opposition forces have re-occurred in the past decades (Marat 2016). Importantly while the war lives on in people's memory, the state pays little attention to memories of the war. I noticed more than occasionally that the Tajik Civil War has an important legacy, in that people fear to express anxiety towards authorities and to fellow citizens, as they are afraid of recurring conflicts. In one of the villages I studied (in Jaloliddini Balkhi) people often lamented the power shifts that have taken place since the civil war; some feel socially and politically deprived.

1.3.4.4. A spatial dimension within political economy and the logic of cotton production

The spatial variation in state presence in relation to geography will be described in detail in Chapter 2, where I will analyse how the variations in state and societal actors' presence, and the interaction between them, shape local pathways of agrarian change, in which the relative isolation of a place matters. As Rigg (2001, 10) noted, locality has a "determining role in dictating patterns and processes of change."

As noted earlier in this chapter, under Soviet rule state presence and economic development were (already) highly uneven, and one could say there were political geographies, as pockets of state order. These differences have in fact continued into the post-Soviet years, and these differences have had ramifications for agrarian change. As Kuns (2017a, 40) also noted: "Importantly, the

landscape, and complex and uneven geographic patterns of economic development possibilities, are not just vessels in which [agrarian] change takes place, but active constitutive moments in the creation of different agrarian trajectories."

The most important differentiation in Tajikistan's geography that will be distinguished in Chapter 2 is between highland and lowland agriculture. Landscape features, such as altitude and remoteness, have important implications for state-society relations and the degree to which agriculture may appeal to elite interests. As will be explained in Chapter 2, the marginal revenues of highland agriculture in Tajikistan greatly contrast with the agricultural revenues that can be accumulated – and extracted – in the lowlands. Chapter 2 will build on Scott's (2009) "*The art of not being governed"* to explain how highland farming creates "frictions of appropriation" that constrain agricultural extractivism. Chapters 3 and 4 will zoom in on lowland agriculture, with a primary focus on the role of cotton as the longstanding dominant crop in these settings.

In this thesis, while crop determinism is avoided as the connection between crops and the organisation of society is not one-on-one, I will pay more attention to the under-conceptualised influences of crops on agrarian reform and production relations in both Marxist political economy and more mainstream agrarian economic approaches. For instance, in cotton production, centralised irrigation can be a lever of control over individual farmers, but farmers experience significantly more autonomy in production when they have access to self-controlled wells and pumps for crop irrigation. Yet as Hirschman (1981, 96) explained, it is "not that a staple will determine the sociopolitical environment in any unique and exhaustive way, but […] each time it will imprint certain patterns of its own on whatever environment happens to be around".[38] Crop particularities shape production relations. Following McCarthy (2010, 824), who wrote about oil palm production in Indonesia, we could argue that "the commodity-specific nature of [cotton] has important implications for agrarian outcomes." The importance of the nature of particular agrarian commodities comes excellently to the fore in the seminal work of Bray (1986) on rice in East Asia. Bray highlighted the interplay between rice cultivation and production relations, as she noted that "a skilled and experienced smallholder or tenant farmer is in just as good a position to raise the productivity of his land as a wealthy landlord […] inspecting an irrigated field for weeds is almost as onerous as weeding it oneself" (Bray 1986, 115). Li's (2014) analysis of the entrance of cacao on Indonesia's Sulawesi also showcases how a crop can significantly reconfigure daily life, including social relations of production and social stratification. As Li analysed, the entrance of cacao changed land tenure relations, as the growing of cacao trees implied a change to a permanent transfer of ownership of land.

In Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia, cotton has left impressive marks on the organisation of rural society, in contrast to, for instance, tobacco (a crop which was also increasingly grown under Soviet rule)[39] in which the household remained the primary production unit (Giehler 2017). As flagged up before, cotton has a long history in Central Asia. The "cotton mania," as I would term it, has continued in Tajikistan after 1991. For decades the agrarian economy has relied on this single crop, and I will argue that cotton is still prominent. Between 1991 and 2012 the total area planted with cotton decreased from almost 300,000 hectares to nearly 200,000 hectares (TajStat 2013a), which equals 33 per cent.[40] At present, cotton is still planted on around 20 - 25 per cent

of the country's arable land. More interesting is the fact that, as noted before, cotton contributes to over 30 per cent of total tax revenues, and still is the country's prime agricultural commodity; accounting for 13.5 per cent of total exports (TajStat 2016b).[41] In this regard, it is notable that cotton – throughout the cotton production complex – is easier to tax than horticulture products, which may be consumed or marketed locally and through short and simple value chains, as farmers may directly sell their primary agricultural commodities without the involvement of intermediaries.

It may not come as a surprise, that with the elite's interest in the cotton sector, the command hierarchy oriented around cotton has continued. During and in particular since the upending of Soviet rule, the political economy of cotton has entailed specific production relations characterised by severe power inequality. The strategic position of cotton in the country's economy has meant that the state has assisted regime-insiders to extract significant resources from the countryside. This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. A political economy lens to study agrarian change

One can distinguish different approaches to understanding the politics of agrarian transformation: (a) neo-institutional economics (Popkin 1978); (b) the sustainable livelihoods approach (cf. Scoones 2009); (c) a Marxist (class-based) perspective (Bernstein 2010); and, (d) an agrarian populist perspective (cf. Scott 1976). These approaches differ in several aspects, such as their unit of analysis; the level of analysis (micro versus macro); and, the key assumptions and explanatory factors for agrarian change. Notably, the neo-institutional economic perspective dominates scholarly research on Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian economy (see for instance Lerman and Sedik 2009; Nekbakhtshoev 2016; Robinson *et al.* 2008).

Theoretically this thesis is informed by critical peasant studies, including agrarian political economy and rural livelihood analyses. Following this analytical framework, which also includes state-society relations and economic anthropology with a critical analysis of debt, I classify my work and thinking as neo-Marxist. I primarily adopt a structuralist approach to understanding agrarian change and I go beyond an instrumentalist take of the state. This entails an approach that attends to both the macro- and the micro-level, and to the political economy of the localities studied.

Hence, I study agrarian change through a political economy lens to understand deeper structures of inequality and social differentiation in both political and economic dimensions. As noted before, I do so by analysing the four key questions of agrarian political economy as proposed by Bernstein (2010, 22): "Who owns what?" "Who does what?" "Who gets what?" "What do they do with [the surplus created]?"

A key element in a political economy approach is people's access to the means and forces of production, or in other words: class. While I do not focus explicitly on class, I do analyse aspects

such as stratification, social differentiation, and, importantly, relations of power, in which domination and ideology assume great importance. In terms of state-society relations, I address the fact that relations of power mark state institutions. These institutions, in turn, affect people's access to the means and forces of production.

Within a Marxist political economy approach I pay particular attention to uneven development and the geography of agrarian change, that is, "the agricultural geography of different kinds of farms" (Kuns 2017a, 40). By highlighting the role of space and landscape, that is, aspects such as altitude, remoteness, isolation and crop specificities, I aim to bring the aspect of geography and the nature of agrarian commodities more into the spotlight in the study of agrarian change (as also called for by Roberts (1992), and Kuns (2017a)).

1.4.2. Research set up and methods

This research has a qualitative, longitudinal design and comprises three interrelated fieldwork periods, in which two research sites were followed over three years: April-August 2012; May-September 2013; and, October 2014-February 2015. The longitudinal approach helps to track changes in land use over the course of the years: processes of land accumulation/consolidation and fragmentation and the entrance of new actors in the agrarian sector (particularly foreign (Chinese) investors). Qualitative research is appropriate to study slowly progressing subjects (Rubin and Rubin 2005; Mason 2002).

A qualitative longitudinal design allows for an inductive, iterative approach, as with grounded theory, "what is to be studied *emerges* from the analytical process over time, rather than being designated a priori" (Clarke 2007, 425, emphasis in original). This was particularly the case with the issue of cotton debt (which will be discussed in Chapter 3), that emerged as a theme during the evaluation of the first period of fieldwork. I thus agree with Burawoy and Verdery (1999, 6) that "[a] focus on the day-to-day realities of postsocialism reveals a much more ambiguous account of the transformation announced with such fanfare by theories of modernisation and of market and democratic transition."

The design of this research as a comparative case study helps to highlight that "responses to decollectivisation exhibit tremendous diversity, not just from country to country but from region to region and even village to village" (Verdery 2003, 12-13). Particularly Chapters 3 and 4 will demonstrate that reforms unfolded in locally distinct ways. The comparative case study approach is meaningful to shed light on the specific dynamics at the local level and the mechanisms at work.

Fieldwork methods were various; of mainly of ethnographic nature: participant observation; structured, semi-structured and informal conversations; thick description; and, discourse analysis. The actors interviewed and observed were of various backgrounds, social strata and nationality: Tajik rural inhabitants; state officials at national, regional, district and local levels; international donor aid employees; international consultants; and, Chinese enterprise managers and Chinese farm workers. I talked with people in authorities' offices, along and in the fields and markets, and stayed with two host families in two villages (in the districts of Jaloliddini Balkhi and Yovon), through whom I became acquainted with village life, local social stratification, and the rhythm of

the day and the season. During the fieldwork in the countryside, snowball sampling was predominantly used to meet relevant actors, particularly farm households in the villages' surrounding. If possible, field notes were taken during the interview. In other instances a few notes were jotted, and in cases where note taking was prohibited, it happened afterwards. Most interviews were evaluated afterwards with the research assistant to clarify respondents' answers and their sometimes more concealed suggestive statements. The interview data have been processed and analysed using the qualitative computer software Atlas.Ti, which enables the codification of data, and to grasp the general narratives.

The methods described refine understanding of the mechanisms and processes through which farm household enterprises strategically respond to and deal with their situation, to understand why people respond the way they do. Hence, this study focuses on the structure-agency dialectic (Archer 1998) – with most attention to structure – and the micro-processes of transformation, meaning that I have examined both structural conditions, as well as studied individual strategies at the farm level. As noted by Kandiyoti (2002a, 251), "[a]n adequate apprehension of […] evolving realities [...] can only be captured through detailed ethnographies that reveal both the intended and unintended effects of […] policies, as well as the responses of those who are at the receiving end."

It is important to note that the authoritarian context and highly politicised agricultural sector creates challenges and warrants time and particular techniques to gain more insights into the research context (see also Veldwisch 2008b on similar experiences in Uzbekistan). Tajikistan is not an easy country to study. This relates not least to a study of the agrarian sector, which is highly politicised, certainly when cotton is concerned. What is more, the country's post-conflict and authoritarian status has important ramifications for the way in which (with whom, and how) research can be undertaken. In 2013, I had to postpone my fieldwork for some weeks because the country's president was planning to visit the Chinese farms, and all "suspected subjects" (like me) in the surrounding were urged to stay away. Overall, respondents often demonstrated fear of traceability. Because I noticed that even note taking sometimes affected people's willingness to talk, I did not make any effort to try to record interviews, except for one interview with an expatriate who explicitly agreed to have the interview recorded (in February 2015). In some situations it was obvious that people had initially not told me the truth, simply because of self-protection. It led to some hilarious situations, for instance when I cross checked data during a second interview with (the same) farmers and earlier observations were denied, or when farm size data conflicted with earlier reported figures, as if farms had suddenly shrunk in size. Yet rapport building evidently paid off.

Given the sensitivity and political stakes in the economy, and the lack of institutional backing, it has been impossible to conduct a quantitative survey, and to obtain reliable statistics of the local context (such as lists of farm holdings, years of establishment, not to speak of farm debt levels). This may appear as a disadvantage, but I also question the value of anonymous surveys in some settings. As Kandiyoti (1999) noted, there are serious shortcomings in standardised surveys in the transformative setting of Central Asia.[42] Qualitative research proves valuable, and can be relevant when findings apply to contexts beyond the research setting (Mason 2002). Qualitative research

is particularly essential in a setting with an absence of scholarly insights, to provide entry to the research context. It helps to go beyond formal state narratives and to grasp the detail and reality concealed in, for instance, national statistics.

1.4.3. A note on statistics

"[P]oor maps and incomplete data are usually interpreted as evidence of deficient state capacity" (Hall *et al*. 2011, 12; see also Jerven 2013 on state capacity and statistics; see Scott 1998 and Mitchell 2002 on state simplification and mapping). Yet this may not always be the case: statistics are never politically neutral, they are products of particular priorities, assumptions and biases, and it is important to assess their "role, power and quality" (Jerven 2013, 1; on political use of statistics see also Roger 2014). This research primarily relies on qualitative methods, in part, because it appeared quite problematic to obtain reliable statistics reflecting local agrarian structures, as noted above. With regard to the cotton debt problematic discussed in Chapter 3, I note that the highly politicised nature of the debt did not allow for any quantification. In this regard, one could say I follow Marx, who "was less concerned with magnitudes than he was with understanding social relationships" (Harvey 1982, 43). However in Chapter 2 frequent reference is made to statistics provided by the Statistical Agency of the Republic of Tajikistan (TajStat). Statistics are valuable to indicate (some) tendencies in agrarian change, but as noted, statistics are always biased, and (also) for that reason statistics are critically evaluated in Chapter 2. It will be argued that in post-Soviet Tajikistan, statistics on the agrarian economy have served the goal to please international donors, by displaying reform progress. As a result, while statistics may seem blurred, incomplete data does not necessarily entail weak state capacity. As Jerven (2013, 55) argued about statistics of African countries: "The political economy in which the 'facts' are embedded does matter." Statistics do not necessarily speak for themselves and data is never (scale) neutral. "The data we 'gather' in science are *already* (pre-) conceptualised" (Sayer 1992, 52, emphasis in original). The post-Soviet statistics reflect the role of *pripiski* in Soviet agriculture (Humphrey 1983, 224) which were "'on paper figures' […] [as] a resource of the bureaucracy, used in the furtherance of careers."

As will be noted in Chapter 2, reforms in post-Soviet Tajikistan purported to follow ambitious plans on paper. Policy implementation was evidenced by state officials stressing the growth in the number of (in reality ill-defined) *dehqon* farms. There are, however, overviews on different categories of *dehqon* farms kept by the (national) Land Committee, but these are not made public in statistical yearbooks. These data are very difficult to access by outsiders. In this way, as it was in Soviet times, in post-Soviet Tajikistan statistics have been a mechanism of power, as the Tajik regime has sought to influence the way in which reality should be seen. In Soviet agriculture this was, for instance, reflected in the fact that the use and importance of household plots was highly underestimated in statistics (Giese 1970).

1.4.4. Positionality in the field

Positionality of the researcher, and that of both assistants and research objects, requires attention: reflection is an essential component of doing research. Being a young single European woman in the conservative setting of Tajikistan had, as each research position has, important implications for the way in which interactions took place in the field. I was an apparent "outsider"

in many different respects.

First of all, I was a foreigner who wished to understand farm practices, farming structures, and the (Soviet) history of the locality. Respondents did not always understand my objectives, and expressed surprise at my arrival in such remote places in southwest Tajikistan. Politics was a no-go area, and therefore I often framed my research in a positive light by talking about specific agrarian practices and rural development. Of course, "[t]he rhetoric we use and the form in which we present knowledge are not neutral carriers of meaning but influence the content" (Sayer 1992, 10-11). Sometimes I played the ignorant novice (cf. Rubin and Rubin 2005, 86) to learn about farm practices, and in the field many people thought I was an agronomist in training. Strikingly, this led to situations in which I was asked technical questions about crop suitability, even once by a group of note-taking Chinese farm workers during a visit to their office.

Second, I was not only a foreigner but a relatively young female foreigner, doing research in a highly conservative countryside. In order to smoothen my integration, and simply because it made me feel more at ease, I conformed to cultural dress codes with which I also gained acceptance, particularly in one of my field sites where my host was not only a farmer, but also a local religious leader. My behaviour was appreciated in this regard, and it helped me to gain closer contact with the (often rather isolated) women in the rural setting. At the same time, I tried to enjoy my freedom whenever possible, and was the only female cyclist in one of the villages in which I worked (in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district).

Third, not only I was an outsider, but my male research assistants were too, to some extent. Particularly because of my presence as young female researcher, the use of male research assistants appeared key.[43] This was also important because I only gradually developed Tajik language skills. Of course my initial lack of language skills had major disadvantages, as it took me much longer to understand the research context, and made me conscious of the difficulties of working with interpreters on politically-sensitive themes. Yet a male assistant was important in a male-dominated society, and heads of farms were mainly male. My assistants were also valuable because they individually participated in local events during our stay, such as the shared (*Iftar*) meals during *Ramadan*. This significantly helped our local integration. At the same time my own language skills improved over time, which later enabled me to approach people on my own. This proved valuable to understand local conventions, and I gained further insights into local social stratification and women's positions in the local community.

My experiences as an outsider are reminiscent of that described by Abashin (2015), who experienced many difficulties in finding village accommodation in a village in the northern Sughd region. In my first weeks of field research I worked with an assistant from the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi. His family was willing to host me, which was a great offer given that the case I aimed to study was at walking distance. Unfortunately he left his job, and when I returned with a new assistant a few months later I could not find a place to stay. I knew that I could not accept an offer from the *raisi jamoat* (the mayor) to stay at his place, since that would have problematised my contacts with village dwellers. Of course refusing his offer was also problematic, and I explained to him that my research would benefit more from living among farmers and close to the fields. I

kept visiting his office frequently, as I felt it necessary to oil our connection to safeguard my stay in the village. Moreover, he and his staff were key figures in obtaining data and hearing news about village developments. Eventually one of the poorest families in the village was willing to host me, of course for a reasonable fee. I am still grateful for their support, but I felt my stay demanded too much from this family. In later years I occasionally returned to visit the family, while living with other families. The benefit of staying with three different families was that the different stays gave me insights into the social stratification of the village and the various positions of different families, and people's relationships vis-à-vis the state/local authorities; and hence the way in which post-Soviet transformation played out on the ground.

In the district of Yovon finding a village stay was less problematic, and I have been hosted by the same family in different periods of field work. On my first visit to the village in this district the *raisi mahalla* (the leader of the (self-governed) neighbourhood) directly offered me a place to stay at his house. His position was different from a *raisi jamoat*, and so I felt comfortable about accepting his offer to stay at his place. As a result of my regular return to the same family in the Yovon district, I have become part of the family over the course of the years and have always felt welcome at their place, even though the situation was sometimes difficult with many children and grandchildren surrounding me. It was, moreover, often difficult to explain my purpose to my host families. Time and again they asked me if the book was still not finished, and, moreover, how I had gained permission from my family back home to travel all the way to Tajikistan on my own.

Personal encounters and interactions proved essential for me, to reflect on my findings and challenge my presumptions. This was particularly the case when researching the Chinese land investments in Tajikistan which were, particularly among foreign expats in Tajikistan, seen as "land grabs." Furthermore, just as many anthropologists, as noted by Hann (2002b, 5), I was "critical of policies based on the transfer of Western models, which overlook institutional contexts and strong threads of continuity that mark even the most dramatic of social ruptures." With regard to the Chinese land investments, I tended to take the side of the "victimised group," i.e. the Tajik farming community. Yet while I remained critical, meeting the Chinese farm workers in person helped me to reflect on my presumptions and become more nuanced, and to pinpoint the – in my view – real causes of the problems, which are in the political economy of Tajikistan. Hence interacting with Chinese individuals behind the grand label of "China" and the Chinese "land grab" proved very valuable. My personal journey in this regard resembled the way in which the research and discourse on "land grabbing" has become more reflective, with scholars (cf. Oya 2013; Scoones *et al.* 2013; Edelman 2013) arguing to dig deeper than superficial populist media outlets did and tend to do. The Chinese companies did not aggressively "grab" farmland and the land investment did not entail the dispossession of land and was not driven by the (often assumed) need to feed China's domestic population. Rather, the Chinese land investment was driven by China's domestic tight land market and labour surpluses, where the Tajik agrarian economy appeared an attractive frontier. I will analyse the Chinese farmland investments in Tajikistan in Chapter 5.

Reflection was also important for yet another reason. Verdery (2003, 192) noted that she often found herself "the object of laments and complaining." I also observed that I, as an outsider, was sometimes regarded as a potential source of help, and, in more concrete terms, of money. As a

result my experiences were not necessarily in line with those of Zanca (2010, 67) in rural Uzbekistan, who observed that people were "reluctant to tell […] about the awful side of life." There are numerous international donors working in Tajikistan, and I was sometimes regarded as potential access to at least one of them. I tried to question or challenge some over-obvious complaints, but did encounter personal dilemmas when farmers asked me what to do in case of delayed cotton payments. I also felt indebted to those who always offered their time to talk, explain issues and answer my questions. I always tried to explain to people that I could not offer any direct help, but that I hoped my work would be read and taken up by people with the means to instigate change and improvement. And, as also concluded by Verdery (2003) in her Romanian study site, I think people did have reason to complain, and therefore I took most of their stories to be true.

Each period of fieldwork required intensive cultivation of networks, both in formal as in informal sense, that is, both with regard to obtaining research permission as well as gaining access to village life. Time and again, between 2012 and 2015, I struggled to obtain a research permit. One anecdote needs to be told here. When I first came to Tajikistan, I was told that one needed a research permit from authorities to conduct research in the countryside. I had never heard other colleagues talking of a research permit and was confused about how to obtain one. Apparently there was no clear procedure, and some people told me I should try to invest in connections with people working within the state apparatus. I also understood that some young scholars preferred to work without the permit to avoid the bureaucratic procedure and endless waiting. I could not take the risk of working without, since I would be highly visible in the countryside, and also because I worked with people I did not want to put at risk. However, acquiring the permit was a challenge to my patience time and again.

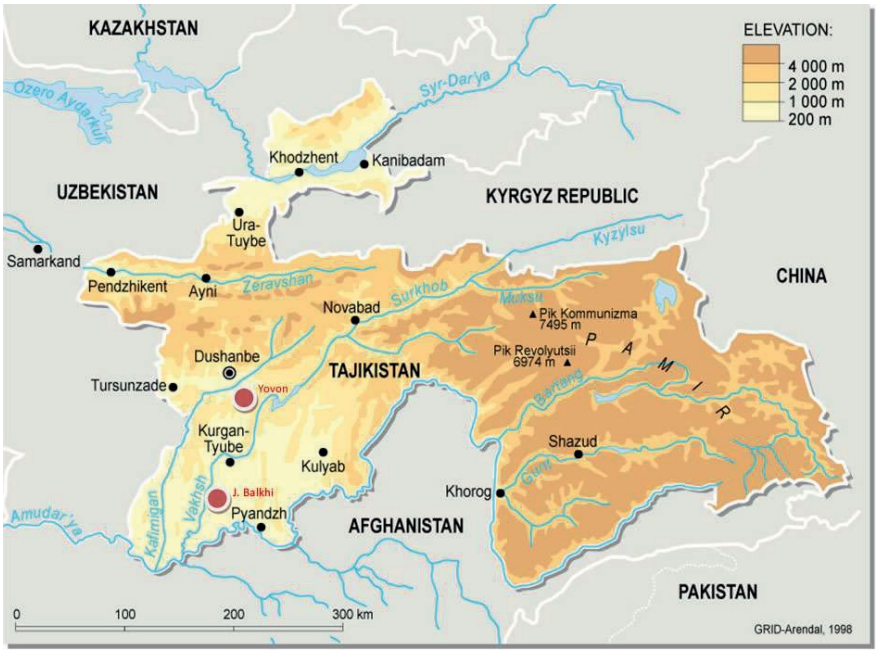
In the first year of fieldwork, I had many difficulties in reaching the right people and authorities. Through good contacts with colleagues in Leiden (I am indebted to Gabrielle van den Berg) I finally accessed a former state official who could help me. He wrote a long letter to the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The letter stated that I wished to undertake ethnographic research in the countryside, which was understood as doing research on agriculture and study occasions of weddings and funerals. Weeks of waiting, queuing and frustration followed, after which I finally obtained a letter with which I had to visit the regional authorities for further information. Upon arrival I was told they had confronted a dilemma. The regional authorities, representing the Ministry of Agriculture at the regional level, could help me with the permit for doing research on agriculture, but they could not help me with ethnographic research, i.e. a study of occasions of weddings and funerals. I was left puzzled, but luckily they gave me permission after all. In the second period of fieldwork, navigating and networking helped me to obtain support from the Tajik Academy of Sciences, and in the last period of fieldwork I was finally supported by the German embassy in Tajikistan and the Dutch embassy in Astana (Kazakhstan). They helped me gain approval from the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after the Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Institute of Agricultural Economics, was allowed to provide further assistance. Nevertheless, I observed that despite the approval of national agencies, the actual ability to conduct fieldwork was always contingent on local level authorities and individual agents. At the same time, relative independence from local authorities was essential in order to interact with

(more ordinary) rural dwellers. As noted above, I rejected an offer to stay with the *raisi jamoat* in the village in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, since I felt this would have greatly affected my contact with the local community.

1.4.5. Research localities

The case studies which were conducted were ethnographies of transformation in two different localities: the districts of Yovon and Jaloliddini Balkhi (earlier named the district of Kolkhozobod) (indicated in Figure 1.2 below). These districts are located in the Vakhsh valley in the Khatlon region in southwest Tajikistan.

Figure 1.2 Map of Tajikistan



Source: Compiled by the author based on:
http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map_ea9b
Note: Main fieldwork locations: Yovon and Jaloliddini Balkhi, the Khatlon region

The Vakhsh valley was, as noted before, a prominent cotton producing region; it was "the 'Golden Valley' of Soviet times" (Akiner 2002, 160). According to Dudoignon and Qalandar (2014, 69-70):

> [E]specially its rapid irrigation was identified as a priority of all-Union significance already in 1929. Although situated geographically in an ultra-periphery of the USSR, the valley became from the 1930s to the 1970s a strategic building site of the Union […] At the regional level it was conceived as the economic backbone of the Tajik SSR.

"In the early 1950s the Vakhsh Valley produced 40 per cent of Tajikistan's cotton" (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 64).[44] While the Khatlon region comprises only 17 per cent of Tajikistan's area, it

encompasses nearly 50 per cent of the country's arable land. Nowadays the Khatlon region is the primary agricultural region of the country, contributing over 50 per cent of the country's gross agricultural output (GAO) (TajStat 2015b) and over 60 per cent of the national cotton harvest is produced in the Khatlon region (TajStat 2013a). The province accounts for around 35 per cent of the population, of which almost 75 per cent lives in the rural areas (TajStat 2015a). The extensive irrigation systems built by the Soviet regime since the 1930s, allow for (large-scale) agricultural production. With a summer temperature above 40 degrees Celsius and without any meaningful precipitation in the growing season, irrigation is critical.

The two research sites were selected in 2012 based on three main aspects. The two localities contrast in terms of (1) political history; (2) the extent to which agrarian reform has been accomplished; and, (3) in terms of the actors involved in farming. These characteristics have resulted in differing land use patterns, diverging farm sizes, and a variety of perceptions and responses towards farm restructuring.

First, in terms of the political history, relevant to note is that, in the Yovon district, the (mainly Uzbek speaking) community lived as semi-nomads in the area before Soviet policies forced them to collectivise.[45] Hence people in this locality had not been subject to resettlement. People's historical ties to the area figured prominently in several conversations I had with my host in this locality, who told long stories about the origins of his village. The semi-nomadic origins of the local population are still evident in the fact that most of the local households hold relatively large numbers of livestock (mainly sheep). This characteristic makes the Yovon district rather unique within the Khatlon region (see also World Bank 2009).

The district of Jaloliddini Balkhi has a totally different political history. The former *kolkhoz* had been built from scratch and villagers had been brought by force, mostly from Tajikistan's northern mountainous districts in the 1950s. As a result, most villagers strongly identified with the place they (or their ancestors) originally came from. These regional ties have become more pronounced since the Tajik Civil War. While most families in this village had been resettled from the same region in northern Tajikistan under Soviet rule, they had not been relocated as whole community at once (which happened particularly after the Second World War, see Ferrando 2011).

Second, with regard to the process of agrarian transformation, in the Yovon district the locality studied was a former *sovkhoz*, while in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district it concerned a former *kolkhoz*.[46] Farm restructuring took place in very different ways on the two sites. In the first case study area (the Yovon district), farm reform of the former state farm was instigated by a World Bank project in 1999 and the (partial) restructuring of the former *sovkhoz* occurred through a lottery, as will be described in Chapter 4. As a result farm reform was pushed through relatively early, certainly compared to the process of decollectivisation that occurred in the second case study (the Jaloliddini Balkhi district), which only took place in 2010. In the latter, as will be explained in Chapter 3, in 2010 people were pressured to choose whether or not to actualise their former *kolkhoz* share.

Third, the actors involved in the rural economy differ between the two localities: There was a difference in terms of the actors in control of the cotton value chain in the 1990s and mid 2000s. I will touch upon this aspect again in the concluding chapter of this thesis. What is more, there are great discrepancies in terms of the kind of farm enterprises that can be found in the two localities nowadays. In the Yovon district, relatively large scale (10 to over 300 hectares) farm enterprises operate, which are primarily focused on animal fodder, cotton and wheat. In contrast, in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district it is predominantly small *dehqon* farmers focused on cotton, vegetables, sunflowers and rice. Most of these relatively small farms were formed after the top-down pressure to fragment the successor to the *kolkhoz*. The few large-scale farms in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district are collective *dehqon* farms that are successors to the *kolkhoz*'s brigade units.

These differences in the two research sites contribute to the research objectives described above. The comparative study sheds light on land politics that determine farm restructuring (sub-question 1); agrarian production relations (sub-question 2); and, processes of capital accumulation (sub-question 3). Dynamics of agrarian change and the resulting class differentiation tend to follow distinctive local paths, determined by the local political economy.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the Yovon district has significantly more arable land (almost 32,000 hectares, compared to almost 24,000 hectares in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district), but in terms of agricultural production, the two sites are quite similar. Also in terms of population density, the two districts are quite similar as the population/land ratio (people/km^2) in Yovon is 234 versus 202 in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district (TajStat 2016a, 28). Average yields have fluctuated over the years and there are no major differences between the two districts at the *district level* (TajStat 2014).[47]

In 2013, 41 per cent of the Yovon district and 40 per cent of the Jaloliddini Balkhi district's arable land was planted with cotton (TajStat 2014), other prominent crops were grains (38 per cent in the Yovon district and 31 per cent in Jaloliddini Balkhi) (TajStat 2013a). Remaining fields were planted with vegetables, melons, and, particularly in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district, sunflowers and rice. Both districts are also predominantly rural: over 80 per cent of the population reside in the countryside (TajStat 2015a).

1.4.5.1. Site 1: the Yovon district

The Yovon district is located closest to the capital city of Tajikistan (Dushanbe) (approximately 40 kilometres). Yovon is one of the primary cotton-growing districts of the Khatlon region (Government of Tajikistan 2007; World Bank 2009; PlaNet Guarantee 2011). As will be mentioned in Chapter 4, under Soviet rule agricultural production in the Yovon district expanded with the completion of a tunnel (in 1968) that brought irrigation water to the valley. For this reason, one could conclude that there are no absolute water shortages, also since a large irrigation canal passes the village (see figure 4.2 in Chapter 4). Nevertheless, some farmers do experience difficulties, particularly those that depend on other actors for accessing water. As opposed to the locality studied in Jaloliddini Balkhi, there are hardly any lands left fallow or abandoned in this area, and salinisation seems less of a problem than in the case studied in the Jaloliddini Balkhi

district. As will be described in Chapter 4, there is apparent competition over land, with which this locality differs significantly from the case that I studied in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district.

The area under study in the Yovon district provides an interesting case, since the *sovkhoz* in the area was part of the World Bank Farm Privatisation Support Project (FPSP) in the late 1990s. It is for this reason (as part of the FPSP), that partial reorganisation of this former state farm was accomplished well before most other former Soviet farms elsewhere in the country were restructured. In Chapter 4 I will deal in particular with the unfolding of this project in the Yovon district and I will shed light on emerging farm types. I will describe socio-economic differentiation and analyse the emerging typology of farm enterprises in the locality, in which large farm enterprises (LFEs) nowadays co-exist with smallholder *dehqon* farms.

1.4.5.2. Site 2: the Jaloliddini Balkhi district

The district of Jaloliddini Balkhi is located further away from the capital city Dushanbe, around 140 kilometres. There are few opportunities for meaningful off-farm employment and in winter the area is isolated from any urban area. The Tajik Civil War has had a devastating impact on this area (more than on the Yovon district), particularly in terms of state-society relations, and it still marks the local community to this day. "When we returned from Afghanistan [after the most violent years of the war], they [the people from Kulob – the regional faction that took power after the Civil War] had taken all the [good] houses" (interview with a female villager, 25 July 2013). The conflict settled down and the post-civil war appointed village chairman belonged to the Kulob coalition.[48] This exacerbated the distance between villagers and authorities. Rural dwellers felt marginalised. Based on villagers' narratives, the war was less intense in the Yovon district. In Yovon there were no abrupt changes in local leadership and less people fled the area in the mid 1990s.

In contrast to the early reorganisation of farming in Yovon, in the southern district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, as in most of lowland Tajikistan, collectivised agriculture continued until the late 2000s. It was only in 2010 that the national government pushed for reforms here. In Soviet times the area was of state importance because of two Soviet agricultural research stations located in the village vicinity. One specialised in subtropical products (nuts and fruits), the other in cotton. Particularly the subtropical research institute had international status during the Soviet years.[49] The earlier respectable status however has vanished. Since the breakdown of the Soviet Union the state has progressively neglected the area. Fields are highly salinised and large farm fields are abandoned. As opposed to large scale commercial businesses observed in the Yovon district, there are predominantly small (and indebted) *dehqon* farmers in this locality in Jaloliddini Balkhi, while the successor to the *kolkhoz* also still exists.

1.5. The structure of the thesis

Besides this introduction, this thesis comprises four analytical (and partially empirical) chapters, that are published as separate articles, followed by a conclusion. The chapters are briefly

introduced, with reference to the way in which they contribute to answering the research questions. To recap, I questioned, on pages 3 and 4:

What constitutes the political economy of agrarian transformation in post-socialist Tajikistan, and how and to what extent does capital accumulation of the agrarian economy occur?

This study's sub-questions are:

1. *How do agrarian politics shape farm structures and rural livelihoods in lowland Tajikistan?* (Chapters 2, 3 and 4)
2. *How are agrarian production relations transformed under capitalism?* (Chapters 2, 3 and 4)
3. *What are the dominant ways of surplus extraction and capital accumulation in the agrarian economy of lowland Tajikistan, and which actors are in charge of this process?* (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5)

Chapter 2: "*Towards a geography of window dressing and benign neglect: the state, donors, and elites in Tajikistan's trajectories of post-Soviet agrarian change*" is co-authored by one of the supervisors (Oane Visser). This chapter brings into the analysis state-society relations and political economy. It particularly aims at understanding the country's diverse pathways of agrarian change, and does so by disentangling the role of the state and societal actors in various different geographies of the country. Chapter 2 contributes to answering the three sub-questions: the chapter sheds light on land politics and farm structures (sub-question 1); on production relations (sub-question 2); and, on the dominant ways of surplus extraction and capital accumulation (sub-question 3). With its nationwide coverage, this chapter provides an umbrella under which the later chapters fall. It is informed by a myriad of academic research and policy reports and statistical data on Tajik agriculture.

Chapter 2 contends that Tajikistan can be regarded as a laboratory for agrarian change within the wider post-Soviet realm. Despite a country-wide single land policy, striking differences have come into play over time and space. By means of this analysis, the chapter aims to contribute to the broader understanding of trajectories of agrarian change as occurring in Central Asia and in the post-socialist context. It is geographical and political economy factors that have a strong impact on the development of farm patterns and practices over time. Hence, as argued for by Kalb (2002, 323, noted in a general context) this chapter aims to address how "paths through time are systematically linked with 'junctions' in space: that is, with a systematic study of the spatial inter-linkages and social relationships that define territories and communities."

Chapter 3 "*Soft budgets and elastic debt: farm liabilities in the agrarian political economy of post-Soviet Tajikistan*" zooms in on the cotton regime of accumulation in the context of a former *kolkhoz* in southwest Tajikistan in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi. In doing so, it focuses on property rights transformation and points at the fact that access to land may be meaningless when it is not accompanied by effective control over land. The chapter discusses how decollectivisation not only included a division of (valuable) farm assets, but also of farm liabilities. Through strategically recombining property (cf. Stark 1996), strongmen[50] have privately appropriated

valuable assets, and transferred liabilities to former *kolkhoz* workers, the new individual farmers. Well placed people privatised administrative rights (cf. Gluckman 1965; Verdery 2003) with which they could decide who would get what, and who could make effective use of landed property, and how. Indebted farmland is the core liability that is discussed in this chapter. By highlighting the role assumed by debt, Chapter 3 contributes to sub-questions 1, 2, and 3: it discusses land politics and farm structures; production relations, and the way in which farmers have become tied to land; and, it sheds light on processes of capital accumulation and farm surplus appropriation.

I will describe how debt is used by strongmen to safeguard the cultivation of farmland; debt has served to bond and discipline farm labour. At the same time debt has had an elastic capacity, since one farmer appeared more indebted than another, depending on farmers' political capital. Hence, the story of personal debt speaks to a story larger than itself: it evidences social relations of production and (implicitly) the absence of an autonomous state.

Already under Soviet rule local elites held power and control over peripheries,[51] yet debt, as a social relation, relates here in this specific context to Tajikistan's post-conflict status where post-Soviet transformation and the Tajik Civil War have changed the distribution of wealth. Debt emerged as a carry-over of Soviet production relations, in the post-Soviet shortage economy. The earlier system of cotton futures functioned as a form of "monopsonistic exploitation" (cf. Oya 2012, 7 – who noted this in the context of Africa). In later years, debt was transferred to nominally independent farmers, who were expected to continue planting cotton, as the state's strategic crop. Chapter 3 then highlights how extraction of surplus appropriation has taken place in Tajikistan: through an adverse contract farming system.

Chapter 4 "*Granted to privatise, but failed to capitalise: agri-food politics and emerging farm typologies in post-Soviet Tajikistan*" particularly looks at the unfolding differentiation of farm enterprises in the Yovon district, as a result of the interplay of structure and agency. It applies a livelihood perspective (cf. Chambers and Conway 1992; Scoones 2009), and identifies five different farm types. The resulting typology sheds light on actors' differential access to the means and factors of production. The typology is also used to analyse and explain the interrelatedness between different farm enterprises. The "symbiosis" that existed in the dualistic structure of Soviet agriculture continues in present-day rural Tajikistan. This symbiosis involves exchanges of capital, labour, farm inputs and crop residues, among which cotton stalks are of high importance.

This chapter analyses, in particular, one of the problematics of the agrarian question (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009a, 19) in that it focuses on the aspect of capital accumulation. It analyses by whom and to what extent the Tajik agrarian economy has the capacity "to create productive resources surplus to its reproductive requirements" (cf. Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009a, 19). In so doing, i.e. by looking at actors; rural capital accumulation processes; and labour relations, this chapter aims to provide answers to all three sub-questions. The chapter highlights the political economy and rural actors' uneven access to technology, knowledge, and to the state (as a source of accumulation (cf. Das 2007)).

Chapter 5 "*Politics or profits along the 'Silk Road': What drives Chinese farms in Tajikistan and helps them thrive?*" brings this thesis back again to the macro, global context. It engages the global "land grab" debate (Visser and Spoor 2011; Scoones *et al.* 2013; Hofman and Ho 2012) as it analyses Chinese land investments in Tajikistan. Only in 2011 Tajikistan was discovered by Chinese actors as a new frontier to introduce agrarian inputs and expand the variety of food crops on the domestic (Tajik) market.[52] By paying attention to the influx of foreign investors in Tajikistan's agrarian economy, I aim to demonstrate that agrarian change does not unfold in a vacuum; this is much more the case than in the first decade of agrarian transformation during which most "classic" ethnographies of post-Soviet agrarian change appeared (cf. Verdery 2003; Allina-Pisano 2008). At the same time, I aim to show that agrarian transformation in one country (i.e. China) is linked with transformation in another, that is, in Tajikistan. In this regard, this chapter exemplifies that we cannot analyse pathways of agrarian change in isolation, as I argued before.

Thus Chapter 5 looks to Tajikistan from an outside perspective. More subtly it sheds light on the Tajik political economy as it explains how and why Chinese agricultural companies can profit from unsaturated and underdeveloped markets. In this way, this chapter, though implicitly, flags up the way in which, in Tajikistan, production politics have prioritised particular domains of the agrarian economy (i.e. cotton) over others (staples and horticulture). The immature agrarian market offers profit potential for Chinese enterprises. In this way it helps to answer the first and third research sub-questions: it analyses land politics and farm structures and traits of rural accumulation.

Chapter 6 concludes and highlights the most prominent findings of this thesis. It adopts different lenses through which we can see continuity in disguise, and through which we can understand the Tajik regime. It pays particular attention to production politics, production relations and debt; property rights; traits of rural capital accumulation in Tajikistan; and, rural resistance and contentious politics.

Notes

[1] The notions of "post-Soviet" and "post-socialism" are used interchangeably in this thesis. I discuss these rubrics in the concluding chapter of this thesis. The notion of post-socialism has specifically been applied to extend the analysis beyond the post-Soviet realm. Furthermore, the notion of post-socialism directly followed from the fact that I have partially leaned on scholarship on China's pathway of agrarian change (such as Yan and Chen 2015; Q.F. Zhang 2015). Yet while, politically the Chinese state is still socialist, the Chinese economy has become largely market driven and liberalised; some have argued that China became post-socialist in the post-Mao era (for a discussion see Latham 2002). In order to go beyond post-socialism and conceptualise the Chinese context in which a socialist government intertwines with a liberalised economy, i.e. in which socialist rule demonstrates resilience, Pieke (2009, 7) suggested the term "neo-socialism."

[2] The figure is taken from a World Bank (2012b) report, which seems to be based on data up to 2005. I am uncertain whether this figure is still representative for 2019.

[3] In this thesis, decollectivisation is defined as "the conversion of state and collective farms into either private (corporate or individual) farms, or tenant farms with long-term leases, or genuine producer cooperatives" (Pryor 1992, 265).

[4] This table is a simplification of reality (as tables always are). The most important facts to take into account are that the Kazakh economy is relatively the most diversified and that while Uzbekistan's economy is also relatively diversified, it has limited capacity to export its commodities (Laruelle 2012). The table also does not include Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's decayed mining operations, and the fact that narcotrafficking "feeds the local shadow economy" (Laruelle 2012, 312) of these latter two countries.

[5] Comparisons worldwide are as follows: Kazakhstan is the 30th gas producer and 16th largest oil producer in the world; Uzbekistan is the 7th largest cotton producer and the 16th gas producer in the world; Turkmenistan is the 10th largest producer of gas worldwide (CIA 2017).

[6] Detailed geographic characteristics will be discussed in Chapter 2.

[7] The crisis was caused by sanctions imposed by the United States and European countries and international institutions in response to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. The international sanctions were followed by a reaction by the Russian government, which totally banned food imports from a number of countries.

[8] In 2016, in terms of remittances' contribution to the country's GDP, Tajikistan ranked lower than Kyrgyzstan and several other migration-dependent economies such as Nepal and Liberia (World Bank 2017a).

[9] Veldwisch and Spoor (2008) identified different "forms of production" in the context of Uzbekistan. This, the authors contended, was to go beyond the controversies related to the "modes of production." On forms of production see also Friedmann (1980); on the problematic of applying the "domestic mode of production" to the Russian context, see Humphrey (1998). In this thesis I will not engage any further in the debate on modes of production.

[10] On the labour process approach see also Braverman 1974.

[11] At the same time, "[t]he transformation of relations in production […] cannot be conceived outside the transformation of relations of production" (Burawoy 1985, 63).

[12] "The process of production is seen to have two political moments. First, the organisation of work has political and ideological *effects* – that is, as men and women transform raw materials into useful things, they also reproduce particular social relations as well as an experience of those relations. Second, alongside the organisation of work – that is, the *labour process* – there are distinctive political and ideological *apparatuses of production* which regulate production relations. The notion of *production regime* or, more specifically, factory regime embraces both these dimensions of production politics" (Burawoy 1985, 7-8, emphasis in original).

[13] As Zanca (2010) and O'Neill (2003) noted, there were three forms of property holding in pre-Soviet times in the Kokand Khanate (so-called *amliak*, *mulk*, and *wacf* lands). "[L]and ownership and use were regulated significantly by *sharia*" (Zanca 2010, 51, emphasis in original). Yet as Zanca (2010, 51) continued: "As such, it has often been molded to fit particular political and cultural conditions, reflecting the political interests of dynastic rulers and statesmen."

[14] Slightly later, in the early 1900s, European states aggressively introduced cotton production in their African colonies (Sneyd 2011; Beckert 2015).

[15] As Gleason (1991, 344) noted, with a sense of irony: "Although Central Asians obviously wear clothes, the great bulk of the cotton produced in Central Asia is destined for use outside the region."

[16] Yet given the ambiguity surrounding Soviet statistics (as I will touch upon in the methodology section later), one should interpret these figures with caution.

[17] Yet there were some textile industries in Soviet Tajikistan, mainly concentrated in the northern region, at that time Leninobod *oblast*; "[t]he textile industry accounted for almost 50 per cent of total industrial production in 1956" (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970, 55).

[18] Khan and Ghai (1979, 475) noted that "the over-all rate of tractorisation in Central Asian agriculture would appear to have been greater than that in the highly capital-intensive agriculture in the USA." Yet Gleason (1990), Kalinovsky (2018) and Pomfret (2002) have argued that mechanisation on Soviet farms remained relatively limited.

[19] Gleason (1990, 69) therefore stated that there were clear reasons for "the economic and social underdevelopment associated with Soviet Asian cotton production."

[20] In 1940 there were 3093 *kolkhozes* and 21 *sovkhozes* in Tajikistan (Herbers 2006, 99; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970).

[21] This was not a theme of study (or attention) under Soviet rule, as for Soviet ethnographers, "it was politically unacceptable to acknowledge the limitations of Soviet influence" (Akiner 1998, 2).

[22] In Scott's (1976) understanding, the peasant economy in pre-capitalist society was a moral economy, in which peasants valued social justice, collective welfare and a subsistence ethic over potential individual gains. Reciprocity and patron-client relations marked these societies, in which peasants spread risks and redistributed pains. The notion of the moral economy was originally conceptualised by Thompson (1991) who described food riots in 18th-century England, where people rioted to demand fair bread prices, and mobilised a call for social justice. They opposed market-driven food prices.

[23] According to Kalinovsky (2018, 244-5), "the Soviet period saw three postcolonial moments. The first was in the aftermath of the Russian revolution […] The second phase began after Stalin's death." The third phase was the perestroika era.

[24] Zanca (2010) observed that Uzbekistan's farmers continue to use the word "plantation."

[25] Kalinovsky (2018) described a shift in the way in which Tajik people perceived Soviet rule. Particularly in the 1980s people started to lament the inequality within the USSR and the exploitative nature of cotton production in Tajikistan.

[26] According to Akiner (1998, 19), Soviet driven modernisation of Central Asia differed from modernisation in parts of Africa and Asia in three respects: "[F]irstly, [modernisation] was imposed from without rather than generated from within; secondly, it took place in the context of a tightly controlled totalitarian system […]; thirdly, it was implemented at very great speed and across the whole spectrum of society." There was a "modernisation without the market" (Kandiyoti 1996).

[27] As Kassymbekova (2016, 17) noted: "Blurring boundaries between imperialism and socialism, colonialism and state building, the Soviet political design combined ideas and mechanisms of liberation and oppression, universalism and difference."

[28] Interestingly this mode of control that sustains traditional modes of farming was also relatively recently observed by Boboyorov (2012, 413) in Tajikistan, who noted that "the personalistic practices […] maintain the primitive cotton-growing system and substantially reduce the role of more advanced technical knowledge about cotton growing and marketing." Elites monopolise agricultural knowledge and machinery and as a result withhold the modernisation of agriculture.

[29] Gluckman (1965) avoided the notion of "hierarchy." As he noted (1965, 111), "the holding of estates of administration retreats or advances in a graded arrangement. I therefore consider it applicable to situations where groups, without authoritative leaders, devolve estates on their component segments, down to the individual cultivator."

[30] Poulantzas "denied that the state is an instrument and/or can be monopolised by particular class fractions. Instead it is relatively autonomous from the dominant classes and fractions and organises them into a power bloc under the hegemony of one fraction" (Jessop 1985, 109).

[31] Poulantzas, in turn, built his theory of the state on Marx's (2010[1894]) take on capital, namely as a social relation (see also Jessop 1990).

[32] Official development assistance (ODA) cumulated to over 334 million US dollars, which was around 4.1 per cent of Tajikistan's gross national income (GNI) in 2016, which equals approximately 5.7 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), coming down to 38 US dollars per capita (World Bank 2018). This is much lower than received in earlier years, particularly in the aftermath of the Tajik Civil War. As I will describe in Chapter 2, between 1996 and 1998 "the influx of aid" equalled around 58 per cent of the country's GDP (as of 1998) (Nakaya 2009). Yet ODA is still significant and roughly around the same (in relative terms) as many post-colonial African states received in 2016. The neighbouring war-torn Afghan state received much more in 2016: ODA equalled 20.6 per cent of the GNI and 117 US dollars/capita respectively (World Bank 2018).

[33] The Chinese Export-Import Bank is an important source of loans for the Tajik government. Loans increased from over 200 million US dollars in 2007 to over 1 billion US dollars in 2013. These loans covered over 40 per cent of the country's credits (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Tajikistan 2014). In 2016, bilateral loans formed almost 60 per cent of total foreign debt, of which 88 per cent was provided by the Chinese Export-Import Bank (nearly 1.2 billion US dollars) (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Tajikistan 2016).

[34] Hence Fox (1993, 9) referred with this statement only to internal, i.e. domestic, societal actors. I argue that, as stated above, in the Tajik context, particularly external, i.e. foreign, societal actors have played an important role in affecting state functioning.

[35] According to Akiner (1998, 19), "passivity and deference to authority were the most effective, and sometimes sole, means of defence against the ruthless progressivism of the [Soviet] state. […] Thus, in 1991, on the eve of independence, the level of

political development in the region was not very different from that which had been obtained seventy, or even a hundred, years earlier."

[36] Which entail practices that undermine "support for the regime and compliance with its directives" (Radnitz 2010, 82).

[37] Laruelle (2012) suggested looking more at the cyclical processes of post-Soviet regimes, following Hale (2005) and to conceptualise Central Asian regimes as "patronal presidentialism." This term can be defined by its two components (Hale 2005, 137-8): "First, a directly elected presidency is invested with great formal powers relative to other state organs. Second, the president also wields a high degree of informal power based on widespread patron-client relationships at the intersection of the state and the economy. The term 'patronal' thus refers to the exercise of political authority primarily through selective transfers of resources rather than formalised institutionalised practices, idea-based politics, or generalised exchange as enforced through the established rule of law."

[38] As Hirschman (1981, 84) noted, it is important to look at crops such as "sugarcane, coffee, rice, or tobacco […] to identify some general characteristics […] that influence and condition the kind of development experienced by the countries specialising in them." It is first of all important "to look for properties that arise out of the development process itself."

[39] Like cotton, tobacco was already planted before the Soviet era, but much less intensively (Abashin 2015).

[40] Meanwhile the production decreased by 49 per cent between 1991 and 2012 (from 819,616 tons to 417,978 tons; TajStat 2013a), indicating a decrease in average yield.

[41] Manufacturing rarely takes place in Tajikistan. Most raw baled cotton fibres are exported after ginning.

[42] Kandiyoti (1999, 500) rightly argued that "[i]n the absence of an in-depth understanding of the local meanings attached to the categories that are most routinely employed in questionnaires and interview schedules, survey findings can be of limited utility, and may even be quite misleading […]. [T]he limitations of survey methodologies may become even more acute in settings where there is a serious scarcity of local level case studies that may assist the analysis of socio-economic processes that are generative of new forms of vulnerability."

[43] The civil war legacy implied that assistants could not be selected at random. Tajik people identify themselves, and others, with the region of their ancestors (see also Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014)). "Regional identities were maintained within the *kolkhoz*" (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 52, emphasis mine) and nowadays these still play a role in gaining trust.

[44] As also noted above, the other primary cotton producing *oblast* is the Sughd region, which was the most developed region in the country in Soviet years (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970). Nowadays the Sughd region still benefits from its favourable location in terms of connections to bordering economies and has a relatively well developed industry.

[45] According to the *raisi mahalla* (the *mahalla* leader) and as reported by several villagers, approximately 60 per cent of the villagers is Uzbek speaking; 40 per cent is Tajik speaking. Interviews with villagers were conducted in the Tajik language as all (adult) farmers and most rural households were skilled in speaking Tajik.

[46] Yet in both cases, rural dwellers had to apply to the district authorities if they wanted to establish a *dehqon* farm. Officially, in the Soviet *sovkhoz,* as a state-owned enterprise, people were employed by the state, while people working on *kolkhoz* fields (the collective farm) were officially members of the collective and held a (paper) share. According to Zanca (2010, 36), "[a]s factory-type farmers, [*sovkhoz* workers] were viewed as members of the working class. In contrast, [*kolkhoz* workers] remained peasants." Yet in daily Soviet life (that is, circumstances under which Soviet rural dwellers lived and worked) the differences between the types of farms were negligible.

[47] Only fruit yields tend to be significantly higher in Jaloliddini Balkhi, probably given its warmer summers. At the same time the high temperature implies that perishable produce has to be transported quickly or stored cool to prevent spoilage, which is more problematic in this district than in the Yovon district, given the somewhat longer distance to urban markets.

[48] As highlighted earlier in this introduction, regional identities are important in Tajikistan and they became more pronounced in the Soviet and post-Soviet era. In the Tajik Civil War *kolkhoz* property became part of the conflict. As Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014, 56) noted: "[S]ome claim that the 1993 unification of the Kulob and Qurghonteppa regions into the Khatlon oblast was a similar effort by the Kulobi elite to take this cotton-rich region under its control."

[49] As Giehler (2017) noted, the subtropical research station was well-known also within Tajikistan. Many *kolkhoz* workers visited the station to obtain seedlings for their own household plot for private production.

[50] The term strongmen here and elsewhere in the thesis could have been replaced by oligarchs. Yet as will be noted in Chapter 3 I have chosen to use the word strongmen since it can better denote hierarchy and the power asymmetry between superordinate and subordinate actors; the rulers and those ruled over.

[51] Collins (2006, 97) wrote: "Whether by using their positions to steal funds from the collective to support kinsmen, or by penetrating the hugely profitable cotton sector, clan elites redirected massive amounts of Soviet assets to their networks."

[52] Yet also in Soviet years there were foreigners active in the agrarian economy. While not described in detail, according to Nourzhanov and Bleuer (2013, 205), "under Soviet rule Koreans had virtually monopolised production of rice, maize and

onions in Tajikistan, deriving substantial profits from trade in these stocks. In the late 1980s they began to face competition from Gharmis [the people from the city of Gharm, in northern Tajikistan] and Uzbeks, who often resorted to unfair practices to evict Koreans from Tajikistan's bazaars. The Association of Soviet Koreans, which could rely on [7,000] well-to-do compatriots in Dushanbe alone, hired qualified lawyers, bribed officials and even set up physical protection squads to rectify the situation." Giehler (2017) described that Koreans worked on *kolkhozes* as seasonal labourers and sometimes as permanent workers. Koreans moved into Central Asia under Stalin, as noted by Humphrey (2002a, xxiv) where they "came to flourish during the late Soviet decades" in farming and market gardening. In the early 1990s many left Central Asia because of national policies that discriminated against them (Humphrey 2002a). This may also explain why I have not observed Korean farmers in Tajikistan. One other reason for their departure may be the Tajik Civil War. During field research Tajik farmers told me that there had been Korean farmers in their vicinity during Soviet times, and that they had left in the 1990s.

2. Towards a geography of window dressing and benign neglect: the state, donors, and elites in Tajikistan's trajectories of post-Soviet agrarian change[1]

Abstract

After more than two decades of post-Soviet agrarian change, farming structures in Tajikistan remain dynamic. Despite a centralised reform agenda pushed forward by international donors, the local implementation of reforms has resulted in striking differences in agrarian structures across the country. This chapter investigates Tajikistan's geography and the agrarian political economy. We show that the unevenness of the Tajik state's power and autonomy vis-à-vis societal actors has been important in bringing about stark differences 1) spatially, between regions, and 2) between policy design and selected statistical indicators on agrarian reform on the one hand, and the policies' sluggish implementation on the other.

2.1 Introduction

> It is important to emphasise that farm restructuring in Tajikistan is clearly donor driven. Some 40 to 50 donor agencies working in [the] country are currently advocating land reform for Tajikistan. The borrower was interested in irrigation system rehabilitation. The Bank lobbied for a privatised approach to farming generally (World Bank 2008, 23).

Understanding this World Bank quote requires a close look at the trajectory of agrarian change in Tajikistan, which has been characterised by uneven state power, a strong presence of international donors, and powerful domestic elites.

Studies on agrarian transition in the former Soviet Union after its demise in 1991 have all attempted to explain divergent reform outcomes and "disappointing" progress towards farm individualisation,[2] which challenged expectations and puzzled many scholars and policy-makers (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Lerman 2001). Tajikistan has remained largely understudied on its own, and has often been grouped together with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the other Central Asian countries where a gradual transformation with latent signals towards liberalisation has taken place (Spoor and Visser 2001; Visser 2008).

Analyses on agrarian change in Tajikistan are dominated by reports from NGOs and consultancy companies (e.g. IFAD 2015; FAO 2014), which shed light on Tajikistan's post-conflict, land scarcity and food insecurity status. Over 70 per cent of Tajikistan's population resides in rural areas and over 50 per cent of the rural dwellers find employment in agriculture, pointing to the fact that access to land is of high importance for most of the population. At the same time, the agricultural base on which the rural population depends is weak. The country has the lowest ratio of irrigated

land to population in Central Asia (FAO 2014, 7). Only six per cent of the country's surface is arable, and part of this arable land has degraded due to, for instance, salinisation.

There are a few recent academic studies on agrarian change in Tajikistan that are narrowly focused (e.g. Robinson and Whitton 2010 on pasture management; Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018; Boboyorov 2013), and a small number of more holistic studies of agrarian change that only cover the period up to the mid-2000s (Herbers 2006; Robinson *et al.* 2008; Rowe 2010; Sehring 2009). The last decade of agrarian reform, which showed profound shifts in land reform dynamics, has not been included in a comprehensive analysis. This overview is especially significant when considering that Tajikistan represents a complex, yet insightful case of agrarian transformation.

We argue that understanding Tajikistan's process of agrarian change may contribute in various ways to better insights into the pathways of agrarian change in Central Asia, and the post-Soviet, post-socialist space at large, and possibly beyond. In terms of the wider theoretical relevance of this chapter, we aim to (re)insert the geographical dimension more strongly into the political economy analysis, interweaving land politics with geographic features (like natural resource endowments and altitude). In this regard, we follow Chayanov's (1966[1925], xxxvii) argument that the agrarian question is, in fact, a regional one. While Chayanov wrote about Russia, where the regional question might "force" itself upon the research more strongly, we will show that more attention for the geographical dimension is also warranted for a smaller country like Tajikistan. We reveal that Tajikistan's regionally varied agrarian reform has been the result of a spatially-specific political economy of agrarian transformation, including the regionally differentiated capacity of the state (for which we apply Fox's (1993) state-society framework).

It is important to note that we are predominantly concerned with reforms of arable land use, even though over 80 per cent of Tajikistan's agricultural land is pastureland. There are various reasons for this. First, the livestock sector has been of little importance for the national economy, as it comprised seven per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013 (IFAD 2015, 30).[3] A second, related, reason to exclude the livestock sector is that we focus particularly on *commercial* agricultural production. Animal husbandry in Tajikistan is predominantly small-scale subsistence oriented, with a very high share of individual households contributing to the gross agricultural output (GAO) of livestock: it increased from 55 per cent in 1991 to 93 per cent in 2012 (TajStat 2013a, 16).[4] In terms of the low productivity and importance of livestock, Tajikistan can be regarded as an "outlier" in Central Asia (Lerman and Sedik 2009).[5]

With our research we aim to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of farm structures have been emerging in post-Soviet Tajikistan?
- What are the main factors and (domestic and foreign) actors that have been influencing agrarian transformation?
- How have these actors and their interplay led to spatial differentiation in reform pathways throughout the country?

This chapter is based on the critical study of statistics, policy documents, donor reports, and news articles as well as fieldwork (interviews and observations), primarily in the southwestern region of Tajikistan (indicated in Figure 2.1).

This chapter is structured as follows. In the next section we discuss theories of agrarian transformation, which we then use to lay out our argument – namely: how the interaction of geography and the agrarian political economy shapes pathways of agrarian transformation. The third section, which describes agrarian change in post-Soviet Tajikistan, is split up into three phases in chronologic order. Such a chronological analysis of Tajikistan's post-Soviet trajectory of agrarian change (1991-2015), helps us to highlight important time-specific events that have occurred in response to particular state-society interactions. These events, in turn, have caused salient changes in legislation and patterns of agrarian change and farming structures. After this empirical section, the fourth and last section presents the conclusions.

2.2 Detangling trajectories of agrarian transformation: theoretical framework

2.2.1 Interlinking the role of geography and the political economy in agrarian transformation

The scholarly debate on post-socialist agrarian change has gone through different phases. In the initial studies on post-socialist agriculture that emerged in the 1990s, the study of "transition" from collective farming structures to small-scale farming was at the core, with a primary focus on the role of institutions and the economic dimension of reform (Csaki 2000; Lerman 2001). Since the 2000s, in-depth studies have appeared that have paid more attention to socio-political issues – for instance social inertia, the Soviet legacy, and cadre resistance (Allina-Pisano 2008; Hann and Sárkány 2003; Verdery 2003).

What often remained absent in previous post-socialist "transitologies," in our view, is the attention to geography, and specifically to the way in which geographic characteristics articulate with land politics. We contend that the linkage of geographic characteristics and the local agrarian political economy has important implications for the way in which transformation occurs (see Ioffe *et al.* 2006; Meurs and Begg 1998 on post-Soviet restructuring). This implies that farm restructuring unfolds in spatially distinct ways. As Roberts (1992, 124) rightly put it:

> What we have then, under uneven development, is a regional mosaic of differentiation and levelling, of increasing and decreasing productive advantage associated with natural features of the landscape. This implies not only a continual restructuring of the relationship between nature and production, but a geographic pattern to that restructuring.

This relates both to the changes in the physical environment and the implications of geography as a variable shaping the agrarian political economy. Insights from outside the post-Soviet realm are

valuable in understanding this interplay (see for instance Bray 1986; Scott 2009; Roberts 1992). As Marsden *et al.* (1996, 368) emphasised, "'environment' [often] continues to be treated as an exogenous category, and one upon which agricultural production 'impacts'" (see also Ioffe *et al.* 2006 for a discussion of "environmental determinism"). "Processes of agricultural restructuring may be expressed through locally and regionally constructed spaces and landscapes, even if the origins of restructuring lie in international economic and political systems" (Marsden *et al.* 1996, 367).

We argue that the role of geography in shaping agrarian transformation is threefold. First, the possible degrees of landscape engineering depend on geographic features. In highland settings, agrarian reform in terms of land (re)distribution or consolidation tends to have relatively little impact on the physical landscape and the agrarian practices on the ground. In mountainous regions, where only small and dispersed areas are suitable for agrarian production, farming is undertaken on fragmented plots. In lowland agriculture, on the contrary, land fragmentation or consolidation has more impact on the physical landscape. In the latter setting, a change in production methods or a break-up of large-scale production structures is likely to be complicated (or "problematic") (cf. Hayami 2010; Swinnen and Rozelle 2006).

The second way in which geography affects agrarian change is the way in which agro-ecological characteristics – in terms of altitude, climate and soil quality – condition particular cropping varieties and agronomic practices (as also argued by Scott 2009, 192). In highlands, economies of scale at the farm level (that is *in* production) are virtually non-existent. The use of large machinery is impeded by the difficult topography of mountainous areas. As a result, large-scale holdings have little to no production advantage in mountainous areas compared to small-scale producers, and in fact the former are much more likely to suffer from diseconomies of scale (such as higher costs of monitoring labour). Hence highland farming tends to be more small-scale than lowland farming.

Further, in the highlands the presence of quickly maturing crops (suited for short growing seasons) means that only short-term investment is needed.[6] Because of the generally small size of the production units, production quantities tend to be relatively small, and farming tends to be undertaken relatively independently. As well as that, the highlands are often more isolated from political interference and the penetration of external markets. As Scott (2009) explained, the crops typically grown in highland settings have "state repelling" characteristics that are difficult to tax or confiscate *en masse.* Scott (2009) termed this kind of farming with "frictions of appropriation," "escape agriculture."[7] Centralised management is constrained and the arm of the state or any other surveillance can be relatively easily challenged or ignored due to regions' remoteness. Interesting to note here is the fact that Soviet leadership attempted to relocate families and entire communities from highlands to lowlands, not only to safeguard labour needs in lowlands, but also to enhance oversight over people. Yet forced resettlement triggered opposition, and some people managed to return to their original settlement, which had been almost "emptied out," where

"[t]hey could now farm and raise animals as they chose, and live largely free of any state interference" (Kalinovsky 2018, 189).

One example of "state repelling crops" is root crops, like carrots and turnips, which quickly mature, can be stored well and have a low value per unit weight. If produced on spatially dispersed plots, centralised procurement is costly. It should be noted that large-scale plantations sometimes exist in mountainous areas for some crops, such as tea and tobacco (Hayami 2010; Scoones *et al.* 2018), as there may be economies of scale in processing and marketing (Cramb *et al.* 2017; Hayami 2010). This stimulates (and sometimes requires) central coordination of production (Hayami 2010). Control might be achieved by authorities or agribusinesses through setting up outgrower schemes with smallholders and, when markets are at a distance, joint coordination of sales may facilitate smallholder production in the highlands (Hayami 2010).

In lowland settings economies of scale exist in crop production, and often also in crop processing. Crops can be grown in larger quantities over longer maturation periods. Vast tracts of land often feature relatively low land-to-labour ratios and suit a mechanised, industrial type of agriculture optimised through large-scale infrastructure (Pryor 1992; Tomich *et al*. 1995). Importantly the large-scale production of crops like wheat, sugar or cotton, tends to be capital intensive. Moreover, cultivation often requires precise coordination to arrive at timed maturation and uniformed ripening of crops (Scott 2009).

The third way in which geography shapes agrarian reform concerns the interplay of crop production patterns and the distribution of access to the means of production, that is: the agrarian political economy. In highland settings, as noted above, the difficulty of centralised control constrains the appropriation of farm surpluses by authorities. Resources tend to be dispersed. In contrast, control is rather easily achieved in lowlands, and appropriating and upholding control over (cash) crop revenue streams may also be more appealing given larger production quantities. Some production patterns (such as in the production of tea, bananas and oil palm) have a much stronger tendency to result in inequality in landed property, and consequently in social polarisation (Bray 1986; Scott 2009).

2.2.2 State-society interactions in political and economic reforms

In order to understand the role of authority and state action in agrarian transformation, and to avoid seeing the state in isolation, we use a state-society framework (Fox 1993; Migdal 1988) in which we differentiate between external (foreign) and internal (domestic) societal actors that shape state action. External actors include foreign political actors and (international) non-state societal actors, which can both weaken or strengthen state formation.

Both in internal and external state-society relations, two dimensions of the state's power are important when analysing state action: the autonomy of state actors and their capacity (Fox 1993; Migdal 1988). As Fox (1993, 22) argued: "[S]tate action is the result of a reciprocal cause and effect

relationship between changes in the balance of power within the state and shifts in the balance of power within society. Through conflict, each is transformed."

Autonomy, as the first dimension of state power, refers to state leaders' independence from societal actors when designing reforms, through which the state may "reshape, ignore, or circumvent the preferences of even the strongest social actors" (Migdal 1988, 6). Capacity, as the second dimension of state power, relates to the authorities' ability to effectively implement reforms, in other words, the state's penetration and its capacity to control resources (Migdal 1988, 4). As Radnitz (2010, 198) noted, "political power is in large part a function of economic might, and a regime's ability to endure depends on its ability to control, and deprive its putative opponents of access to, resources." Because of this we need to consider to what extent resources are dispersed, and the degree to which private generation of wealth (i.e. independent of the state) is possible, or constrained (cf. Radnitz 2010). State control over critical components in the rural infrastructure can facilitate the exercise of authority in the countryside. The role of material artefacts and infrastructure in shaping power configurations in agriculture is often exemplified by reference to large-scale irrigation systems (cf. Mollinga and Veldwisch 2016; Bray 1986). For instance Mollinga and Veldwisch (2016) illustrated the potential of coinciding political and economic control, where power dynamics over landed property intersect with production structures and crop value chains, and are interwoven with (local) state-society relations in place. In the absence of such infrastructure, exercising authority may be more difficult. Constraints on state authority in remote areas can incite the state to impose a land administration, as by formalising settlement and land use the state may make its population governable (cf. Scott 1998).

To conclude, we argue that understanding variations in a country's trajectories of agrarian change requires a close look at geographic characteristics and the local agrarian political economies in which these characteristics are ingrained. We use this theoretical framework to analyse and explain Tajikistan's post-Soviet agrarian transformation. Before doing so, we first describe the country's general characteristics.

2.3. Agrarian reform in Tajikistan

2.3.1. Setting the stage

We distinguish three phases in the agrarian transformation of post-Soviet Tajikistan: (i) from 1991 to 1998; (ii) from 1999 to 2006; and, (iii) from 2007 to 2015. We will address these phases in more detail later on, paying attention to: a) changes in farm structures as portrayed in agricultural statistics and relating them to state, donor, and societal actors' interactions, and b) changes in farming patterns "on the ground." In order to explain a) and b) and particularly discrepancies between the two, we will pay attention to geography, as it relates to cropping patterns and agronomic practices, and the political economy, focusing on land politics. The role of local characteristics such as water availability and population density in shaping farm reform processes

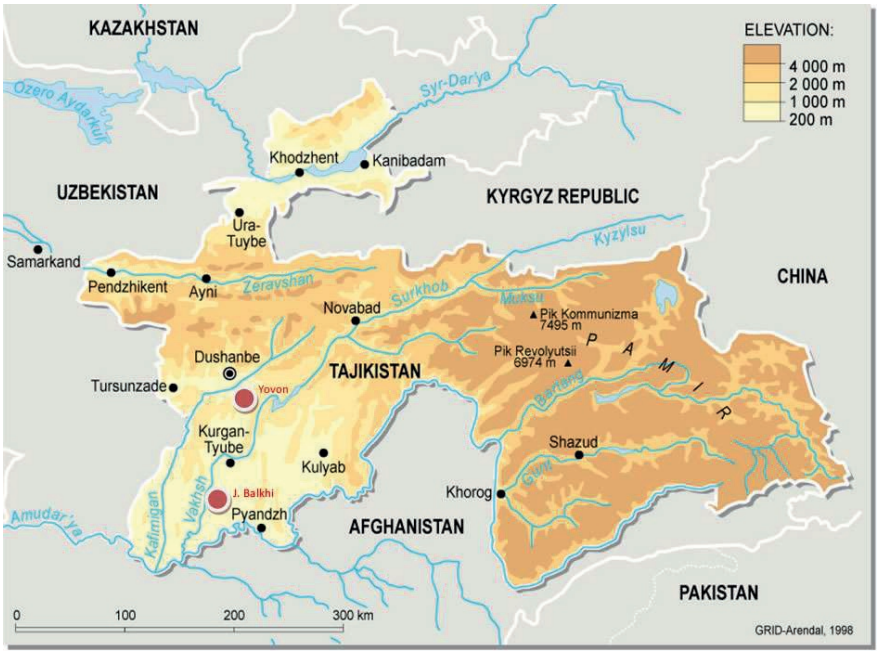
will be dealt with only briefly, as their effects on land reform appear ambiguous (cf. Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2014; Nekbakhtshoev 2016).

Before we discuss the various phases of agrarian reform, we first provide a brief description of Tajikistan's geography, by describing its administrative regions, followed by an overview of the main societal actors relevant to land reform.

2.3.1.1. Geographic variation

Tajikistan features significant variation in terms of agricultural production, partly due to local agro-climatic differences. We focus here largely on the variations between Tajikistan's three provinces and the districts that are individually directly subordinated to Tajikistan's capital city Dushanbe.

Figure 2.1 Map of Tajikistan



Source: Compiled by the authors, based on:
http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map_ea9b
Note: Main fieldwork locations: Yovon and Jaloliddini Balkhi, the Khatlon region

Table 2.1. Selected national and regional agricultural indicators[8]

	Arable land[1] (ha.) (% of national total)	Arable land under farms*[1] (ha.) (% of regional total)	Arable land under hh. plots[1] (ha.) (% of regional total)	GAO 2014, % of national[3]	Arable land (ha./ capita)[2]	Average *dehqon* farm size (ha. of arable land)					Growth (%)** *dehqon* farm units[4]
						1997[3]	2004[3]	2009[3]	2012[3]	2014[4]	
Tajikistan	842,525 (100 %)	662,011 (78.6 %)	180,514 (21.4 %)	100	0.11	4.8	24	13.4	6.9	3.9	34.3
GBAO	11,605 (1.4 %)	9,229 (79.5 %)	2,376 (20.5 %)	2.8	0.06			44.6	64.2	1.1	29.4
Sughd	277,720 (33.0 %)	226,312 (81.5 %)	51,408 (18.5 %)	27.1	0.12			24.6	10.8	4.1	104.4
Khatlon	401,326 (47.6 %)	318,737 (79.4 %)	82,589 (20.6 %)	52.5	0.16			14.1	6.7	4.3	15.0
RRS	150,888 (17.9 %)	107,556 (71.3 %)	43,332 (28.7 %)	17.6	0.08			5.4	3.8	3.5	10.8
Dushanbe	986 (0.0 %)	177 (18.0 %)	809 (82.0 %)	-							

Sources: Composed by the authors based on:

[1] TajStat 2013a, 64-66

[2] TajStat 2015a; TajStat 2014 (over the year 2012)

[3] TajStat 2015b (number of farms) and TajStat 2014, 91

[4] The Land Cadastre, obtained from the National Association of *Dehqon* Farms (6 February 2015). The numbers reflect the situation at the end of 2014.

Notes:

*As categorised by the Statistical Agency; includes all agricultural producers (state farms, *dehqon* farms and other categories, excluding rural households)

** Percentages reflect relative growth in units of *dehqon* farms established between 1 January 2014 and 1 October 2014.

The eastern mountainous Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) is characterised by very high mountains (the Pamir) (see map, Figure 2.1), which reach up to 4,000 metres. During long and severe winters villages are completely isolated (Herbers 2006; Kreutzmann 2003). Agricultural production has always been restricted to a short growing season. It is carried out on small fragmented plots, specifically suited to horticulture and root crops (e.g. mulberries, apricots, tobacco, carrots, and potatoes). The region has less than two per cent of the country's arable land and contributes less than three per cent to the country's gross agricultural output (GAO) (see

Table 2.1). In 1925 “the Pamir region [Gorno Badakhshan] became an autonomous oblast within the [that time] Tajikistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR)” (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 20). The region has received special attention by the Tajik state ever since. The relations between the population in GBAO and the state have become more contested after the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the Tajik Civil War, and the regional identity is strong (grounded in socio-cultural aspects, language and religion). Beyond the region’s geographic isolation, the problematic (socio-) political relation between its population and the state plays a role in the state's constrained ability to govern this region (Mostowlansky 2017).

In the northwest of the country, the Sughd region includes highlands and lowlands. The highlands isolate Sughd’s lowlands from the rest of Tajikistan’s lowlands in southern Tajikistan, as well as from the capital city Dushanbe. Sughd’s regional economy benefits from proximity to neighbouring states in terms of export potential and trade (World Bank 2012a). Importantly, during the Soviet Union the Sughd region was of the state’s importance: “It was important for the cotton and agricultural production of the country and made the greatest contribution to the republic’s economy […] Moscow chose [people from the Sughd region] as leaders for several reasons, including that Khujand was the most developed and industrialised part of Tajikistan, and that education was most advanced there” (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 63). Agricultural production in Sughd’s lowlands includes grain crops and cotton. Horticulture, tobacco, and root crop cultivation take place in the highlands. The region contains nearly 33 per cent of the country’s total arable land, and contributes slightly less than 30 per cent to the national GAO.

The “*Raions* of Republican Subordination” (RRS) are the districts under direct central rule. These districts surround the capital Dushanbe and include more hilly districts north of the capital. Cotton and grains are cultivated in the lowland areas and in the somewhat more remote and hilly districts mainly rain-fed agriculture is practised. The districts close to the capital are important in supplying urban markets with fruits and vegetables. The RRS comprises almost 18 per cent of the country’s arable land, and agricultural production contributes almost 18 per cent to the national GAO.

Khatlon in the southwest is the most important region for agriculture. Already during Soviet times, it comprised the most fertile lowlands suitable for cotton production (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970). Nowadays the region contributes over 50 per cent to the national GAO and also comprises over 50 per cent of the country’s arable land. The Khatlon region is relatively flat. Cotton and grains are the primary crops produced large-scale. Next to the RRS, farms in Khatlon supply urban markets in the capital and the southwest of the country.

2.3.1.2. The role of domestic societal actors in political and economic reforms

Geographical distinctiveness has implications for market relations and rural livelihoods, but also for state presence and political interference. And as Radnitz (2010, 199) noted, “[t]he dispersion of resources plays a role in social movements that is often overlooked.” Here we note that – with the exception of the elite – there has been a remarkable absence of domestic societal actors in

shaping Tajikistan's land reform.[9] As in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the Tajik state has been captured by a hybrid regime which is centred on the ruling presidential family, which seeks to control strategic economic sectors (cf. Heathershaw 2011; Nakaya 2009). This authoritarian regime has a clear effect on social mobilisation: political engagement, overt protest or expressions of critique on the regime are almost absent (Heathershaw 2009; 2011). The fear of recurring conflicts in Tajik society also helps to explain the country's severely circumscribed civic action since the 1990s. There are virtually no effective movements that represent anything like a counterforce to the state (Heathershaw 2009). As Enríquez and Newman (2016, 603) stated in reference to Venezuela: "With autonomy from society, struggles *within* the state determine the development path that the state will pursue" (emphasis in original). As Heathershaw (2009, 1333) noted:

> "Opposition" political parties are tolerated so long as they remain virtual—performing to the symbols of an international audience or to the scripts of their elite producers whilst going largely unheard locally and nationally. They not only substitute for the lack of opposition and dialogue but deter their practical realisation.

In other words, societal actors can continue as long as they do not threaten the regime's authority and its power over agricultural revenues, remaining largely virtual.

As we will point out below, the willingness to engage in individual farming is related to the particular local political economy of reform, but also to more latent aspects associated with the legacies of Soviet agriculture (which has left imprints on farm know-how, rural mentalities, and market relations). The rural population has not massively embarked on private farming – which donors initially expected and have strived to achieve.

2.3.2. Phase 1. Collapse of production, halted reforms, and emergency relief (1991-1997)

2.3.2.1. State policy and donors in the 1990s

Tajikistan's early post-Soviet period was marked by a civil war (1992-1997). The country experienced a sharp economic decline, just as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In response to the critical situation of food insecurity and impoverishment during the Tajik Civil War, a large cohort of donors quickly entered the country with emergency relief and capital injections. "The influx of aid – some US$454 million between 1996 and 1998," (Nakaya 2009, 262) equalled almost 60 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) of 1998. The reform of the agrarian economy, including state financing and farm restructuring, was a critical requirement of international financial institutions (IFIs) for disbursing credits. From this period onwards, external actors became very important in Tajikistan's political and socio-economic transformation, at both state and household levels, as labour migration started to become an essential source of livelihood.

A number of decrees to reorganise farms followed over the course of the 1990s. The first law to initiate farm restructuring in Tajikistan was the 1992 Law on *Dehqon* farms, and in 1996 the first Land Code was adopted. The latter enabled people to request land use rights to individual parcels of both arable and pastureland with the objective of setting up a commercial farm.[10] This type of holding became known as the *dehqon* farm. At the same time, agricultural enterprises could be set up on land allocated as land under the "special land fund."[11]

In the 1990s, the *dehqon* farms were predominantly relatively small individual enterprises, set up by pioneering individuals who separated from the former Soviet *kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz*. However, as we describe later, in the late 1990s the successors to Soviet large-scale farms were also named *dehqon* farms. While a distinction was made between "collective," "family," and "private" *dehqon* farms, this could not be observed in publicly available official agricultural statistics. The three categories were lumped into one label.

This simplification of farm units by the state (cf. Scott 1998) underscores the politicised nature of agricultural statistics, as "every act of measurement was an act marked by the play of power relations" (cf. Scott 1998, 27). The statistical categories complicated outsiders' understanding of actual changes in farm structures. This, in turn, enabled the regime insiders to make-up reform progress in order to obtain donor money, while keeping in place old farm structures to ensure continued control over farmland and production.

At the same time, in contrast to these lowland dynamics, in the eastern highlands of the autonomous *oblast* Gorno Badakhshan, major changes in farming structures occurred. The locally embedded Aga Khan Foundation[12] entered the region during the Tajik Civil War and pushed for radical farm break-up (Middleton 2016; Herbers 2006). Its reform package comprised: pressure on the local state to privatise farms, the provision of farm extension services, and agricultural input supply. As Middleton (2016, 258-9) described, the organisation worked through a bottom-up approach:

> [The Aga Khan Foundation] obtained a landmark decision from the local government […] that some state farmland could be distributed to villagers who wished to become private farmers. […] The spontaneous demand from villagers was so great that the local government decided to privatise all land in [one of the valleys]. Significant relative increases in agricultural production in this valley subsequently persuaded the local government to privatise all land in GBAO.

Besides the influence of the Aga Khan Foundation on the decision to reorganise farms in this region, important in understanding the swift restructuring is the fact that the Soviet farms in this highland region had never really aimed to supply consumers beyond those in the direct locality, except for yak and sheep products and limited quantities of tobacco (Herbers 2006; Kreutzmann 2003).[13] The region was therefore much less dependent on large-scale centralised agricultural production chains that were widespread in Tajikistan's lowlands. Farms in the eastern highlands

remained rather insignificant in terms of marketed output (Kreutzmann 2003), and subsequently in terms of revenues for the state. These specific legacies from the Soviet era, that facilitated a change in production relations, were reinforced by the collapse of the economy directly after independence. This stimulated a change towards more autonomy for individual farm workers. The *de facto* distribution of former *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* fields was highly egalitarian, but the fact that field sizes were very small meant that the plots could not provide families with more than a meagre source of subsistence (Middleton 2016; Herbers 2006). According to Robinson *et al.* (2008, 180), the rapid change in GBAO "was very similar to that which took place in Kyrgyzstan around the same time." As Radnitz (2010, 80) noted, in the early 1990s in Kyrgyzstan, "agriculture and industry fell into private hands, depriving the state of its monopoly on the distribution of resources as a means of political control." At the same time, while the mountainous character of GBAO was conducive to land reforms, that have been well recorded, less is known about changes in Tajikistan's western highlands of the Sughd region in those years, where cropping patterns resembled those of the eastern mountainous areas. One important issue is that there was an absence of donors pressuring farm break-up in that region.

2.3.2.2. The intersection of crop revenues and local power constellations in early reform years

Under pressure from the IFIs, the Tajik state eliminated the official state procurement system of crops in 1996 (World Bank 1996). Whereas the state procurement of farm produce previously entailed a range of crops, cotton production had always been prioritised under the Soviet regime (Abashin 2017), making Tajikistan the third cotton producer of the Soviet Union after Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

In the post-Soviet Tajik economy, cotton has remained the primary agricultural export commodity, providing the state with foreign currency (as a so-called forex crop). Also in terms of tax revenues, the cotton economy has been of high importance for the state budget. Compared to other cotton producing countries worldwide, Tajikistan has been "exceptionally dependent on the crop for [its] total export revenues" (cf. Fortucci 2002, 2). The share of cotton exports in total exported goods (in value) has stabilised below 15 per cent of total exports, comprising 65 per cent of the export of agrarian commodities in 2012 (FAOSTAT 2016).

Considering the economic importance of cotton, the regime has understandably had a continued interest in controlling the cotton sector. In order to uphold cotton farming, the government privatised the cotton procurement chain in 1996, by establishing a so-called "*futures* system." In this system, domestic private companies provided commodity credits to cotton producing farms, with cotton fibre serving as collateral. Only a small cohort of actors tied to the regime were able to set up a futures company, and captured local monopsony power over the value chain of cotton via input supply, credit, and sales channels (this will be explained in Chapter 3; see also Van Atta 2009). In this way, a more profound liberalisation of the agrarian economy was thwarted.

A comparison of the national political economies within Central Asia is relevant here. In the countries where either the state or a narrow group of elites have retained control over the cotton sector – Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan – cotton has been the principal cash crop for the national economy (Shamsiev 2012; Pomfret 2012; Markowitz 2016).[14] In all three countries, the state preserved its land ownership to secure both control and crop revenues, and in all cases wealth generation could hardly happen outside of the state. The centralised control made local elites dependent on the centre (i.e. the central state) for rents, and secured their loyalty vis-à-vis the regime (Markowitz 2016; Pomfret 2012; on Uzbekistan see Radnitz 2010).

In contrast, in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where no agrarian commodity dominated the economy and where the economy was relatively more diversified, the agrarian economy was liberalised to a large extent in the 1990s (Shamsiev 2012; Markowitz 2016; Radnitz 2010). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the fact that its newly appointed president (in 1991) came from outside (i.e. not from the former Soviet ruling elite) played a role, and also that he wanted to fashion himself as a break with the past and wished to court Western investment (Radnitz 2010). Kyrgyzstan's relative lack of resources was also important as it made the Kyrgyz government highly receptive to donor pressure in the early 1990s.

The extent to which the cotton sector has been liberalised, in turn, has important implications for the farm gate prices of cotton. The state's cotton monopolies (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and to a somewhat lesser extent private (regional) monopolies in Tajikistan led to suppressed farm gate prices (Shamsiev 2005). In the more competitive environments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, cotton farm gate prices have been considerably higher (Shamsiev 2005). The control over the crop value chain is thus key in understanding the distribution of revenues from cotton farming.

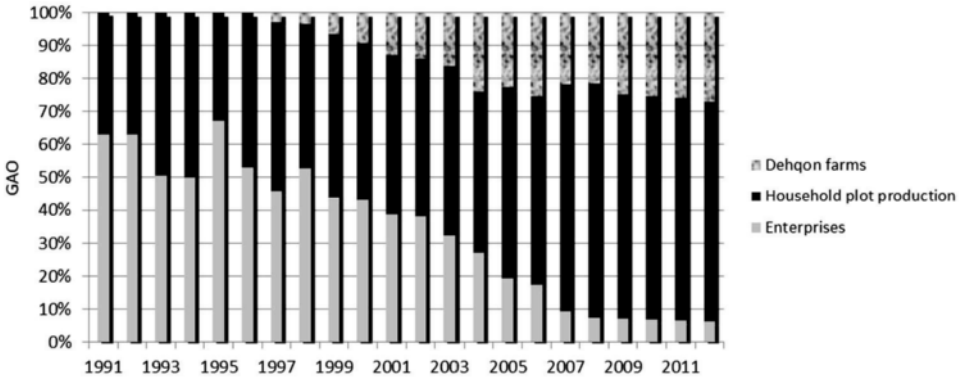
Due to the interest in cotton, the Tajik regime has sought to maintain control over cotton-growing areas and in these lowlands, in the 1990s, the majority of *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* continued without juridical or organisational change. The few pioneering, individual *dehqon* farmers had to operate in an environment hostile to individual smaller-scale farming, as production relations had hardly changed.

Thus, the specific local agrarian political economies resulted in different trajectories of agrarian change, even though international donors were active in some lowland and highland areas. This was already clearly visible in the course of the 1990s. The differences are clearly visible in Figures 2.4 and 2.5. However, because the Badakhshan region only comprises a tiny share of the overall (national) acreage of arable land, the early shift to *dehqon* farms in this region cannot be observed in statistics displaying the nationwide trends (Figure 2.3).

In the difficult period of the 1990s, the government responded to the impoverishment of the rural population by granting "presidential land" (*zamini presidenti*) to rural households in 1995 and

1997 (Decree numbers 342 and 874).[15] As Figure 2.2 shows, instead of the new *dehqon* farms, which donors had expected to become the engines of agrarian change, it was small-scale, subsistence-oriented household plots, which proved vital for domestic food security. Rural households contributed the majority of the value of production (including the livestock sector): 63.4 per cent of the GAO in 2014 (TajStat 2015b, 27).[16] The flexibility of small-scale household plot production entailed adaptive capacity. Subsequently, rural households were less affected by a decrease in input supply in the 1990s. Overall, however, the share of rural households' production in the total *marketed* output volume of agriculture remained minor. The major part of the production is grown for subsistence needs. Furthermore, households in the lowlands remained dependent to some extent on large-scale *dehqon* farms and large farm enterprises. The engagement in cotton farming through wage work at, or membership in, a cotton producing farm has been important to obtain cotton stalks that are essential as a source of fuel for rural households. This (inter)dependency will be further described in Chapter 4.

Figure 2.2: Gross agricultural output per farm type



Sources: Composed by the authors based on:
1991 and 2007-2012: TajStat 2013a, 16 (comparative prices Tajik somoni (TJS) 2012)
1992-1997: IMF 2000, 56 (comparative prices Tajik roubles 1997)
1997-2007: Lerman 2009, 7

2.3.3. Phase 2. Window dressing for the donors (1998-2006)

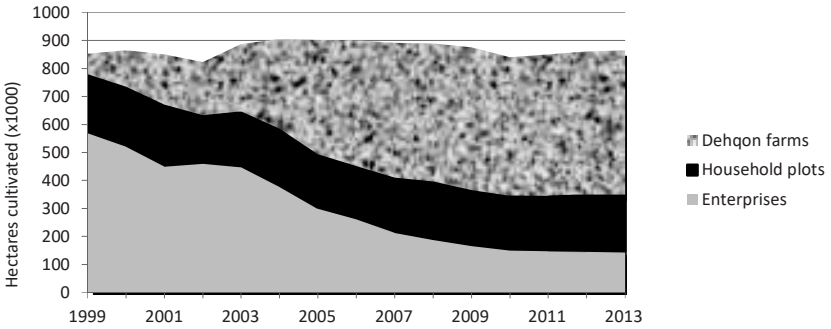
2.3.3.1. "Progress" in land reform in absolute numbers

Agricultural recovery began after 1998. The discrepancy observed in agrarian reform between the highlands and the lowlands continued after the 1990s. By the year 2000, across the country, *dehqon* farms accounted for 15 per cent of all arable land (see figure 2.3, TajStat 2005), but with important regional variations. In 2000, *dehqon* farms in GBAO cultivated 66.6 per cent of all arable land (see Figure 2.4), while *dehqon* farms in Khatlon and Sughd, where most of the lowlands are

located, farmed only 9.7 and 17.4 per cent of arable land, respectively. In the Region of Republican Subordination, *dehqon* farms held 22.6 per cent of arable land (TajStat 2005).

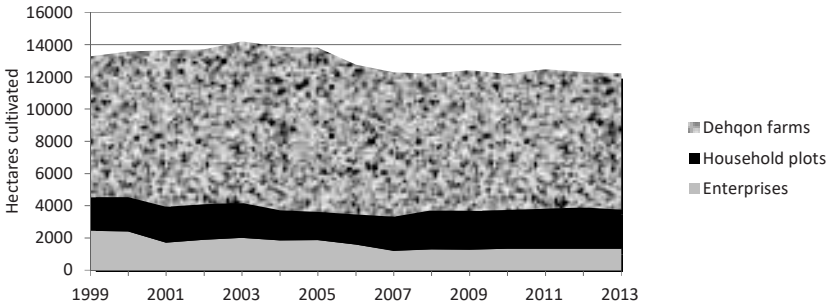
Based on statistical data, one might be tempted to conclude that, after the "stagnation" in the first part of the 1990s, genuine reform took place by the late 1990s. However, the trend observable in Figure 2.2 regarding the changing roles of state and collective farms (lower bar) and *dehqon* farms (upper bar) in GAO is mainly caused by the nominal shift from *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* to *dehqon* farms. With this act of renaming farm enterprises, the notion of the *dehqon* farm became blurred, complicating an understanding of the "individualised" post-Soviet farm. Particularly in the lowlands, the shift from former *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* to *dehqon* farms was often only a paper matter, with little effect on the ground (Robinson *et al.* 2008). This mere nominal change also explains why the national average size of a *dehqon* farm increased from 4.8 hectares of arable land in 1997 to 24 hectares in 2004 (see Table 2.1).

Figure 2.3. Land use by land user category, 1999-2013: Tajikistan nation-wide



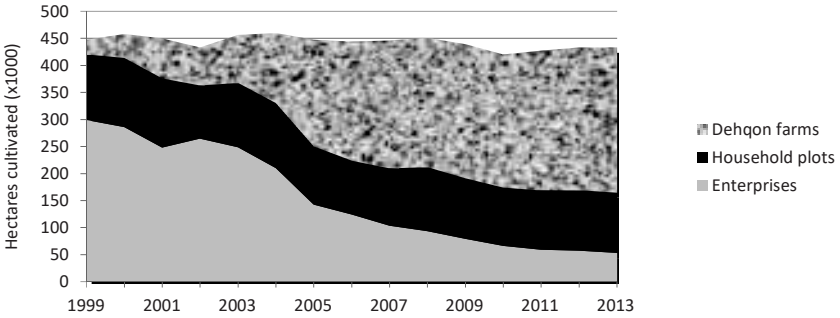
Sources: Composed by the authors based on TajStat (2005; 2012; 2014)

Figure 2.4. Land use by land user category, 1999-2013: GBAO (highlands)



Sources: Composed by the authors based on TajStat (2005; 2012; 2014)

Figure 2.5. Land use by land user category, 1999-2013: Khatlon (lowlands)



Sources: Composed by the authors based on TajStat (2005; 2012; 2014)

2.3.3.2. The state and elite responses to donor pressure in the 2000s

In 1999, the World Bank initiated a farm privatisation support programme (FPSP) in order to convince state officials of the need to reform agriculture (this will be further described in Chapter 4). The World Bank's reform package was not much different from the reform package that had been pushed through by the Aga Khan Foundation in Gorno Badakhshan a few years before. The difference was that, in the case of the World Bank pilot projects, the government determined where these would take place.[17] In later evaluations, the World Bank (2008) clearly noted the difficulty in convincing the government to reform farms. Genuine reform would mean a lack of control by the state and elites and could also imply a potential production "disruption" (cf. Hayami 2010, 3317 – noted in a general context on restructuring of plantations). Under the FPSP, formally privatised farms continued to produce collectively in order to preserve economies of scale in the production of cotton and avoid a collapse in production. In other words, there was no freedom of farm labour. Moreover, wider changes beyond the World Bank's pilot projects were stifled. A former *sovkhoz* worker, living in the area of the FPSP in the Yovon district, recalled in an interview (15 August 2013) that he had also attempted to start an individual farm in the late 1990s, but authorities had told him to wait; he could not join the cohort of individual farmers that were part of the World Bank's FPSP in the vicinity.

One way in which farm chairmen could discourage farm members from withdrawing land to set up an individual farm, was through the control over irrigation systems (Sehring 2009). In Tajikistan, farming is impossible without access to irrigation water. At the same time, officials could pursue superficial alterations while retaining control by transferring large areas of former state farmland to (local) elites rather than to the rural population. Another strategy was the renaming of a collective *dehqon* farm into one or more associations of *dehqon* farms. Both manoeuvres merely changed the label of farms, as we noted before, with the aim of displaying reform commitment; the land titling, however, occurred without profound changes on the ground.

One example is the way in which the Decree 385 on farm reorganisation, promulgated in October 2002, was implemented. As also will be noted in Chapter 4, the decree stipulated the gradual reorganisation of 225 agricultural enterprises before December 2005. Yet, "[a]s the 2005 deadline for farm restructuring loomed many former collectives restructured formally as [collective *dehqon* farms], offering physical shares of an equal size and proper title documentation to all members" (Robinson *et al.* 2008, 182). Such a shift to collective *dehqon* farms can also be observed in statistics we obtained for the Jaloliddini Balkhi district, in the lowlands of the Khatlon region. In this district, 15 new large *dehqon* farms were registered between 2004 and 2005 (TajStat 2013b). These new farms were privatised former production brigades of the local *kolkhoz.* This transformation had not meant a real change in land ownership (as recalled by a farmer and a former farm accountant in a fieldwork interview 16 July 2013). Therefore, we interpret statistics on farm restructuring in the 2004-2006 period with caution; fieldwork data is key to contextualising the statistics. Remarkably Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev (2018) specifically focused on the period before 2005 in their analysis on farm decollectivisation in Tajikistan. The authors

aimed to exclude external factors that may affect farm restructuring, such as the debt resettlement scheme implemented after 2008 (described later). They find that "low cotton yield is a necessary condition for farm individualisation in districts that are distant [more than 100 kilometres away] from the capital" (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018, 409).

The nominal shift to fulfil privatisation targets, as an obvious example of "window dressing," indicates the lack of intrinsic motivation to restructure farms in the lowlands. The actors controlling the means of production had virtually no willingness to reform. Progress failed to live up to the World Bank's expectations, whereas the Tajik Ministry of Finance declared in 2004 (as cited in World Bank 2004a, 17) that:

> Actually, the reform on privatisation of the enterprises and farms is completed. […] The status of the Land Committee is upgraded to the level of the Ministry; it is the State Committee at the Government. The transparency of the farms privatisation process is ensured through publication of the statistical bulletins, with the data, reflecting the number of privatised farms.

By formulating ambitious plans on paper, and pointing at apparently successful reform cases and stressing the growth in the number of (in reality ill-defined) *dehqon* farms, the authorities could claim that they did what donors required them to do, while subverting further pressure (Robinson *et al.* 2008).

Reforms unfolded differently in the eastern highlands, where a trend of farm individualisation became a "mass movement" (such as observed by Petrick and Carter (2009) in Moldova). But this only came about as a result of the interplay of geographical and political economy factors, as donor lobbying coincided with conditions favourable to small-scale farming: fragmented production units and low revenue farming. Consequently, people expressed eagerness to farm privately. Villagers could make effective use of the land – even though the former Soviet state or collective farm initially remained as a paper entity (Robinson *et al.* 2008; Herbers 2006). The *de jure* and *de facto* privatisation of farms unfolded rather easily, and was almost completed by the year 1999.[18] In later years, farm fragmentation has been ongoing, as the numbers in Table 2.1 (over the year 2014) indicate.

Such a conjuncture clearly did not emerge in lowland Tajikistan. That rural dwellers showed little interest in farming in the lowland areas in that period seems rational: Individual farming was rightly perceived to be very difficult, if not very unattractive, under the continued production regime in which cotton dominated.

Again, fewer insights exist about agrarian reform in that period in the western highlands. Yet it is known that collectives with large numbers of shareholders existed up until 2014 (Welt Hunger Hilfe 2015). The differences observed between the eastern and western highland regions can be explained by a few factors. For one, even though the highlands in the Sughd region also

experienced rising donor presence, these smaller donors were primarily focused on emergency relief, not on farm reform. As Sehring (2009) observed, collective farm members in the western highlands lacked the knowledge to apply for an individual farm, and the substantial costs of a registration constituted an additional barrier. The second factor is that even if rural dwellers wished to start their own farm, authorities in the western highlands maintained a production quota of, among others, tobacco (Sehring 2009).[19]

At the national level, it is also important to take into account the political economy and the divergence in donor orientation in order to understand why the effect of donor presence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan differed substantially. The Kyrgyz state received slightly more donor aid per capita (Sehring 2009). However, aid volume alone cannot explain the significantly different trajectories of post-Soviet political, economic, and agrarian transformation.

As we noted, the Kyrgyz state quickly adopted donor advice and privatised the economy (Radnitz 2010). By privatising the agricultural sector the state withdrew its control over farming and allowed for the "decentralised generation of wealth" (Radnitz 2010, 167). This is partly explained by the fact that, as noted before, the newly appointed Kyrgyz president came from "outside" and the Kyrgyz state urgently needed foreign aid in the early 1990s (Radnitz 2010). Moreover, there were few elite interests in the agrarian economy, given that there were no principal agricultural commodities that fed the national economy. This was different in Tajikistan, where cotton remained of the state's and elite's interests.

An equally important aspect is that the orientation of Western donors in both countries differed. "Donor involvement in Kyrgyzstan reflected the initial interest to foster democracy and civil society in the early 1990s" (Sehring 2009, 102). Donors' orientation in Kyrgyzstan on civil rights resonated with domestic non-state societal actors; in Tajikistan, such domestic actors were hardly present in those years. In Tajikistan, donor aid concentrated on humanitarian assistance during and after the war. Donor presence proliferated in the aftermath of the Tajik Civil War and the post "9/11" period when the U.S. Bush administration intensified the "war on terror" in neighbouring Afghanistan. Economic development in Tajikistan was deemed critical to the situation in Afghanistan, as a way of preventing the spread of terrorism across the border.

To conclude: in the lowlands, which account for the majority of Tajikistan's arable land and agricultural output, formal policies and statistics contrasted with the situation on the ground. The power over farm break-up rested with high placed elites within the ruling regime; there was limited autonomy for local authorities or other decision-makers. As a result, there were few differences between lowland districts in land reform in that period, except for a few pockets of small individual farms (cf. Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018).

2.3.3.3. Power and control over agricultural value chains

Dehqon farms in the eastern highland region Badakhshan experienced more autonomy as opposed to those in the lowlands. The highland farms were primarily subsistence oriented, with little surplus being sold, or bartered in the direct vicinity (Kreutzmann 2003). A distinguishing feature of GBAO's agricultural sector is that *dehqon* farms have been highly important for the growth in GAO since the 2000s, as opposed to crop output growth in lowland regions, where household plots continued to have a more prominent role. The small-scale farming practices in the mountains did not require substantial capital injections or large-scale infrastructure. It deprived the authorities of a means of control. This, together with strong support from donors for farm privatisation, and rural dwellers' eagerness to farm, enabled a thorough privatisation process. Figure 2.4 clearly shows that *dehqon* farms in GBAO cultivated a large part of the region's arable land already in the late 1990s. It testifies to the rapid individualisation of farms in Gorno Badakhshan.

For lowland farms, engaging in cotton production contract schemes with futures companies remained the only way to obtain inputs to start the growing season. The futures system was set up to preserve cotton production and served as a chain of command and control over cotton farming. The futures companies' domination was "caused not by good quality of service but through pressure of the [district governments] forcing farmers to sign contracts with [a] company" (KasWag AgriConsulting Worldwide 2008, 51). Besides the incentive of access to inputs on credit, and authorities' pressure on farms to allocate 70 per cent of their fields to cotton, another clear (state-deployed) incentive to cultivate cotton was the reduced taxes for land allocated to cotton (half of those for other crops).

Due to the requirement to cultivate – the often unprofitable – cotton in the lowlands, most newly established *dehqon* farmers had to rely predominantly on their household plot for income revenues and food security in those years (World Bank 2012a; 2012d). Whereas the average cotton yield across the country was below 21 centner per hectare[20] (TajStat 2014), "[i]n average, Tajikistan's cotton growers must produce no less than 2200kg [22 centner] of raw cotton/ha before positive returns become possible" (KasWag AgriConsulting Worldwide 2008, 16). What is more, revenues of cotton production come only once a year. The economic margins for other, less capital-intensive crops (such as wheat and onions) have been much higher (Shamsiev 2012; FAO 2014), but farmers' control over cropping patterns has long been withheld.[21] Moreover, the cultivation of larger volumes of food crops encountered major obstacles for individual farmers, because small urban markets were easily saturated, and because of the difficulties to obtain quality inputs (World Bank 2012a).[22]

Besides suppressed farm gate prices, the capital intensity involved in cotton makes production relatively expensive. Whereas cotton is manually weeded and harvested, and can be grown on small as well as large farms, economies of scale exist in production and processing.[23] What is especially relevant is that capital intensive, mechanical practices are essential early in the growing

season: flattening the fields; ploughing; sowing seeds; and, the application of chemical inputs. In addition, each round of irrigation required for cotton is costly (FAO 2014). As a result, farmers encountered many difficulties in capitalising on their production. And, since farms had major difficulties producing the contracted amounts of cotton, and because the futures system worked inadequately, cotton farms accumulated debt over the years (this will also be discussed in Chapter 3; and see also Van Atta 2009). Yet debt was unevenly distributed. Cotton farms in the Khatlon region were more indebted than those elsewhere in the lowlands.[24] Nevertheless, rural poverty appeared equally pronounced in both (Sugdh and Khatlon) regions (World Bank 2012e).[25]

To conclude, the late 1990s-2006 period in the lowlands was characterised by the stark discrepancy between ambitious reform plans and a piecemeal, highly selective implementation on the ground. Referring to both highland and lowland regions, a key Western consultant to the Tajik government adequately characterised the spatially divergent character of agrarian change (i.e. until 2007), by stating in an interview (15 February 2015):

> So, the result is [that] you get what looks like a diverting system, because it depends on the local political power and the government's judgement of the importance of the place […]. "Ok donors, you want to do this, fine, just do it in the mountains, do it in places we do not care about."

2.3.4. Phase 3. Donor lobbying and strengthening rural divides (2007-2015)

2.3.4.1. A string of crises and a momentum for change

The third stage in the process of agrarian change began in 2007, picking up steam from 2009 onwards. The year 2007 can be characterised as a watershed in Tajikistan's post-Soviet agrarian change, because it marked the beginning of a new transformation in agrarian production relations.

The watershed was the result of a complex string of crises in a short period in the winter of 2007-8. First, in December 2007, the Tajik National Bank was forced to admit that it had provided sovereign guarantees for cotton loans from international financiers, which had not been reported to the IMF. It was "covert state financing to the cotton sector" (Van Atta 2009, 19).[26] Second, just after the revelation of this scandal happened an extremely harsh winter followed, which revealed the Tajik state's inability to feed its people (Heathershaw 2011; Brill Olcott 2012). Due to the cold winter, early harvests failed (including winter wheat), and in the months after food production was further affected by a severe locust infestation in hilly and lowland areas (Brill Olcott 2012; UNWFP 2008). "[C]ombined with the global rise in food prices this resulted in 2.2 million people being undernourished" (FAO 2017, 50).

2.3.4.2. Increased donor pressure in the late 2000s

In the past decades, the politics surrounding the cotton sector in Tajikistan discouraged donor involvement and foreign investors. This was particularly the case in the Khatlon region, where various NGOs showed a reluctance to become involved in cotton farming; in the Sughd region, some donor projects (such as extension services) focused on cotton farmers were started in the

late 2000s. As an agricultural expert of an international donor, working in the Khatlon region, explained (quoted by Boboyorov (2012, 430)): "We do not work with the cotton farms because cotton does not give anything to the people."[27]

The case of a Swiss agribusiness, which established its presence after 2010 in the Khatlon region, testifies to the political sensitivity of the sector in the Khatlon region. The company entered with support from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) but left in 2014. As is stated in Chapter 5: "While one reason for the Swiss company's exit may have been financial difficulties, it has been said […] that it was compelled to leave primarily because it had been perceived as a threat to the local elites' cotton businesses."

The crises of 2007-2008 gave donors the means to pressure the state to react, particularly since the need for access to food was high in the lowlands, where the regime had continuously delayed the conversion from (inefficient) non-edible cotton production to food crops. Donors were urged to interfere. Earlier they had not been able to alter the balance of power and the dominance of elites, which obstructed reforms. After the Tajik government declared, in 2004, that "farm privatisation had been completed," the World Bank concluded in 2008 that "[a]ssuming that secure land use rights could be introduced in five years [1999-2004] was an over-ambitious objective" (World Bank 2008, 21).

Donors have had a crucial role since Tajikistan's independence. First in emergency relief during and after the Tajik Civil War, followed by projects focused on farm individualisation, and later in continuing to exert pressure on the state to implement and follow up on policy changes. Notably the cohort of foreign (external) actors active in Tajikistan has changed. While the post-war period saw a rapid inflow of donor aid, which equalled "the West," the countries making up the "international community" have become more diverse since the mid-2000s. Besides Russia's standing presence; China, Iran, Turkey and India have also entered the stage. One would expect that the increasing presence of these "new" countries, particularly in terms of loans and investments, competes with and subsequently lessens the pressure on Central Asian regimes from "traditional donors." However, we cannot (yet) observe such a clear effect with regard to agrarian reform at this stage.

2.3.4.3. Differentiation within lowlands and highlands, and changes in value chain control

Beyond the previously addressed highland-lowland dichotomy in the speed and scope of land reform, variance *within* these different geographies has emerged over the course of years. This particularly started off after the crises in 2007-2008 when international donors urged the Tajik government to bring more meaningful change to the agrarian sector, specifically regarding the inertia in the cotton sector.

The futures system had led to a total nation-wide debt of over 500 million US dollars. To solve the crisis in cotton farming and to restructure the institutional environment for individual farmers, a

reform programme (the "Road Map") was initiated of which the "Freedom to Farm decree" (Cabinet Resolution number 111), adopted in March 2007, was expected to set change in motion. As of 2008 the futures system would end, with which a stranglehold over cotton farming would be removed. However, the later reforms (Decree 312 and 663), that further stipulated farm restructuring and farm debt write-off, indicate that the early reform policies largely remained only a paper matter. The follow up of seemingly similar decrees in these years echo the process of reform in the early 2000s, when several decrees reiterated earlier ones and remained without profound change on the ground.

With the "Road Map" we could expect devolution of decision-making over farm break-up.[28] Yet as will be described in Chapter 3, and as Boboyorov (2012; 2016) also observed, the eventual implementation of the debt resolution scheme has depended on domestic elites who controlled the cotton futures companies. For instance, in the Jaloliddini Balkhi and Shahritus districts of the Khatlon region, debt has not been nullified. The elite-controlled futures company operating in these districts has not accepted a debt write off, as it would have implied financial loss, and, more importantly, a loss of elites' control over cotton revenues (this will be explained in Chapter 3; see also Boboyorov 2012). As a result, there are important differences between the *de facto* and *de jure* land ownership in Tajikistan. Evidently, the "Road Map" is not implemented in each and every locality.

Local variations such as the debt write off, intersecting donor capital, regime presence and private investments, have caused rural divides to grow. The fact that cotton debt was more pronounced in the Khatlon region than in Sughd, testifies to the political domination over the cotton sector in the southwestern region. Interestingly, in a survey among farms in the Khatlon and Sughd region, Frey and Tovbaeva (2016, 59) found that

> [w]hen making a cut-off point at 20 hectares of cotton production, smallholder farms in Khatlon are, on average, only 1/3 the size of smallholder farms in Sughd. Medium farms are more similar in size, but whilst medium farms in Khatlon grow almost only cotton, medium farms in Sughd are more diversified. Amongst smallholder farms, Khatlon farms are also more specialised in cotton than Sughd farms.

Remarkable recent reforms have aimed at splitting up large farms, particularly in the Sughd region where in late 2013, a pro-reform governor[29] was appointed. He initiated a regional regulation to downsize farms to a maximum of 10 hectares (see also Chorshanbiyev 2013). The governor's push also had implications in the western highland area of the Sughd region, where a profound break-up of collective farming has only been more effectively set in motion since then (as collective *dehqon* farms with large numbers of members have continued to exist - see Welt Hunger Hilfe 2015). As described above, the donors in these highlands had earlier predominantly focused on improving rural livelihoods, without pressuring the (local) state to individualise and privatise farms. Interestingly, about 80 per cent of Tajikistan's agro-processing industries has been

concentrated in the northern Sughd region, and the regional economy also benefits from the proximity to neighbouring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. These factors potentially enlarge outlet opportunities for farmers in this region, which are largely absent in the southwestern Khatlon region.

The above-mentioned examples of donor and state encounters exemplify the direct and indirect role of external actors on state formation, and the variances in outcomes across Tajikistan. It remains extremely difficult to pinpoint the factors that facilitate or constrain reform at a local level, i.e. within districts, particularly regarding the role of geographic characteristics such as population density, water availability, and soil fertility. There is contradictory data in this regard. For instance, Mukhamedova and Wegerich (2014) found that farms were decollectivised relatively early in areas with a low land to population ratio (with smaller farmland shares). In contrast, Nekbakhtshoev (2016) concluded that localities with relative labour surplus (with low land to population ratios) allow farm chairmen to obstruct decollectivisation. These authors also differed in their conclusions regarding the impact of water availability on farm reform. Whereas Nekbakhtshoev (2016) found that relative water abundance indirectly obstructs reform (also observed by Sehring 2009), Mukhamedova and Wegerich (2014) observed that it actually enhances the speed of farm privatisation, since it incites farm shareholders to withdraw their share to start a private farm. Such variations in local outcomes indicate that population density and water cannot explain more general reform patterns.

2.3.4.4. Farm restructuring after 2007 through a statistical lens

As a prelude to the conclusion of this chapter, it is clear that in terms of numbers there have been significant changes over the years. Since 2007, *dehqon* farmers have been cultivating the majority of land (TajStat 2014). Compared to 24,900 *dehqon* farms in 2006 (TajStat 2010, 116), the rural sector included 130,000 *dehqon* farms at the end of 2014, with an average farm size below five hectares (see Table 2.1). Whereas one could assume that elites or farm chairmen would try to obstruct farm individualisation, especially in areas with potentially high yields, the figures show that farm break-up has taken place regardless of potential yields. Still, as we have underscored before: These statistics do not include the large elite controlled farms that exist in the lowlands. These enterprises are not always classified as *dehqon* farms but as "other farm types," such as joint stock ventures and associations. As a result, their size does not affect the average *dehqon* farm size. In 2012 there were 2,170 of such "other farm types" recorded, e.g. joint stock ventures, agricultural associations and conglomerates (TajStat 2013a).

As we noted, rural dwellers have not played an important role in determining the trajectory of farm reform, but farmers have responded to the changing market dynamics and the increased freedom to farm with crop diversification. Even though cotton growing remains prominent in irrigated lowlands,[30] and despite the consistent informal pressure to grow cotton, vegetable production in lowland regions has also increased.[31] Notably, profits of crops other than cotton increased considerably between 2005 and 2012. The profitability margin of watermelon, for

instance, showed a nine-fold increase, while reported profits from cotton decreased seven-fold (FAO 2014, 29). These figures clearly indicate that an orientation away from cotton has great potential to improve farm viability. Nevertheless, farm revenues remain limited for many rural dwellers: for highlanders because of limited plot sizes, and for lowlanders because of a lacking *de facto* ability to cultivate the most profitable crops.

2.4. Conclusion: towards a deeper understanding of trajectories of agrarian change

After nearly 25 years of independence in Tajikistan, a look at changes in absolute numbers of farms would suggest that a significant transformation has taken place with regard to farm structure. We have addressed the need to look beyond these numbers. We have attempted to shed light on the spatial nature of the agrarian question (cf. Chayanov 1966[1925]; Meurs and Begg 1998) by showing the interplay between geography and state-society, in both domestic and foreign, relations. In so doing, we have accounted for prior and present production conditions, as well as state-society dynamics. This analysis has enabled us to conclude the following.

First, what distinguishes Tajikistan is the stark regional variety in reforms, without the emergence of one dominant agrarian pattern. There is an apparent geographic dimension to Tajikistan's pathways of farm restructuring. The stark regional variety could already be observed in the early 2000s, and it has further strengthened since then (cf. Robinson *et al.* 2008; Herbers 2006). We distinguished two main trajectories of agrarian reform diverging in timing and in depth. In the highland regions, throughout history, mountains have only allowed for small-scale crop cultivation in the narrow valleys.[32] The "dispersion of resources" (cf. Radnitz 2010) and the "friction of appropriation" (cf. Scott 2009), both in terms of the geography and subsequently in terms of the absence of big production volumes and revenues, facilitated farm break-up. In the eastern highlands, farm reform occurred more or less in parallel with the rapid process of farm reform in Kyrgyzstan in the same period (cf. Robinson *et al.* 2008). The state and donor-prioritised lowlands, however, featured very different politics of place. In these areas, large farm structures, featuring large production units with substantial, large, indivisible assets (like irrigation systems), carried on much longer, as farm individualisation there required more drastic change. In this regard, the much slower process in the lowlands resembled the pathway of agrarian transformation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where interests to politically control the countryside obstructed land reforms.

We also attempted to touch on differences within seemingly similar geographic zones. In highland regions, we have highlighted the role of donor orientation in explaining such variety. In the lowlands, we have had to deal with a lack of empirical data, which makes is difficult to draw conclusions at this stage. As noted earlier, Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev (2018) found that low cotton yields in localities far from the capital may be related to higher rates of decollectivisation, but one may also argue that there is less demand for individual farming in such a context. Other

studies on local characteristics inhibiting or inciting farm reform are contradictory, as we noted regarding the aspect of water availability analysed by Nekbakhtshoev (2016) and Mukhamedova and Wegerich (2014).

As a second conclusion, we have provided some evidence for our argument that the interplay of geography and political economy has been prominent in shaping reform outcomes. We have particularly addressed the aspects of altitude, crop characteristics and agronomic practices in relation to land politics. The interplay between these features, we contend, is important, as it comprises the main internal and external factors that shape agrarian reform. What we then observe is the remarkable continuation of production relations as they existed in Soviet agriculture. Specific patterns of production relations and concomitant constellations of power over the means of production have remained intact.

Third, understanding the readiness and willingness to reform brings us back to our analysis of state-society relations (Fox 1993; Migdal 1988; Evans 1995). As Radnitz (2010, 10) noted (in reference to Kyrgyzstan), "'the new [post-Soviet] regimes' initial approaches to economic reform and the civic sphere gave rise to different elite configurations," and "the ability to maintain a livelihood independent of the state affords potential activists political autonomy" (Radnitz 2010, 199). Particularly political activism has not been possible in Tajikistan and the post-Soviet regime has placed significant barriers to independent generation of wealth.

Since Tajikistan's independence, international donors have pressured the Tajik government to implement countrywide farm reform. This has not resulted in a uniform trajectory. Reform has stagnated across regions that were seen as important for the ruling regime. As Evans (1995, 5) explained: "State actions reflect and enforce disparities of social power on behalf of the privileged." In those areas of regime interest, we have pointed at the different ways in which the regime upheld control and thwarted change.

The data available on district or even municipal levels are still too sparse, and sometimes contradictive, to explain divergences at lower levels. We have made an attempt to explain how domestic elites secured revenues and control over large scale farming, throughout the lowlands, until the late 2000s. Elites were unable to generate wealth independently, and remained tied to the state (like in Uzbekistan (cf. Radnitz 2010)). Only after 2008 with the "Road Map" in place, could the devolution of decision-making over farm-break up to local authorities lead to more local variations. Hence, this chapter should be regarded as a first attempt to describe and conceptualise Tajikistan's post-Soviet agrarian pathways, and may guide future, more in-depth research. A future examination of local variations in the political economy, for instance of the implications of debt, may provide better insights into the way in which farm debt impacts farm autonomy and local livelihoods, and how responses "from below" are shaped across localities.

The case of Tajikistan supports understanding spatial variance from a broader spatial level, where the political economy and land politics are shaped by resource endowments and potential resource revenues. As we have described, while a change in ownership over the means of production in the highlands – where centralised control has always been constrained – on the one hand led to a transfer of responsibility over farm operations and farm revenues, on the other hand, in the lowland areas, elites engaged in window dressing in order to control crop revenues, leading to shallow and spatially uneven reforms. As Fox (1993, 20) noted about agrarian reform, "the frequent penetration of states by private elites, the anti-redistributive biases of most state agencies, and the inherently decentralised nature of most social reforms makes it quite difficult to find states that pursue such reforms in a unified way."

And yet divergent outcomes in land reform in Tajikistan and other countries continue to surprise observers, even those paying attention to the political economy. Whereas this aspect of discordant state action can be found in other setting across the world, the fictional nature of statistics is (also) very much a Soviet legacy. As Wedel (1998, 74) stated:

> [J]ust as they [authorities] had engaged in certain "fictions," ranging from subtle readjustment of figures to outright falsification, to meet prespecified targets under central planning, so they employed the same kinds of fictions in the aid process to please the Western consultants and the donor community. Some so-called privatisations proved to be paper transactions only.

When analysing agrarian change in Ukraine, Allina-Pisano (2008) even spoke of land reforms as a kind of "Potemkin-village" (a cardboard façade). In Tajikistan, although (evidence of) outright falsification of data is rare – except from the 2007 cotton debt scandal – ambiguous statistical categories of land reforms have certainly and continuously obstructed the monitoring of land reform.

The Tajik state has a great deal of *autonomy* vis-à-vis domestic societal actors, except for elites. While social movements have been mostly weak in Central Asia and former Soviet countries (cf. Mamonova and Visser 2014; Radnitz 2010), they have been virtually absent in Tajikistan. If anything, (multilateral) international actors, not domestic public outcries, have been the ones to affect policy formation. The proliferation of donors and their recent mounting influence shows that the Tajik state has been amenable to external pressure, as it lacked the strong resource-based autonomy of the neighbouring states of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Interestingly, state formation happened partly through external intervention, as donors attempted to compensate for the lack of state capacity. At the same time, also at the micro-level of the household, external dynamics and actors have been of tremendous importance since the 1990s. The influence of changing (global) geopolitics and external actors on the Tajik state, including on the agrarian economy and rural livelihoods, such as the role of Russia and China, may be an important direction for further research in this volatile Central Asian region.

One could say that reforms have come a long way in the policy discourse. In that sense, the forty or fifty donors advocating land reform in Tajikistan – mentioned in the opening quote of the chapter – had a visible influence. While land reform officially envisioned the creation of a vibrant cohort of private, independent farmers, this has been a tedious and little yielding effort so far. Control over the countryside – as a way to secure order – has been employed in tandem with the extraction of rural wealth through large-scale farms. However, the overall picture in the country – despite all its variety in its geography and loopholes in the law – is now one of more profound reform.

Hence, the interplays between geographic and political economy dynamics warrant more attention in theories on agrarian transformation, but also – and more importantly – in policy discourse, reform templates and technical assistance, in order to avoid further divides.

Notes

[1] This chapter is based on a co-authored paper written together with one of the supervisors, Dr. Oane Visser.

[2] With "individualisation" we refer to the breaking up of (Soviet) collective and state farms into individual farms.

[3] The share of the livestock sector in gross agricultural output (GAO) increased, however, from around 25 per cent between 1999 and 2006 (Lerman and Sedik 2009) to around 35 per cent in 2012 (TajStat 2013a, 16). Also in terms of livestock numbers there has been an increase (TajStat 2013a).

[4] For instance, in 2013 household production of milk and meat comprised, respectively, 95 and 94 per cent of the total production (TajStat 2014, 127/126).

[5] As Lerman and Sedik (2009, 310) noted, "[e]ven Uzbekistan, with its agriculture heavily dependent on cotton like that in Tajikistan, maintains livestock production levels in excess of 40-45 per cent of GAO." Remarkably, fodder crop production in Tajikistan's eastern highland region Gorno Badakhshan, where livestock has been a prominent source of livelihood, has declined. It went from accounting for almost 70 per cent of all farmland in 1987 to 20 per cent by the year 2000 (Herbers 2006, 228).

[6] For the connection between short growing seasons and small-scale farming see Hayami (2010).

[7] Scott (2009) defined "escape crops" as crops that can be either stored, and hidden, relatively easily. The nature of such crops constrains appropriation.

[8] Note that TajStat 2013a and TajStat 2014 provide different figures regarding arable land (and land actually sown with crops). The sources used are indicated under the table. Furthermore, note that the figures reported on average farm sizes in GBAO appear contradictory. There are great discrepancies between the years 2009, 2012 and 2014 when comparing national statistics (TajStat 2015b) and the data obtained from the recently established (2013) Land Cadastre. The latter is more consistent with trends over the years in GBAO (see also FAO 2014), and provides a more realistic picture.

[9] There were no massive calls "from below" for farm decollectivisation in most of the Soviet states before their independence. Societal responses were also shaped by societal motives, as the large-scale farms were total social institutions (cf. Humphrey 1983). Laird (1993) noted the widespread social inertia that characterised most of the Soviet population, which was different in Eastern European countries, where a strong ideology of land restitution and anti-communism prevailed.

[10] The state has retained ownership over land, and the main form of land tenure is through inheritable land use rights.

[11] Under Tajik law (Decree number 499), the special land fund is created by (i) agricultural lands that have been left unused/become abandoned; (ii) reserve lands; (iii) forest lands not covered by forests; and, (iv) unused land from former collective and state owned farms.

[12] The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), as the charity arm of the Aga Khan (the hereditary imam of the Ismaili), works primarily in GBAO where the majority of the population belongs to the Ismaili denomination of Shia Islam (whereas the overall majority of the country belongs to the Sunni denomination). The Aga Khan's spiritual leadership and crucial support to the Badakhshan region during and after the Tajik Civil War has created an enduring loyalty among the population.

[13] The imperative to control this region was at least as much due to geopolitical interests, as the region formed an outer border of the Soviet Union (Kreutzmann 2003).

[14] However, the share of cotton in these economies' GDP decreased significantly between 1995 and 2011, see also Table 1.1. in Chapter 1: in Turkmenistan, from 24.5 to 2.5 per cent; in Uzbekistan, from 18.2 to 4.8 per cent; and in Tajikistan, from 9.7 to 4.7 per cent (Shamsiev 2012). Notably, in Tajikistan the share of cotton in the GDP equals that of Uzbekistan. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, cotton only contributed respectively 0.5 and 1.7 per cent to the GDP in 1995 (Shamsiev 2012).

[15] According to the Land Code, households have the right to 0.15 hectares of irrigated and 0.25 hectares of rain-fed land (in the mountainous areas, up to 0.40 hectares). In reality the actual size of household plots differs, depending on local environmental and socio-economic factors. Over time, land held as household plots has expanded from 75,000 hectares in 1991 (Herbers 2006, 110) to over 201,000 hectares in 2013, comprising 23 per cent of the total agricultural area (TajStat 2014).

[16] Household food production was a pivotal supplement to rural inhabitants' wages in the Soviet era. It existed in a symbiotic relationship with work on the Soviet farm (Rowe 2009; Giehler 2017). In 1990, on the eve of Tajikistan's independence, household plot production accounted for one third of marketed agricultural output (Rowe 2009, 691).

[17] Azerbaijan's privatisation project was showcased, but later the World Bank (2008, 21) acknowledged that "given the differences between Tajikistan and some of its neighbours, the use of a blueprint design led to a pilot that was too complex

and ambitious and not tailored enough to the specific circumstances of the country." We contend that a major reason for the difficulties in replicating the Azerbaijan model was the Tajik economy's reliance on cotton (and the subsequent incentive for elites to attempt to control cotton production); for the Azeri state, in contrast, revenues from non-agricultural sectors (primarily oil) overshadowed the importance of the agrarian economy.

[18] According to a survey conducted by DFID, USAID and the World Bank (2012, 54), in the Vanj district, where the Aga Khan Foundation was already active in the 1990s, "farmers have been operating under […] *de facto* arrangements [of individual farming] for several years" thanks to the work of the Aga Khan Foundation.

[19] Tobacco is an example of a highland crop that is often cultivated through outgrower schemes or on plantations, as economies of scale exist in marketing and processing (see for instance Scoones *et al.* 2018). In Soviet Tajikistan, tobacco was cultivated by production units based on families (Giehler 2017). In this regard, the introduction of this crop differed considerably from the introduction of cotton, which radically altered traditional livelihoods.

[20] In Soviet agriculture, agricultural production and yields were indicated in centners(/hectare). Centners are still widely used in Tajikistan. One centner equals 0.1 ton.

[21] More recent reports indicate that the gross margins for cotton are only 20 and 12 per cent of those for wheat and stone-fruits (like apricots and cherries) respectively (Shamsiev 2012).

[22] Beside state and elite pressure, an important incentive to grow cotton is that rural households use cotton stalks as a source of fuel, which is essential in the absence of (reliable) gas supplies and electricity. Moreover, in the context of poor post-harvest and storage facilities, the non-perishability of cotton provides added advantages over other crops.

[23] Yet in a recent survey, Frey and Tovbaeva (2016, 59) argued that "it seems likely that large farms have some economies of scale that result in cost savings but are run less efficiently than smaller farms resulting in lower yields. The net effect on profitability is zero [and] it seems that the most significant cost savings in farms that grow cotton on more than 20 hectares come from savings in labour as well as mechanisation costs."

[24] There is a notable difference related to cotton value chain control between the Sughd and Khatlon regions, which has emerged since the establishment of the futures system. In order to obtain cash at harvest time, farmers in the Khatlon region have tended to sell raw cotton at the ginnery; by doing so, they directly transfer ownership over produce, without receiving residual products (such as cotton cake and oil). Cotton farmers in the Sughd region more often maintain control over their cotton after harvest. Many farmers contract the ginnery as a service facility, after which they receive the fibre back so as to (possibly) sell it at a later moment. In this way farmers enjoy more agency regarding sales and can use or share the by-products of cotton as they wish. While the perceived autonomy of farmers in the Sughd region in contrast to those in Khatlon is often attributed to the regional populations' educational levels and farmers' entrepreneurial mentality (as frequently observed in conversations with consultants, farmers and state officials in the Sughd region, in fieldwork 2014-2015), the civil war legacy and differences in regime domination may be equally important in understanding differences.

[25] "Regionally, rural poverty was highest and deepest in the cotton growing areas of Khatlon and Sughd, and these two regions also made the least progress in terms of poverty reduction […] Rural poverty declined much faster in RRS and GBAO" (World Bank 2012a, 9).

[26] Just before, the IMF had declared that "thanks to aid from the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI), Tajikistan was not in danger of any debt distress if moderate policies were followed. It warned, however, that new foreign borrowing […] could lead to a quick change in the situation. [Soon after, however the Tajik state] concluded an agreement with the People's Republic of China for a loan of approximately $900 million" (Van Atta 2009, 29), which brought discredit on the state, and showed the competing agendas of external actors in Tajikistan.

[27] Yet in the past few years, the German GIZ (the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ GmbH)) has established an agricultural extension service project in Khatlon based on an extension service project in the Sughd region that has been running for longer (see also Frey and Tovbaeva 2016).

[28] Hence, we attribute more importance to localised factors in shaping farm reform processes after this debt resolution programme (in contrast to Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018, who explicitly excluded this later period).

[29] The governor's recent call for a countrywide shift away from a dependency on cotton (see Umarov 2016), is also noticeable in this regard.

[30] The total amount of cotton has decreased to around 20-25 per cent of arable land (TajStat 2013a; TajStat 2014). In 2013, in the Khatlon and Sughd regions, 40 and 25.2 per cent of arable land (under all farm types, excluding household plots) respectively, was still cultivated with cotton.

[31] The contribution of farms in Khatlon to the total (national) harvest of vegetables increased from 26 to 50 per cent between 1991 and 2012 (TajStat 2013a, 168).

[32] As we noted before, it does not mean that production is only undertaken by autonomous smallholders in mountainous areas. Plantations and outgrower schemes can also exist in the highlands, for instance in production of tea and coffee, and tobacco (see for instance Scoones *et al.* 2018; Cramb *et al.* 2017).

3. Soft budgets and elastic debt: farm liabilities in the agrarian political economy of post-Soviet Tajikistan[1]

Abstract
Since Tajikistan's independence, market reforms, and pressure from international donors have brought changes to the state's role in the economy. The official narrative holds that the post-socialist state reduced its control over agriculture, but there are still various mechanisms through which it exerts control over farming. In this chapter, I examine Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian change through the prism of farm debt. Farm debt used to be an accounting nuisance in Soviet agriculture as a result of so-called soft budget constraints. In the political economy of post-socialist transformation, farm cotton debt has been transformed into indebted land. I classify this debt "elastic" for its ambiguous nature. It ties farmers to land and makes farmers' independence illusory. With an in-depth analysis based on original ethnographic insights, I aim to provide a theoretical contribution to the way in which debt is conceptualised and politicised in post-Soviet Tajikistan.

3.1. Introduction

> "Before we would start working in cotton there, I would need to know who owns those farms", the local employee of an international donor told me in 2013. I wondered: "Who owns those farms? Those are individualised farms holding a proper title. Doesn't that say enough?"

Wandering through the central market of Dushanbe, on any given morning, one can only be impressed by the range of fresh fruit and vegetables on offer at every stall. The socialist shortage economy seems to be firmly in the past. Meanwhile, foreign and domestic agribusinesses are slowly emerging. One tends to conclude that agrarian modernisation in Tajikistan has finally begun in earnest. However, behind this façade, farm practices and rural livelihoods are restricted by rent-seeking elites in areas of the state's benign neglect.

Tajikistan's agrarian economy was set for reform in 1991, in accordance with post-Soviet transformation across the former Soviet Union. Although the state officially withdrew from the agricultural sector to abide by conditions set by international donors, strongmen[2] personally close to the presidential family have found ways to safeguard control over particular areas and agricultural revenue streams. The production of cotton – condemned as much as praised as the "white gold" (cf. ICG 2005; Spoor 2007; Van Atta 2009) – has played a prominent role in shaping local pathways of agrarian transformation in post-Soviet Tajikistan. One way in which this takes place is through sustained farm indebtedness.

In this third chapter, based on longitudinal fieldwork, including interviews with farmers, rural dwellers, state officials (at local, district and national level) and, foreign consultants employed by international donors, I will analyse the role of cotton debt in the process of post-socialist agrarian change in Tajikistan.[3] In so doing, I have a threefold objective. First, I aim to discuss the particularities of post-socialist agrarian transformation in Tajikistan, through the prism of debt. By

describing how the role of debt has changed in this setting, from a collectively held farm liability to an "elastic" individually held debt, I aim to show that post-Soviet agrarian change in Tajikistan has not resulted in far-reaching farm privatisation. Instead, a primarily nominal farm individualisation has taken place. A second and related objective is to contribute to the anthropology of debt. Building on concepts of accounting in socialist economies (Kornai 1980; Bockman *et al.* 2016), I will demonstrate how farm debt emerged due to the continuation of "soft budget constraints" in the cotton economy and how the function of the debt, and its perception, was transformed. Debt became a mechanism that tied people to land and controlled farm labour. In so doing, I aim to provide a more in-depth ethnographic understanding of this debt problem than recent analyses (see for instance, Kassam 2011; Nekbakhtshoev 2016; Van Atta 2009). My final objective is to contribute to understanding land governance in this little-explored context of post-Soviet Central Asia. In this way this chapter engages literature concerning post-socialist agrarian change (cf. Allina-Pisano 2008; Trevisani 2007; Verdery 2003) and the scholarly debates on debt, agrarian debt, and debt peonage (cf. Gerber 2014; Graeber 2011; Guérin 2013).

This chapter is structured as follows. The following, second, section provides the theoretical underpinning of the chapter. It builds on economic anthropology to address issues of land, property, and debt. I describe farm accounting rationales as inherent features of an agrarian political economy. The third section proceeds with an analysis of the emergence of cotton debt in Tajikistan. In the fourth section, I analyse the transformation of cotton debt that has occurred since 2009 and the implications of debt for rural livelihoods. The fifth section concludes the chapter.

3.2. Defining debt and property in different economic regimes

3.2.1. Accounting rationales and shortage economies

The ways in which production factors such as land, labour, and capital are valued and appreciated depend on a particular economic and political regime (Appadurai 1986). Land has a very peculiar characteristic in the sense that it is fixed. "[Land's] imperfect substitutability, its illiquidity and its limited divisibility – mean that it is only a 'quasi-financial asset' in which rent and interest remain analytically distinct" (Fairbairn 2014, 782). Land, and also labour, and capital, differ from commodities or assets, as Polanyi (2001[1944], 76) noted, they are fictitious commodities: "it is with the help of this fiction that the actual markets for labour, land, and money are organised."

In the Soviet Union, land and labour were not commodified. Farmland that belonged to a *kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz* was not included on the farms' balance sheets. Moreover, prices were not used to allocate resources,[4] but were "mere extras in bureaucratic coordination" (Kornai 1992, 148). Exceeding the budget did not always have repercussions for the farms' functioning. Debt was regarded as a purely technical matter, to be solved by internal cross-subsidisation or by heightening crop procurement prices (Kornai 1992; Kitching 2001). This accounting rationale underpins Kornai's (1980) concept of "soft budget constraints." A firm with soft budget constraints decides on production levels based on the available input, not on production costs and consumer demand. In this way, a rational price evaluation is absent, and

> [a]ccordingly […] demand is hardly constrained by solvency considerations. The firm, as *buyer*, tries to acquire as much input as possible in order that shortage should not hinder production. The other side of the same phenomenon is that the firm, as *seller*, faces an almost insatiable demand (Kornai 1980, 29, emphasis in original).

This is why the socialist economy can be seen as an "economy of shortage" (Kornai 1980). Prioritising continued production over profit and attributing importance to overcoming unemployment were clear political decisions (Kornai 1980; Bockman *et al.* 2016).[5] As such, a debt in Soviet agriculture was inherent to the socialist agrarian political economy with implications for the way in which it was perceived.

That being said, although the concept of soft budget constraints has often been used to explain the functioning of (in economic terms) underperforming firms in socialist economies, capitalist economies also feature soft budget constraints, in cases where the state or private creditors consider a firm's survival important and bail it out (cf. Visser and Kalb 2010). As a result, the "hardness" of budget constraints depends on the (local) political economy, rather than on the overall economic regime, and this hardness can vary within an economy across localities and over time (Amelina 2002; Woodruff 1999).

Amelina (2002) consequently qualified such frequently oscillating budget constraints as "elastic," instead of "soft" or "hard." As Amelina described in the context of post-Soviet Russia, farms' accounting rationales and budget constraints became more locally defined with post-socialist transformation, shaped by bargaining and manoeuvring between agents of the state and farm leadership. A debt could be tolerated in one season, but authorities could harden budget constraints in the next, so making the possibility of bankruptcy real. As a result, interests and actions of the local state could conflict with nationwide economic reforms (Woodruff 1999).

3.2.2. The anthropology of debt

3.2.2.1. Debt (as property) in the post-socialist realm

> If we see the transition as a project of cultural engineering in which fundamental social ideas are resignified – including not only "markets," "democracy," and "private property" but also ideas about entitlement, accountability, and responsibility – then the (re)creation of private property is evidently a critical locus for this cultural project (Verdery 1999, 54).

Ethnographies on post-socialist land reform (cf. Allina-Pisano 2008; Trevisani 2007; Verdery 2003) show how the division of assets and liabilities unfolded along with the breakdown of the Soviet bloc and the attempts to create market economies (see also Stark 1996). Collective debt, private gains and value appropriation were part and parcel of this process. Liabilities and debt tended to be individualised, as were farmland and farm assets.

The process of redefining property in the post-socialist setting has not necessarily proceeded along formal registers (cf. Allina-Pisano 2008; Verdery 2003). The specific allocation of property was often obscure. People held a variety of overlapping rights. Those with administrative or

allocative power held the authority to determine who would get what; power constellations were highly important for the final redefinition and redistribution of socialist property.

3.2.2.2. Debt in agriculture

In an agrarian context, debt has often been associated with the commodification of agriculture and contract farming schemes (Gerber 2014; McMichael 2013; Watts 1994). From the perspective of institutional economics, contract farming tends to be regarded as a way to minimise transaction costs and the possibility of market failure (Djanikbekov *et al.* 2013). In international development aid discourse, the inclusion of smallholders into commodity chains and global food markets tends to be seen as a way to relieve rural poverty and improve global food security. Critical analyses point, however, at the often-asymmetric power relations and socioeconomic differentiation inherent in contract farming and outgrower schemes (McMichael 2013; Watts 1994).

Notably, the characteristics of contract farming, like vertically coordinated production chains and standardised production patterns, are not typical of agrarian capitalism, and can be found across time and place. For instance, production relations in colonial plantations, feudal estates and socialist agriculture also featured an industrial labour process with a highly specified division of tasks. These production relations entailed labour bondage to varying extents (cf. Byres 2016; Guérin 2013; Ransom and Sutch 1972; Veldwisch and Spoor 2008).

Particularly in the production of cash crops that cannot be (directly) consumed (e.g. sugar, cotton, and coffee), farmers are inclined to engage in more complex interdependencies, and their control over the value chain is often minimal. What is more, single-crop contracts or loans restrict farmers' options to diversify and increase farms' risks (McMichael 2013). With production risks left to the farmer, a fluctuating production season may result in perpetually increasing debt. These, in turn, may force farmers into treadmills of production, with the risk of dispossession (Gerber 2014). "The contract […] defines the social space of autonomy and subordination that the grower occupies in relation to the labour process. It maps […] the topography of direct and indirect control" (Watts 1994, 27).

In so doing, debt can become an exercise of power in contract farming arrangements, as being instrumental in fulfilling the terms of the contract (cf. Guérin 2013; McMichael 2013). Along these lines, Byres (2016, 444) described the thirlage imposed upon farm tenants to landlord services in feudalist Scotland. Ransom and Sutch (1972) analysed spiralling debt in the cotton sector in post-bellum America. Here, the local merchants' monopoly in supplying credit to farmers allowed the merchants to enforce the growing of cotton over food crops. These analyses highlight that debt, through its often-coercive nature, "transforms or reinforces patterns of capital ownership and therefore the power structure" (Gerber 2014, 743). In more nuanced terms, debt shapes people's behaviour and it structures society, just like barter and gift (cf. Mauss 1954; Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992; Graeber 2011), and debt exists in every society and regime of accumulation. Complexities and entanglements, and the ways in which debt is perceived, however, differ from one context to another.

3.2.3. Landed property, authority, and autonomy

Understanding the emergence of debt in agriculture, as well as its relation to land, brings one back to the juncture of property, authority, and autonomy (Verdery 2003; von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2006). Property rights over land have been at the core of debates in development studies and "transition" literature, in which advocates of neoliberal reform have explained failures in agrarian development through a lack of private property rights over land (cf. de Soto 2000; criticised by von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2006). I follow critiques in thinking that this reflects a naïve understanding. For instance, by only juxtaposing the strands of "private," "public" and "communal," one may overlook salient aspects of the users' authority and autonomy over production (Ribot and Peluso 2003; von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2006). Relations of production, and duties and liabilities that come with property, mediate access to resources.

Farmers may hold private ownership over farmland, but external actors and factors like the state, the market, technologies and knowledge (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 173) may condition property utilisation. As a result, land use rarely depends on the landowner alone. "Behind the mask of private ownership often lurk such complicated arrangements, and management rights often become more important than the residual ownership aspect of property" (von Benda Beckmann *et al.* 2006, 20). Analysing the "bundles of power" over resource access and use – rather than focusing only on the "bundle of rights" – is indispensable for understanding the way in which resource revenues are distributed in society. As I will demonstrate below, and as the introductory sentence of this chapter also pointed to, the crucial issue in Tajikistan has not been whether the title deed has been transferred – that is, the property rights over land – but whether production relations have altered. This is because production relations ultimately determine the distribution of production revenues.

3.3. Cotton debt in Tajikistan

Building on the concepts discussed above, in this section I explore the genealogy of cotton debt in Tajikistan. I will describe its early emergence, and in the section that follows I will analyse how farm debt was transformed after 2009 in a specific locality, and how debt has impacted farm livelihoods since then.

Tajikistan's initial farm debt situation echoes developments in other post-socialist republics in the 1990s, especially the problem of perpetual farm debt. In contrast to Central and Eastern Europe, where debt settlement and farm reorganisation were accomplished early on, several countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were confronted with persisting and accumulating farm debt (cf. Csaki *et al.* 2001).[6] The complex nature of the farms' organisation meant that debt resettlement schemes seen in capitalist economies (following "standard financial ratios" (cf. Csaki *et al.* 2001, 44)) could not be applied to the post-socialist farm enterprises. One aspect they could not cover, for instance, was the farms' important societal role in the countryside. Nevertheless, the problem of farm debt in most of the former Soviet Union was resolved in the 2000s. This was not the case in Tajikistan, where the regime held an interest in upholding debt, as I will describe in more detail below.

3.3.1. A prelude to Tajikistan's post-Soviet farm debt: the futures system

The narrative of Tajikistan's persistent farm debt phenomenon started in 1996, when the Tajik government abolished the crop procurement system and state financing of agriculture, to meet the requirements of "transition" schemes set by international donors. At that time, the government feared that this measure would mean the demise of cotton production, since farms would be left without inputs. As it was under the Soviet regime, cotton revenues have been critical for the post-Soviet economy. Cotton has been the principal agricultural export commodity. In 2014, cotton exports comprised 132.1 million US dollars, equalling 13.5 per cent of the value of total exports (TajStat 2016b). The state budget has also benefited from high taxes levied on various segments of the cotton production complex, which cumulatively have added up to over 30 per cent of total national tax revenues (World Bank 2012b).

In order to compensate for state withdrawal, the government set up a triadic system through which the cotton-producing farm enterprises (the former *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* and newly established *dehqon* farms – as the commercial farms that were to succeed former Soviet farms)[7] could receive advances (working capital in cash and in kind, such as seeds and fertilisers), in which cotton served as collateral. This became known as the futures system, and was in fact a reintroduction of the former Soviet credit supply system, similar to the *tovarnii kredit* in Russia (as described by Kitching 1998a, 7). Through the futures system a few regime insiders – strongmen – seized control over the cotton sector, which meant that the privatisation of the cotton sector resulted in crony capitalism.

The futures system involved state, domestic and international actors. Different state agencies played a regulating role in quality certification and exports. The National Bank of Tajikistan (NBT), which also provided guarantees for credits from international agents, issued export licenses. Licenses were issued to only a small number of domestic "futures companies" and the functioning of investment banks and futures companies was under the control of a few strongmen as cronies of the state. Their responsibilities overlapped (Nakaya 2009). With their extensive reach futures companies almost entirely replaced the former authority of the Soviet regime in the cotton economy; the critical differences were that the companies were privately held, and driven by a desire to accumulate private capital (ICG 2005; Van Atta 2009). Farms' inclusion in these schemes was involuntary and movement of cotton seed outside prescribed localities was prohibited (Van Atta 2009; Porteous 2003). The futures companies' monopsony empowered them to manipulate the farm gate prices of cotton, without adjustment to the (usually higher) world market prices (Kassam 2011). Farm inputs were also regularly overpriced and delivered late. In this way, the futures system facilitated extraction of capital from the countryside. Export earnings remained in a few hands within the regime (Boboyorov 2012; ICG 2005; Van Atta 2009).

The actors in the cotton sector knew the critical role that cotton production had for the state. The companies as well as farms assumed there was no risk of bankruptcy as they anticipated state support in this regard. This situation encouraged irrational input supply and demand by cotton-producing farms. As was the case in Soviet agriculture, input supply was based on expected output. If the expected production was inflated, it was possible to request greater inputs than what was needed (cf. Kassam 2011). Hence, the soft budget constraints that had featured in the

socialist economy continued in post-socialism (as also noted in other post-socialist contexts by Amelina 2002; Csaki *et al.* 2001; Shtaltovna *et al.* 2012; Woodruff 1999). However, the former in-kind budgets that characterised Soviet agriculture, as well as farm debt, had become monetised in this post-Soviet setting (as also observed by Burawoy 2001b in Russia).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the reorganised Soviet farms (by that time renamed as farm associations and *dehqon* farms) had no choice but to work through futures contracts, as very few banks offered agrarian financing. Resorting to barter outside the futures system would not solve the need for specific inputs, since the private market in agricultural supplies was weakly developed. This also meant that these reorganised farms had difficulties in obtaining inputs for crops other than cotton, which in turn led them to increase input demands for cotton and divert these to the production of other crops.

Kassam (2011, 7) therefore maintained that cotton debt was "fictitious," stating that it was merely "a paper loss on the account of the collective farm" – little more than a form of private taxation on the diversion of inputs. Following this line of argument, one could conclude that the perception of post-Soviet farm debt was similar to that of Soviet farm debt and that it had few repercussions for farms. However, I contend that debt was much more than that, consistent with Van Atta (2009) who characterised the debt as fictitious because of the fact that futures companies accumulated capital through which strongmen enriched themselves. Debt had a significant role, firstly in securing cotton production. In recent years, in specific localities, debt has tied people to their land. There was no proper documentation held by farmers on their indebtedness, but paying off debt became increasingly difficult, which meant that a treadmill of production emerged. "Basically the futurist [sic] is saying: 'look, you have no choice. You have to keep producing and if you want to keep producing, take our terms'" (as stated by a foreign consultant in an interview, 17 February 2015).

3.3.2. State efforts towards liberalising the cotton economy

Driven by international donor pressure to spur farm reorganisation and by decreasing cotton production figures, the Tajik government, since the early 2000s, made several attempts to solve the debt issue, mainly through legislative changes. In 2002, the futures companies' local monopsonies were formally eliminated and all farmers were then free to select their outlet for cotton regardless of their location (Van Atta 2009). Nevertheless, farmers' options were limited: apart from persistent pressure by local elites on farms to take their terms, the farms also struggled with cash shortages and transport problems.

An important decree was promulgated in 2003, which entailed that farms' cotton debt was to be redefined into a debt per hectare, with repayments to start in 2005. This decree transformed cotton debt into a land-tied debt, or: indebted fields (*qarzi zamin*). The redefinition gave the farm debt problem in Tajikistan a very peculiar characteristic, since – in most cases of farm debt restructuring in the former Soviet Union – land remained outside the debt settlement procedure (as in the cases described by Csaki *et al.* 2001). The consequence of this decree in Tajikistan was that farm shareholders would be held liable for a part of the collective *dehqon* farm's debt once they withdrew their share to start their own farm. Even though this procedure was not in

accordance with the Tajik Civil Code, which was proven by donor-initiated pilot court cases, the decree was introduced.[8] Notably, court cases were not likely to be initiated in localities where farmers lacked the backing of an international donor.

3.3.3. Donor interference

Several international donors had their own vision about debt resolution, but their projects all had little impact. Strongmen thwarted any meaningful changes, since debt served as a lever of control over farms. Tajik authorities saw technical solutions for the problem, and expected international donors to step in with financial aid. Structural change in production relations did not take place. As a foreign consultant commented in an interview (17 February 2015):

> If you read all the cotton sector project reports, from about 2002 to about 2007, they all say, "well, the problem is that our cotton yield is not high enough. We produce about two tons of cotton per hectare. As soon as we produce three, then we can solve our problems." So they brought in new grades and standards, they intended to bring in new, better seed, but nothing worked, because the farmers couldn't afford it, and… you know, the good farms can get funding anyway, since they [well-run farms] are not running up debts.

Pressured by international donors, the Tajik government adopted Cabinet Resolution 111 on "Freedom to Farm" in March 2007, which would guarantee farmers the freedom in the selection of crops and crop outlets. The futures system would also be abolished at the end of 2007. However, these changes remained only on paper. On the ground, the situation did not change and at the end of 2007, the total nationwide cotton debt had risen to 548 million US dollars,[9] but debt was unevenly spread throughout the country, with higher debt concentrations in the southwestern Khatlon region (Government of Tajikistan 2007), where political domination over the cotton sector was more pronounced.[10] "Seventy-four per cent of the cotton processing was controlled by five firms" (Nakaya 2009, 266) of which the two largest controlled 20 per cent of the national cotton market (see also KasWag AgriConsulting Worldwide 2008; Government of Tajikistan 2007 on futures companies' control over farms). One of the primary actors was the head of the National Bank, who held private interests in the cotton sector. After the revelation of hidden sovereign guarantees for cotton finance, discovered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he had to step down.[11]

The revelation of this scandal coincided with an extremely cold winter in which international donor assistance was critical to the population in the form of food and emergency aid. These crises provided donors the opportunity to more strongly pressure the Tajik state to reform the cotton sector. It resulted in the adoption of an extensive agrarian reform programme (the "Cotton Debt Road Map") with land reform and a debt resettlement scheme at its core. The government would write off all cotton-related debt accumulated by farms by 1 January 2008 (Decree 663 and Resolution 312), and the "Road Map" programme declaration pointed out that

> [i]nvestors who obtained this finance through [Kredit Invest] will be obliged to take this loss in full, while independent investors and commercial banks will have their debt write-off offset by government securities. Non-cotton loans made by investors will be repaid to the [National Bank of Tajikistan] at concessional rates (World Bank 2010, 2).

The "Road Map" also implied an end to the role of the National Bank in issuing export licenses for cotton. This had previously given the state a powerful mechanism to control the market. Scrapping it was meant to create a more market-based environment for cotton ginneries, with more transparent pricing. The World Bank set up projects to raise the rural population's awareness of farmers' rights and the debt resolution programme, and would start a small number of local pilot projects on debt restructuring.

To summarise this section, farm debt emerged as a result of the socialist legacy of soft budget constraints which characterised the agrarian political economy. This debt was related to factors both internal and external to the organisation of the farm. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the debt logic changed locally after 2009, as it became subject to local power plays and social inequality. As alluded to above, debt sheds light on social relations and societal transformation – which is also the aim of this chapter.

3.4. Debt continued: the local political economy of cotton

With the "Road Map" in place, the cotton debt problem gradually seemed to disappear from the international donor agenda, even though the political will to resolve the debt problem was questioned. The government had earlier proposed to leave debt restructuring with futures companies, with which donors disagreed, since this would create transparency issues (KasWag AgriConsulting Worldwide 2008). But in fact this is what eventually happened. The political will to change production relations in cotton farming, through which the debt had emerged and was upheld, was absent. Whereas in particular districts cotton growing *dehqon* farms were freed from debt, with more freedom to farm as a result, this has not been the case everywhere. Hence, the state's and donors' benign neglect of specific areas has enabled elites to persevere in claiming debt. One of these areas is a locality in southwest Tajikistan, where cotton debt "survived." I describe this case below, based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in three periods: April–August 2012; May–September 2013; and, September 2014–February 2015. While temporarily residing in the village, I had numerous, daily conversations with villagers and over 50 farmers as well as local and district authorities, including the land committee and the district *Agroprom* (the agricultural department of the district government). These conversations did not directly address cotton debt, as this topic was heavily politicised. Instead, my longitudinal research, in the form of frequent revisits over the years, with a Tajik field assistant, generated trust. This allowed me to gain insight into the history of the village, its social structure, people's livelihoods and, gradually, the on-the-ground reality of cotton debt.[12]

3.4.1. Land and liabilities in Jaloliddini Balkhi

The district of Kolkhozobod – literally: "developed through the *kolkhoz*" – was a prominent district in Soviet times.[13] Flourishing research stations were located in the southern villages, where Soviet experts were employed to conduct research on subtropical crops and trees. The inhabitants had been resettled there by the Soviet regime from Tajikistan's northern mountainous districts in the 1950s in order to work on the newly established cotton *kolkhoz*es.

After the Soviet breakup and the Tajik Civil War (1992–1997), district and local power shifts gradually took place, including a change in *kolkhoz* leadership. Through this change, the government aimed to safeguard political representation and fulfil its political goals on the ground; one of these goals was securing cotton production (Boboyorov 2012). Importantly, the power reshuffling meant a loss of villagers' representation at several levels of government.

When state procurement of crops was abolished in 1996, as explained above, futures companies in the hands of a small number of well-connected strongmen took control of the cotton value chain. This also happened in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi. With privatisation of the cotton sector, the district became subject to one strongman's power. Particularly important in his political power and ability to influence authorities were his ties to the ruling presidential family, as he had married into this family.[14]

Local authorities – such as the *Agroprom* – then followed his (and therewith the regime's) interests, controlling and prioritising cotton farming over other kinds of production. Production plans set by the central regime were pushed through by district authorities (particularly as the district governor holding office during my period of fieldwork held a ginnery), who, in turn, pressed lower authorities (*jamoats*) and collective *dehqon* farm chairmen to safeguard compliance (on similar observations see Boboyorov 2012). For local and district authorities, fulfilling mandates was important in order to secure succession. Local authorities yearly gathered the farmers to urge them to transport their cotton harvest to specific ginneries. In this way, the regime's interests in the cotton economy were endorsed from the top to the bottom.

The entanglements of the state's and private interests made it very difficult for villagers to distinguish actors and interests, even though the paternal state had vanished. As a result, the already low level of trust in local authorities decreased, as villagers articulated the loss of representation: "What to do, the old *rais* [collective farm chairman] is dead, and there is no one listening to us" (interview with a landless villager, 17 July 2012). People perceived protests to be worthless, since legal aid centres, lawyers and prosecutors, in locals' eyes, were all related to a small circle of strongmen (as a *dehqon* farmer stated, 31 July 2013).

The lack of public investment resulted in dilapidated infrastructure, with consequences such as waterlogging, severe soil salinisation, and desertification. Authorities ignored the villagers' pleas for support, including complaint letters to local authorities and to ministries in the capital Dushanbe. Even though the Ministry of Agriculture had analysed the area and had declared it to be severely affected, land taxes had not been lowered. As a farmer complained in an interview (20 August 2013):

> Every time when the tax payment comes, I show the letters, but… the only thing they demand… is the payment. If they are not impressed by a letter stamped by the ministry, why should they listen to a farmer in the first place?

3.4.2. Qarzi zamin: the debt puzzle. Why did debt persist?

During my first weeks of field research in 2012, I attempted to study the process of farm restructuring in the locality. The issue of farm debt (as indebted fields, "*qarzi zamin*") repeatedly

came up in conversations with farmers. The villagers held contradictory opinions on the existence of cotton debt.

I was puzzled. Why, if there had been a nationwide debt write off in 2008–2009, did debt persist here? Or had debt been newly incurred? Who had debt and how high was it, and who had no debt? What was on paper? The international donors who had previously been involved in the debt resettlement programme had completed evaluation reports, and state officials working both in the capital Dushanbe and in the district centre refuted my observations. The local authorities also claimed that they had no part in the debt issue, as I observed in an interview with the secretary of the local government (1 December 2014):

> *"Dehqon* farmers have five years," the secretary says. "And then?" I ask. "Yagon kas namedonad [no one knows], the fields are salinised. Not on the other side of the road, the situation is better there. The situation may improve. Smaller farms have no debt anymore, only the bigger ones. It is their fault if *dehqon* farmers are still in debt."

From the top to the bottom of the hierarchy, the authorities repeatedly argued that cotton debt belonged to the past.

According to the collective farm chairman, after five years debt would increase again (interview 29 July 2013), as if debt was "frozen," as Boboyorov (2012, 429) observed in a nearby locality where farmers would only have to start paying it off once their farm production began to return a profit. I understood only over time that debt was written off on paper but not in practice. The strongman had not accepted a loss. Many questions called for the need to analyse the individualisation and implications of farm debt on the ground.

3.4.3. The allocative right to divide assets and liabilities

Local farm reorganisation had been erratic since the 2000s. As production conditions worsened, the large collective *dehqon* farm – the successor to the *kolkhoz* – as well as smaller (collective) *dehqon* farms accumulated cotton debt.[15] As several villagers recalled, a top down push for farm reform took place in 2010, when officials from the capital came to issue land certificates "on the spot," particularly with the goal to restructure the large successor to the *kolkhoz*.

The national authorities, under pressure from international donors, had thought it legitimate to intervene, since the process of farm reorganisation had halted over the years and the collective farm shareholders had not expressed an eagerness to take land out. There was no competition for land, in contrast to some other localities in Tajikistan.

The land committee went from house to house to inform and urge the shareholders: "Please take the land, it is empty, start a farm, take your share" (recalled in an interview with a farmer 14 September 2013). "Please take your share, there is a huge garage and you can also take things from there" (recalled in an interview with a former brigade head, 16 July 2013) – seemingly ignoring the fact that many assets were long sold or appropriated. It should be noted that the shares existed only on paper. They were attached to the shareholders' former working unit (brigade), but the plots had not been physically demarcated.

The land committee gave the shareholders three options: First, they could take their share and assemble other shareholders to start a *dehqon* farm; second, they could keep their share and stay with the collective *dehqon* farm; or third, they could reject their share and officially resign. The ceiling of a farm size was set at four hectares, as the authorities thought that people might not have the power to farm more land (interview with the collective *dehqon* farm's former accountant, 16 July 2013).

With the top-down push of farm reorganisation in 2010, female-headed households had not been inclined to start a farm. Countrywide, though, a reasonable number of women *de facto* run *dehqon* farms.[16] Here, the lack of *de jure* female-owned farms was the result of women's subordinated position in this conservative setting and the perceived lack of labour power within the household, in the absence of men. When migrating male household members brought in more money than they thought to earn from farming, households were also less inclined to take on individual farming and the private risks that would come along with it.

If people resigned, their land share was added to the governmental "reserve fund," which meant this land became uncultivated. That part of land was no longer under the responsibility of the collective *dehqon* farm. That being said, while this meant that the total size of the collective *dehqon* farm shrank, and while most farm assets were long gone, the debt of the large collective *dehqon* farm was still part of the farm restructuring process. Like land, the single, collective debt was converted into several individual ones: each individual debt corresponded to the size of the new, individual *dehqon* farm (between 750 and 1500 US dollars per hectare). In this way, farm reorganisation transformed the collective liability into a private liability. A sum of 750 up to 1500 US dollars per hectare is a substantial sum in the context of Tajikistan, where as I will note in Chapter 4, profits from cotton may be below 200 US dollars per hectare (a figure derived from one growing season which is one year). One may understand that such meagre benefits do not allow for debt pay-off, given that farm earnings are primarily used to meet household subsistence needs.

Yet the speeding-up of the decollectivisation process after 2010 could be regarded as a reflection of the authorities' successful attempt to individualise farmland, and the chairman's role in this. It echoes Allina-Pisano's (2008, 172) observations in the Ukrainian/ Russian Black Earth region, where "[s]ome apparent privatisation success stories depended on directors' successful manipulation not only of language but also of farm liability." Through a strategy of "recombining property" (cf. Stark 1996) the chairman was able to appropriate former collectivised farm assets for private use (like the former *kolkhoz* garage and the good fields near the mountain), while transferring the liabilities to others.

The chairman's authority was highly disputed among villagers, as he controlled who would get what. Drawing on Verdery's (2003) concept of allocative rights, we may understand how the chairman gained privileged access to farm assets prior to and shortly after farm restructuring. This is similar to the state of affairs in the Soviet Union – when the state held ownership over the means of production – in which a head of a lower level of authority was meant to allocate, control and regulate use-rights, as a social and government agent (as described by Abashin 2017).

The chairman held a privileged position vis-à-vis the strongman through which he could instrumentalise his role. He had become the intermediary between the strongman's futures company and local farms, as he facilitated contracts between them. His role also involved the responsibility to collect farmers' tax payments on behalf of the company (interview with a farmer, 1 December 2014). For some small farmers, continuing contracts with the strongman's company seemed the easiest way to obtain necessary inputs and machinery and advice, which they lacked. At the same time, this meant that relations of dependency were reproduced. The chairman kept his status as "*rais*" (collective farm chair) in locals' eyes and discourse, which led to the striking fact that some *dehqon* farmers appeared not even to know who the actor claiming the debt was, as it all was mediated by the chairman. They termed the company the "sponsor" or "*f'jucher*."

3.4.4. From an asset to a means: debt to discipline labour

One might wonder why former shareholders started a farm under these conditions. Debt could be seen as a source of patronage. Having a *dehqon* farm meant access to irrigated land in the village, and access to land – with or without the pressure to grow cotton – meant access to some part of land for food crops, and perhaps future prosperity. In other settings, a debt tied to land could also be regarded as an implicit price for land. However, the severe constraints on production and the lack of fertile land in this setting refute such thoughts. Nonetheless, several villagers decided to start their own *dehqon* farm. This was because they wished to have a landed base in their village, as a fall-back option, also since off-farm employment opportunities were limited due to the lack of industries nearby.

None of the farm households, however, could rely on revenues from farming alone. They had highly diversified sources of livelihood. Among these, migrant remittances were critical in providing for family and farm needs.[17] Capital accumulation from farming (i.e. "from below") in this setting, even by *dehqon* farmers without debt, was exceptional. In this regard this locality is not unique in Tajikistan, since individual farming in many other parts of the country cannot provide a meaningful income.

The debt was not corrected for inflation or adjusted with interest, and the payments had not been collected after 2010, but land use by the smaller *dehqon* farms had remained strictly monitored by the local authorities and the collective *dehqon* farm chairman. Farmers were required to report their cultivation details and were investigated thereupon by authorities, and once in a while the "revizor" (the state's inspector) passed by.

> They [the futures company] have all our personal information. There is a *penja* [an interest-based penalty] [for the debt]. People have five years to pay it off, but they [the futures company] did not come for two years in a row now. We're all in debt (interview with a farmer, 1 December 2014).

These controls suggest that the actual value of the debt was unimportant. The officially nullified debt had become an extra-economic means to bond farmers' labour and discipline farm practices; indebted fields tied people to the land, and through the interlocking pressure and control from local authorities, the debt secured cotton production. The futures contract scheme through which

debt had emerged had long been abolished, but the "politics of contract farming" (cf. Clapp 1994) had survived.

The formal requirement was that 20 per cent of the debt should be paid off per year, in cash or in cotton. Pay off in kind was more realistic for cash-strapped farm households, which the strongman was sure to know. At the same time, the in-kind payment allowed the strongman to manipulate the severity and duration of indebtedness, namely through suppressing farm gate prices of cotton.

Yet one may question whether the debt was the single factor to coerce *dehqon* farmers to grow cotton. The Tajik saying that "cotton is the state's wealth" ("*Pakhta boigarii davlat ast*") could be understood as a justification for the state's pressure to grow the crop. With a lowered tax for cotton cultivation (compared to other crops), the government has long continued to encourage cotton production. Beyond these incentives there are other factors that may ultimately lead farmers to grow cotton, and for rural households to be involved in cotton production. First, transport facilities and marketing options for large quantities of perishable crops have been limited. Second, the legacy of Soviet agriculture plays a role, where farmers sometimes lack the knowledge needed to produce other crops. Cotton cultivation and concomitant labour mobilisation have been shaping the structures of daily village life for several decades. Third, farmers' access to credit and inputs has, for a long time, been limited to advances for cotton cultivation (with which credit was highly politicised); and, finally, cotton stalks, as a source of fuel for household needs, continue to be essential in the countryside in the absence of gas and reliable electricity supplies. There are few alternatives to these by-products.

However, diversification of cropping patterns has clearly taken place in areas where debt peonage has disappeared: on fields of the few debtless *dehqon* farmers in this locality, and also in neighbouring settlements.[18] Profits from crops other than cotton are significantly higher but restrictions in market outlets and governmental pressure, like here, severely limit farmers in exploiting the potential of farming. Especially such local variations typify the highly localised nature of the agrarian political economy in Tajikistan and its implications for farming patterns and rural livelihoods.

3.4.5. The elasticity of debt

As noted, villagers and *dehqon* farmers held contradictory perceptions of the implications of being in debt. The ones who started in 2010 had never received an official document stating the size of their individual debt, but had been required to sign documents with which they had accepted the debt.

The farmers who were aware of the earlier debt write off were hoping for a second (country-wide) bailout, or for the debt to wither away one day. In this way, even if the debt was real, farmers anticipated support, as had been the case in earlier years. The individualisation of farm assets and debt had been fraught with ambiguity, having been shaped by local power plays between elites, authorities, and farmers. In contrast to what (neo-)classical economists (de Soto 2000; Csaki *et al.* 2001) might have expected from a transformation away from socialism, it was non-economic rather than financial capital that has become decisive in building a farm livelihood. According to

the former *kolkhoz* accountant (interview 16 July 2013), some powerful, well-connected people had been able to bargain debt down to zero when they started their individual farms; the debt attached to the fields they acquired would stay with the former collective *dehqon* farm (whose indebtedness, as a consequence, increased). As a result, it was only a few farmers who fared well: the ones who had separated from the large collective in the 1990s thanks to their political and social capital, like one prospering family with three (out of five) sons individually farming. For outsider, well-connected actors who were willing to farm, debt could be waived – such as for the district governor, but also for the collective *dehqon* farm chairman. As local strongmen, these two farmed former collective *dehqon* farms' fields in the area with relatively good conditions. "If you cultivate gold there, you will harvest gold. If you cultivate gold here, you will harvest sand" (interview with the collective farm chairman, 29 July 2013).

To this end, and building on Verdery's (1996) notion of land elasticity and Amelina's (2002) elastic soft budget constraints, I term this debt "elastic." Where collective farmland shrank and stretched in the decollectivisation process in Verdery's Romanian context, debt was pliable and perceived in different ways, and some indebted farmers appeared more troubled than others, regardless of the amount of debt.

By bargaining over payments, debt, and yield levels, some farmers could accrue benefits to lessen hardship and could offset the labour spent on cotton (somewhat). Debt then appeared less hard or harmful (i.e. more advantageous) for the farmers with political connections and social capital, since they could (slightly) ignore pressure by authorities, like the farming sons mentioned before. The farmers with less political capital had limited options, as the elastic nature of the debt made appealing to courts complicated, even beyond the high political stakes, social inequality and skewed knowledge on legal issues that made taking legal steps unrealistic in the first place. As noted by one indebted farmer, who had a complicated relationship with authorities: "You have the rule of law, and the rule of practice" (interview 31 July 2013).

During my regular visits to this farmer and his wife and children, I observed a few clear implications of farmers' indebtedness. In 2012, the family farm (officially a collective *dehqon* farm) comprised an area of 30 indebted hectares, and the family tried to "return" 15 hectares to the district authorities. In 2004, as a successor of a brigade of the former *kolkhoz*, they had started with 140 hectares. After four years they returned 110 hectares. In those years the farm had 70 members, but the fields were too far for the members (living in the village centre) to commute, and in 2012, with 30 hectares, the family had problems finding workers, and undertook most of the work with only family members. The couple often explained how they actively searched for (on-farm) income-generating activities. In 2014, they told me that they had tried to sell their cotton harvest secretly at a ginnery at further distance, in order to avoid claims on their income, as any known surplus of income would be siphoned off by the strongman. In earlier years they had also tried to sell cotton at ginneries outside of the direct locality, but authorities had hindered this attempt. All in all, the family had many concerns. The most apparent constraint in their livelihood was, I noticed, their indebted farmland, and their troubled relationship with authorities, in which the legacy of the Tajik Civil War played an apparent role. They were anxious that a person in the locality (a "Kulobi") had received land without a debt. Notably the *raisi jamoat* was a Kulobi too.

The couple and their oldest son often expressed their worries about "spontaneous" visits by authorities. Local authorities, in turn, made cynical comments about this farm household and harassed the family by demanding informal payments once in a while (as I observed during a visit to local authorities 3 August 2013).

The story of this family demonstrates a number of aspects. For one, it shows the importance of social and political capital, and the "elasticity" of debt, as in this case, the family's lack of social and political capital created various difficulties in daily life. Second, it indicates the legacy of the Tajik Civil War that still plays a role in this locality. Last but not least, it shows how farming in this locality develops; instead of farm development we see here farm decline and divestment. People seek to exit farming, leading to an increasing number of abandoned farmlands.

I observed that the variegated experiences of indebtedness, and debt's "elasticity," resulted in uneven control over land, and the insecurity of land tenure rendered the farmers highly dependent. In all cases debt tied local farmers to land, which meant it prevented a rural exodus or a diversification of cropping patterns through which the local base could become a meaningful source of livelihood. The debt seemed nearly unresolvable, which in fact challenges the label of "debt" (in the way defined by Graeber 2011).

3.4.6. Debt and everyday resistance

Debt was a burden in that it implied that declared profits would be siphoned off. Paying off might seem appealing, as it would "untie" the farmer from the land, with more autonomy as a result. Nevertheless, farmers perceived this as almost impossible and preferred to hide small profits and underreport harvests; debt encouraged them to practise creative accounting. Some farmers sought to secretly sell cotton at a (greater) distance with the aim to hide earnings, but the majority of farmers sold their cotton at one outlet.[19] So, while farming did display capitalist features – such as profit-oriented calculus and a reliance on wage labour – these features were not related to the cotton economy. This refutes Gerber's (2014, 736) statement that "indebtedness shapes capitalist rationality." In fact, such a corollary was prevented here by the elasticity of debt.

Alternative forms of land tenure also appeared: By leasing land from other village farmers, farmers could avoid production obligations and claims over revenues, while liabilities remained with the formal landowner – like a chairman of a small collective *dehqon* farm who registered an individual *dehqon* farm in his private name, in order to obtain a bank loan.[20] Others tried to convince authorities that cotton seeds had failed to germinate in order to obtain permission for alternative crop cultivation.[21] Farmers thus looked for strategies to benefit from farming, and through specific ways one was able to diversify cropping patterns more than another.

The farmers' covert strategies had minimal impact on the relations of power and hegemony, as they did not directly challenge structural conditions. Farmers' strategies, like their arguments over failed germination of cotton seeds, and their secretive sales of harvested cotton, were rather "everyday forms of peasant resistance" (cf. Scott 1985; 1986; Kerkvliet 2009) than actions that would bring meaningful change.[22]

3.4.7. The wider consequences: debt, farm reorganisation, and land abandonment

Regardless of the pervasive nature of debt, having indebted farmland was not a source of shame, as the entire farm community was in debt. As one farmer put it, "it is not my debt, but my fields that are indebted" (interview, 6 December 2014).

Even so, debt had severe implications for farm investment and farm development. For instance, some farmers had considered expanding their farm holdings, but withdrew their applications once they realised the significant debt that would come along with the land use certificates. This clearly exemplifies the consequences of debt for farm reorganisation (as also observed by Ruben and Lerman 2005 in Nicaragua).[23]

In particular, the remaining collective *dehqon* farms struggled with lands that were increasingly uncultivated. Collective *dehqon* farm shareholders were unmotivated to undertake barely remunerated work. The district authorities actively sought to find new uses for the fields. They allocated fields for rice cultivation to governmental institutions, and in 2011 they granted fields to a Chinese investor, legitimising the deal with the argument that the abandoned fields exemplified people's lack of willingness and ability to farm. "When applying for land at the *hukumat* [district authorities] they told us '*davai*, *davai* [come on, come on], take the debt; if you do not take them, then don't farm the fields'" (interview with a farmer, 20 August 2013). "The *jamoat* [local authorities] said, 'if no one takes the lands, we will give them to the Afghans or the Chinese'" (interview with a former *kolkhoz* member, 20 July 2012). The villagers were particularly anxious about the Chinese land investment since the Chinese investor had been given land without debt, which once again shows the elastic nature of the debt. Yet it has not been because of lack of entrepreneurship or farming skills that land had been abandoned, as the just quoted villager added: "If all the lands were without debt, we could also take it!" Rather, post-Soviet hierarchies played an important role in land use and land abandonment. Power configurations defined who would have effective control over land and production revenues, with clear implications for land use.

3.5. Conclusion

With Tajikistan's independence and the ensuing civil war, *kolkhoz* land and assets became conflicted property. By investigating the transformation and appropriation of debt in this setting, I aimed to contribute to post-socialist studies, as well as to studies on agrarian debt in general (cf. Gerber 2014; McMichael 2013).

First, this chapter sheds light on the way in which the specifics of farm accounting depend on the political economy, rather than on the economic regime (Amelina 2002; Visser and Kalb 2010). I showed that Tajik cotton debt originated from the Soviet legacy in the cotton sector, which partially retained its soft budget constraints – as was the case in other post-socialist settings (cf. Amelina 2002; Shtaltovna *et al.* 2012; Burawoy 2001b). In Tajikistan, this enabled loss-making cotton farms to survive, while it also secured cotton revenues. Both farmers and futures companies were aware of the impossibility of going bankrupt.

As this chapter demonstrated, debt has been redefined and transformed from its Soviet understanding. This case exemplifies that even though debt may feature in different societies across time and space, implications and perceptions differ. Particularly after the implementation of the donor-driven debt resettlement scheme, debt became a more concealed "mechanism of capital, land and labour control" (Gerber 2014, 732). The strongman used liabilities to generate private wealth, in order to seize the generated surplus (in fact a mode of primitive accumulation). There was never a political willingness to write off debt.

Second, the pliability of debt bears a resemblance to the varying nature of budget constraints as described by Amelina (2002), and Verdery's (1999) "fuzzy rights" and responsibilities over land. If we see debt as negative property, "[f]uzziness, then, will lie precisely in the *lack* of routinised rules and crystallised practices around private property in the context of postsocialism, as well as in the constraints on exercising bundles of power" (Verdery 1999, 55, emphasis in original). The debt appeared "fictitious" (cf. Kassam 2011; Van Atta 2009), but I contend that it can best be qualified as "elastic." This elasticity typifies the local agrarian political economy in which local power configurations determine the hardness of the debt. Whereas a debt imposed on one farmer was "hard" and restrictive, for another a debt seemed less constraining. The fact that the Chinese investor acquired fields without debt in 2011, as if debt had suddenly disappeared, points once more at this elasticity.

Whereas analogies of debt exist between the case of Tajikistan and other post-socialist localities (cf. Allina-Pisano 2008; Shtaltovna *et al.* 2012), the political economy of debt described in this chapter is unique, embedded in post-Soviet and local post-conflict power configurations. At the same time, beyond its Soviet and civil war legacies, cotton debt in Tajikistan shares characteristics with agrarian debt in other regions. The implications of farm debt on reorganisation have also been observed in other settings (cf. Allina-Pisano 2008 in the Black Earth region; Ruben and Lerman 2005 in Nicaragua), while the emergence of farm debt in Tajikistan, as a consequence of asymmetric power relations in contract farming, reflects more general characteristics of debt in contract farming as observed in other contexts by Byres (2016), Guérin (2013), and McMichael (2013).

Finally, by examining the local trajectory of post-socialist agrarian change through the prism of debt, this chapter sheds light on the consequences of the political economy of cotton for the fate of the former Soviet farm worker. Examining the context only from a narrow property rights point of view could be misleading. These Tajik farmers may hold only one component of the typical bundle of rights, and even that might have a peculiar form. Specifically, the right to (individually) cultivate land brings with it the obligation to do so with cotton. By unpacking the bundle of rights, one can grasp the variation within it (cf. von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2006), and thus account for local variations even though legal labels are the same. As von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* (2006, 11) stated, "much theory [on property rights] reifies the individual as an actor, granting owners far more agency than they have in real life." The *de jure* "individual" Tajik farmer may *de facto* be less autonomous than envisioned by international donors.

It is therefore debatable whether post-socialism has meant a social and political change, or if it rather is a continuation of institutionalised power configurations, in which regime interests filter down to the local level through a chain of command and control. The "Road Map" implemented after 2008 has not created a road to prosperity. Despite donor pressure to resettle and solve the debt, the Tajik state was unable to remove the debt's structural causes. Freedom to farm has been frustrated. If there has been a road to prosperity, it has been a narrow one for the happy few. What used to be a state revenue stream from the export of cotton has been captured by a small clique of rentiers. In this way, the localities outside the attention of the international donors have come under a debt-based mode of governance. This political economy of debt entails that a rural exodus is prevented, where people otherwise might leave. Debt restricts villagers from exploiting the potential of farming. Forgotten by the state, unobserved by international donors, and left to the vagaries of strongmen, rural dwellers express a strong wish to leave. The power asymmetries over land and farm revenues in these areas of benign neglect inhibit agrarian development, render people governable, and depress rural livelihoods.

Notes

[1] This chapter is based on an article published in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45(7): 1360-81.

[2] In this chapter, I use the term "strongmen" rather than "cotton elites" (cf. Boboyorov 2012, 413) to refer to elites tied to the ruling regime by kinship, regional identity or marriage. In my view the term "strongmen" better denotes the significant unequal power relationship between strongmen and farmers. It is also used to indicate that the economic base of such strongmen goes beyond the cotton sector as having high stakes in other sectors of the economy.

[3] Legislative information has been cross-checked with the legal database managed by the Tajik government Adlia (www.adlia.tj).

[4] This was different outside the state-regulated economy, where people could accumulate capital through their labour.

[5] For a discussion and interpretation of Polanyi's view on socialist accounting, in which maximum productivity and social justice prevail, see Bockman *et al.* (2016).

[6] The high inflation of the early 1990s meant that debt inherited from the Soviet period quickly decreased (Csaki *et al.* 2001). For this reason, "farm debt" in the remainder of this chapter refers to debt incurred in the post-Soviet period.

[7] Where I may incidentally use only the term "farmer," this refers to the *dehqon* farmer; and this may refer to both women and men. The main way to start a farm is to apply for a land-use certificate with the district authorities. Land-use rights are generally granted for inheritable use, while the state has retained ownership over land.

[8] A collective (*dehqon*) farm (a legal person) cannot transfer a debt to an individual or family *dehqon* farm (which at that time was an entity without the status of legal person and not the legal successor to the collective farm).

[9] Farm debt for government-supplied utilities has always been less severe, and has been written off by the government more frequently.

[10] The quote at the beginning of the chapter, from an employee of an international donor organisation working in the northern region of the country, sheds light on the fact that landed property is more dominated by strongmen in the southwestern region.

[11] The same person was later appointed the deputy prime minister in charge of the national process of agrarian reform (see also Van Atta 2009), and in 2015 appointed director of Agroinvestbank, even as he maintained his high stakes in the agrarian economy. In his different positions, he has been able to pursue his private interests in the agrarian economy (further described in Chapter 4).

[12] Observations and interviews were noted in a field diary, later analysed using computer software (Atlas.ti).

[13] The district's name was changed to Jaloliddini Rumi in June 2007, and changed again in February 2016, to Jaloliddini Balkhi.

[14] Besides the cotton economy, this strongman has vested interests in the financial and industrial sectors.

[15] The main collective *dehqon* farm, as successor to the *kolkhoz*, gradually decreased in size over the years (TajStat 2013b, 40). Between 2009 and 2010 it decreased by more than 40 per cent, reflecting the top-down push described, after which smaller farm units were established. Notably, only farmers with smaller farms, who had started in the 1990s when farm debt was lower or non-existent, had been able to pay off debt over time.

[16] I thank the reviewers for raising the issue of gender. Farming in Tajikistan has feminised in the past decades as a result of high male labour migration, and beyond that farm work in Tajikistan is highly gendered, where women primarily undertake all the manual farm work and men carry out the mechanised practices. In the absence of men, women have to undertake both farm work and reproductive work.

[17] Labour migration is an essential source of livelihood throughout the country. In 2013, remittances equalled over 50 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank 2016), with which Tajikistan ranked highest worldwide.

[18] A comparison based on (district) statistics is not possible, given the fact that there are clear intra-district differences. My argument is based here on personal observations of crop diversification; Nekbakhtshoev (2016) also noted a relatively more diversified cropping pattern in a neighbouring district.

[19] Whereas the number of cotton ginneries has increased in recent years, it is questioned whether the ginneries really compete. A large number of ginneries in the districts in southwestern Tajikistan are controlled by the strongman, and sales of cotton seed is also restricted (see also Boboyorov 2012, 424).

[20] Whereas farmers have faced difficulties to obtain short-term credits, banks have refused to finance indebted farmers. In earlier years, "a farm that wish[ed] to work with a new investor or credit supplier need[ed] to provide a certificate (issued by the NBT) that show[ed] that they ha[d] no debts to any parties" (World Bank 2012b, 7).

[21] If farmers could convince authorities that resowing has failed, they could cultivate other (food) crops which could be consumed or sold freely, for instance rice; cultivation of this crop is also regarded as beneficial to decrease soil salinity. In this regard, there is a competition between crops, resembling the situation Veldwisch and Spoor (2008) observed in Uzbekistan.

[22] As Scott (1986, 30) explained, peasants' everyday resistance may result in structural change, but not at all times. Peasants "may marginally alleviate exploitation […] they may change the course of subsequent development, and they may more rarely

help bring the system down. These, however, are possible consequences. Their intention, by contrast, is nearly always survival and persistence."

[23] Nekbakhtshoev (2016) observed elsewhere that collective *dehqon* farm chairmen instrumentalised debt to discourage farm fragmentation, by demanding repayment from shareholders once they wanted to separate. This was explicitly not at stake here.

4. Granted to privatise, but failed to capitalise: agri-food politics and emerging farm typologies in post-Soviet Tajikistan[1]

Abstract

Despite the fact that the post-Soviet Tajik state embarked on agrarian reforms in the early 1990s, agrarian change has only unfolded gradually in the country since then. This chapter analyses post-socialist agrarian change in one locality in southwest Tajikistan. By building on and contributing to studies on the political economy of rural transformation and rural livelihoods, I identify a five-partite agrarian structure that has emerged as a result of reforms enforced top-down and farmers' agency. I highlight three important observations. Firstly, I demonstrate that the competition between different farm types largely plays out in and over output markets, rather than over land. Secondly, I shed light on patterns of capital accumulation in agriculture that have emerged over time, representing nascent capitalism: "from above," by cronies of the state, merchants, and foreign enterprises; and "from below," as a small cohort of specialising smallholders has emerged. Thirdly, I describe a strong interrelatedness, or "symbiosis," between different farm types.

4.1. Introduction

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, "doing development" by "rule of experts" (cf. Mitchell 2002), like that in Africa and Latin America, also entered the post-Soviet realm. This was also the case in post-Soviet Tajikistan, where, especially since the aftermath of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997), significant capital injections by international actors sought to reform the rural economy and nurture market-led economic growth. Over the years privatisation of economic subjects became a "yardstick of progress" (cf. Wedel 1998, 50). In the countryside the main focus was on the physical breakup of the former state and collective farms. Meanwhile, the wider production environment proved much more difficult to change, not least because of the state's involvement in the economy, a Soviet legacy, and the ways in which material artefacts embodied the Soviet modernisation paradigm of large-scale industrial farming.

In an effort to instil capitalist farming, the World Bank encouraged the speeding up of farm reform in Tajikistan in the late 1990s by insisting on the full parcelisation of former *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* (state and collective farms). This chapter analyses the subsequent unfolding of agrarian change and illustrates that instead of donors' aspirations to nurture a Western type of private, individual farming, a more diverse classification of farms has emerged from the interplay of structural conditions and farmers' agency. In the locality under study many of those farmers who were granted to privatise, eventually failed to capitalise. This chapter then argues against any teleological thinking of post-socialist "transition."

This chapter interrogates: How has agrarian transformation unfolded after the World Bank's pilot project on farm restructuring in a lowland locality in Tajikistan?[2] How does rural capital accumulation take place? What types of farm enterprises have emerged in the process of transformation, and, how do they relate to each other? Accordingly, this chapter has a threefold

objective. First, the chapter aims to discuss agrarian change and rural livelihood dynamics through a political economy lens, and the ways in which actors' access to the means of production has been reshaped. Second, the chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of post-socialist farm differentiation in general and in the context of underexplored Central Asia, by presenting a five-partite farm typology that has emerged in the locality under study. My third aim is to analyse and describe the strong interrelatedness between farm types. I thus use the typology primarily in a tentative way, and point to the fact that boundaries between the farm types are not as rigid as they may seem. The interrelatedness is an important characteristic of farm types in post-Soviet Tajikistan, and in fact in the post-Soviet realm at large (see, for instance, Veldwisch and Bock 2011; Visser 2009). Moreover, I argue that it is the integration between the farm types that keeps the cotton economy running.

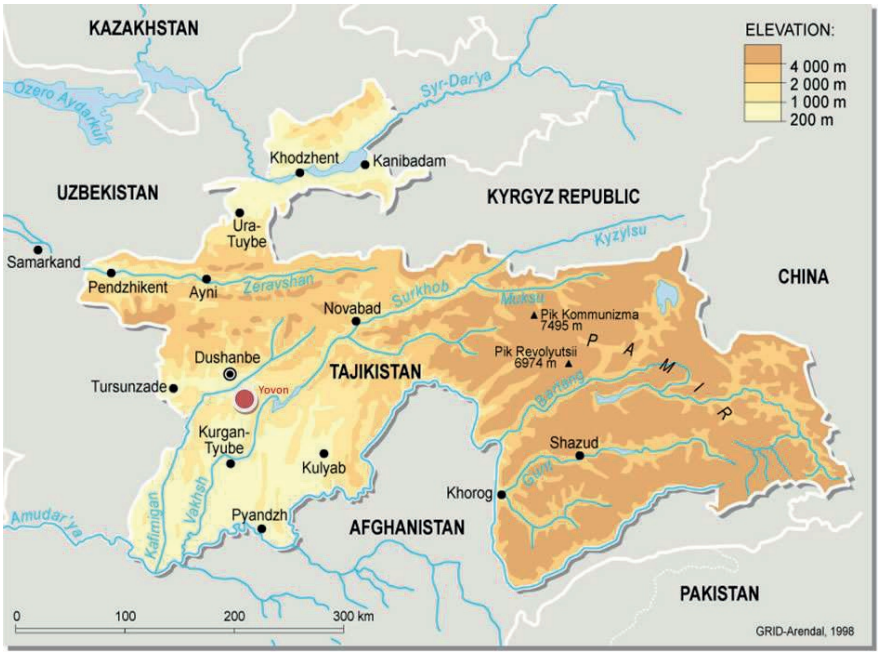
I go beyond the classifications in official state statistics[3] and identify an emerging typology of farms comprised of five different farm types: (i) the capitalist, post-Soviet large farm enterprise (LFE); (ii) the farmer "by default;" (iii) the incoming tenant; (iv) the specialising and diversifying smallholder; and (v) the rural household. A close examination of this diversity of farms points to the fact that the legal classifications of farms, as well as farm size, are misleading as indicators of farm viability, relative wealth and social status. Instead of farm size and actors' access to farmland, farms' market engagement, reliance on (external) capital, farmers' autonomy, and cropping patterns are more important indicators in understanding farm viability. Hence access to land alone does not necessarily imply rural well-being. The farm enterprise differentiation analysed here is a result of two synergetic processes, namely the entrance of outside capital (capitalism "from above") happening alongside a differentiation within the category of former Soviet farm workers (capitalism "from below").

This chapter is structured as follows: in the following, second, section, I briefly discuss the methodology of research and describe the locality in which the research has been conducted. The third section provides the theoretical underpinning of this chapter. I discuss: pathways of agrarian capitalism; the (sustainable) livelihoods approach; and, farm symbiosis. In the fourth section that follows, I describe the politics and process of Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian transformation. The fifth section provides insights into the unfolding farm typology, which is an illustration of the dynamics of agrarian change in a lowland locality in southwest Tajikistan. Before concluding, the sixth section elaborates on rural resistance in Tajikistan. The seventh section is the conclusion.

4.2. Methodology

The findings presented in this chapter derive from longitudinal, qualitative research undertaken in three periods: April-August 2012; May-September 2013; and October 2014-February 2015, in the Yovon district (a lowland locality) in southwest Tajikistan (see Figure 4.1), in which the World Bank executed its Farm Privatisation Support Project in the late 1990s.

Figure 4.1. Map of Tajikistan



Source: Compiled by the author based on:
http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map_ea9b

The Yovon district stands out regarding the relatively high amount of arable land (over 32,000 hectares) (TajStat 2014). The field conditions are relatively good, as I did not observe problems with soil salinisation in the locality. While a few farmers I interviewed encountered water shortages, most farmers did not have problems accessing water.[4] The Yovon valley receives water through a 7.3 kilometre long tunnel (visited during fieldwork in 2012), which was constructed in the 1960s under Bolshevik rule and a canal flows along the settlements (see Figure 4.2). The completion of the tunnel in 1968 allowed for an expansion of agricultural production in the Yovon district, in particular of cotton production.

An important aspect, that plays a role in the unfolding of agrarian change in this locality is the fact that the Yovon district is located relatively close (around 45 kilometres) to the capital city of Tajikistan, Dushanbe. This undoubtedly explains the presence of some of the farm types in this area, in particular the well-connected large farm enterprises, the Chinese investor and the incoming tenants (all described below). All these actors benefit from the relatively well-maintained infrastructure and relatively good access to industrial/urban centres.

Yet despite seemingly attractive farm conditions and the presence of off-farm employment opportunities, migration to Russia as a source of livelihood seems to be no less important here than elsewhere in Tajikistan. Almost 70 per cent of the rural households in the entire district have at least one household member who migrates (World Bank 2009).[5] Farm earnings remain extremely low: Overall "average monthly income per person in the agricultural sector is three

times lower than [the] average income in the country and in many cases lower than [the] officially set minimal salary" (FAO 2014, 8).

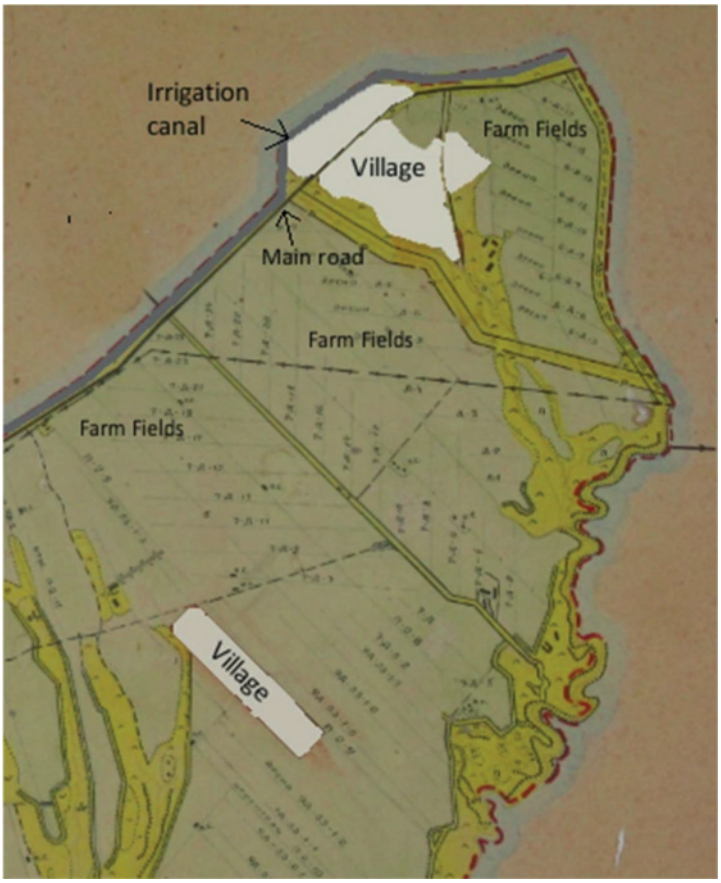
During field research, numerous semi-structured interviews and informal conversations were held with over 20 rural households, as well as with 50 farmers who represent the detected farm types in this locality: four farmers were diversifying smallholders; four were incoming tenants; five were representatives of large farm enterprises; and, the remaining farmers (37 in total) were so-called farmers "by default." Given that there were 206 *dehqon* farmers in this administrative unit (the *jamoat*) in 2013, my sample represents around 25 per cent of all *dehqon* farmers in the vicinity. The average size of the farm in this locality was 17 hectares (data obtained during fieldwork in 2013).[6] During fieldwork, snowball sampling was used; in the end, I visited nearly all farm fields along the main road and surrounding the largest village in the locality (see Figure 4.2); this included the area on which the World Bank's privatisation project was focused.[7]

I am aware of the fact that my sample size is small, but my goal is not to map out a typology representative for the whole of Tajikistan. Given the highly differentiated geographic zones found throughout Tajikistan, such an exercise would be highly ambitious. I use the typology as a device to illustrate two essential characteristics of Tajikistan's rural economy: First, I shed light on the differences between farm holdings, in particular regarding capital accumulation and access to the means of production; and second, I emphasise and characterise the integration between the different enterprises. Notably, the typology covers a range of farm types that can be found in lowland Tajikistan, but not all farm types that I have detected (in particular large farm enterprises (LFEs), incoming tenants, and foreign enterprises) can be found elsewhere across Tajikistan's lowlands.

In addition to the interviews with rural dwellers, several semi-structured interviews were held with governmental officials at the local and district level. Use of national and district statistics and reports (DfID, USAID and World Bank 2012; FAO 2014; Government of Tajikistan 2007; TajStat 2013a; 2014; 2015b; USAID and World Bank 2008; World Bank 2004b; 2006; 2009; 2012b; 2016) further informed the analysis.

The two villages around which fieldwork was conducted, belong to the same *jamoat* (smallest administrative unit in Tajikistan) and are surrounded by farm fields (see Figure 4.2).[8] Both villages are nuclear entities, with household plots (household gardens) directly adjacent to the houses. A well maintained road connects the villages to each other. The large farm fields are located along this main road.

Figure 4.2. Case study location



Source: Compiled by the author, based on a map obtained during fieldwork in 2013

4.3. Theoretical framework: post-socialist agrarian change, a livelihoods perspective, and farm symbiosis

4.3.1. Post-socialist agrarian change

With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the agrarian question, and studies of the class dynamics of agrarian change regained attention, as did the study of post-Soviet agrarian transformation. The debate centered on questions regarding how the post-Soviet countryside would transform with the entry of private capital and the implications for rural differentiation, as well as the fate of the former Soviet farm worker (see for instance Kitching 1998b; Small 2007; Wegren 2005).

Hence the agrarian question revived in the post-socialist setting. Much scholarly work on agrarian change and rural social differentiation focuses on the way in which capital penetrates the countryside, in which a trend of capitalism "from above" is juxtaposed with the process of capitalism "from below" (Lenin 1977[1908]; Byres 1996; Yan and Chen 2015). Reference is

frequently made to two distinct models that featured in the 19th-century discussion of the agrarian question. In the Prussian pathway, a landlord class transformed into capitalist farmers and preempted a trajectory of capitalism "from below." This Prussian model is mirrored against that of (North) America, which witnessed a trajectory of capitalism "from below," as family farms became the dominant type of capitalist farmers. Yet as Byres (1996) pointed out, agrarian change pathways may be highly diverse. This was earlier recognised by Lenin (1977[1908], 33), who noted that "[o]f course, infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible". America is one example in which capitalist farming emerged in the North from simple commodity producers, while in the South the former slave-based (cotton) plantations gradually transformed into capitalist farms based on sharecropping arrangements (Byres 1996). More recently, Yan and Chen (2015) analysed the variety of trajectories of capitalist transformation in China. Their analysis showed that capitalism "from above" may conjoin capitalism "from below."

Yet, while reference is often made to those historical pathways, one cannot simply apply the late 19th-century agrarian question to the 21st-century. As Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009b, 317) noted: "[U]nderstanding the traits of rural accumulation in an era of neoliberal globalisation is extremely important when evaluating the salience or otherwise of the agrarian question in the contemporary period." As a result we need to attend to diverse pathways of agrarian change, and attend to the wider (institutional, political economy) context in which transformation occurs to understand specific responses to agrarian transformation.

4.3.2. Analysing rural livelihoods: the nexus of assets, access, and networks

Agrarian transformation involves a process of the emergence of new and the reshaping of existing forms of production. By asking Bernstein's (2010, 22) questions on agrarian political economy, i.e. "who owns what"; "who does what"; "who gets what"; and, "what do they do with it?" one can shed light on the way and extent to which agrarian transformation produces or reproduces relations of production, highlighting the continuation or change of particular regimes of accumulation and farm labour regulation.

A political economy analysis of agrarian transformation concerns not only an examination of changes in relations of production. It equally requires the analysis of changes in institutions and the forces of production, which include ownership of infrastructure, tools, and technical knowledge. Farm enterprises' access to such assets and capitals, such as human, financial and political capital, is at the core of the sustainable livelihoods approach (Scoones 2009), that has also been applied to studies on agrarian change. A livelihoods perspective is particularly helpful to understand livelihoods in their political and institutional context, and the "micro-level contextual realities on the ground" (Scoones 2009, 173). As I will pinpoint, in Tajikistan, networks and relations are essential in transforming landed resources into profitable "commodity bundles" (cf. Sen 1981, see also Bebbington 1999), such as, marketable crops that eventually provide income streams.

Livelihood trajectories can be classified in different ways (see for instance Dorward *et al.* 2009; Howell 1996). Dorward *et al.* (2009) provided an illuminating categorisation linked to rural

households' land use: they differentiated between households who "hang in," "step up" and "step out" the agrarian economy. These pathways result from the combination of households' production and consumption patterns. In later sections I will refer to this classification, as it is helpful to analyse farm differentiation in Tajikistan, where farm households' combination of different assets and capitals result in particular livelihood trajectories.

The importance of "capitals" in the livelihoods framework also helps to understand how social origins of rural actors play an important role in determining post-socialist processes of property redistribution and possibilities for upward economic mobility (cf. Allina-Pisano 2004; Sutherland 2010). People's social status or background matters as it relates to ingrained entrepreneurial skills, mindsets, access to markets, and specific kinds of knowledge. I will highlight later on that socio-economic background mattered in Tajikistan; not only for accessing land, but even more for making effective use of that land, i.e. the ability to exploit the potential of farming.

Earlier the livelihoods approach has been criticised because of its lack of attention to knowledge, politics, scale, and dynamics (cf. Scoones 2009). We need a more holistic perspective to link, for instance, issues of migration and remittances to local level dynamics as well as attend to power and relationships. In doing so, we may examine people's capabilities, and be cognisant of the differences between people's endowments and entitlements (cf. Bebbington 1999; Sen 1981). At the same time, a livelihoods perspective needs to attend to the way in which a particular context confines livelihood opportunities, for instance in terms of actors' geographical setting, such as the agro-ecological zone in which actors are situated, and the proximity to urban centres and markets.

4.3.3. Farm symbiosis

"Social relations inevitably govern the distribution of property (including land), patterns of work and division of labour, the distribution of income and the dynamics of consumption and accumulation" (Scoones 2009, 186). In Soviet agriculture there was a "murky" (cf. Verdery 2003, 266) partition between state, collective and private property and the different farm units and actors were tightly integrated (Verdery 2003; Visser 2009). The interdependencies entailed that one unit could not thrive without the other. The collective or state farm provided rural dwellers with a range of services, such as healthcare, education, and cultural entertainment while household members contributed their labour to the farm, and they received money and (most often) payments in kind in return. The payments in kind, such as seeds and fertilisers, were used for household plot production, which was essential in Soviet years to top up the income from the work on the large-scale farm.

The Soviet era symbiosis did not directly disappear with the dismantling of Soviet large-scale farms. In Tajikistan, for instance, workers on restructured large farms may receive a strip of land for private use, and those who work on cotton farms may harvest the cotton stalks as part of their remuneration. Hence the contemporary integrated production systems echo Soviet-era symbiosis. At the same time local governments (*jamoats*) have taken over particular functions of the former state and collective farms. Local authorities monitor field use and report their observations to district authorities regularly (as explained to me by a *jamoat* leader, interview 15

June 2013). What is more, every local government employs an agronomist who advises local farmers about their crop cultivation and seeks to enforce a particular cropping pattern.

4.4. Tajikistan's trajectory of agrarian change

4.4.1. Rural and institutional change induced from "the outside"

Starting in 1992, the Tajik state has, with varying degrees of success, embarked on rural transformation, and capitalism has clearly entered the countryside. As Q.F. Zhang (2015) explained, the spread of capitalism includes two important elements: a) the commodification of labour and land, and b) a development in which rural producers become subject to market forces. In Tajikistan, these two processes have clearly taken place over the past two decades, an exception being that land has not been commodified: the state has remained the sole owner of land, and a rural land market does not exist; lease in land, but not sales, is possible.

The earliest law that allowed rural dwellers to start an individual farm was the "Law on *Dehqon* Farms" in 1992.[9] Yet, as in several post-Soviet countries, in Tajikistan the state's strategic production domains remained closely monitored and regulated in the first years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. International donors pressured the Tajik state to reform the economy, but the state was hesitant to liberalise the economy completely. As a result, the market for the previously state mandated crops, cotton being the most prominent, was only partially liberalised. The state procurement system of cotton was replaced by a nominally private procurement system in 1996, the so-called futures system. Notably, the change to the futures system merely meant that the responsibility and power over the cotton value chain were transferred to domestic elites. Their so-called futures companies came to dominate the cotton economy and rural infrastructure (as I also explained in Chapter 3).

The adoption of a "Land Code" followed in 1996, which granted the Tajik population the ability to apply for arable and pasture land. Article 10 of the Land Code distinguishes primary from secondary land users. Primary land users can hold land in unlimited duration or life-long inheritable tenure (as in the case of *dehqon* farmers) (Land Code Articles 11-14). Secondary land users can lease land plots up to a period of 20 years.

Additional laws to restructure the former Soviet farms were promulgated in the following years. Yet despite the promulgation of these laws, there was little change in the agrarian economy, apparently because the state showed reluctance to relinquish control over particular segments of the farm sector. As well as that, at least according to the World Bank (2004b, no pagination), "[the] rural people have a great amount of fear and misinformation, and have heard many rumours regarding privatisation, [but] they are also to see things change."

In order to speed up the process of farm reform, the World Bank initiated a Farm Privatisation Support Programme (FPSP) in the late 1990s (World Bank 2006). With showcases of successful farm restructuring in ten areas of the country, the Bank sought to convince authorities of the need for and potential success of restructuring farms. The FPSP entailed a package of a) parcelisation

of farmland and distribution of land use certificates to the rural population; b) grant schemes and farm advice; and, c) improvement/rehabilitation of rural infrastructure including the establishment of water use associations (World Bank 2006).

In the locality researched for this chapter, there were 32 production units established under the World Bank's FPSP scheme (as mentioned in interviews I had with a former grantee and a farmer, 15 August 2013). These units were under responsibility of "*brigadiers*" and were comprised of individual grantees who received a sum of money (300 US dollars/hectare) to obtain farming necessities in the first year of farming. According to the World Bank (2006, 26): "In retrospect, this grant significantly helped private farmers […] to remain outside of the clutches of the cotton traders," and "to help the new farmers take foothold in a private sector led agricultural sector" (World Bank 2006, 5). Interviews I had with a few villagers painted a somewhat different picture. As one villager (who, notably, had not received a grant in those years) lamented in an interview (7 September 2013):

> They should have checked the way in which the grants were used, the people from America […] People ate [the money]. They gave high wages to their family members […] they thought that the grant would come a next year, and a next year again. Yet after they had finished the grant, it appeared that it was given only once, not again.

According to another villager, production unit *brigadiers* appropriated the grants, with the argument that they would organise the overall production process (interview 7 September 2013).

Since grantees were joined into production units, overseen by a *brigadier*, and had to plant cotton, there was in fact little change in the production environment. The decision-making power over farming was rarely fully transferred to the grantees, as nominally independent *dehqon* farmers. What is more, beyond the pilot projects, an apparent problem that hampered a wider process of farm privatisation appeared to be institutional deficiencies and the lack of support "from the top." As the World Bank (2004b, no pagination) observed:

> Farm privatisation has largely stalled in cotton areas beyond the 10 pilot farms due to strong vested interests. In cotton areas, farm managers, raion administrators, gin operators, and government officials have a stranglehold on the production chain. The FPSP-I farms overcame the countervailing forces through strong pressure from top levels of Government, the Bank and others, but the original expectation of spontaneous replication of farm privatisation in cotton areas has proved to be unrealistic.

In some cases, government officials stifled farm individualisation by delaying the procedure of land use rights certification (DfID, USAID and World Bank 2012; also noted in an interview with a farmer, 14 August 2013). In fact, the Tajik state was an arena in which domestic elites and international donor agencies competed for influence. In October 2002, Decree 385 was promulgated, which stipulated the reorganisation of 225 agricultural enterprises, which should be completed by 31 December 2005. Yet as Robinson *et al.* (2008, 182) noted, this law had little effect on the ground: "As the 2005 deadline for farm restructuring loomed many former collectives restructured formally as [collective *dehqon* farms], offering physical shares of an equal size and proper title documentation to all members."

In this way the state's attempts to restructure the agrarian sector resulted in ambivalent outcomes. International donors believed that individual family farming would be the most suitable type of farm to emerge with farm restructuring (World Bank 2004b).

4.4.2. The 2000s: cotton lock-in and breaking the cotton regime

In the course of the 2000s, under donor pressure, the state adopted more agrarian policies. These policies did not initially bring meaningful change, just like the ones before. For ordinary rural dwellers, the politics of production meant that starting a farm entailed cultivating cotton on most of the land. The potentially more profitable production of fruits and vegetables took place on household plots and smaller parts of *dehqon* farmers' fields.

There were a number of factors that forced farms to produce cotton. First of all, there was implicit and explicit pressure by local authorities to plant cotton on 70 per cent of the farmland. This compulsion remained until the late 2000s and clearly indicates that the state did anything but withdraw its prerogative to control farmers. Local authorities were responsible for distributing quotas to individual farm enterprises and district authorities could revoke land use rights when "irrational land use" was observed (Land Code Article 37). This also concerned the situation when lands were left fallow for two subsequent years. To this day it is up to authorities how "irrational land use" is interpreted. As a result, land rights are highly ambiguous.

The pressure to cultivate cotton is also legitimised, as I have noted (in Chapter 3), through the state's discourse and belief of "*Pakhta boigarii davlat ast*" (cotton is the state's wealth). As one farmer told me in an interview (4 July 2013) with a certain sense of irony: "The government 'asks' us to plant cotton on at least 50 per cent of our fields. Who will grow cotton otherwise?" A second factor which has incited farmers to grow cotton is that land taxes for land sown with cotton are lower than for land grown with other crops. A third factor that made farmers grow cotton in earlier years, was that farm inputs and credits were tied to the cotton futures system (up to 2008). Rural financing schemes hardly existed outside of the cotton sector, as capital markets were in fact non-existent. Yet even if farmers had capital in those years, input markets for food crops were underdeveloped. A fourth factor was that initially only cotton production meant access to water through irrigation networks. According to a World Bank survey (2009), water was still allocated to farms according to the number of hectares planted with cotton. This resulted in a lock "into the existing cotton production arrangements, even though [farmers] could earn more income from raising fruits and vegetables" (World Bank 2009, x). It exemplifies how physical objects – as artefacts (mediated by political decisions) – constrained a change in production relations. Fifth, outlets such as urban food markets (for vegetables and fruits) were saturated with supply from household plot production, and farmers lacked (individual) transport facilities to bring larger amounts of produce to local markets. All these factors point to missing institutions; those institutions that did exist, forced farmers to specialise in the monoculture of cotton.

Not least, knowledge and research shaped post-Soviet farming. One may understand the importance of knowledge, given that its opposites are "ignorance, incompetence, silence and deception" (Harris 2007, 13). In the post-Soviet setting, this entailed the state's ignorance of crops other than those of strategic importance. Soviet agriculture was characterised by a state directed

diffusion of knowledge and technology, which greatly impacted production practices, farming skills and knowledge in the early post-Soviet years (see also Toleubayev *et al.* 2010 in reference to post-Soviet Kazakhstan). While most rural dwellers knew how to produce fruits and vegetables on their small household plots, growing such produce on a larger scale required other skills and knowledge that they lacked (DfID, USAID and World Bank 2012). Not less important is that knowledge of cotton production was monopolised (by seed-producing farms and local agronomists), which rendered farmers dependent. Hence cotton was at the core of agrarian institutions, technology, knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs.

This administrative task environment forestalled crop diversification. Nationwide the total amount of land allocated to cotton increased in the early 2000s, while, at the same time, procurement prices declined (World Bank 2012b). As well as that, because the futures system was defunct, farms incurred growing debt (as I explained in Chapter 3). Early in 2007 the state adopted a Cabinet Resolution (number 111) on "Freedom to Farm" which should have granted farmers more autonomy in their production, but meanwhile cotton debt continued to accumulate (and had augmented to over 500 million US dollars by the end of 2007) (as was explained in Chapter 3).

In the winter months that followed, a string of crises meant a grand momentum. In 2007, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exposed a scandal following which the head of the National Bank of Tajikistan had to resign (see also Ernst and Young 2009). The winter that followed (2007-2008) was harsh, and the government urged international donors to provide food and emergency relief (see also Chapters 2 and 3). This situation provided international donors with the ability to exert more pressure on the state to profoundly change agrarian production relations. Eventually the state adopted a "Cotton Debt Road Map" (see also Chapter 3). It included a debt resettlement scheme and an end to the futures system, which had maximised exploitation of cotton growing farmers.[10]

The "Road Map" and Cabinet Resolution 111, as extensively described in Chapter 3, entailed "freedom to farm" and a nation-wide debt write-off. Yet implementation has been uneven because of elite interests, as I noted in Chapter 3, and in many districts throughout Tajikistan local authorities continue to intervene in farm practices. In the locality in the Yovon district, that is subject to discussion in this chapter, cotton-related debt that had accumulated up to 2008 had been written off. Yet authorities continue to enforce particular crop patterns.

A change in cropping orientation can bring significant change to farm profits and food security. For instance, for the year 2012, the gross margins of cotton were nine times lower than that of watermelons and almost ten times less than that of onions (FAO 2014, 32). In terms of food security, noticeable is the fact that cotton production covers the entire growing season from spring until late autumn. Most food crops, in contrast, mature more quickly. This entails that production of such food crops allows for a second or even third harvest in the same season, which may directly benefit farm households' food security.

Yet cotton production continues to be of importance for rural dwellers, as it provides rural

households with paid labour, and cotton stalks, which are an essential source of fuel in the Tajik countryside. One can imagine that a conversion from cotton to wheat production or the mechanisation of cotton farming would mean a loss of employment for many. Particularly the cotton harvest is an important moment in the countryside when people can earn cash. The importance of cotton in this regard can explain a seemingly "backwardness" or involution, as a typical technological "lock-in."

4.5. Emerging farm typology

In this section, I locate differences among agrarian producers by presenting a five-partite typology that has emerged in and around the area of the World Bank's pilot project in the Yovon district (described in the methodology section), as shown in Table 4.1 below: i) the large farm enterprise; ii) the farmer "by default;" iii) the incoming tenant; iv) the specialising and diversifying smallholder; and, (v) the rural household. Note that the typology presented here should be taken only as a heuristic used to shed light on the local pathway of transformation; the role of the politics of production; and, the interrelations between the different farm types (see Figure 4.3). As will be demonstrated below, interrelationships between different farm types are extensive. I argue that this makes my typology unique, as typologies often present a series of stand-alone elements or actors (see for instance the farm typologies presented by Q.F. Zhang 2015 on China, and Sutherland 2010 on Russia and Bulgaria). What is striking about the typology presented in this chapter is that all actors are in some way or the other part of, or connected to, the cotton economy, even if they do not produce any cotton at all. Indeed, I argue, it is the symbiosis between the different farm types that keeps the cotton economy running. Another aspect that characterises nearly all types is the fact that livelihood portfolios are highly diverse; rural households engage in multiple livelihoods, including on- and off farming. This is a clear indication of the poor profitability of the agrarian sector.

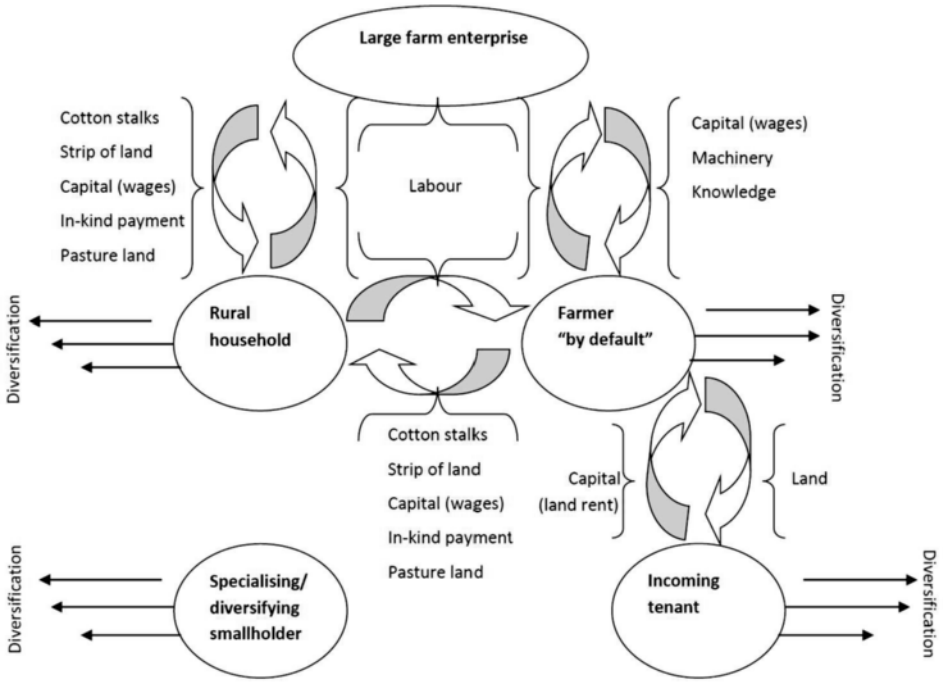
The proposed typology is formed on observed qualitative characteristics: specific land tenure; farming capital; crop mix; labour organisation; farm outlet; and, lastly, farmers' social origin. My main reason for selecting these indicators is that I believe they are useful for assessing farms' effective control over land and farm produce, and to understand who governs what, and how.

I thus go beyond the legal classification of farms that exist in Tajikistan, and note that both the farmer "by default" and the specialising and diversifying smallholder are legally certified as *dehqon* farmers. Besides (collective, family, and private) *dehqon* farms the law provides for the establishment of other agricultural enterprises as primary land users, which include state farms (different from former *sovkhozes*); *dehqon* farm associations; agricultural companies; joint-stock companies; agricultural cooperatives; agricultural auxiliary farms of industrial enterprises; and, organisations (FAO 2014). In 2012, there were 2,170 of such "other farm types" and 73,806 *dehqon* farms in Tajikistan (TajStat 2013a, 325-6). *Sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* ceased to exist after 2010 (TajStat 2013a).

Table 4.1. Farm typology in southwest-lowland Tajikistan

	Size (ha.)	Land tenure arrangement	Origin of capital	Crops	Technology	Outlets	Social origin
LFE	> 50	Use rights, unlimited duration	Industrial/ urban	Cotton; wheat; animal feed	Owned large scale	Agri-business; cotton outlets	Nomen-clature/ bureaucrat/ politician
Farmer "by default"	5-20	Use rights, inheritable	Farming/ wage labour/ labour migration	Cotton; wheat; vegetables	Rented/ owned large scale	Cotton outlets; urban markets; subsistence oriented	Former *sovkhoz* worker
Incoming tenant	<5	Leasehold, up to 20 years	Urban/ labour migration	Food cash crops	Manual	Urban markets	Urban worker
Specialising and diversifying smallholder	<5	Use rights, inheritable	Farming/ diversifica-tion	Cotton; wheat; vegetables	Manual/ owned small scale	Small customer networks; urban markets	Rural intelligentsia
Rural household	≤ 0.10	Life-long inheritable holding	Wage labour on/off farm	Vegetables; fruits; herbs	Manual	Subsistence oriented; urban markets	Former *sovkhoz* worker

Figure 4.3. Farm symbiosis in southwest-lowland Tajikistan



4.5.1. The large farm enterprise (LFE)

The proximity of the capital Dushanbe, relatively good soil fertility, and the presence of international donors in the agrarian economy have triggered the injection of outside private (urban and industrial) capital into agriculture in the area under study in the Yovon district, representing a development of "capital going to the countryside" (cf. Yan and Chen 2015, 367, who observed this development in China). Large farm enterprises are in general over 50 hectares, and practise extensive agriculture on large fields. The crop mix is limited and concerns mainly cotton, wheat and animal feed (see Table 4.1).

The emergence of large farm enterprises by domestic elites and foreigners in this locality in which my research was carried out, reflects the process of capitalism "from above." In the case of domestic actors, the enterprises are set up by an elite comprised of former nomenclature, state officials, and businessmen (as I observed in fieldwork between April and September 2013). Their ties to the state endow them with access to the state bureaucracy, with which they can exert influence on the procedures of land allocation. For these elites the state has become a source of accumulation (cf. Das 2007).

Political ties seem to be a key factor allowing these actors to set up large farm enterprises. For instance, as I observed in fieldwork in 2013, in this locality a son of the regional governor owns over 100 hectares (which is relatively large in the current context of Tajikistan); a large landowner

from a northern district controls over 200 hectares; and, a former deputy prime minister, Murodali Alimardonov owns over 300 hectares.

The former deputy prime minister Alimardonov's enterprises are exemplary for the way in which financial, but in particular political capital, can provide an actor with the capability of acquiring agrarian capital and resources such as land. Alimardonov grew up in the Hissar district, a locality close to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. He graduated as an economist and worked in the banking sector from the late Soviet period (1980s) up until the late 2000s, a period in which he was the chair of the National Bank of Tajikistan (NBT). In the 1990s Alimardonov was, according to Ernst and Young (2009), allegedly one of the few regime-insiders to set up a so-called cotton futures company, called "HIMA."[11] Alimardonov's father and brother were also involved in futures companies in earlier years (Ernst and Young 2009), providing further evidence of the importance of finance and political connections.

Alimardonov headed the National Bank of Tajikistan until 2008. He was replaced after the exposure of the scandal discovered by the IMF, mentioned earlier. Following his stint at the National Bank, he moved to the agricultural ministry where he became responsible for overseeing the process of agrarian reform from 2008 to 2015. This is striking giving his major stakes in the agrarian economy. The position at the ministry ostensibly provided him with unique insights into which of the most valuable assets could be turned into profitable farming ventures. What is more, in this capacity he interacted daily with international donors, consultants, and state officials.

Over the years Alimardonov took control of a large number of farm fields throughout the Khatlon region. In the Yovon district, he has more than 1,000 hectares (based on his workers' estimates, interview 28 May 2012). This is a considerable amount of land compared to the national average *dehqon* farm of less than five hectares. Alimardonov's wealth is widely known in the surroundings, and in Tajikistan at large. Villagers once asked my field assistant during an interview (24 May 2012): "You don't know Alimardonov? Are you not a Tajik [person]? He is a very powerful person in the Yovon district. He has all the good fields." Another villager remarked in a conversation (31 May 2012): "Alimardonov owns about half of the fields in the [Yovon] district. He can buy everything."

Over the years Alimardonov has become engaged in the agrarian economy (cotton, wheat, animal feed, horticulture production) as well as holding stakes in the food processing sector; his enterprises are vertically integrated. Owing to his major stakes in the agrarian sector his enterprises have easy access to agrarian inputs, farm machinery, processing facilities, and markets, and also access to agricultural knowledge provided by knowledgeable farm agronomists and field managers, i.e.: human capital.

In the locality where I conducted my fieldwork, Alimardonov's enterprises cultivated cotton and animal feed. The fields planted with animal feed (alfalfa and maize) belong to his livestock enterprise called "JSC Barakati Yovon." This enterprise was established in the 1990s and has grown over the years (see also Jahonnamo 2017). The production of animal feed mainly purposes the feeding of livestock, for the dairy farm. At the same time, the large-scale production of animal

feed is also lucrative since it requires little labour. Villagers employed at this enterprise can take some alfalfa when harvesting, as part of their remuneration, to feed their own cattle (as observed during fieldwork in 2012, and mentioned in an interview with a worker, 22 June 2012).

For LFEs, like that of Alimardonov, extensive state ties, termed by Trevisani (2010, 204) in the context of Uzbekistan "bureaucratic capital," can compensate for the otherwise poorly developed in- and output markets. Alimardonov's political clout also means that his enterprises can tap into international donor-led funding schemes. In one instance, as I observed in fieldwork in the summer of 2013, combine harvesters donated by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) were supposedly given to already large enterprises, who subsequently lent them out to local wheat-growing farmers, who had to pay for them (according to a local agronomist, interview 1 September 2013). In this way, the donor project benefited the already large farmers and allowed them to further fortify their influence locally. It reinforced large farms' role as local patrons.

An interview I had with a farmer testifies to the importance of political (and "bureaucratic") capital (1 September 2013):

> IH: Why are local people not farming these fields? I noticed that there are many outsiders farming in this locality.
>
> Farmer: Who, how? [farmer repeats several times]. What could these fields give them? They [local villagers] do not have an uncle [i.e. connections to authority].

My fieldwork observations and interviews suggest that those without political or bureaucratic capital have encountered major obstacles to capitalising on farming. The position of local farmers contrasts with the large farms who start up with external capital and accumulate capital over time, and who have primary access to farm equipment, such as the donor-granted combine harvesters. The LFEs gradually accumulate land, enabled by the bankruptcy of local farmers, as a farmer explained (interview 31 August 2013):

> Farmer: In the early 2000s everyone who had the conditions [in terms of labour] could take land, but prices of inputs were high. Everything was expensive, and it was too difficult for many people. They stopped. Some others started a farm after that, but many left for Russia.
>
> IH: How did these large farms then emerge?
>
> Farmer: It is like a treadmill [farmer folds his arms and expresses a treadmill]. It is too difficult for many farmers. They can only use the fields for a few years, and then they have to stop again due to financial problems. These people search for work elsewhere or become employed by the large farms. The large farms take over the fields.

The story of one *brigadier* at an LFE is exemplary in this regard, and reflects the patterns of rural differentiation, reinforced by the accumulation of land by elites. This villager was one of the beneficiaries of the World Bank's grant scheme in 2000, and he was appointed to run a production unit of 12 hectares (which meant that he held one hectare and would supervise 11 other individual grantees, who were pooled in one unit). The first years were successful, as he told me in an

interview (5 July 2013). There was sufficient money to purchase inputs, and his unit achieved high cotton yields. Yet he could not fulfil cotton production requirements in later years. Inputs were too expensive and cotton prices were low. He initially returned four of his 12 hectares of farmland to the authorities, and soon after he transferred the responsibilities of all other fields to "a friend," and left for Russia, for work. When he returned to the village in 2008 he was asked by a neighbour to become field manager on the farm of Alimardonov. He was clearly one of the local dwellers who was "granted to privatise, but failed to capitalise."

The LFEs are typical large capitalist farms based on hired local wage labour; but, strikingly, the management structure echoes Soviet farming. When it concerns cotton, the labour force working on these farms is local: manual work is mostly done by female villagers, such as members of land-poor rural households, who are responsible for particular parts of the cotton fields (called "*hectarchi*"), while people with a *dehqon* farm may work for the LFE, for instance as a tractor driver, or manager of a production unit. Hence, the daily operation of these farms is tightly linked to other actors in the rural economy, as also displayed in Figure 4.3. In turn, farm workers receive a (meagre) monetary salary; an in-kind payment (sometimes wheat and a strip of land to cultivate food crops) and they can glean crop residues (such as cotton stalks).

In the category of large farm enterprises that feature the mode of capitalism "from above," one may include foreign investors. In Tajikistan, foreigners can lease land for up to 50 years. According to numerous villagers I met in the summer of 2012, Iranian people had been farming in this locality in recent years, but their business had not developed well. In 2012, Chinese agribusinesses established farms in this locality, injecting another form of capital from the outside. While Chinese farm enterprises have now expanded to other districts, in 2013 their presence in the Yovon district was still a-typical, as there were hardly any foreign farm enterprises active elsewhere in Tajikistan.

While there is officially only one Chinese enterprise involved, in practice it is an umbrella of enterprises that engages in both large-scale production of cotton and wheat, and the production of vegetables (as will be described in Chapter 5). In this regard, the Chinese enterprise exhibits both the characteristics of domestic LFEs and that of diversifying smallholders, as discussed later.

The Chinese farms have a comparative advantage in their cotton and wheat production just as the domestic elite-controlled LFEs, thanks to their direct control over the crop value chain. The foreign businesses can access and supply urban markets with their own independent transport and storage facilities (observed during fieldwork in January 2015). As a result, these Chinese enterprises can benefit from the state's benign neglect in the area of perishable food crops that used to be the domain of smallholder rural households. As I will note in Chapter 5: "[T]he success of the Chinese farms may rest on the failure of Tajikistan's post-socialist transformation to develop a strong agricultural base and support the individual farm enterprise."

In order for both the domestic and the foreign large farm enterprises to succeed, the control over land is as important as the control over parts of the agricultural value chain. Interestingly, as of 2015 one of the Chinese enterprises has contracted local farmers for the production of cotton, resembling an outgrower model. District authorities acted as mediators in establishing contracts

(interview with a district state official, 16 December 2014). Notably for other crops outgrower models in Tajikistan hardly exist.

4.5.2. The farmer "by default"

Larger in number than all other farm types is the farmer "by default." As displayed in Table 4.1, the crop diversity of farmers "by default," is limited, and consists of cotton, wheat and a third food crop that is often grown after the wheat harvest in early June.[12] Among my interview respondents, 37 of the 50 farm representatives were farmers "by default," and I use this notion to point to the rural dwellers who applied for farmland and set up a *dehqon* farm (mostly some 5-20 hectares, see Table 4.1) in the late 1990s and early 2000s because of a lack of alternatives, at a time when people assumed farming could prove profitable in later years.[13] Farming was regarded as the best option in the absence of other meaningful livelihood sources. Many of the ordinary Soviet *sovkhoz* workers who lacked essential political and human capital were eligible to apply for land and became farmers "by default."[14]

Cotton is a primary crop grown by farmers "by default." In this locality in the Yovon district, in 2013, nearly 70 per cent of the total farmland was planted with cotton (in agreement with the overall district figures, as nearly 70 per cent of all district farmland was cultivated with the crop, as mentioned in an interview with a district state official, 19 May 2012).[15] According to local authorities' statistics, over 80 per cent of the local *dehqon* farmers cultivated cotton in 2013.[16]

The cultivation of cotton, as described earlier, took place under pressure from the state up until the late 2000s, and farmers are still asked to plant cotton on at least 50 per cent of their field (interview with a farmer, 27 June 2013). Cropping patterns are negotiated on an individual basis, in which farmers' political capital is essential. Hence, just as land use rights are ambiguous (as noted in a preceding section) or "elastic," so too are quota. This is a key difference with earlier years and with Soviet agriculture, when production quotas were more universal and "inelastic." Interestingly, farm taxes are also negotiable, as a farmer told me in a conversation (27 June 2013):

> Farmer: In the past, cotton fed everyone. Everyone had a workplace in cotton. And now? Everything is expensive. Renting the combine harvester for our wheat was very expensive this year, and we [farmers "by default"] were all competing for it. When the government saw all the unharvested fields, they lowered the additional tax expenses for the combine harvester. Yet part of our wheat harvest has been destroyed; 10 per cent because of the wind, 20 per cent because of the rain. And now the birds. And cotton prices are very low this year.
>
> IH: So why do you still grow 10 hectares with cotton?
>
> Farmer: Well, we need cotton stalks.
>
> IH: You need 10 hectares for that?
>
> Farmer: Well, no the government asks us to do it. To plant cotton on at least 50 per cent of our fields.

Besides the aspect of taxes, this conversation highlights a few other important points. Firstly, the farmers "by default" have mostly been unable to accumulate equipment and depend on LFEs for technology. Second, the conversation highlights the important symbiosis between the cotton producing farmers "by default" and rural households, exemplified by the importance of cotton stalks.

The production relations and cropping characteristics of cotton are very much different from that of other (food) crops that are grown only on smaller parts of land. Cotton production is relatively capital and labour intensive. The marginal returns for cotton come only once a year. There is little capital accumulated over time, as revenues primarily act to offset the expenses of cotton production. A related problem that farmers face is that they receive the payments for cotton late, or not at all, over consecutive years. I encountered several farmers (during fieldwork in the summer of 2013) who lamented late payments; some were even considering court cases. The resulting financial problems greatly affected the liquidity of the farm enterprise.

According to Boboyorov (2016, 310): "[T]he less privileged farmers have access only to low-quality resources, limited financial means and poor technical facilities." Connections, i.e. political capital, are essential for thriving on farming. This is especially important for accessing farm inputs, such as machinery and seeds, in time, and also for accessing advice by local agronomists on weather and soil conditions. Because of the long maturation of cotton, delayed production or crop failure can have significant repercussions. In this regard, farmers who also work for the larger LFEs have a great advantage: they can secure farm machinery using the LFE infrastructure. What is more, work at an LFE also provides additional (monetary) income and farmers "by default" may also benefit from additional agronomic advice thanks to their ties to the LFEs. These interlinkages, illustrated in Figure 4.3, once more demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between large and small farm units. The necessity to access machinery keeps the interdependencies between *dehqon* farms and large farm enterprises intact. Over 30 per cent of farmers in this locality reported that they rented machines from larger farms or leasing companies (World Bank 2009, 111). Others might own an (old) tractor, or, as I frequently observed, may borrow one from neighbours.

One example of a less-privileged farmer "by default" is a local religious leader, who set up a farm of 16 hectares with his family (ten hectares of irrigated land, six hectares of rain-fed land) after the FPSP was installed, in 2003 (interviews 22 May 2012; 30 May 2012; 4 October 2014). The irrigated fields are planted with cotton and wheat every year, and the family started a small orchard on two hectares. Because of his daily work on local religious affairs, the head of the household delegates the fieldwork to one adult son and the female family members. Two sons work and study in Russia.

Notably, as I have observed over the years, the farm household encounters many difficulties every year. It faces water shortages, which greatly affect the cultivation of cotton, and which also complicate a second harvest after wheat. Another prominent problem is that the farm head and his family members lack the necessary farm knowledge. They regularly experiment with new seed varieties, such as when the head of the household purchased potato seeds in 2013 from a hilly district (Faizobod) that is well known for its potato varieties. The project failed, as the religious

leader told me in 2014 (interview 4 October 2014). Luckily the household receives remittances from their sons abroad, and the head of the family is occasionally paid for religious services.

For most farmers the production of a second crop after the wheat is harvested is not a voluntary undertaking; farmers are pressured into cultivating the fields not planted with cotton twice a year (most often winter wheat first, followed by a vegetable crop).[17] Some farmers would prefer to leave the lands fallow after wheat, particularly because a second harvest crop requires additional labour and inputs (as mentioned by a farmer, interview 4 July 2013). The labour needed for vegetable production competes with the labour on the cotton fields, and, as the religious leader described above, many farmers have difficulties finding good quality seeds. The fact that chemical fertilisers are very expensive is a problem too. Yet leaving lands fallow is strongly discouraged and farmers sometimes receive written demands from the district government. Indeed, land use is regularly monitored by the district authorities, as one farmer explained (interview 4 July 2013):

> Farmer: We plant cotton on 10 hectares of our fields. The government asks us to do so. [The farmer starts to empty his pockets and shows a letter]. And here, [the district and local authorities] compel us to grow a second crop after our winter wheat. We have to grow two crops per season on the fields not planted with cotton. They check it.
>
> IH: So what will you plant?
>
> Farmer: I don't know yet. Perhaps we'll plant food crops on two or three hectares. We have water problems at our field site, but still receive such orders. Every year we complain [the farmer shows copies of the letters with stamps]. 50 per cent of the water seeps away. Only now thanks to the Chinese [investor, who rehabilitated the irrigation system] we have had water for two weeks.

The conversation underscores two important aspects. For one, monitoring by local authorities is extensive. Second, water is essential in the arid climate of the Yovon district (and of Tajikistan at large), and some farmers lack the capital to undertake the necessary maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure.

Importantly, however, countrywide the *dehqon* farmers achieve higher yields than "other farm enterprises," at least concerning the major crops (cotton, wheat, potatoes, vegetables) (TajStat 2013a), while (ordinary) rural households, on their household plots, achieve highest yields (in centner/hectare) (except for cotton, which is not cultivated on household plots).[18] It is therefore no surprise that prominent foreign consultants advocate further land reform (see for instance Lerman and Sedik 2018).

The livelihoods of farmers "by default" could be described as "hanging in" (cf. Dorward *et al.* 2009, 242) "whereby assets are held and activities are engaged in to maintain livelihood levels, often in the face of adverse socio-economic circumstances." Unsurprisingly, for farmers "by default," diversifying livelihoods is essential: labour migration by other family members tends to be common practice, and remittances are "the main safety net for [many] family farmers" (DfID, USAID and World Bank 2012, 25). The farmers "by default" accumulate little capital over time. Earnings from cotton tend to be insufficient, and for many it is only their reliance on migrant remittances that can explain their resilience.[19] One indication is that the value of remittances

transferred by individual migrants may amount to a net income of 150 US dollars per month (World Bank 2009, 6), whilst profits from cotton may be below 200 US dollars per hectare (FAO 2014) – that is planted over one growing season.[20]

The factor constraining the viability of these farms is clearly not access to land; it is rather the adverse production relations that hamper their viability, and farmers' constrained access to both input and output markets. Many lowland farmers are endowed with land but do not have full decision-making power over their own labour practices. As was stated in a USAID and World Bank (2008) report, 28 per cent of farmers in the Yovon district did not agree at all that they could use the land as they wished, and 43 per cent did not agree very much. Only one per cent reported that they fully agreed that they could use their land as they wished (USAID and World Bank 2008, 35).

Besides such institutional and informal barriers, farmers' understanding of and insights into (urban) market dynamics is sometimes limited, as is their ability to negotiate with middlemen. Many farmers cannot "play the market." They cannot negotiate on prices, as they cannot risk any losses and lack autonomy; they rather "cope with the market," which means "adaptation but no fundamental restructuring towards a market orientation and economic viability" (as defined by Spoor and Visser 2004, 516 in the context of Russia). As one farmer said: "Yes, we can sell our harvests on the local market [bazaar] nowadays. But the problem is that you need a consistent quantity and quality. 10 packages today, 10 packages tomorrow. We can't get that done" (interview 4 July 2013). What is more, many rural dwellers lack an agricultural education. While farmers are often advised by district and local authorities regarding when to sow cotton, and when and how to irrigate the fields and apply chemical inputs, as I observed during fieldwork in 2013, when it comes to vegetable production, farmers are left on their own, and have to find their way in retail stores and markets to select seed varieties and chemical inputs. It leads farmers to experiment with seeds, with high chances of failure, like the farm household described above.

> The production of marketable crops, which the underprivileged farmers risk growing, depends on weather conditions, which they cannot predict, on rapid change of the technical characteristics of commercialised seeds, which they are not able to follow, and on outdated knowledge about markets (Boboyorov 2016, 323).

To sum up: many of the farmers "by default" face difficulties running profitable enterprises under the current regime. This is due to their lack of financial, political and human capital, which are essential in transforming agricultural production into profitable commodities. Access to markets, to knowledge, and to capital is much more important than access to land alone. Many farmers can keep their enterprise running thanks to income from other sources, such as migrant remittances and other livelihood sources. If farmers go bankrupt, their lands are quickly taken over by other (local) farmers or the LFEs.

One way in which farmers "by default" may limit risks and maximise potential income is by renting out land to incoming tenants (discussed below). It provides the farmers "by default" with a stable income. Boboyorov (2016) observed elsewhere in the country that (cotton) farmers rented out (non-cotton) land to people with more expertise on non-cotton crops.

4.5.3. The incoming tenant

A different kind of "outside capital" entering agriculture in this area is seen in the investments of urban dwellers in agriculture. Tenants can lease land from farmers "by default" without much difficulty, up to a period of 20 years (see Table 4.1). As I witnessed in 2012, the tenants lease part of the farmland of farmers "by default" against a cash payment without production obligations (see also Figure 4.3). While the farmer "by default" plants cotton on the prescribed parts of the fields, the incoming tenants cultivate remaining parts of land, and can select their crop mix freely. Incoming tenants are commercially oriented and focus on labour-intensive production of food crops that are highly remunerative on urban markets. For instance, tenants that I interviewed on 23 May 2012 were engaged in watermelon and tomato production on one hectare. They had worked as taxi drivers in Russia, but working there had become more problematic now migrants were required to have a license. "Now we try this, and we may rent more land if it turns out to be successful. Acquaintances of ours, also leasing land around here, inspired us to do the same." The other incoming tenants I met were also primarily engaged in cash crop production for sales at urban markets, such as watermelons (interview 23 June 2012). Interestingly, I also observed a case where urbanites paid villagers to take care of beehives for honey production; a lorry with beehives was parked in a villager's garden (interview 27 May 2012). Other remarkable tenants I observed during fieldwork in 2012 were two Chinese men (working for a Chinese company near the district centre) who leased a few hectares of farmland from a local farmer, for one year, to produce potatoes and onions (I will discuss this in Chapter 5 too).

Incoming tenants, like the ones cited above, do not reside in the countryside but commute from the (capital) city to work on their plots. For these incoming tenants, entering and exiting farming does not require major efforts related to administrative requirements, or capital investments. Hence, the phenomenon of cash crop production by incoming tenants tells more about the characteristics of this locality, which is located in the proximity of the district centre (10 kilometres) and less than an hour's drive from the capital city of Tajikistan, Dushanbe (at 45 kilometres distance). Where many local farmers are unable to support themselves from the farm produce, outsiders are able to profit from farming.

There are several ways in which incoming tenants have an advantage over local farmers. First of all, they are not plagued by the pressure from local authorities to engage in cotton production relations. Secondly, they are free to select their crop mix. Importantly, cultivars such as perishable vegetables require less precision in planting in time (compared to cotton), implying that a failed sowing does not directly result in financial problems. Even if seeds have to be replanted, the fact that vegetables have a much shorter ripening time means that an initial sowing is not as crucial as it is with cotton. The incoming tenants can thus grow less risky and more lucrative crops. As also addressed above, the differences in the gross margins of cotton, on the one hand, and crops such as wheat, tomatoes and stone fruits, on the other, are remarkable. The gross margins of tomatoes are around eight times that of cotton (Shamsiev 2012; see also FAO 2014). A third advantage is that the relatively small scale of the production of vegetables is not capital intensive in terms of technological requirements: Most work can be done manually, which means that the tenants do not compete locally for scarce agricultural machinery. Fourth, with their base in the city, incoming tenants can select from a wider variety of input markets. Of course, without any knowledge of

farming, they (also) run the risk of crop failure. Yet their investments are relatively low. A fifth advantage is that the urban base provides them with daily insights into market dynamics, where they can follow price trends and product varieties, and as a result they can market their small production quantities timely, by transporting it to specific urban outlets. These urban markets offer a robust and stable demand for their produce. Lastly, tenants are not responsible for undertaking the irrigation infrastructure in the fields. Here applies what Verdery (2004, 154) noted in the context of Romania: "[L]easing might be safer than owning, for being the owner of a concrete individualised property object potentially made one more vulnerable to risk than being a tenant […] Leasing enables shucking off liabilities that owners are forced to bear".

4.5.4. The specialising and diversifying smallholder

The fourth type of farmer that has emerged in this setting is the specialising and diversifying smallholder farmer. I cluster these subtypes together because they overlap, particularly in terms of their highly skilled farm practices and knowledge of their rights. As displayed in Table 4.1, the specialising and diversifying smallholders cultivate a relatively small surface of land (up to five hectares) and grow a large variety of crops, which they sell at urban markets and to particular customers. I observed that these smallholders have a different origin than the farmers "by default," as they belonged to the rural intelligentsia in earlier years.[21]

Hence, while the smallholders are legally *dehqon* farmers just like the farmers "by default," these smallholders differ in important respects from the farmers "by default." First of all, they do not sow their land, or only a minor part of their land, with cotton. If cotton is grown by smallholders it is only on a small part of land, in order to express loyalty to authorities, and to have cotton stalks as a source of household fuel. Second, and relatedly, their crop mix is much more diverse than that of farmers "by default," incoming tenants, or LFEs. Third, their background is different from all other farm types, as already mentioned. Fourth, as displayed in Figure 4.3, these farm households operate relatively independently, as they hardly interact with other actors engaged in the agrarian economy.

The smallholders, exploiting economies of scope, are petty commodity producers but also seem to feature characteristics of "the new peasantry" (cf. van der Ploeg 2014), or an ideal type of smallholder (Netting 1993), in that they are partially subsistence oriented and strive for autonomy and distantiation, employ craftsmanship, and cultivate local networks.

One farm household in the locality (where the man was a former Soviet bureaucrat, who had held a job at the *sovkhoz* before, and the woman was a retired school teacher) initially started a farm on 10 hectares. As the couple told me in an interview (2 September 2013), they transferred seven hectares to their sons (one of whom cultivated cotton) and continued production on the remaining three hectares. In 2013 they planted chickpeas, cabbage, tomatoes, melons, and strawberries. This family stands out compared to most other rural households, in particular regarding their human capital, as they eagerly look to optimise their production of crops, but also of, for instance, honey. Customer networks are important for the couple, in order to sell their produce. In 2014, the family planted cabbage on nearly 0.5 hectares and was able to harvest approximately 30 tons. Local women bought the crop for 1 Tajik somoni (TJS) per kilo to process

it into pickled salad for market sales. A rough calculation is that the household could earn 30,000 TJS from only 0.5 hectares (interview 13 December 2014). This equalled approximately 5,000 US dollars and illustrates the great difference compared to the gross margins of cotton. In earlier years, thanks to farm revenues and their small village shop the couple was able to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Most small farms reinvest their accumulated capital into the farm enterprise, as did, for instance, one farmer who bought a small Chinese-branded tractor and a small solar panel to have electricity at the field site. Farmers express regret and sometimes frustration that they are not allowed to build large premises on the field site, which could allow farmers to engage in value-added practices. By prohibiting these activities the state holds back the development of the agrarian economy. The innovative farmer, with his mini-tractor and solar panel, expressed his difficulties and annoyance and stated the following (interview 10 September 2013):

> I grow three crops each season: winter wheat, now I am cultivating onions, and I will plant a third crop after that. We're required to grow at least two crops on these fields. But look at this: all my carrots and onions. The government does not allow us to start a processing factory in the countryside. How can we earn a living then? It should be like in Germany. I've heard that farmers sell their produce to factories close to the farm fields. That is a good idea. I've also visited the *hukumat* [district government] to ask if I can set up an animal farm. Then I can fertilise my fields with manure from my own animals. But the government does not allow me.

Political capital is essential for these smallholders. As Boboyorov (2016, 322) argued: "[D]ue to power relations, only a few privileged farmers have the opportunity to specialise in certain types of marketable crops. The specialisation of farmers in such crops depends less on their expertise but rather on their personal relations with the elites." With their orientation towards specific crops and outlets, these farms engage in a niche market, and as such, also because they remain small, do not pose a threat to elite interests. As a result, farmers experience different "political economic spaces," which Kuns (2017b, 484) defined in the context of Ukrainian agriculture as "that taxes are not too onerous, resources are not confiscated, and the conjuncture and farm-gate prices are favourable enough to reward hard work and enable 'forward planning.'"

Connections also play an important role in networking with customers. Particularly in niche markets, in which the small-holding farmers control a large part of the crop value chain, secure sales depend on permanent clients. The farmers' embedded transactions with trusted customers contrast with the atomised, impersonal exchanges in which the cotton-producing farmers are involved. As I observed in August 2013, one of the diversifying farmers had created customer networks that exploit the potential of "just in time" marketing, which Kuns (2017b, 496) observed also in southern Ukraine, where "non-local traders descend on the village around harvest time." The "just-in-time" strategy relieves the farmer of the need to transport goods to the market and of negotiating with middlemen, but it only applies to particular perishable crops or special varieties that are in high demand. Sellers only come when they expect higher market revenues in small marketing circuits.

These diversifying and specialising smallholders are "stepping up" (cf. Dorward *et al.* 2009, 242) "whereby current activities are engaged in, with investments in assets [such as small-scale machinery and knowledge] to expand these activities, in order to increase production and income to improve livelihoods". Smallholders seize upon farming and accumulate capital not through scale enlargement (as is the case with the large enterprises described above), but through intensification of practices. As Netting (1993, 9) noted in a more general discussion on smallholders, "skills make up for scale." Farmers of this type know their right to select their crops and also how to play the market, like the household described above. Like the incoming tenants, the diversifying smallholder farmers experience a significant degree of autonomy vis-à-vis upstream and downstream markets and knowledge regimes, thanks to their selective production. It is clear that a combination of "capitals" is at play here. Firstly, in making a living, secondly, in giving sense to life, but not less, in "challenging the structures under which one makes a living" (cf. Bebbington 1999, 2022).

Nevertheless, this type of farmer confronts the deficiencies in the private supplies of agricultural inputs. The following quote, by the woman from the diversifying farm household described earlier, illustrates how the inadequacies in input markets may incite farmers to cultivate cotton (interview 13 December 2014).

> We bought seeds from laboratories this year, for all kinds of crops. But the seeds were infected. Everyone in the *mahalla* [local community] had this problem. The crops looked nice, but once harvested they directly got spoiled, in particular the tomatoes. I do not trust the laboratories. They manipulate the seeds and also make you buy fertiliser. I regret it that I did not grow cotton on these fields.

4.5.5. Rural households

Besides the various farm enterprises described below, there is a large number of rural households that do not own a larger farm enterprise but only have access to a household plot, which are, as noted earlier, small gardens adjacent to people's houses. As shown in Table 4.1, these plots are privately held without user restrictions, and most rural households grow a variety of crops on the small plot for subsistence needs and some sales, to top up the income from work elsewhere.

Food production on household plots was prominent throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet years (Rowe 2009). Especially in the 1990s, in the period of war and economic collapse and the decline of the former large-scale Soviet farms, and the resulting wage arrears, household plots functioned as a social safety net, triggering the commodification of private production to make a living. The majority of rural households combines (intensive) cultivation of the household plot[22] with non-farm employment, such as taxi driving, labour migration, and work in the capital city Dushanbe.

In this locality, household plots are around 0.09 hectares (World Bank 2009); according to a World Bank (2009) survey in this district, 88 per cent of the people cultivated household plots and for almost 40 per cent of the households work on the household plot is the second most important source of employment. Under the Land Code (Article 71), households in the lowlands have the right to 0.15 hectares of irrigated land, and 0.25 hectares of rain-fed land. Yet in reality the size of a household plot is contingent on local land availability and population density.

Nationwide the contribution of rural household plot production to gross agricultural output was over 60 per cent in 2014 (TajStat 2015b), while these households cultivated only 23 per cent of the total arable land in 2012 (TajStat 2013a, 27). Importantly, compared to "other agricultural enterprises" and *dehqon* farms, yields of crops produced on household plots stand out (TajStat 2013a). Nationwide, as noted by FAO (2014, 7) "[t]he agricultural productivity on [such smallholder] farms has driven the substantial rates of growth, with a lower contribution from the privatised mid-size commercial farms," which I term the farmer "by default." In a report by the World Bank (2009, 35) it was however noted that "household plots and presidential lands only act to reproduce labour for the large farms, rather than release the households from the poverty trap." Hence, while production on household plots may be intensive, and may be important for gross agricultural output, it is not sufficient as a single source of livelihood. Also interesting to note is that the quote from the World Bank report underscores the strong interaction between large farm enterprises and rural households (also displayed in Figure 4.3).

While rural households do share characteristics with diversifying smallholders, I do not lump the two categories together, particularly because of the fact that land-poor households do not regard themselves capable of farming. For many rural households, individual farming has not been an option in recent years, because of a lack of political, human and/or financial capital. As one female villager once said in a conversation (25 June 2012): "Perhaps, if I work 100 years on the fields, I can start farming." For young villagers, farming has not been regarded as lucrative in the past few years. "From profits of farming you can only buy cigarettes" (as stated by a local youth, interview 19 June 2012). Nevertheless many rural households attempt to access farmland. There are a few incentives to work on (cotton producing) farm enterprises as so-called "*hectarchi.*" First, labourers earn a salary and build up a small pension. Second, working on a farm may provide workers with a strip of land or farm inputs that can be used for household plot production and as grazing land for households' livestock. Third, as noted before, work on the cotton fields entails provision of cotton stalks. Even though the monthly wage may be marginal, such benefits are important incentives to engage in farm work. It is also here where the symbiotic relationship between the large farms and rural households, still surfaces.

4.6. Rural resistance

One may wonder how the subordinated farmers and rural households cope with the hardship that they experience in daily life. This brings me to the issue of rural resistance. In earlier sections I have already noted the difficulties the World Bank encountered in the late 1990s in convincing state officials of the need to reform the former Soviet large-scale agricultural sector. There was an apparent resistance; elites and state officials, from the top to the local level, feared the demise of the cotton economy. In this regard, their attempts to stifle land reform can be explained.

Yet one would expect the subordinated *dehqon* farmers and ordinary rural dwellers to express even more resistance against their subordinate and disadvantageous position in the context described in this chapter. However, while people are aware of the extensive exploitation that takes place, the Tajik rural society remains remarkably calm and silent. There are a few factors at

play here. First, unmistakably, the authoritarian regime plays a role in limiting rural uprisings. Second, the legacy of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) plays a role. People still fear a return of conflict. Third, as Boboyorov (2013) observed, local elites try to repress local conflicts by stressing the importance of village honour. Fourth, collective agency is problematic; there is no rural collective institution which has the capacity to oppose the exploitation that characterises Tajikistan's rural economy. Importantly, given that it is mostly women who perform the harsh labour in the summer heat on the cotton fields, exploitation has an important gender dimension.

There are, however, ways in which farmers express "everyday forms of peasant resistance" (cf. Scott 1985), that, in effect, however, do not challenge relations of power. For instance, according to Tajik media, a citizen of the Yovon district had stolen cattle from one of the big LFEs (Tajikistan News Gazette not dated). And as I observed, farmers seek to convince authorities that cotton has failed to mature on their fields, with which they may gain exception and be allowed to grow food crops. While I haven't heard farmers doing so, and while cotton seeds are expensive, one may only speculate about farmers who sow limited amounts of cotton seeds on bad fields, in order to enhance the possibility of failure.[23] Furthermore, in this locality I also observed farmers who petitioned with a letter that they even brought to the president's office, to call for their right to select their own crops. These latter instances seem to echo a kind of "naïve monarchism" as observed in Russia, by Mamonova (2016). Petitioning, however, had no effect. And when I asked a farmer in an interview (14 August 2013) whether he had joined other farmers in their written request to clean the drainage canal, he answered: "You can write a [whole] book here, but who is going to clean [the drainage]?"

The majority of farmers however acquiesce to the pressure to cultivate cotton. There is still another important expression of discontent in the Tajik countryside: people vote with their feet. Over one million of the Tajik population reportedly migrates. In other words: over 40 per cent of the Tajik labour force migrates temporarily to Russia. It is primarily (young) men who migrate. Labour migration can be seen as a prominent way in which resistance is (silently) expressed.

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the emergence and differentiation of farms in post-socialist Tajikistan. This process was placed in the context of donor intervention. The World Bank's FPSP was not a one-off transfer of technology and money, as it came with a package that included the rehabilitation of waterways, training and supervision. I have pinpointed the apparent resistance against agrarian transformation among state officials, and the way in which rural dwellers have coped in this repressive context.

The main focus of this chapter was on the five-partite typology of rural actors that I identified. The typology aims to expose the key patterns of transformation that have been set in motion. It has been used as a qualitative, embedded, interactive device to specifically shed light on farm types, and farms' interactions. The earlier symbiosis with the large farm enterprise has somewhat eroded, but interrelations between rural actors still mark the countryside. This interrelatedness is

a key characteristic of the Tajik rural economy, and I contend that it is the integration between different farm types that keeps the cotton economy afloat.

The unfolding typology is the result of structure – markets, policies, state law and regulations – as well as actors' agency to observe and exploit room for manoeuvre. I have shown that there is a substantial diversity subsumed within legal and statistical terms. While the partially integrated farmer "by default" and the autonomous diversified smallholder may both be termed *dehqon* farmers, they differ significantly in their access to inputs and technology; in their farm knowledge and market engagement; and, most important of all, in their autonomy over their production. The typology reflects the political economy of agrarian transformation in this lowland setting, where *dehqon* farming has emerged and developed in various ways. A common denominator is livelihood diversification, which is pursued out of necessity.

Within the typology I have shed light on the polar extremes of capital accumulation. The entry of outsiders and the commodification of the agrarian sector propel differentiation in two ways: capitalist agriculture develops with the entry of industrial and merchant capital, something which happens alongside a differentiation within the category of rural dwellers.

The politically assisted regime, – capitalism "from above" – embodied in the capitalist large farm enterprises, has wider economic bases beyond farming. The LFEs' appearance in this area exemplifies the interwoven political and economic power of Tajikistan's regime. The hegemony over the local agrarian economy (through politics and ownership of farm assets, processing, and storage facilities) enables these actors to mould both law and policies, and shape the production regime to their own interest. A combination of factors has been at work: access to inputs, knowledge, rural infrastructure and exposure to (partially) liberalised markets. They secure their wealth through the privileged access to the means/forces of production.

This type co-exists with the more endogenous, locally grounded pattern of capitalism "from below," reflected in diversified smallholder farming. Elites have been lenient to such "successful" farms as long as they have remained small and focused on markets in which the elites have little interest.

I have shown that land in Tajikistan is only valuable when a farmer has market access and autonomy over farm practices and labour. In this regard, the Tajik countryside is reminiscent of neighbouring Uzbekistan's rural areas, where "'owning' land does not necessarily include the whole bundle of individual rights and powers, such as the ability to transfer and allocate land or profit from its products" (Veldwisch and Bock 2011, 584). In livelihood studies' discourse (cf. Scoones 2009; Bebbington 1999), we could say, many *dehqon* farmers in Tajikistan are endowed with land, but lack the "assets that give people capability" (cf. Bebbington 1999, 2029) to turn land into a meaningful livelihood. Hence the aspects of power and institutions deserve a prominent place in livelihood analyses (cf. Scoones 2009).

Land reform is only meaningful if accompanied by more profound change, most importantly the effective ownership of land. Further research needs to be conducted to deepen the understanding

of the representativeness of the typology identified in this chapter. Although there are serious drawbacks in the use of household surveys in the transformative setting of Central Asia (see Kandiyoti 1999 on Uzbekistan), quantitative data should be obtained to support qualitative findings.

However, the case presented in this chapter indicates a dynamic of farm individualisation and shows that geography and external factors are very important in agrarian change. It teaches us that pathways of agrarian change do not follow stereotype models predicated on experiences elsewhere. The junction of local specificities and broader processes in interplay with farm households' agency are patterning dynamics of agrarian change. It is only from such wider perspectives that we can understand and appreciate local trajectories of post-socialist transformation.

Notes

[1] This chapter is based on an article currently (January 2019) under review for publication.

[2] There are important differences in farm restructuring and farming characteristics between highlands and lowlands in Tajikistan. This chapter engages only with lowland farming.

[3] Macro statistical data (for instance TajStat 2013a) do not capture the differentiation at the local level.

[4] Some farm fields are irrigated using gravity irrigation, other farmers use pumps. Some of the rural households also use pumps to irrigate their household plot. Most rural households in Tajikistan do not have access to piped water. In this locality households have to fetch water from smaller streams flowing through the village, or from the canal further away (see Figure 4.2).

[5] Note that animal husbandry is prominent in the Yovon district, more than in most other lowland areas. Nearly 30 per cent of the households regards keeping livestock as an important activity (World Bank 2009). This was also clearly observed during fieldwork. Livestock is predominantly held in small numbers by rural households, and is important capital when sold in times of need. "[T]he proceeds from selling a single cow might easily exceed proceeds from cotton field labour" (World Bank 2009, 11).

[6] This size contrasts with the national average farm size of nearly five hectares in 2015. The national average size has considerably decreased over the past few years (see also Chapter 2).

[7] Hence, I also interviewed farmers who cultivated farmland that was outside the former pilot project area.

[8] The *jamoat* is comprised of five villages, and I conducted research in and around the largest village, and the village which is the centre of the *jamoat* (located at the right and left sides respectively in Figure 4.2). The *jamoat* covers a total area of over 6,000 hectares, with a community of nearly 15,000 people. 67 per cent of the irrigated land was sown with cotton in 2013 (data obtained during field work, summer 2013).

[9] According to Boboyorov (2016) there are public farms (collectives and production cooperatives) and private *dehqon* farms (family and shareholder farms); most often people distinguish between collective, family and private *dehqon* farms.

[10] Contracting by cotton procurers still takes place, particularly when farmers are short of capital at the start of the growing season. In those cases, farmers receive capital and inputs on credit, while the future-predicted cotton harvest serves as collateral.

[11] HIMA was established in 1994, originally operating only as a futures company. In 2010, HIMA textiles was opened, which focuses on the processing of raw cotton into textile and clothing (The European Times 2012).

[12] Local wheat is generally low in quality and is primarily cultivated for households' subsistence needs. The low quality of domestic wheat is related to the impoverishment of local seed varieties and the lack of proper harvesting and milling practices.

[13] Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev (2018) used the same term ("by default") to suggest that farm workers of collective *dehqon* farms gained access to land not because they were proactive in asserting their land rights but because the farm managers could not maintain control over land.

[14] Note that I do not argue that all *dehqon* farms are farmers "by default." Also the diversifying smallholders described later on, are certified as *dehqon* farmers.

[15] According to TajStat (2014) only around 40 per cent of the district's farmland was sown with cotton. The difference may be explained by the difference between arable and irrigated land.

[16] Based on data collected at the field site.

[17] Throughout Tajikistan farmers are expected to have (at least) two crop cycles on fields not planted with cotton.

[18] In the Khatlon region, however, "other farm enterprises" achieve slightly higher cotton yields than *dehqon* farms; 22.5 centner/hectare versus 22.0 centner/hectare respectively (for the year 2012) (TajStat 2013a, 193-4).

[19] Notably, nationwide, "[d]espite the increase in farm income, the percentage of farmers who reported total farm-income dependence declined by 10 per cent between 2007 and 2011" (DFID, USAID and World Bank 2012, 23).

[20] Cotton farm gate prices have fluctuated over the years, but have dropped significantly since 2011 (FAO 2014).

[21] Though, notably, there was also one teacher who I would classify as a farmer "by default."

[22] A few villagers have had access to additional (more remote) plots, that are known as "presidential land" (*zamini presidenti*). Such plots were allocated to rural dwellers throughout Tajikistan in 1995 and 1997, to provide the rural population with an additional safety net. In this locality, nearly all former presidential lands were gone, because land was needed for village expansion.

[23] Yet cotton seeds are expensive, and for that reason I do not think that farmers would waste a large amount of seeds. Interestingly, Mozambican peasants under colonial rule cooked cotton seeds to prevent the germination of cotton plants (Isaacman 1996).

5. Politics or profits along the "Silk Road": what drives Chinese farms in Tajikistan and helps them thrive?[1]

Abstract
China's influence in the neighbouring Central Asian states is growing at a fast pace. Since the launch of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative to accelerate China's engagement in Central Asia and beyond, nearly all Chinese activity in this region has been gathered under OBOR. OBOR now seems to cover a plethora of spatially and temporally expanding state and privately driven projects. In this chapter, I discuss large- and small-scale Chinese farm enterprises in Tajikistan, in which discussions around China's "global land investments" and OBOR intersect. Beneath abstract conceptualisations of OBOR and the Chinese presence in Central Asia, my analysis shows that Chinese land investments in Tajikistan are shaped by Chinese dynamics of agrarian change and are contingent upon country-specific conditions. Rather than state-led endeavours as is often assumed, the main Chinese actors in Tajik agriculture are capitalist yet partially state-embedded enterprises driven by profit-oriented goals. Chinese farm enterprises tap into specific market demands that are either unanswered or underdeveloped in Tajikistan, or which have emerged due to the growing number of Chinese consumers in Tajikistan. The nature and drivers of Chinese land acquisitions in Tajikistan shed light on the various, sometimes competing, factors driving China's broader foreign "land rush," in Central Asia (and beyond).

5.1. Introduction

China's influence in the neighbouring Central Asian states is growing at a fast pace. One of the recent manifestations of this is Chinese land investment in Tajikistan. In 2011 popular media reported that 1,500 Chinese farmers would start agricultural production on 2,000 hectares in Tajikistan (Pannier 2011). In 2012 other sources reported that "China" would lease an area of 6,000 hectares (Vinson 2012). The news was soon reposted on an Internet "land grab" database (www.farmlandgrab.org) and thence portrayed in a way that fits within the general "land grab" discourse globally (cf. Grain 2008). The investment was thus typecast as part of the wave of Chinese global land investments that has been documented since 2008 (Grain 2008; Cotula *et al.* 2009; Bräutigam and Zhang 2013). While avoiding the term "land grab" because of its inaccurate connotations (as also argued by Hofman and Ho 2012; Bräutigam and Zhang 2013; Yan and Sautman 2010), this chapter aims to address a knowledge gap about China's engagement in agriculture in its neighbouring region (cf. Visser and Spoor 2011; Henderson *et al.* 2013). Moreover, by presenting a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which China's "going out" takes shape in its direct vicinity, this chapter provides insights into the characteristics and implications of China's "going global."

Since autumn 2013, China's growing presence in Central Asia is placed within the Chinese government's Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative as the land-based component within the

popularised One Belt, One Road (OBOR, *Yidai Yilu*) (cf. Farchy 2016; Summers 2016; Swaine 2014). Therefore, the analysis of farmland investments in Tajikistan in this chapter builds on and contributes to both analyses of OBOR and the Chinese presence in Central Asia (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012; Summers 2016) and literature on foreign land investments (cf. Gong and Le Billon 2014; Hofman and Ho 2012; Visser and Spoor 2011; Wolford *et al.* 2013; Yan and Sautman 2010).

This chapter is based on longitudinal field research focused on post-Soviet agrarian change in two villages in Tajikistan's southwestern Khatlon region and interviews with Chinese farm managers, Chinese farm workers, their Tajik assistants, and Tajik wage labourers conducted between March–August 2012, June–September 2013, and September 2014–February 2015. Field research insights have been supplemented with archive and media/web research conducted between 2012 and 2016.

Based on my research on the nature of Chinese land investments in Tajikistan, I show that the contemporary processes of agrarian change in both Tajikistan and China are essential for understanding and explaining these land investments. The common assumption that it is the pursuit of security in food or energy that drives China's global search for land proves incorrect (cf. Grain 2008; for critique see Bräutigam and Zhang 2013; Gong and Le Billon 2014; Hofman and Ho 2012; Yan and Sautman 2010). More in-depth critical research has also shown that other motives (also) drive Chinese land investments, which include among other things, the export of technology, the search for market potential abroad (Yan and Sautman 2010; Bräutigam and Zhang 2013), and surplus rural labour[2] (Bräutigam and Tang 2009). In the context of Central Asia, one could raise questions whether border region stability and long-term geo-political/international cooperation play a role, as it is often assumed that China's growing presence in Central Asia and OBOR are mainly driven by geopolitical motives (cf. European Council on Foreign Relations 2015; see also, Cooley 2012; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012; for a critique, see also, Summers 2016).

Examining various types of investments, I argue first that the large Chinese land investments and the specific orientation of the Chinese farm enterprises involved in the investments shed light on Tajikistan's political economy of post-socialist rural transformation. The Chinese companies tap into the emerging agro-industrial and food markets, where many Tajik farmers lack the political and financial capital to do so. Paradoxically then, the success of the Chinese farms may rest on the failure of Tajikistan's post-socialist transformation to develop a strong agricultural base and support the individual farm enterprise. Second, the Chinese small-scale farms' focus on satisfying Chinese consumers' demands in Tajikistan is an opportunistic response to the increasing number of (permanent and temporary) Chinese inhabitants in Tajikistan. These small farm enterprises thus engage in a new niche market, which emerged as an ancillary effect of the growing Chinese presence in the country. Hence, while both small and large Chinese enterprises have a commercial orientation, their background and their market engagement differ strongly. I contend that these different kinds of Chinese farms in Tajikistan signify the major ways in which Chinese actors currently engage in agriculture on a global scale (see also, Yan and Sautman 2010; Cook *et al.* 2016). At the same time, they represent the diversity of Chinese actors involved in China's growing presence in the wider regional economy of Central Asia. Moreover, the types of Chinese farms in Tajikistan feature striking parallels with a typology of agricultural enterprises emerging in the

contemporary process of agrarian change in China (Yan and Chen 2015; Zhang *et al.* 2015; Schneider 2016).

This chapter is structured as follows. The next, second, section characterises in brief China's contemporary dynamics of agrarian change and presents the specific context of Tajikistan's agrarian economy and China's contemporary presence in Tajikistan. This section also sheds light on the importance of state-society relations in understanding the actual materialisation of investments on the ground. The third section is primarily based on field research in Tajikistan. It describes and analyses different types of Chinese involvement in Tajik agriculture, including Chinese individual farms and larger investments, thus highlighting the various characteristics of these investments. The final section concludes the chapter.

5.2. The push and pull factors of Chinese farmland investments in Tajikistan

The variety of Chinese projects in Central Asia subsumed under the One Belt, One Road initiative is substantial, including infrastructure projects, investments, loans, and trade agreements by state, private and public-private enterprises. China's growing presence (and the specific impetus given by OBOR) understandably triggers major debates in terms of "who drives what, and why." Yet as Breslin (2009, 834) earlier noted, "[w]e can […] argue about what drives what – whether international security concerns drive a change in economic strategy to mollify the region, or domestic political/economic perspectives drive a move to engage the region." Chinese authorities, international agencies, and media refer to OBOR, sometimes regardless of the exact starting points of individual projects or phenomena and regardless of the specific character of the Chinese presence, whether individual, corporate, or state-driven, and whether focused on trade, finance, investments, or politics (cf. Farchy 2016; National Development and Reform Commission 2015; Summers 2016; Swaine 2014). The initiatives clustered under OBOR go beyond investments for resource acquisitions and relate to domestic competition, regional stability, state finance, and labour issues. These aspects have also been noted in relation to China's "Western development" (*xibu da kaifa*) (Goodman 2004; Yeh 2009); the country's "going out" (*zou chuqu*), and Chinese global agricultural land investments (Yan and Sautman 2010; Hofman and Ho 2012). As Summers (2016) suggests, OBOR can be conceptualised as a continuation of earlier policies and goals rather than as an entirely new state-driven project, particularly as the often-mentioned drivers of China's global "going out" and Chinese global land investments have preceded and intertwine with OBOR.

At first glance, the Chinese investments in farmland in Tajikistan seem surprising. Tajikistan is not known as a country with highly productive farmland or with much potential for high-revenue agriculture. As noted in earlier chapters, only around six per cent of the country's land area is arable land, and large parts of the rural population experience periods of food insecurity. In addition, the costs of transporting perishable fruits and vegetables are substantial, and – with weakly developed transport corridors (cf. Peyrouse and Raballand 2015) – the bureaucracy and transaction costs are considerable for the export of goods in general. This suggests that Chinese land investments in this country have not been driven by the need to feed Chinese domestic consumers and hints at the need for a closer examination of locally specific characteristics and

dynamics in agrarian development in Tajikistan, as well as in China, to understand these land investments.

5.2.1. The role of Chinese agrarian dynamics in Chinese land investments in Tajikistan

Understanding the plurality of Chinese actors involved in China's growing regional presence requires profound attention to developments in China's domestic economy. China's rural context is of great relevance to Chinese land investments abroad (see also, Schneider 2016). Contemporary dynamics of agrarian change in China echo characteristics of the country's economic reforms in earlier years in which the development towards a more market-based economy meant the privatisation of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). It forced centrally planned enterprises – from national to regional and provincial levels – to dismantle and reconfigure themselves in a competitive market (cf. Yan and Sautman (2010, 315) on Chinese SOEs in Africa). This competition and enterprise differentiation also characterise the process of agrarian transformation in China. The studies by Yan and Chen (2015) and Zhang *et al.* (2015) on the dynamics in the Chinese agrarian society point to an accelerated capitalisation of agriculture. In this process, the commodification of the means of production like the introduction of market-based mechanisms in accessing land has profound implications on social stratification in the countryside. For instance, the differentiation into distinct types of agricultural producers is characterised by large businesses taking the lead in modernisation and smaller family farms facing subsumption into larger enterprises and incorporation into more complex and interdependent production relations. Going abroad can expand the market potential or can provide a resort to escape from domestic competition (see also, Yan and Sautman 2010; Schneider 2016).

The going out of Chinese enterprises and individuals has unfolded into different migration patterns as well as into different trade and investment patterns overseas. China's state-owned companies have been assumed to head most Chinese overseas projects, particularly when it comes to their impact in economic, social, and political transformation (Henderson *et al.* 2013; Hofman and Ho 2012). However, although individual and smaller scale activities are often little observed, Chinese individual entrepreneurs have, in fact, been the most active agents of China's growth abroad (cf. Gu 2009, on Chinese private companies in Africa).

From this perspective, OBOR as an initiative to accelerate Chinese expansion indeed embodies remedies to phenomena inherent to capitalism, like overcapacity, and excess supply, as a spatial fix (cf. Harvey 2003), different from (only) geopolitical motives (as also argued by Summers (2016)). Yet, while Summers (2016) asserted that OBOR is primarily a capitalist endeavour with geopolitical implications, in my view several goals are pursued in tandem, with commerce being undertaken by Chinese companies in conjunction with the Chinese authorities' efforts to gain presence and power. The facilities provided by bilateral agreements ease trade and investments. As Hofman and Ho (2012, 7) previously explained, the Chinese state plays a "vital role in planning and driving the off-shoring of production," which could be termed "developmental outsourcing."

Yet, whereas dynamics in China's economy are often attributed primary importance as factors engendering the "going out" of Chinese companies (cf. Summers 2016; Swaine 2014), the mode and orientation of Chinese actors overseas and the investments abroad are not less shaped by the

conditions in host societies. It is rather the interplay of different foreign and domestic, and national as well as local, political economies that provide push and pull factors for investment and which shape the eventual realisation of investments. Hence, here the context of Tajikistan is no less important in understanding the orientation of Chinese enterprises in this country.

5.2.2. The Tajik context: post-Soviet agriculture

With hardly any industry in the country, the agrarian economy is highly important in Tajikistan. As a whole, the agrarian sector contributes around 20 per cent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Lerman and Sedik 2009; World Bank 2016). Yet there are severe impediments to rural and agrarian development. With the end of the Soviet Union, state support to the agrarian sector vanished, organisational structures broke down, and the state's supplies of agricultural inputs (such as agro-chemicals) gradually came to an end. Though the Tajik state began to restructure the former Soviet agrarian landscape after 1991 through land and farm reform, it took a long time before the reorganisation of the former collective (*kolkhozes*) and state (*sovkhozes*) farms truly took off (Robinson *et al.* 2008; Lerman and Sedik 2009). The Tajik Civil War (1992–1997) left its imprint on the society and on the rural sector, particularly in the southwestern Khatlon region.

Over 70 per cent of the Tajik population resides in the countryside, and agriculture is the main source of employment for over 50 per cent of the population (TajStat 2015a; World Bank 2016). Access to land is important for the rural population, either in terms of a household plot or (employment at) a *dehqon* farm. Local differences in geography and off-farm employment options have resulted in varying degrees of competition over land, but also in differences related to farm size, crop mix, and farmer autonomy (Robinson *et al.* 2008). The average size of a *dehqon* farm is around five hectares, but there are extreme differences – from isolated holdings of 0.5 hectares in the highlands to elite-run enterprises of a few hundred hectares or more in the lowlands. Notably, small-scale household plot production has continued to play a pivotal role for domestic food security and market supply (63.4 per cent of the gross agricultural output came from household plots in 2014; TajStat 2015b). The significant role of household plot production in food production is related to the fact that household plot production has been predominantly oriented towards horticulture crops, while most *dehqon* farms have focused on larger scale production of mainly wheat and cotton (Lerman and Sedik 2009; Rowe 2009).

Yet, farming is insufficient as a single source of livelihood for most rural dwellers. Rural households are therefore forced to develop a highly diversified livelihood portfolio, which often comprises both on-and-off farm work, frequently including labour migration of one or more (male) family members. While the situation has improved, an environment conducive to individual farming has been missing for many years, and the absence of adequate infrastructure and underdeveloped markets still constrain agrarian development (see, for instance, USAID 2014).

The constraints in agrarian development and the lack of profits from farming are caused by a few interrelated factors. First, private sector development in the agro-industrial markets (of seeds and agro-chemicals) has been limited. This is related to the lack of perceived market potential among private enterprises and due to the absence of a (pre-existing) domestic agro-industry. As a result,

farms face monopsonies of suppliers and high input prices. Second, innovations and scientific research in agriculture have been halted since the breakdown of the Soviet Union. As a result, knowledge and expertise, as well as education, have been shaped largely by Soviet agriculture that was oriented towards larger scale production practices (cf. Shtaltovna 2016; Van Assche 2016). As yet another legacy of collective farming, new individual farmers initially (and some still) often lacked an entrepreneurial mindset, as they were used to top-down decision-making in the planned economy. They often did not have the knowledge essential to run a farm enterprise or the experience to grow diverse crops beyond small-scale horticulture production on household plots. Many of the new farmers had become "farmers by default" (cf. Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2018). A final, more pronounced factor that inhibits the development of agriculture is of a political economy nature. Although people can obtain land use certificates for inheritable rights over land by applying with the district authorities, the laws are ambiguous and are often shaped by patrimonial relationships and local power plays. As a result of continued elite and state interests in agricultural revenues (particularly from cotton, which makes up just below 15 per cent of the country's export value; TajStat 2016b), farm reorganisation has been slow in the prime agricultural regions where elites have aimed to retain control over farms, which severely affects farmers' autonomy and ability to profit from farming, as has been extensively described throughout the preceding chapters. Despite the formal abolishment of the state's crop procurement system, elites' vested interests in mainly cotton have obstructed the diversification of production in lowland areas for many years, and rural and agrarian development have stagnated. Moreover, in areas where the state has clearly withdrawn support, a lack of maintenance of infrastructure has resulted in deterioration of roads and irrigation and drainage systems, leading to severe soil salinisation and desertification.

In a nutshell, Tajikistan's post-socialist rural transformation has resulted in a situation where most of the Tajik rural population is unable to live off the land, with institutions and infrastructure such as service organisations, financial institutions, and markets unable to support smaller scale farmers. Importantly, such an absence of access to markets and institutional support to smaller scale individual farming is a feature of the neighbouring post-Soviet Central Asian countries too (cf. Spoor 2012; on Kazakhstan, see Toleubayev *et al.* 2010). Capitalisation "from below" has barely been taking place in the Tajik countryside, and the few investments in farming are based on external capital (i.e. income from off-farm work, migration, or industrial capital from wealthier (local) actors). Initiatives and efforts to improve farm production and stimulate innovation in agriculture have until now been primarily donor-driven. Since the late 1990s, many international organisations and donors have initiated rural development projects such as the establishment of extension services, and have set up grant schemes for machinery, agricultural technology, and farm inputs (Shtaltovna 2016; USAID 2014). However donor-driven projects have had to manoeuvre within the agrarian political economy, where particular crops and practices are prioritised over others, and where access to land, farmers' autonomy, and the ability to farm depend on (local) political patronage.

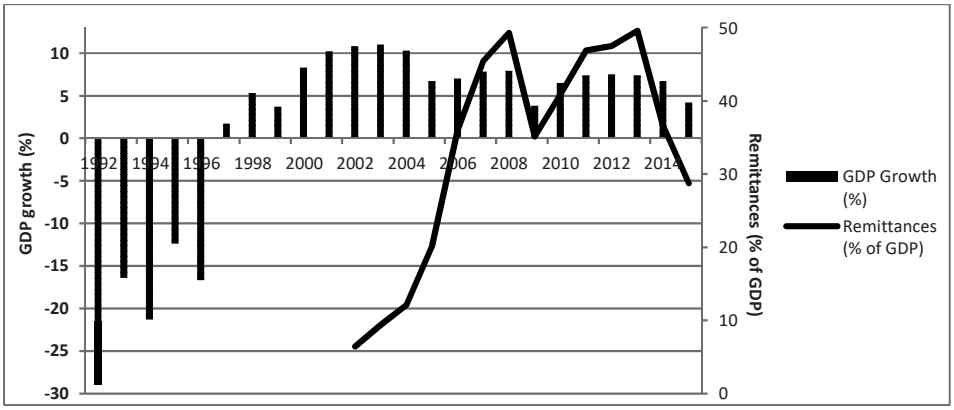
5.2.3. China as a benefactor to the Tajik economy?

Against the background of an impoverished rural sector and a capital-short state, the Tajik government announced Chinese land investments in 2011 as beneficial to Tajik agriculture. The

particular Chinese investment that was announced in 2011 was said to lead to an upgrading of production, an improvement of farming conditions, and it would create rural employment.

Tajikistan ranked poorest in Soviet Central Asia, and as noted, the breakdown of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan's Civil War have had worse impact on Tajik society and the economy. The economy started to recover in the late 1990s (with a positive GDP growth rate since 1997; see also, Figure 5.1). The relative importance of different sectors for the national economy has remained fairly stable over the past few years. The importance of the agrarian sector for the national economy has gradually declined – from 35 per cent of the GDP in 2000 to 20 per cent of the GDP in 2015 (World Bank 2016). A small number of commodity exports has been critical for the economy (aluminium, cotton, and labour (migration)), which makes the economy highly vulnerable to external shocks. Migration to Russia has started to take off since the aftermath of the Tajik Civil War, in parallel with what has been seen in neighbouring Central Asian countries since their independence, where post-socialist transformation has pushed people off the land and where the national economy has lacked sufficient employment opportunities. Money transfers by labour migrants have been critical for individual households and the Tajik economy in general (as the trend in Figure 5.1 also clearly indicates). Tajikistan stood out in Central Asia in relative terms of the importance of migration for the domestic economy in the past few years, and even also worldwide: Tajikistan has ranked highest in terms of the contribution of migrant transfers to the national economy, as in 2013 remittances equalled more than 50 per cent of the GDP. Both the decline in GDP and in migrant transfers from Russia after 2013 have been due to spill over effects of the economic downturn in Russia (World Bank 2016), whereas the restrictions set by the Russian government on labour migrants from Central Asia and the growing hostility toward Central Asian migrants among the Russian population have also played a role. Yet, still in 2015 around one million Tajik people (10–15 per cent of the total population) reportedly migrated (World Bank 2015).

Figure 5.1. Tajikistan's gross domestic product growth rates and relative importance of remittances (1991–2015).



Source: Author's drawing based on World Bank data 1991–2015 (World Bank 2018).

Against the background of the contraction of the Russian economy, the importance of Chinese capital for the Central Asian economies has grown rapidly. Central Asia emerged as a frontier zone for the Chinese economy in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the region's importance for the Chinese economy has been growing ever since (Cooley 2012; Kassenova 2009; Laruelle 2015; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012; see also Kerr 2010). Chinese land investments thus clearly fit within the larger trends with regard to China's growing role in Central Asian states' economic development and the shifting geopolitical relations in the region. China has become a prime economic partner in terms of state credits, loans, and investments. The Tajik establishment has turned toward China, rather than Iran, Russia, or Europe (as asserted by a Tajik senior scholar at the Academy of Sciences, interview 17 February 2015). According to the director of the Centre for Strategic Research under the President of Tajikistan (interview 18 February 2015), China is seen as the generous non-conditional creditor that offers a welcome alternative to the more "traditional" donors, in fact as a "lender of last resort"[3] (Sattori 2013). In 2013, Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) accounted for almost 50 per cent of all FDI in the Tajik economy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan 2015), and the importance of Chinese investments has further increased: the Chinese government pledged investments totalling two billion US dollars in 2014; for the 2015–2018 period, the Tajik government announced a new Chinese governmental investment package totalling six billion US dollars (Farchy 2014).

5.2.4. The role of host countries' state-society relations and perceptions of "China"

Whereas Chinese investments have been taking place all over Central Asia, especially in infrastructure and mining, Chinese investments in farmland have only materialised in Tajikistan. As is the case throughout the Central Asian states that feature pronounced regional and land-based identities and where post-Soviet nation building has meant a resurrection of national borders (Collins 2006; Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2014; Reeves 2014), the Chinese land investments triggered anxiety in Tajikistan. Despite the hostility, the land acquisition did take place. In interviews with villagers (April and May 2012), people recited newspaper headlines like *Tajiks to Russia, Chinese to Tajikistan?* (Faromarzi 2012). Yet outspoken expressions of resentment have remained absent. This absence is due to the country's strengthening authoritarian regime, in a context where the civil society has already been severely circumscribed (see also, Heathershaw 2009). The legacy of the Tajik Civil War also plays a role here, as many people fear recurring violent conflicts.

State-society relations in the host country and the host populations' perceptions about "China" can (drastically) alter the actual crystallisation of investments. The way in which investments materialise is contingent on local socio-political dynamics and characteristics. Although the neighbouring Central Asian states feature constraints in agrarian development similar to Tajikistan (as mentioned above) that may trigger foreign investment in agriculture, in Kyrgyzstan (in 2004) and in Kazakhstan (in 2009 and 2011), previously announced and planned Chinese investments in farmland were cancelled after large protests (Centrasia 2004; Demytrie 2010; Visser and Spoor 2011).[4] In April 2016, again various large protests took place in Kazakhstan against a planned amendment of the Land Code that would enable foreigners to lease farmland for a longer term (up to 25 years). In response to the protests, the Kazakh government placed a one-year

moratorium on the Land Code, which halted the planned amendments (Orazgaliyeva 2016; Putz 2016).

The Tajik population's anxiety regarding China's growing presence reached a climax in 2011 when a longstanding border dispute between China and Tajikistan, originating in the late 1800s, was finally settled (Bitabarova 2016, 67; Alimov 2012). As Olimova (2008, 64) described,

> China claimed three disputed sites in the territory of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region […] totalling to an area of over 20,000 square kilometres. In 2001, after a long period of coordination, Tajikistan agreed to transfer more than 1,000 square kilometres of this territory to China.

By 2013, the border had shifted. While there were no settlements in the disputed area, Tajik herders lost their pastures (Bitabarova 2016). The fact that the ratification was concluded almost simultaneously with the publicised large-scale Chinese farmland investment, discussed below, augmented the population's fear. Public information about the ratification of the agreement was scarce, and many Tajik people feared that their government would cede more land to the Chinese government in the future. In turn, these fears added to speculations about China's growing presence in the country. There are no reliable statistics with regard to the number of Chinese migrants, but analysts and media have reported numbers ranging from 15,000 up to even 80,000 (Judah 2011) if informal and temporary migration were to be included. Details of specific contracts and investments are scant, and as a result, wariness regarding Chinese "takeovers," colonisation, and Sinification has frequently circulated in media, even though media is rather state controlled (see, for instance, Emomiddin 2009; Faromarzi 2012; Ilhom 2012; Nasriev 2011; Tursunzoda 2013; on similar observations in Kazakhstan, see Sadovskaya 2007; Burkhanov and Chen 2016).

However compared to the initial, rather monolithic negative discourse on China, Tajik people's perceptions of the Chinese presence and China itself have begun to differ across social strata. This has resulted from more personalised encounters between Tajik and Chinese individuals and the more pluralistic forms of Chinese engagement in the Tajik economy. Whereas the Tajik regime supports investments and seeks to legitimise Chinese companies' operations as benefactors to the economy, the Tajik intelligentsia, which mostly distances itself from the post-Soviet regime, remains skeptical. For middle and lower classes, Chinese investment and the presence of Chinese companies may mean business and employment, including in the agrarian sector. A change in perceptions of China particularly occurs through personalised encounters on the work floor or in business, where the grander "China" is being unpacked and challenged (bearing a resemblance to Dyatlov's (2012) observations of similar discourse shifts in the Russian Far East). For many young adults, the Chinese economy (including Chinese investments in Tajikistan and businesses in China) now offers a potential future. Saliently, I observed (in the winter of 2014–2015), that several Chinese companies are replacing their Russian-speaking Chinese staff members with Chinese speaking Tajik assistants. The learning of Chinese can be interpreted as a pragmatic decision of Tajik parents to secure future employment for their children or the product of a longer term vision of the Chinese government to lay the foundation for infrastructure in both physical (i.e. roads, transit corridors) and human capital terms. Thus, although some still fear a Chinese takeover, more nuanced notions have also developed over the last couple of years. These shifts are

important for understanding the way in which the Chinese presence has been unfolding on the ground.

5.3. Different forms of Chinese agricultural engagements in Tajikistan

In 2011, international media articles reported a case of Chinese land investment in Tajikistan where 1,500 Chinese farmers were to start cultivating 2,000 hectares of farmland in Tajikistan's primary agricultural region, Khatlon (Pannier 2011). In Tajik and Chinese media, it was said that the investments would yield better crop production, improve field conditions, and upgrade agricultural knowledge and technology (Asia Plus 2014; Nosirjon 2014; Xinhua 2014a; 2014b). Demonstration plots would be set up, and Tajik farmers would benefit from knowledge transfer (Nosirjon 2014). According to Chinese media, five demonstration areas were assigned (China State Farms 2014). Tajik governmental officials were cited in local media:

> We will consider the widening of farming land for this company to include lands that are not in proper use by other farmer communities, and we expect further collaboration between the company and farmer communities in Yovon, and the import of new and more fertile seeds of wheat from the farmers of the Henan province (Nosirjon 2014).

However, during an exploratory trip through the Khatlon region in 2012, I had difficulties locating any Chinese farmers. The authorities remained vague regarding the exact locations of the Chinese land investments. Tajik rural dwellers, authorities, and foreign expats with whom I spoke were little informed about the actual developments and conflated a variety of different Chinese farms and projects in agriculture into one large investment.

5.3.1. Tapping into the Tajik market: large-scale Chinese land investment in Tajikistan

The Chinese land acquisition that was announced in Tajikistan in 2011 referred to a Chinese company that started its operation in Tajikistan in 2012. Since the company's Chinese and Tajik names differed, and due to the secrecy around the company's operations, understanding the background of this supposedly "single" investment appeared a complex issue. In fact, different operations have been covered under one umbrella corporation, named Jing Yin Yin Hai (in Tajik: *Szinyan Inhai LLC*). Since its start, the Jing Yin Yin Hai company has grown, and by 2015 its operations had vertically integrated. The company's headquarters are set in Dushanbe, and it has been operating in different districts; namely Yovon (cultivating cotton, staples, and vegetables), Jaloliddini Balkhi (the company left this district after 2013, but cultivated rice, maize, and cotton), and Vahdat (seed factory). Up to 2013 the total operations covered around 415 hectares; in January 2015 the area under cultivation was over 500 hectares, with plans for further expansion in the next few years. Local media reported figures as high as 6,300 hectares (Chorshanbiyev 2015), but whether the investment really unfolds accordingly, remains to be seen. The company's actual operations are up until 2015 significantly smaller than reported in the media (cf. Pannier 2011; Vinson 2012). At the same time, they differ from the initial statements of Tajik governmental officials, since the promise of establishing extension activities for Tajik farmers has not been fulfilled.

Jing Yin Yin Hai's establishment in Tajikistan was initiated by a former official of the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture, who had observed the profit potential of investment in the Tajik agricultural economy. Initially involved only in the crop seed business, the former official attracted other Chinese companies to expand the business in Tajikistan. As of 2015, there were two principal companies involved in this co-venture:[5] Huang Fan and Jing Yin Yin Hai Seeds, both from the Henan province. The operations of Huang Fan and Jing Yin Yin Hai Seeds differ in crops and approach, as do their origins. Their goal, however, is aligned in that they both aim at the development of markets in agricultural crops (including fresh vegetables and staples like wheat and cotton), and perhaps with more long-term importance, the development of the agro-food industry (in crop seeds and technology). Jing Yin Yin Hai's operations point at attempts to gain control over production chains, as opposed to only controlling land as a means of production. As of 2015 included a vegetable-producing unit (established in October 2012); a seed-processing unit (registered in July 2013); and a flour-processing factory (registered in July 2013) (as stated on the Chinese website *Zhiqiye*; Guangzhou Yuandao 2015).

The farm enterprise Huang Fan, as one of the two companies involved in Jing Yin Yin Hai, has been concentrating on the large-scale production of wheat and cotton in Tajikistan. It has a license to sell, breed, and cultivate home-grown (Chinese) wheat and a cotton seed variety (called "Inshan-2") and to export cotton lint (Asadov 2013, 19). Founded in 1951, Huang Fan has a long history. As a result of increasing production costs and land rental prices in China, the company's profit margins have decreased. At the same time, the increase in mechanisation of farming in China resulted in worker surplus, and these factors together have driven the company to search for opportunities abroad. Prior to investing in Tajikistan, the farm's leadership also investigated the situation in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In the end, it decided to invest in Tajikistan and Ukraine, where it assumed it would find good production conditions and policy benefits (Xinhua 2014b). Tajik district authorities have been playing an important role in the Chinese company's land acquisitions, as they are the principal governmental body responsible for issuing land use certificates. Also in other matters, the Chinese company clearly benefits from connections with Tajik authorities, who, for instance, facilitate the further spread of marketing potential locally and to other districts in the country. The company has its own cotton gin and has set up contract farming schemes with local Tajik farmers, in which it provides credit and farm inputs. The target for 2015 was to contract cotton-growing farmers totalling an area of 3,000 hectares (as stated in an interview with the head of the local government (*jamoat*), 18 December 2014). Huang Fan's operation through contract farming schemes allows the company to expand, control, and discipline production. For Tajik authorities and elites with stakes in the cotton value chain, the company's operation may be regarded as a safeguard to uphold cotton production. According to the Chinese staff, the company has been asked to cultivate cotton on (at least) 60 per cent of its fields (interview with the company's financial manager, 5 January 2015). This percentage is comparable to what is still often enforced upon Tajik farmers, which is to cultivate cotton on 50-70 per cent of their fields. Since cotton in Tajikistan is highly important for the economy as a critical foreign exchange crop, engaging in the cotton value chain has considerable potential for profits. At the same time, it is risky to engage in this elite-controlled economy.

A striking issue here is that Huang Fan has actually replaced a Swiss agribusiness that operated in the same area and that also procured cotton through contract farming schemes, and owned a local ginnery. While one reason for the Swiss company's exit may have been financial difficulties, it has been said (in informal conversations with European expats) that it was compelled to leave primarily because it had been perceived as a threat to the local elites' cotton businesses. The role of elites in this Chinese investment is also substantiated by a related case of competition among Chinese companies. Before Jing Yin Yin Hai settled in the Yovon district in 2013, a Chinese family farm had been working for one year on the same the fields – ones which belonged to a large Tajik landowner living in a northern district. When Jing Yin Yin Hai arrived, the Chinese family farm was compelled to move to a district north of Dushanbe, where it was given fields by the same Tajik landowner.

Another salient case that sheds light on the role of the local agrarian political economy in Chinese land acquisitions is an instance where Jing Yin Yin Hai was given "abandoned land" in the southern Jaloliddini Balkhi district. In this district, the rural infrastructure had become dilapidated after the Tajik Civil War of the 1990s; the worsened production conditions have also been caused by the continuing monoculture of cotton. District authorities legitimised the Chinese investment by stating that Jing Yin Yin Hai would rejuvenate the fields and infrastructure, for which both the cash-strapped state and local farmers lacked resources. Yet, the abandonment of land here was not caused by a lack of farmers' entrepreneurial attitudes or inefficient practices, but had deeper political economy origins. Local elites in this area have used their administrative rights and power to divide farm assets and liabilities in the process of farm reorganisation, of which cotton debt has been an essential component. Many local farmers have become trapped in debt-bondage, (as described in Chapter 3) and debt has come to serve as a coercive mechanism to produce cotton. In turn, cotton debt has become a major impediment to the development of local farms. The Chinese company was given "abandoned" fields by district authorities without any debt, and without further production requirements. This created discontent among the local inhabitants. Although the Chinese investment did not dispossess the villagers in question, the company could benefit from pre-existing inequalities when acquiring access to land. However, even though the Chinese company attempted to rehabilitate the irrigation and drainage systems, it could not achieve adequate yields; thus, it left this location after the production failed for two consecutive years (cf. Ergasheva 2014). The failure to realise profitable harvests was decisive for the enterprise to leave.

This latter example clearly demonstrates the role of the agrarian political economy in Chinese land investments and how local patron-client relationships indirectly enabled the investor to access land. As Wolford *et al.* (2013) argued, the role of the state and the local political economy are critical in shaping and facilitating foreign land acquisitions.

Complementing Huang Fan's cultivation of cotton and staples is Jing Yin Yin Hai Seeds' focus on vegetable seed and crop production. The company was founded in China in 2007 and was granted the status of a leading enterprise in seed technology by the Henan province in 2011 (Jing Yin Yin Hai not dated). In Tajikistan the company actively expands its operations, which has become visible at the field site and in the central bazaar of the Tajik capital, where the company's managers

and translators negotiate for good prices of fresh produce with middlemen on a daily basis. Besides this outlet, Chinese private businessmen engaged in purchasing vegetables from the company directly at the farm gate.

The focus is on the production of vegetables, crop seed, and the development of agricultural technology, particularly greenhouses, all of which have a great potential given the lack of competition from both rural households' plot production and *dehqon* farms. This leaves ample market potential for the Chinese company. Jing Yin Yin Hai Seeds' produce comprises both vegetables used in Tajik cuisine such as onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, and chili peppers, and particular Chinese vegetables such as beans, melons, eggplant, and cabbage, which are produced in smaller amounts. The company introduces new varieties on local markets and in doing so, enhances the availability and diversity of vegetables, particularly in the winter season, since crops are produced in greenhouses. This development thus challenges initial assumptions that Chinese "land grabs" are driven by Chinese domestic food demands. By introducing new seed varieties, crops, new technology, and a market of agro-chemicals, the company strives to gain control over particular agricultural value chains – which means, the control over input supply, production of agricultural commodities, potential value-added practices, and sales of products (i.e. control over both upstream and downstream activities). In an interview (6 January 2015), the Chinese farm managers explicitly stated that they aimed to become the largest vegetable-producing enterprise of Central Asia, with outlets to Russia, Afghanistan, and further abroad. The company may regard its investment in Tajikistan as a way to enter the Central Asian agricultural market, where (as explained above, in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), similar profit potentials may be found, but where access to agricultural land has proven to be more contested.

While Chinese managers and specialists run Jing Yin Yin Hai, the work in the fields and in the greenhouses rely on local labour. Local authorities initially had an important role in recruiting Tajik villagers, but in later years the organisation of labour has been facilitated by the permanent appointment of villagers as guards and field supervisors. For landless villagers, the salary offered by the Chinese has been relatively higher than what they would earn by working for local farmers, although the work is more demanding (as local workers and villagers mentioned in different interviews in July–September 2013 and December 2014–January 2015). Wage labour at the Chinese company has especially become more attractive for local male Tajiks, since conditions of labour migration to Russia have worsened.

A second large-scale land acquisition by a Chinese investor, reported on Chinese television (Henan TV 2012), is another example of the way in which China's dynamics of agrarian change and both the Chinese and Tajik political economies of land play a role in Chinese land investments in Tajikistan. While I have been unable to locate this farm during fieldwork, according to the interview on Henan News, it would comprise around 800 hectares (12,000 Chinese mu), and was based on a leasehold arrangement for a period of 49 years (Henan TV 2012). The investment was pledged by a Chinese agricultural entrepreneur from the Henan province, who started a "cooperative" in China in 2007 while learning to use modern agricultural technology.[6] On Henan News (Henan TV 2012), he talked about his experiences in Tajikistan in later years:

> "I was thinking about finding opportunities to make profit for my cooperative. The idea of going abroad to make profit came to my mind." Mr. Han consulted a friend who had gained experience abroad. "In August of last year, a friend of mine told me that the countries near Russia have vast barren lands, as people there are mostly herdsmen instead of farmers. We first went there to investigate … In our country [China], the land-leasing fee is 1,000 RMB per mu, while in Tajikistan, the corresponding price is 13.7 RMB per mu. Taking other fees into account, the price per month is between 500 to 600 RMB." Henan News continues: "Mr. Han has established an efficient and high-level agricultural zone in Tajikistan." Mr. Han laughs and states: "We feel proud of ourselves. I never imagined that I could become well-known by farming."

These examples of Jing Yin Yin Hai and Mr. Han's cooperative demonstrate that the Chinese domestic context and the goal of capital accumulation clearly drive investments, while host country conditions further shape the enterprises' orientation. Although the company Jing Yin Yin Hai and the "cooperative" discussed here have different management and ownership structures, they also have important features in common. Both are regarded as vehicles of agricultural modernisation in contemporary China. As Yan and Chen (2015) described, an accelerated capitalist development in the Chinese countryside is leading to a highly stratified rural society, where dragon-head enterprises are expected to spur agricultural modernisation. Interestingly, Jing Yin Yin Hai takes up such a role in Tajikistan, and has a clear longer term orientation to expand and diversify the business. The cooperative of Mr. Han could be regarded as an example of the growing prominence of commercial capital in China's agrarian development, where access to farmland is increasingly organised through market mechanisms. This may incite agricultural entrepreneurs like Mr. Han to start companies abroad. Both investments were triggered by the assumed profit potential of investment in Tajikistan's agrarian economy. The enterprises are able to profit from the fact that agrarian development has been stagnant in Tajikistan, and can benefit from the pre-existing inequalities in access to the means and factors of production: land, agricultural technology, farm inputs, and control over agricultural value chains.

5.3.2. Small-scale Chinese farms in Tajikistan: satisfying Chinese consumers' preferences

Whereas large-scale Chinese projects and initiatives tend to dominate the Tajik media, less analysed are Chinese individuals' enterprises and cross-border trade. Many Chinese individuals have crossed the border in the last few years, after having learned of the lucrative nature of doing business in the frontier zone of Central Asia.[7] Individually initiated Chinese farms in Tajikistan are exemplary for this kind of entrepreneurship. In this section, I highlight two kinds of farm enterprises, different from the ones portrayed above in that their markets and outlets are more narrow and specific. While varying in land tenure, focus, and size (yet primarily within a range of one to five hectares), the origins of these two types of small farms are directly related to the growing presence of Chinese actors in Tajikistan.

The first type of small-scale Chinese farms is one run by Chinese individuals, who grow vegetables for private consumption or to supplement their income from formal employment at Chinese companies. These small Chinese farming endeavours are self-organised. The migrants lease land for only one or a few growing seasons in the direct vicinity of their accommodation. In most instances, they work individually or they cooperate within their network of friends or colleagues.

The demographic structure of the Chinese society plays a role here: most Chinese people who currently work in the urban (i.e. industrial) sectors have a rural background and are used to cultivating their household plots intensively. While they changed their occupation by migrating, they use their farming experience to supplement their income once abroad or to satisfy their specific food preferences. In the Yovon district, for instance, two Chinese men working at the Chinese cement factory in the district centre leased a field of a few hectares from a local farmer in 2012, for only one year, where they grew potatoes and onions. This kind of land tenure is very different from the longer term leasehold arrangements described above, where contracts are signed with district authorities for a longer period of time, most often for 49 years. Local Tajik inhabitants assumed that the field cultivated by the two Chinese men was part of the larger Chinese land investment by Jing Yin Yin Hai described above, and though the farm activities were in the same locality (*jamoat*), there was in fact no connection between the two.

Another type of Chinese small-scale farming that targets the Chinese consumer market in Tajikistan is of a more established, permanent, and commercial kind. It differs from the former one in that its primary goal is capital accumulation rather than a non-remunerating side activity. One example is a Chinese family who originated from the eastern part of China. They moved initially to the capital of the Xinjiang region, Urumqi, and decided to cross the border and settle in the Tajik capital in 2009, where they expected to find better income opportunities. The family managed to rent a shop in the central bazaar in the Tajik capital to sell dry goods imported from China. They soon observed a demand for particular Chinese vegetables and were able to lease a small plot (around one hectare) from a Tajik woman near their house.

The revenues from the fields and the shop provided the family with a good but not extraordinarily high income. The family rehabilitated old greenhouses that had been left on the fields, which allowed them to cultivate vegetables throughout the year, such as cabbage, spinach, and beans. All inputs required for the production were imported from China. Besides vegetables and dried products, the family also has been selling pork ordered from Tajik suppliers. The shop was not their only outlet. More commercially significant outlets were Chinese restaurants and Chinese companies that run their own canteens. The family clearly responded to a niche they observed – supplying Chinese individuals and companies. They started as petty commodity traders but branched out to become commodity producers. The enterprise's potential to develop seemed significant given the fact that it served an expanding Chinese community and was located close to a neighbourhood that seemed to become the Chinatown of Tajikistan's capital (as observed in winter 2014–2015 and April 2016). The enterprise clearly engaged in a market niche that has emerged and grown in the past few years. The value chain of the farm's produce was short, but the highly specific market segment implied guaranteed sales, and there had not been much market competition for the specific produce at the time of the interviews (January 2015).[8]

5.3.3. State support

It seems logical that the various Chinese farm enterprises would benefit from the agricultural cooperation agreement between China and Tajikistan (Yuldoshev 2014, see also H. Zhang 2015), certainly now that great impetus is given to China's regional expansion in Central Asia and beyond. However, I have not been able to substantiate evidence of state support in interviews. The Chinese

companies appeared to be entirely responsible themselves for competing with Tajik traders for market outlets in nearby urban areas. There were no indications of a strong connection with the Chinese central government, either technically or politically, while Tajik authorities appeared to have a clear role in mediating access to land.

At the same time, Jing Yin Yin Hai's expansion seems typical for the developmental trajectory of dragon-head enterprises, in which the Chinese state has an important role (Schneider 2016, 12): "[D]ragon heads represent a kind of state-private nexus that challenges strict state/private binaries." Jing Yin Yin Hai is the first agricultural company from Henan that has executed the province's "going out" strategy, as Chinese media and the company website affirmed (Xinhua 2014a; Jing Yin Yin Hai not dated). The company thus clearly follows up on governmental aspirations, which fit the policy of "developmental outsourcing" (cf. Hofman and Ho 2012). As the Chinese ambassador in Tajikistan stated on the website of his embassy (May 2014): "Today, the Chinese people will sow the seeds of friendship on the Tajik land, tomorrow it will reap rich fruit of bilateral pragmatic cooperation" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Tajikistan 2015).

This apparent role of Chinese authorities, and in particular the role of the regional authorities of the Henan province, supports Summers (2016) argument that OBOR includes policy incentives separately undertaken by the Chinese regional authorities. Thus, the Chinese state plays a role in facilitating Chinese private investment. The ways in which Chinese companies develop, may highly differ.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I aimed to highlight the variety of Chinese actors involved in the Tajik economy, with a particular reference to land, and the factors that drive these actors to invest in Tajikistan. Nearly all contemporary Chinese presence in Central Asia is analysed from a macro perspective and subsumed under the development of the One Belt, One Road initiative. The considerable attention given to OBOR by the media and in the international (political) arena suggests that China's presence in Central Asia and beyond is all part of a grand plan of the Chinese government. The focus on such grand narratives and the rhetoric about "land grabbing" make invisible the actual complexity and heterogeneity of Chinese land investments on the ground. The variety in Chinese farm enterprises I observed, which may continue to grow and change, indicates that only detailed analyses can properly detangle the actors involved and their motivations. By contrasting two types of Chinese farm enterprises in Tajikistan, I have sought to elucidate the variety of Chinese farm enterprises active in Tajikistan, as well as the enterprises' drivers and the ways in which they interact with the Tajik society. I have also pointed at the different segments of the consumer and agricultural markets targeted by the Chinese farm enterprises.

First and foremost, I have demonstrated that commercial motives drive Chinese farm enterprises in Tajikistan, rather than geopolitical imperatives. Beneath this notion of "commerce," my in-depth analysis has shown that commercial interests materialise in distinct ways. The Chinese

actors in Tajikistan's agriculture are profit-oriented, but the manner through which they access the means and factors of production differ, as does the way in which they capitalise on their produce and business.

Large Chinese enterprises clearly tap into segments of the domestic market that have been underdeveloped in the process of Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian change, with factors related to the political economy and Tajikistan's Soviet and civil war legacy. With its production of crops and specific focus on seed breeding, the company Jing Yin Yin Hai aims to engage in and profit from upstream and downstream markets, and attempts to export technology. While the production is currently destined for the Tajik market, the company may expand sales across the Central Asian region in future years to neighbouring republics where a similar profit potential in the agrarian economy may exist. As such, Jing Yin Yin Hai's profile has similarities with an "agro-capitalist" Chinese farm in Zambia (Bräutigam and Tang 2009; Yan and Sautman 2010). This agro-capitalist tendency contradicts the common narrative on Chinese agricultural ventures abroad. The smaller Chinese farms are also commercially oriented, but focus on a market niche which is much more narrow and very specific, triggered by the growing Chinese consumer demand in Tajikistan.

Second, as noted before, the Chinese context plays a major role in these foreign land investments. The typology of Chinese enterprises in Tajikistan presented above seems to be a testimony to the main actors in Chinese agriculture – family farms, cooperatives, and dragon-head enterprises (cf. Yan and Chen 2015, Zhang *et al.* 2015). This typology reflects outcomes of contemporary rural differentiation processes in China, where going abroad may offer options for Chinese companies to expand or yet prevent a forced exit from the agricultural sector. The specific case of the Chinese family described also more generally represents Chinese individuals' choice to come to Tajikistan – an opportunistic decision in search of a better livelihood. The lack of employment opportunities, competition on the domestic market, meagre retirement payments, and stringent labour regulations are driving part of the migratory processes.

To conclude, a joint analysis of Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian transformation and Chinese dynamics of agrarian change is essential to understanding the origins of these investments and the ways in which they materialise (or not). Answering the question of "what drives the Chinese farms in Tajikistan and helps them thrive" thus requires looking beyond grand narratives. Understanding China's role in and drivers of overseas farming requires us to zoom in on context-specific characteristics within and beyond borders. Only through such an exercise can the complex amalgams of Chinese actors be unpacked and abstract conceptualisations be challenged.

Notes

[1] This chapter is based on an article published in the *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57(3): 457-81.

[2] Some have argued that Chinese agricultural investments function as a way to channel labour surplus from China's poor rural areas abroad. Bräutigam and Tang (2009, 694), for example, found that (in the late 2000s) "Chinese observers began to comment that agricultural investment in Africa also had the potential to relocate Chinese farmers displaced through the dual pressures of WTO trade liberalisation and China's rapid urbanisation."

[3] However, Chinese involvement in peacekeeping missions (for instance, in Mali in 2015) points at a change in foreign policy, like Alden and Large (2015) have also noted in relation to China's foreign policy regarding African states – from a non-conditional creditor to an actor that starts to engage in "norms making."

[4] Rumours of Chinese colonisation and large Chinese leaseholds circulated in the Kyrgyz media, although leasehold contracts were never confirmed (Centrasia 2004). The framing of the supposed deal hinted at discrediting the president of that time. In Kazakhstan, "local authorities of the autonomous Kazakh region of Ili in Xinjiang' acquired rights to lease 7,000 hectares (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012, 108), but whether or not this leasehold agreement materialised has never been clarified. "The lands were rented to about 3,000 Chinese colonists for a period of ten years" (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012, 108). In 2009, rumours once again circulated about a supposed deal between Chinese and Kazakh authorities for the leasehold of farmland. The announcement caused major protests, after which the agreement was cancelled (Demytrie 2010; on the earlier Chinese investment in Kazakhstan in 2004, see Altaiskaya Pravda 2004).

[5] Jing Yin Yin Hai has attracted a third Chinese company, the Xinjiang Tianye Water Saving Irrigation System Co. Ltd. (part of Xinjiang Tianye (Group) Co.), to provide the technology for the farms, particularly drip irrigation. Tianye's activities in Tajikistan are also interesting from another perspective; besides this project, the company is engaged in a project that resulted from an agreement between China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Department of Agriculture and Tajikistan's Ministry of Agriculture. The Tianye company has been commissioned to execute this state-initiated development project, which was acquired through public bidding. This is thus a typical project in which multiple Chinese state and private commercial actors are engaged, with (sometimes) distinct objectives.

[6] As Yan and Chen (2015, 379) asserted, the term "cooperative" has sometimes been used purely to obtain governmental support: "Some are fake because they only exist on paper, while others are created by private enterprises. One common dynamic among actually running cooperatives is that big households use them to dominate access to government subsidies, as well as to control the distribution of economic surplus."

[7] Entering Tajikistan from China over land is only possible via the border post at Kulma-Karasu. The border post was opened in 2004 and has increased in importance as a corridor for China's regional expansion. It is only since 2010 that the border has been open all year round. As of February 2016 direct flights between Dushanbe and Beijing exist.

[8] For personal reasons this family had to leave in summer 2015, but their business was taken over by other Chinese.

6. Conclusion: The Tajik cotton mania, debt in its unevenness, and continuity in disguise

This study has dealt with Tajikistan's pathways of agrarian change, with a primary focus on cotton growing lowland Tajikistan. Its main focus has been on patterns of accumulation, surplus expropriation, and production relations. I have pointed to the production politics in different localities, and the unfolding of post-socialist agrarian change. In this final chapter, I will draw my final conclusions. I will first discuss the general findings. In the subsequent section I will explain the differences between the two localities; conclude on pathways of agrarian change as they emerged in lowland Tajikistan; and, discuss the implications for understanding the Tajik state and rural politics.

6.1. Continuity in post-socialism

6.1.1. What's after socialism?

Post-socialist Tajikistan has gone through major political, economic, and social changes in the past 25 years. We can now return to the questions raised in the introductory chapter of this thesis, in brief: "What's after socialism?"

An interrogation of the everyday economy is indispensable to understand post-socialist transformation (cf. Burawoy and Krotov 1992). I have attempted to understand the reality of Tajikistan's transformation somewhere "in between" socialism and capitalism, and have studied two distinct trajectories of agrarian change. By looking at micropolitics through the lens of "small transformations," I have revealed the continuation and legacies of Soviet agrarian politics, particularly when it comes down to the social relations *in* and *of* production in the cotton production complex. Yet I would go even farther and argue that cotton farming carries a stamp of serfdom in which cotton debt has served as a means of bondage, as will be discussed further below. A feudalist turn is, indeed, to respond to Verdery (1996, 227), in my view not an entirely "absurd image."[1] I use this metaphor in particular to shed light on agrarian production relations.[2] Verdery (1996, 208) particularly referred to feudalism's characteristic of the "parcellisation of sovereignty." I do not argue that agrarian production relations in Tajikistan reflect true feudalism, but I find the feudalist metaphor adequate to characterise production relations in the cotton economy (characterised by debt bondage) and it is more suitable than terming them "capitalist." Importantly, note that, as Brass (2008) and Kara (2017) argued and demonstrated, unfree labour and debt bondage can exist in capitalism too.[3] For instance, adverse contract farming arrangements between global food empires or agri-businesses and smallholder farmers, resulting in indebted farmers and increasingly constrained farmer autonomy, can be regarded as forms of unfree production relations or bonded labour. I also pointed to this development in the introductory chapter, where I noted that contract farming schemes may eventually lead to a situation in which farmers become divorced from the means of production.

To this day, the Tajik rural landscape has features of a planned economy. Yet while the state is still controlling the agricultural production by upholding ownership of land, this is not the main mechanism of control. More important is the fact that under a formally changed political and economic stratification, the monoculture of cotton and relations of dependency between post-socialist elites and farmers have been kept intact. This is not to say that in "purely" capitalist economies dependencies between farms and other actors do not exist; yet it is important what form these relations take: market pressure versus state-like hierarchical pressure. In Tajikistan, *de jure* things have changed but *de facto* continuity can be observed. Hence, against conventional wisdom and expectations of (neo)classical economists, in the emerging capitalist market economy, production relations and related regimes of surplus extraction and distribution have not been significantly reshaped. Political capital, rather than financial capital, is key in making a living in the Tajik countryside. The lack of profound change in production relations in a context of formal economic "transition" is what Burawoy (2001b) (in the context of post-Soviet Russia) termed the "transition without transformation." Following Burawoy (1985), we could say the labour process in agriculture has remained the same, as farmers (still) lack the decision-making power over their labour, and the political apparatus of production has also hardly altered. The old economic order has continued in a somewhat different form.

During a (foreign) donor meeting I attended in February 2015 in Dushanbe, one of the attending expatriates stated his worries about the stagnation of Tajikistan's rural economy, and the absence of private investment. "How can Tajik agriculture develop, if private investment remains absent? What is the driving force of this economy? Is it public money or donor injections?" He had attended the "2015 Development Forum" in Tajikistan and had seen the presentation by Mr. Yu, the country director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In his presentation Mr. Yu had discussed the aspect of private sector investment in Tajikistan and had compared it to other countries (see Yu 2015). The expatriate who had attended his presentation recalled the figures, and said: "There is hardly any private investment in Tajikistan [it accounted for around 29 per cent between 2000 and 2012 in total gross fixed capital formation]." He continued: "Where does this end? In Georgia, Armenia and Moldova, private sector investment is much higher and accounts for around 90 per cent of all investment.[4] It is important to bring in the private sector; but how? Something is going very wrong here." Indeed, the differences are remarkable. Striking (as well) is that, according to Yu's figures, in Uzbekistan, where the agrarian economy has been relatively isolated in the past decades, private investment's share in total gross fixed capital formation was almost 75 per cent between 2000 and 2012 (Yu 2015).[5]

With the above in mind, one can thus ask, just as Ioffe *et al.* (2006, 221) wrote in reference to Russia: Is Tajikistan "at a crossroads between two economic systems, command and market?" Is there (still) a movement towards capitalism in Tajikistan, or is this mix of socialism and capitalism – in which the socialist-like planned economy concerns the elite-controlled cotton production complex, and the capitalist component regards the relatively autonomous smaller-scale commercial vegetable and fruit production – the final, that is, permanent state? What do the rubrics of socialism and capitalism actually entail in everyday life? I question the transition paradigm, and find credence in the work by Verdery (1996, 208) who used the feudalist metaphor

to startle "the automatic presumption that what is happening in the former socialist bloc is a transition to markets and capitalism."

> [T]hinking about feudalism points us in directions at least as fruitful for gaining knowledge of what is happening in the former Soviet bloc as do images of a transition to capitalism, with its big bangs, markets, democracy, shock therapy, and private property. All these highlight not current developments but an expectation, a telos (Verdery 1996, 227).

One could wonder if Tajikistan constitutes a puzzle where "agrarian transition […] [does] not necessarily imply the full development of capitalist social relations of production in agriculture as part of the establishment of the dominance of capitalism within a particular social formation" (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009a, 21). After more than 25 years of "transition," Soviet-style relations of production have been kept intact in an attempt to sustain surplus expropriation. This has been the way in which surplus was "pumped out of direct producers" (cf. Marx 2010[1894], 555). This system has been kept running by strong state support; the entire cotton sector functions with soft budget constraints.

We can only understand this persistence of cotton farming if we look at the micro level of the farm household and the interaction between farm households, state, and parastatal firms and "expand our understanding of production beyond its purely economic moment and explicitly include politics" (Burawoy 1985, 7). In Uzbekistan, Trevisani (2007, 85) observed that, while one might observe continuation of production relations from a distance, relations between (former) peripheries and centres have transformed; as such, "recent reform intensification has produced a significant shift in the patterns of political dynamics in rural Uzbekistan." Indeed, also in Tajikistan centre-periphery relations have changed: the market as imperative has increased in importance in inflicting struggle and competition between farmers and local authorities, and struggles over claims and resources have become more localised. The situation in Tajikistan reminisces the context of Uzbekistan as observed by Trevisani (2007, 90): "[Reforms] on the one hand, generate more space for entrepreneurship while, on the other, maintain constraints on the entrepreneurial freedom". In the sections that follow, I will describe the continuity that has characterised post-Soviet agrarian transformation in Tajikistan, which particularly relates to the cotton production complex.

6.1.2. A political geographic dimension to agrarian change: islands of agrarian order and production politics

In a recent ethnographic work on bazaars in Kyrgyzstan, Spector (2017) identified islands of order amidst an unstable political climate in Kyrgyzstan. She described how bazaar elders created pockets of stability in the setting of a malfunctioning state. I apply this concept of islands of order in this thesis to indicate why and how elites have created islands of agrarian order in areas deemed of interest, whereas other areas were characterised by neglect. In this regard there has been a strong political geographic dimension to Tajikistan's pathways of agrarian change.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis I discussed cotton's long history in Central Asia. In parts of Uzbekistan and northern Tajikistan, cotton was already planted before the Russian conquest in the 19th-century, and a "cotton boom" started in earnest with the establishment of cotton

producing farms under Bolshevik rule (Abashin 2015; Zanca 2010). As was noted before, the Soviet state attributed primary importance to cotton growing areas whilst livestock raising, household plot production, and grain-growing Soviet farms received less attention from the state. Hence, even at that time, the state granted privileges to particular localities, where revenues were most lucrative and also easy to extract. Subsequently, the prominent role of cotton has shaped the post-Soviet political economy of agrarian transformation.

The post-Soviet Tajik state has not fully liberalised the agrarian economy. Particularly the cotton sector, concentrated in the Tajik lowlands, has remained rigidly controlled. The regime has forced farmers to grow cotton, a crop which farmers "could not eat, or process to serve local needs" (as stated by Mitchell 2002, 59-60 in reference to Egypt). Yet this is actually not true in the Central Asian context. "Cotton [has become] the farms' proverbial lifeblood" (cf. Zanca 2010, 66): The Tajik population consumes cotton oil on a daily basis, and consumes the meat from cattle that are fed with so-called cotton cake.

In order to retain the monoculture of cotton, Tajik strongmen used the mechanism of debt, and various relations of dependency (Boboyorov 2012). As such, elites have created islands of agrarian order in localities of interest: pockets of production regulation, where, through the mechanism of debt – among other means – a change in production relations has been stifled. At the same time, individualisation of farming and true "freedom to farm" was achieved more easily in areas of the state's neglect, such as the eastern highland region, Gorno Badakhshan. In those localities there was no apparent elite or state interest to keep large-scale farming structures intact.

6.1.3. Debt

Debt is a core element in Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian order. As I noted in Chapter 3 ("*Soft budgets and elastic debt: farm liabilities in the agrarian political economy of post-Soviet Tajikistan"*) debt arose in the course of the 2000s through an adverse contract farming system (the so-called futures system). Farms became locked-in a debt cycle. Cotton producing farms throughout Tajikistan featured cotton debt until 2008, after which debt was to be nullified. This had happened in the locality I studied in the Yovon district, but a write-off of debt had not taken place in the other village I studied that is located in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district. The latter case was analysed in Chapter 3.

In agrarian settings, debt can have different implications. Firstly, in capitalist relations of production debt relates to accumulation by dispossession of land (Gerber 2014; Li 2010; McMichael 2013). Earlier Lenin (1977[1908]) also identified debt as a means that might stimulate the emergence of agrarian capitalism.[6] Interestingly, as I described in the introductory chapter of this thesis, quite a large number of peasants in Tsarist Central Asia lost land as a result of cotton debt which had resulted from a system based on cotton futures. Farmers risked losing access to land once they could not fulfil the terms of the contract. The way in which debt functioned in those years is often seen today in market economies, in which debt is a typical market mechanism that eventually provokes the transfer of land to more (in pure economic terms) productive and efficient land users. Interestingly farm debt is a prominent issue in European agriculture

nowadays, where farms are under big pressure to enlarge their scale of operation (van der Ploeg *et al.* 2015).

A second way in which debt can play out on the ground is in bonding labour. This mechanism often comes to the fore in historical analyses of debt, for instance as a feature in feudal relations of production, where debt ties people to the soil (see for instance Bhaduri 1973; Breman 2007; Byres 2016). Yet debt bondage is not a relic of the past, as I noted before, exemplified for instance by relatively recent observations of this specific production relation in rural India (Brass 2008; Guérin 2013) and elsewhere in the world (Kara 2017).[7]

The debt in Tajikistan is ambiguous and rather unique. First of all, cotton debt, or rather, indebted farmland (*qarzi zamin*) in Tajikistan finds its origin in the legacy of Soviet rationales of accounting: part of the explanation for the accumulation of debt is that soft budget constraints characterised the cotton economy for a long time, in which accounting by farmers echoed that of Soviet agriculture. Credit-providing institutions, i.e. Tajik banks, as well as farmers, could incur debt, without any repercussions. Hence budget constraints were soft.

A second remarkable feature of the Tajik debt is that it has become detached from its legal owner, but it has remained attached to land. It was the predecessor of the individual farms, the collective farm, whose indebted fields were transferred to individual farmers. What is more, even in the early 2000s indebtedness could be questioned, as domestic elites capitalised on the cotton production complex (Ernst and Young 2009; World Bank 2012b). "[T]he donor community and the Government of Tajikistan should be extremely wary of placing credence in the debts as reported by investors and their financiers" (World Bank 2012b, 1). As was noted in a World Bank (2012b, 13) report:[8]

> [D]espite the export tax, the low ginning rate, high deductions and arguably low yields, cotton farming in Tajikistan was only unprofitable in 2002 based on the above assumptions [i.e. "an international price comparison based on 36 per cent ginning outturn and the Tajik situation of an outturn of 32 per cent," and "a cost of production of USD 200/MT"]. Given this picture, it is yet again hard to comprehend the argument that the sector currently finds itself in a position of severe debt. Furthermore, based on the price levels prior to 2001, it is almost inexplicable how the sector could have been in so much debt prior to 2001.

A third characteristic of the Tajik debt is that the strongman, described in Chapter 3, did not want any debt pay off. The strongman's primary interest was in cotton production. There was also no interest involved; debt did not increase over the years. By upholding debt the strongman could continue extracting rents from agriculture, since debt served to tie people to the soil. Hence, in Tajikistan, cotton debt has not led to a dispossession of land. In this regard, the debt in Tajikistan seems reminiscent of observations of debt in settings where it leads to labour bondage, in feudal-like agrarian structures (cf. Breman 2007).

In the locality studied in Chapter 3, even though there was demographic pressure, there was no competition over land, but rather land abandonment. In 2013, the district authorities circulated an announcement, calling for interested parties (farmers, enterprises, institutions) to farm 400

hectares of land in the district. This may not seem a large area (comprising less than 2 per cent of the district's farmland) but the fact that it was not used was enough to worry district authorities. As in Soviet agriculture, there was a widespread belief (especially held by state officials) that all available arable land should be cultivated.

As a result, in this district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, there was no "land's end," which Li (2014) observed in Indonesia, where villagers increasingly engaged in commodity production of cacao and privately occupied land until all land was taken. All the former common lands had been usurped and transformed into privately controlled plots (cf. Li 2014). It was only due to debt that farmers continued to cultivate fields in the case studied in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district; debt served to safeguard land cultivation; debt tied people to land.

Fourth, debt was entangled with authorities' pressure on farmers to plant cotton. I therefore argue that debt was not a straightforward economic means, but it had extra-economic elements as farmers were coerced into producing cotton.[9]

A fifth unique aspect of Tajikistan's *qarzi zamin* is that, as I elaborated in Chapter 3, debt was pliable. In other words it was elastic; for one farmer more burdensome than for another. The Chinese farm enterprise, which commenced its operation in 2012, could start without any debt. For those burdened with debt, an exit from farming was only possible once one could find a successor to his/her farm, who would take over the indebted fields; farmers' mobility was curtailed.

Lastly, debt existed "in disguise." Despite the far-reaching consequences of debt for the rural dwellers concerned, in the capital city of Tajikistan, governmental officials were not aware of, or pretended to be unaware of the continuation of (old) debt and international donors widely assumed the debt problem to be history. With the national debt write-off and adoption of the "Road Map" in 2009, it was believed by "outsiders" that debt belonged to the past.

The highly important theme of farm and cotton debt and its role for rural livelihoods, which has featured in this thesis, warrants further attention. Debt is inherent to contemporary capitalist societies and has gained increasing scholarly attention in the past few years (Gerber 2014; Graeber 2011; Visser and Kalb 2010), and I wish to explore the issue of farm and cotton debt in the post-Soviet setting more in depth, by studying it through a political economy and/or political ecology lens, particularly since soil salinisation and land degradation are interwoven with values over land, and constrain rural livelihoods throughout Tajikistan and Central Asia. Farm and agricultural debt have been observed in neighbouring Uzbekistan as well (Trevisani 2010; Shtaltovna *et al.* 2012). The theme of agrarian debt in Central Asia merits attention, particularly regarding the perceptions and ramifications of debt.

6.1.4. The wider production politics

Besides debt as a mechanism to secure land cultivation and cotton production, the state has pressured farmers into planting cotton by stipulating cotton quotas, which formally existed up until the late 2000s, but which informally continue to this day. This was described in Chapter 4

("*Granted to privatise, but failed to capitalise: agri-food politics and emerging farm typologies in post-Soviet Tajikistan"*). Land use practices are closely monitored, and, a lowered land tax for cotton has served the similar goal of enticing farmers to plant cotton. Yet similar to debt's elastic capacity, I noted in Chapter 4 that production plans and land taxes were also negotiable; they were also pliable in some respect. Following the Tajik Land Code, "inappropriate land use" and leaving land fallow for two subsequent years can imply a loss of the land use rights certificate. The ambiguous interpretation of land use laws has given authorities arbitrary power; it imparts "access control to these state agencies and leave[s] resource users in the position of having to invest in relations with these agents in order to maintain access" (cf. Ribot and Peluso 2003, 163).

Hence farmers' autonomy continues to be severely circumscribed. The state is still significantly involved in the organisation of production and farmers do not have a free choice where and when to market their crops, particularly when cotton is concerned. Chapter 4 particularly touched on the forces of production in transformation, and the political economy of knowledge, and the opposites of knowledge: ignorance and incompetence. This peculiarity of knowledge generation (and negligence) testifies to the way in which power and knowledge are in fact inseparable; which Foucault (1972) extensively analysed and theorised. The fact that the Tajik state has prioritised cotton over all other farm produce has meant that food crop production has long been ignored. Already under Soviet rule this was a niche overlooked by the Soviet state; for the post-Soviet state, food crop production has remained of little interest. Also in this regard, there has been a strong continuation of Soviet policies, in which food crops were predominantly planted on rural household plots, and much less on the *kolkhozes*' and *sovkhozes*' fields. Importantly the state's negligence towards food crop production also concerns a lack of attention to institutions and infrastructure needed for the production and marketing of vegetable crops. Because institutions (and input markets) for food crop production remain underdeveloped many farmers prefer to grow cotton, as a crop that does not get spoiled easily. This is different for perishable vegetables, which require rapid transport to markets. Hence the lack of state attention for food crop production (also) plays an important role in explaining the continuation of cotton production.

6.1.5. Possession and dispossession: from bundle of rights to bundle of powers

> If we move beyond [mere] rights, we are more apt to see […] how amazingly simplistic was the design of the entire project [of decollectivisation], given the vast panoply of absurdly framed procedures, unintended consequences, and unrealised intentions it produced (Verdery 2003, 19).

Tajikistan's farm debt and the country's agricultural institutions highlight that we need to unpack the bundle of rights. While, in the global "land grab" discourse land is portrayed and perceived to be a lucrative asset, I have shown in my thesis that land can also be a liability. If farmers do not have the ultimate effective user rights, land ownership is hollow. I have sought to demonstrate how various policies, and informal land governance in which debt played an important role, have created powerless farmers who lack the autonomy over their own labour. With decollectivisation farmers were made individually responsible for their enterprise – they had to bear the risks of production – and decollectivisation burdened them with debt as liability. At the same time farmers were not given the autonomy to decide over their production.[10] Besides explicit coercion, for a long time the political economy entailed that cotton was the only vehicle to obtain credits, farm

inputs, and irrigation water. Moreover, there were no alternative markets for cotton to access better terms. Here applies what Trevisani (2010, 171) observed in Uzbekistan. While relating his observations to the work by Verdery (2003) in Romania, he noted that

> the external conditions in which legal ownership titles [over land] were embedded were much more important than the titles in a narrow sense, because those conditions, over which producers had limited influence, defined what ownership rights ultimately entailed.

And interestingly, according to the World Bank (2012c), in earlier years[11] Tajikistan's farmers were less autonomous than Uzbekistan's farmers even though there was more state control over the cotton sector in the latter.

In the course of post-socialist transformation elites – the strongmen – appropriated administrative rights regarding cotton production, and transferred production obligations and liabilities to individual farmers. *Dehqon* farmers could obtain a land use rights certificate which endowed them with the private right to use land. However this *right* did not (always) translate into the *ability* to use land, and therefore we must distinguish, like Ribot and Peluso (2003, 153) have done, between the "*ability* to derive benefit from things" and "the *right* to benefit from things" (emphasis in original). Following Verdery (2003), people in Tajikistan have not been given the ability to *master* land. The land use certificate that people acquired proved pseudo-ownership for many, for whom it was an empty shell.

That notwithstanding, in Chapter 3 it was explained that a relatively large group of villagers did opt to become farmers. While the former *kolkhoz* had been stripped from its assets, and there was only indebted farmland left, for some villagers farmland was important because having access to farmland provided them with a strip of land for subsistence farming and land to pasture animals. Hence, the right to land comprised, in fact, a bundle of rights. This enticed people to apply for a land use certificate. Moreover, many villagers hoped farming would turn into a lucrative source of income in the future after all, and that debt would one day wither away. They hoped that the situation would change in some distant future, with their rights to land enshrined in law. Yet people valued land not only in mere economic terms; it had symbolic, social and cultural value too. They wanted to have a base in the village even though it was a liability. They valued the local fields because they had always worked these farmlands.

6.1.6. Crop specificities: the Tajik empire of cotton

Due to cotton's history in Central Asia, the crop has become part of the fabric of social life (Boboyorov 2013; Zanca 2010). Everyone knows when sowing, weeding, and harvesting commence. Aspects related to the cotton economy frequently feature in daily news and one only has to browse through a series of Tajik newspapers around September or October to read about the cotton harvesting campaigns. This is just one example that exemplifies the preoccupation with cotton in everyday life in Tajikistan. One could argue that the crop has permeated daily life. Up until today the residues of the cotton plant that remain after harvesting and ginning are essential in the countryside: cotton stalks, cotton oil, and cotton cake are indispensable for rural households (as a source of household fuel; as cooking ingredient; and, as animal feed). These

products are popular throughout rural Tajikistan and the need to access them – particularly cotton stalks – partly sustains the cotton economy. More important is that in rural Tajikistan, like in rural Uzbekistan, cotton production has continued to be of prime importance as one of the few sources of (agricultural) employment.

With my attention to cotton, I do not argue that cotton production always equals exploitation and rural deprivation. However, that Tajikistan's cotton commodity chain features debt may not be a surprise. Ever since the forced expansion of cotton production by colonial empires around the world, the crop has been associated with labour coercion, exploitation and slavery (Isaacman 1996; Bassett 2001; Beckert 2015). To this day cycles of indebtedness, labour exploitation, suppressed prices, and late payments seem to be structural features of the global cotton production complex (see for instance Beckert 2015; Gray and Dowd-Uribe 2013; Ransom and Sutch 1972). Cotton seems controversial across the Global South where it is related to rural poverty and global inequalities (Sneyd 2011; 2015).[12] Hence just as debt characterises the cotton sector in contemporary Tajikistan, so one can observe pervasive cotton debt and farm foreclosure in – for instance – Sub Saharan Africa (Gray 2008; Gray and Dowd-Uribe 2013). We should also not overlook the fact that the crop's production tends to leave severe imprints on natural environments. The desiccation of the Aral Sea has become a global signpost of the devastating impact of cotton production under Soviet rule.

While avoiding crop determinism or essentialism, as well as environmental determinism, we have to be cognisant of the specific characteristics of lowland agriculture, and the commodity-specific nature of cotton, to understand the labour process and the specifics of production relations, that tend to characterise the cotton production complex. As was explained throughout the preceding chapters, cotton is labour and capital intensive. Throughout the production cycle timing matters, in terms of sowing, irrigating, and fertilising the fields. Because of all input requirements, up and downstream market relations are important in the production of cotton. Producer and processor are interdependent; something that is seen in many contract farming arrangements (regardless of crop characteristics). Such relations of dependency are easily exploited and tend to prevail in the production of crops in which value chain coordination is essential, i.e. in the production of crops that are difficult to plant autonomously, and/or whose processing is delicate (such as sugarcane, oil palm, and bananas). While cotton is much less perishable than most food crops, in time transport to the ginneries is important. Long storage at the field site has an adverse impact on the harvest's moisture content, and this in turn may affect the farm gate price. As such, cotton production is a precarious enterprise.

Outgrower schemes under monopolistic and monopsonistic powers tend to characterise the global cotton value chain. In cotton farming in many different countries throughout the Global South, inputs tend to be delivered on credit, and sales are restricted to a few companies, which may hold territorial control. In this regard, cotton production is reminiscent of sugar production, in which even more than in cotton production, a rapid transfer of the crop after the harvest to the mill is necessary, which "binds outgrowers to the structural monopsony of the cane milling companies" (Dubb *et al*. 2017, 469). This is because of sugar cane's high perishability and the fact that value is only created upon sale as processed sugar (Dubb 2017). Sugarcane growers tend to

have little autonomy; as noted by Mintz (1985, 50): The "land and mill must be coordinated, their labour synchronised […]. [Leading to a] land-and-factory combination […]. Without overall control of land and mill, such scheduling and discipline would not have been possible." As Hirschman (1981, 73) described:

> [B]ecause processing operations and forward linkages in general tend to be technological strangers to [such a] staple, these operations, […] tend to be undertaken and controlled by groups distinct from the grower of the staple, who is thus relegated more firmly to his agricultural role […] [the grower] is effectively cut off from any further economic activities on behalf of his product.

In this regard, the labour process of staples such as cotton and sugar – major agricultural commodities with great transformative power, just as soy and palm oil – differ markedly from that of food crops such as rice and vegetables, which farmers can produce, market and consume (individually and directly).[13] As referred to in Chapter 2 ("*Towards a geography of window dressing and benign neglect: the state, donors, and elites in Tajikistan's trajectories of post-Soviet agrarian change"*), Scott (2009) has characterised these consumable food crops as "state repelling"; which means crops with low value per unit of weight that are less attractive – and more costly – to confiscate, and several of such crops "require tender loving care [and thus] appear to be poorly suited to collectivist agriculture" (Hirschman 1981, 96). It is thus imperative to attend to crop specificities and the way in which crop characteristics articulate with production politics and production relations, that is, the extent to which farmers can exercise control over their production.

6.2. Understanding trajectories of agrarian change

How do the Tajik "cotton mania" and redefined property relations, as analysed above, relate to Tajikistan's pathways of agrarian transformation? In this sector I return to Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian question and look at the way in which capitalism has penetrated the countryside. In my research, the primary objective has not been to compare the cases studied, but to look at the range of outcomes in the course of post-socialist transformation.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, analysis of the agrarian question often departs from the models of capitalism "from above" versus that "from below." By pointing at the different pathways described in Chapters 3 and 4 I argue that we should not (only) look at *national* pathways of agrarian transformation (i.e. as done by Lenin (1977[1908]) and Marx (2010[1894]) with the English, Prussian and American way), but look at the development of capitalism with more attention to contingencies in terms of, for instance, geographic and socio-political characteristics of a place.

6.2.1. Traits of rural accumulation: Tajikistan as "outlier"?

In reviewing "traits of rural accumulation under neoliberal globalisation," Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009b) discussed various countries in terms of their rural capital accumulation processes, and the respective linkages between the subsectors of agricultural export production and peasant production. "[U]nderstanding the traits of rural accumulation in an era of neoliberal globalisation

is extremely important when evaluating the salience or otherwise of the agrarian question in the contemporary period" (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009b, 317). The authors identified three different processes, which are (i) accumulation with significant inter-subsectoral linkages; (ii) accumulation with weaker inter-subsectoral linkages; and (iii) outliers (see also Akram-Lodhi *et al.* 2009). Whereas, in the first two processes, agrarian producers serve export markets and domestic demand to greater and lesser degrees, outliers do not. Tajikistan seems to belong to the latter, where "the rural economy neither provides significant agricultural exports nor is an important component of domestic demand, which is driven by migrants' remittances and mineral rents" (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009b, 323). Tajikistan however differs from typical outliers described by Akram-Lodhi *et al.* (2009) and Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009b) (such as Armenia and Ethiopia) in that a number of Tajik farmers are linked to the global economy through cotton production. Another difference is that one does not observe a process of "re-agrarianisation" in Tajikistan;[14] rather, rural households stay with one foot in the countryside, and another in the globalised, transnational economy with their links to migrating family members. Yet being an outlier and having a largely inwardly focussed rural economy does not mean that capitalism does not mature in the countryside. I identify that capitalism matures in rural Tajikistan most prominently "from above," and less significantly also "from below."

6.2.2. Capitalism "from above" and capitalism "from below"

The domestic regime of capitalism "from above" relies on control over land. In Tajikistan it is seen primarily in non-farm capital invested in farmland in which actors (domestic elites) control the land directly, and concentrate more land over time, as was observed in the Yovon district, analysed in Chapter 4. Note that Indirect capital accumulation also takes place, as described in Chapter 3, as domestic elites extract capital from cotton producing farmers, under a regime of debt.

Another trajectory of capital accumulation "from above" is seen in the more recent emergence of foreign investors. As was detailed in Chapter 5 ("*Politics or profits along the 'Silk Road': what drives Chinese farms in Tajikistan and helps them thrive?*"), Tajik agriculture has witnessed increased attention from Chinese investors. The Chinese enterprises active in Tajikistan take the form of large farm enterprises that mimic the domestic large farm enterprises engaged in the cotton economy. Interestingly the presence and focus of the Chinese land investors shed light on the characteristics of the Tajik agrarian economy as the Chinese investments in Tajikistan are highly contingent upon Tajikistan's specific conditions: hungry for investments particularly in the state's strategic domains (cotton and grains), and welcome to investments in the sectors ignored by the state (food crops).

Strikingly, for a long time it seemed as if it was only in Tajikistan where Chinese agribusinesses really got a foot on the ground. At the same time, however, an influx of Chinese agricultural commodities and companies can be seen throughout the Central Asian region. Yet the emergence of Chinese actors in the wider Central Asian region is not without problems, as it is confronted with concrete contestation "from below." These observations provide an interesting entrance to research the wider dynamics in the Central Asian region, particularly in this period in which the

One Belt, One Road (OBOR) (also called the "Silk Road Economic Belt" or "Belt and Road Initiative") is high on political and societal agendas.

If one would only concentrate on the trait of rural accumulation "from above," one tends to conclude that all former *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* workers merely end up as agricultural wage labourers and labour migrants. However, some smaller *dehqon* farmers succeed in building a profitable farm enterprise.[15] Yet in most cases, only the combination of on-farm and off-farm capital can explain the resilience of such small *dehqon* farms. According to Mukhamedova and Wegerich (2018), who base their findings on a relatively old source from 2006, in earlier years migrant remittances contributed around 10 to 15 per cent of income to rural households; from my own observations, I would argue that this percentage is much higher nowadays. Notably, according to a survey on "farmer and farm worker perceptions of land reform and sustainable agriculture in Tajikistan," conducted by DfID, USAID and the World Bank (2012, 22), "for those who received migrant remittances, income from this source increased substantially from 2007 to 2011." Migrant remittances may amount to over 150 US dollars per month, while wages in agriculture are as low as 40 US dollars per month. Moreover, proceeds from one hectare of cotton, that is grown over one full growing season (a full year), may only be around 200 US dollars.

Dehqon farmers who can diversify cropping patterns away from cotton are able to accumulate some capital based on farming. This was also analysed in Chapter 4. I observe a development of capitalism "from below" in Tajikistan, but this remains relatively insignificant to date. Smallholders' ability to diversify production points to their political economic space (cf. Kuns 2017b) and the smallholders engage in smaller niche markets outside of elite interests.

6.2.3. Explaining local variation: uneven traits of rural accumulation

How to explain the differences between the two cases studied and described in Chapter 3 and 4? The cases analysed and described exemplify that there is considerable variation in outcomes of the agrarian question within Tajikistan, even though the localities were subject to the same set of policies (decreed at the national level). I have observed an uneven development of capitalist agriculture within one (seemingly) homogenous lowland region. Hence there is no singular agrarian question, which is in agreement with Lenin (1977[1908], Byres (1996) and Chayanov (1966[1925]), who all focussed on the regional character of the agrarian question.

An analysis of the differences between the two localities brings us back to state-society relations. Whereas the s*ovkhoz* was partially dismantled in the Yovon district in 1999, as a result of a World Bank pilot project, which allowed for the establishment of individual and family *dehqon* farms (as was explained in Chapter 4), the process of farm decollectivisation was much more cumbersome in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi (described in Chapter 3). In the latter district it was only later, also under top-down pressure, that the successor to the *kolkhoz* was (partially) individualised. As was noted in Chapter 2, the international donor community has been a very important societal actor that has exerted pressure on the Tajik state. The fact that farm restructuring was much more cumbersome outside of the World Bank's pilot projects indicates that the state was constrained in its autonomy vis-à-vis domestic elites. These domestic elites had significant interests to stifle profound change in production relations and they assumed a highly significant role in shaping the

state's actions. The lack of the state's autonomy and the dominant role of elites are also reflected in the fact that indebtedness complicates rural livelihoods in particular localities, such as in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district.

The futures system that existed until the late 2000s plays a large role in understanding the variations in farming structures in lowland Tajikistan. It was in the aftermath of the Tajik Civil War that regime insiders had the prerogative to establish futures companies (as I described in Chapter 3). With these companies elites appropriated control over cotton producing farms, though not through direct ownership of farmland. In the Jaloliddini Balkhi district, it was a strongman who had married into the presidential family who took control over the local cotton economy, and to this day this strongman is said to be in control over cotton exports in Tajikistan (Eurasianet 2017). In the Jaloliddini Balkhi district he has upheld an island of agrarian order, with aspects of Soviet continuity, by discarding decrees that would liberate farmers. Debt bondage drives the production of cotton in this locality, under conditions of severe soil salinisation and dilapidated irrigation infrastructure. In this locality in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, land itself is not an attractive asset to grab or possess.

In the Yovon district there was another futures company that had control in the past. Yet even more important, the mechanism assumed by debt, as a way to secure the cultivation of land, was in fact not needed in the Yovon district, where farmers without any debt cultivated the fields. In this district I observed competition over land, because water availability, relatively good soil fertility and proximity to markets make farming potentially profitable. In this setting, large-scale domestic and Chinese commercial farm enterprises have been established, as was described in Chapter 4.

Hence state-society relations emerge from an analysis of the divergent pathways of agrarian change in Tajikistan. Firstly, the analysis brings to light the importance of the presence or absence of international donors, as external societal actors that (seek to) influence the state. Second, the fact that debt has been written off in some, but not in all localities, points in another way to state-society interactions and the importance of geography in understanding pathways of agrarian change. The state's autonomy has been compromised by elites, while at the same time also the state's capacity to penetrate the countryside was obstructed by strongmen. Thus the discrepancies in local rule point to the way in which the status of the agrarian sector and geographic factors (e.g. degree of salinisation, availability of water, proximity to urban centres and markets) influence the strategy adopted by elites.

To recap, the two cases exhibit distinct pathways of agrarian transformation. While in both localities, migrant remittances are an important source of livelihood, there is a large difference in the size of farms and modality of farming. In the Jaloliddini Balkhi district there are predominantly small farmers (around or below four hectares), who possess indebted farmland. There is hardly any rural capital accumulation "from below." In the Yovon district, on the other hand, there are substantially larger farm enterprises (even above 300 hectares) and I identified distinct trajectories of the emergence of capitalist agriculture: "from above," by large agribusinesses, and "from below," by smallholder *dehqon* farmers. These differences testify to the highly context-

dependent character of the agrarian question, that is, for instance, how geographic and natural factors play a role in the process of agrarian change.

6.3. Understanding the Tajik state and post-Soviet regime

6.3.1. Classifying the Tajik state

I already touched upon the importance of state-society relations in understanding divergent pathways of agrarian change in Tajikistan. In this section I want to deepen the analysis. First of all: How should we understand and classify the Tajik state? Second: "What are the implications of particular property forms and productive technologies for the ways human groups live and work together?" (Hann 2003b, 4) Third: "What is the role of agrarian classes of labour – peasant classes, small farmers and agricultural workers – in struggles for democracy"? (Bernstein 2009b, 241)

In the introduction of this thesis, I discussed various concepts that are used to conceptualise and understand the Tajik state and its regime; as a hybrid, neo-patrimonial regime, one featuring clientelism and/or being clan based. Chapter 2 further disentangled state and society interactions and pointed at regime-insiders' strong vested interests in the agrarian economy. The Tajik regime has long been conceptualised as a cohesive group of actors, which may lead one to characterise it as neo-patrimonial. Indeed, the concept of neo-patrimonialism might be useful to explain how patterns of traditional rule exist within the structures of a supposedly modern – democratic – government. Yet the notion of neo-patrimonialism does not suffice in explaining divergence in local rule. For instance: How can we understand the fact that elites uphold debt in one locality, but not in another? As Laruelle (2012, 305) noted, "neopatrimonialism supposes centralised and hierarchical corruption that operates in a pyramidal fashion, and serves a political legitimacy strategy."

Indeed, as Laruelle (2012, 306) continued:

> [The] ideal-typical view [of neo-patrimonialism] has been criticised because it emphasises the stabilising aspects of a regime without giving the means to take into account changes within the regime or what makes it legitimate. Moreover, this vision too often has been limited to the personality of the leader and his family. Analysing neopatrimonialism as a top-down system does not allow one to understand the societal fabric and bottom-up logics.

The notion of neopatrimonialism seems to assume coherence in rule throughout a larger administrative unit, while patrimonial rulers do face difficulties, as Weber (2013[1978], 1055, emphasis in original) explained earlier:

> The continuous struggle of the central power with the various centrifugal local powers creates a specific problem for patrimonialism when the patrimonial ruler, with his personal power resources – his landed property, other sources of revenue and personally loyal officials and soldiers –, confronts not a mere mass of subjects differentiated only according to sibs and vocations, but when he stands as one landlord […] above other *landlords*, who as local *honoratiores* wield an autonomous authority of their own.

I contend that in understanding the variegated capacity and autonomy of the Tajik state, the notion of neo-patrimonialism lacks explanatory power. The state has been relatively autonomous vis-à-vis domestic societal actors, but importantly, not vis-à-vis (some) domestic (networked) elites (see also Boboyorov 2012). However independent elites that could challenge the state are almost absent, as elites have, like in Uzbekistan as explained by Radnitz (2010, 19), limited "mobile assets [such as financial capital] […] giving them little choice but to throw in their lot with authoritarian rulers." At the same time, compared to other state endowments, (such as oil and gold), "[c]otton requires little capital investment, to say nothing of not having to share profits with foreign concerns" (Zanca 2010, 65). In Tajikistan, elites have their primary stakes in immobile assets, such as the agrarian sector and extractive industries. Hence, the economic structures are of primary importance in Tajikistan to understand political change or lack thereof. The monopsonistic control over the agrarian economy, in particular the cotton production complex, has become an essential lever of capital accumulation for the post-Soviet regime. In this context, influence from actors "from below," i.e. the grassroots level, has remained rather insignificant.

As was analysed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, a string of crises between 2007 and 2009 (a natural catastrophe which caused starvation and a political legitimacy crisis) enabled international donor agencies to pressure the state into implementing policies that would bring "freedom to farm" in earnest. The fact that this became a moment for donors to push through more radical change, highlights (again) the susceptibility of the Tajik regime to international aid, as opposed to Tajikistan's more autonomous resource-rich neighbours of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, who are much less amenable to international pressure. In 2008 the futures system was to be abolished in Tajikistan. Farmers would be given the freedom to select and market their crops. It was supposed to profoundly alter production relations and benefit the rural population. Nevertheless, changes have been experienced highly unevenly throughout the country.

One can see a wide variety among and within districts, and cropping patterns are negotiated individually, implying that clientelistic relations at the lower level are of utmost importance for local farmers to thrive on farming. In this regard, the concept of neo-patrimonialism is of little help, and I also agree with Tunçer-Kilavuz (2014) that logics of regionalism and clan do not suffice to understand the functioning of the Tajik state, as these paradigms may be "misleading" and oversimplify reality (Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 68). Whereas one can identify a close group of people connected to the presidential family, as it would represent a "clan," in my view one must not underestimate "the power of personal networks" (cf. Tunçer-Kilavuz 2014, 68) that may imply differences in the way in which agrarian transformation unfolds. This particularly relates to local level dynamics, where I observed that personal networks which cannot directly be related to the institution of "clan," are of primary importance. Here, I agree with Boboyorov (2013, 106) who noted that "clan commitment is less important than the pressure of both traditional and state authorities."

In order to understand post-Soviet rural dynamics in Uzbekistan, Trevisani (2007, 86) argued to look beyond standard narratives of clan-based politics and immobility and also argued that individuals, and not clans, are at the core of "mechanisms through which new inequalities are created." I concur with this view to look at personalised rule to explain local variations in reform

outcomes. There are historical socio-political differences between districts and villages, but I observed that (for instance) the durability of debt depended foremost on the particular futures company in place, and on power relations at the local level. At the same time, as I noted before, geographic factors play a role. Without debt bondage, people in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi might have left farm fields completely abandoned. It resonates with Brass' (2008, 186) evaluation of agrarian changes in India, where "coercion [was] necessary to retain labour-power in the agrarian sector."

6.3.2. The politics of the agrarian question: rural responses and the gendered nature of agrarian transformation and exploitation

6.3.2.1. Politics and rural responses: "exit, voice, and loyalty"[16]

"Was the cotton labourer exploited in the USSR or today? Why doesn't cotton make us rich?" This question, raised by Saifiddin (2009) in the Tajik newspaper "Millat" touches on the problematics of cotton production in Tajikistan. Tajikistan's post-socialist agrarian production politics have been centred on cotton, and have prevented the emergence of a flourishing rural middle class.

As noted before: Only six per cent of Tajikistan's land area is arable land. Tajikistan has a predominantly rural population, and the arable land/capita ratio is as low as 0.11 hectare/capita (TajStat 2015a). Importantly, more than 30 per cent of the population is undernourished (FAO 2017), and many people live below the national poverty line. At the same time the "cotton mania" barely provides rural dwellers with an income and claims a significant part of arable farmland. The cotton economy is tightly associated with rural deprivation, and as was noted in Chapter 2, control over the countryside – as a way to secure order – has been employed in tandem with the extraction of rural wealth. Elites have stifled the dispersion of resources by obstructing agrarian reforms and upholding control, so limiting the benefits for any societal actors. As Chapter 3 concludes: "If there has been a road to prosperity, it has been a narrow one for the happy few." These happy few are the regime-insiders, who uphold stringent control over the agrarian economy in the southwest Khatlon region. At the same time, the whole welfare system erected by the Soviet has vanished in today's Tajikistan, and state services function inadequately; the quality of education and health care have deteriorated, and rural dwellers regularly have to cope with cuts in electricity supply. The living circumstances have anything but improved in the past two decades, and, politically, there is severe repression. I met a few rural dwellers who explicitly questioned the definition of "democracy." The most prominent questions that emerge are: Why do people refrain from fighting over land? Why doesn't the rural population rebel against adverse extractivism and farmers' indebtedness, which severely deter farm well-being and rural development?

According to Marx (2010[1894], proletarian or peasant rebellions are rare. Gramsci (1971) (also) grappled with the dearth of proletarian (and peasant) protest in Italy which led him to develop the thesis of "cultural hegemony." In critical agrarian studies and political science, many scholars have discussed contentious politics (see for instance Scott 1976; Tilly 2006).

To date, few insights exist in the way in which Tajik society responds to the worsening of rural inequalities, in the form of rural wealth disparities, and, for instance, the growing presence of Chinese enterprises in an already land scarce situation. I have done so briefly before (Hofman

2016), but there is ample reason to devote more space and time to it. Mamonova (2015) and Mamonova and Visser (2014) explain that the Soviet legacy, and the ageing population in post-socialist states are often referred to when it comes to explaining civic action, or the lack of it in the post-Soviet realm. This however, as in the case of Ukraine described by Mamonova (2015), is insufficient to fully understand local responses. One example of a society where (urban and rural) protest and revolts have taken place is Kyrgyzstan, which has seen several occurrences of societal mobilisation in the past few years (Radnitz 2010; Pelkmans 2005).

I argue that we can understand and explain regime continuity and state-society relations through the prism of debt and property rights. As Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009b, 328) noted, in reference to Friedrich Engels' work on the agrarian question, "the fulcrum of rural politics is precisely the rural production process and rural accumulation." There are, I contend, a few important factors at play in understanding the absence of (public and/or collective) protest in Tajikistan. Hirschman (1970) identified three ways in which people respond to inadequate services provided by firms, organisations, and states: exit, voice, and loyalty. This classification is helpful in analysing rural politics in Tajikistan.

First, most frequently seen in Tajikistan, is the exit strategy. Exit, as a way to cope with hardship, is an expression of agency with which labourers seek to improve their lot (cf. Harvey 1982). Harvey (1982) discussed the mobility of labour in contemporary capitalist society. "Geographic mobility […] represents the possibility of escape from tyranny and oppression [and] the hope and striving for a better life" (Harvey 1982, 384).[17] Yet the absence of a labour migrant places burdens on the migrant labourer and those left behind.

Then, as Harvey noted (1982, 385),

> [t]he upshot is that labour, if it cannot escape entirely from the clutches of capital, is faced with a bitter choice. It can flee and seek the better life elsewhere, or it can stay in place and fight. The choice is not all or nothing – seasonal, periodic and even relatively long-term migrations (together with remittances to take care of families left behind) are some of the intermediate solutions.

Migration in Tajikistan has severe societal implications. Yet it is the principal way in which Tajik rural (and also urban) dwellers cope with their situation. It is, like Scott (1976, 213) noted in reference to Southeast Asia, "not simply a prelude to industrialisation and urbanisation but rather a fairly permanent feature of the village response to subsistence problems." Over one million people have reportedly migrated in recent years, which equals approximately 12.5 per cent of the population. Yet when the total number of labour migrants is juxtaposed with the total work force, the percentage is much higher, namely over 40 per cent.[18] Importantly, according to Olimova and Olimov (2012), over 90 per cent of migrants are young men.[19]

Rural-urban migration within Tajikistan is much less prominent given that the urban areas do not provide meaningful employment, particularly for many lower educated rural dwellers.[20] The absence of urbanisation is clearly visible in population growth rates over the past decades.[21] Between 2000 and 2014 the population growth rate and the urban growth rate were fairly equal; 2.05 and 2.03 per cent per year between 2000 and 2014 respectively (Restrepo Cadavid *et al*.

2017). Hence, one cannot talk of a significant trend of urbanisation in Tajikistan as the rural/urban ratio has remained unchanged in recent years, and Tajikistan's population still resides predominantly in the countryside, with which it is the most rural of all Central Asian (and European) countries (Restrepo Cadavid *et al*. 2017). In Kyrgyzstan the population growth rate and urban growth rate comprised 1.21 and 1.2 per cent per year respectively (between 1999 and 2013). In Uzbekistan, the population grew by 1.56 per cent per year between 2000 and 2014; the urban population grew by 1.33 per cent per year in that period (Restrepo Cadavid *et al.* 2017). Hence in these three countries, the urbanisation rates nearly equalled population growth rates in the past two decades. In Kazakhstan the population grew by 0.85 per cent per year, with an urban growth rate of 0.54, between 1999 and 2015 (Restrepo Cadavid *et al.* 2017). This is very interesting and relevant to flag up: The Central Asian figures show a contrasting trend in a world undergoing rapid urbanisation. The figures of the Central Asian countries contrast with Russia, where the population and urban growth rates are negative (-0.27 and -0.24, respectively, between 2000 and 2010) (Restrepo Cadavid *et al*. 2017). In other words, Russia experienced a reverse trend where the population moved from urban to rural areas.

This socio-economic reality of significant international labour migration has important ramifications for rural politics, as

> [m]igration can serve to constrict the capacity of civil society to transform everyday politics into collective action, both by reducing the binding character of economic constraints on households, and by intensifying workloads among those who do not migrate (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009b, 328).

A large part of the young able-bodied population of Tajikistan is absent: the labour migrants who reside intermittently in Russia. Hence a part of the rural dwellers is tied to land, and a part of the potentially rebellious population is abroad. It explains why one does not see larger scale calls for more meaningful – real – democratisation and a change in rural life. A similar argument was made by Zanca (2010, 192) who noted in reference to Uzbekistan: "Were it not the case that millions of Uzbeks work abroad, one has to wonder if massive political rebellion, acts of Islamist terrorism, or even increased acts of nonviolent resistance to the state would not be commonplace." "Many [Uzbek] citizens are choosing simply to get away rather than challenge the overwhelming forces of authoritarian rule" (Zanca 2010, 186). One could say the situation suits the Tajik regime, as it means that most potentially rebellious actors are at distance. As once stated by a diplomat based in Tajikistan (recalled in an informal interview, Dushanbe 23 August 2013): "If Russia would close its borders and all men would return, we would experience a second civil war. Who is going to feed all those people?" A number of international donors active in Tajikistan invests in rural development with the idea that it may prevent conflict and safeguard social stability. In a report by DfID, USAID and the World Bank (2012, 12), family farming was presented as a palliative, i.e. as a way to limit societal unrest:

> Tajikistan is already exporting [its] rural population as temporary migrant labourers, and history shows that we should expect that Tajikistan's population will also eventually shift from rural to urban areas, and that some farm holdings will then be consolidated. However, Tajikistan's urban areas are not ready for a sudden or massive rural to urban migration. Such movements in the short-

> and even medium-term would increase poverty as well as the potential for conflict. Family farms hence offer a safety net in the meantime.

Interestingly as Gleason (1991, 347) described, Western scholars – during the Soviet era –

> noted the potential for mass social change as the mechanisation of cotton farms could be expected to release hundreds of thousands of manual cotton harvesters from work in the fields in those Central Asian republics most directly involved in primary agriculture. […] Since social competition for advancement in the newly crowded Central Asian urban areas would cast into sharp relief the differences in achievement among the different ethnic groups, the transformation of Central Asian agriculture could be expected to lead to increased interethnic conflict.[22]

While I would not go that far and argue that family farm development prevents societal unrest, migration does play a role, and it is the complex societal setting in contemporary Tajikistan that hampers the emergence of a meaningful domestic societal movement which can challenge the ruling regime, and which can influence the state.

Yet there are rural dwellers, who voice their concerns. This is a second way in which, following Hirschman (1970), people express their discontent. In Tajikistan, "voice" is expressed in two ways. First, on a daily base, there are expressions of "everyday forms of peasant resistance" (cf. Scott 1985). Bassett (2001) observed multiple incidences of everyday forms of peasant resistance expressed by cotton-growing farmers in Ivory Coast, and Isaacman (1996) described how Mozambican peasants cooked cotton seeds to prevent the germination of cotton plants, and how their resistance was expressed through particular folk songs that were chanted during fieldwork. Such instances require little organisation. In my own fieldwork I noticed a lot of complaints and expressions of anger in rural Tajikistan, through which rural dwellers, on an individual or personal level, expressed their voice. More notably, as I described in Chapters 3 and 4, some farmers secretly diversify their cropping patterns when they should only be planting cotton. Rice cultivation, for instance, is regarded more lucrative than cotton, and the crop is also relatively salt-resistant. Second, briefly touched upon in Chapters 3 and 4: Some farmers petition with letters of complaint that they even send to the president, to call for their right to decide over their own cropping pattern. This seems to echo the kind of "naïve monarchism" as observed by Mamonova (2016) in Russia. Yet some Tajik farmers were left disillusioned when complaints remained unheard by authorities, as for instance, a farmer cited in Chapter 3, clearly brought to the fore. Protest letters to call for their attention remained without effect. It resulted in fatalism; I frequently observed that people regarded social inequality and exploitation as a given. I often recorded expressions of self-victimisation.

Recently policy-makers and scholars have also debated to what extent voice is expressed in terms of religious radicalisation, that is, whether the repressive regimes in Central Asia trigger religious (Islamic) radicalisation (which touches on Scott's thesis that peasants come to rely on "religious or oppositionist structures" (Scott 1976, 219)). Note that I do not refer here to Marx's (1994[1844]) and Lenin's (1970[1952]) theses of religion as opiate of the masses, "which stupefies the people" (Lenin 1970[1952], 90). The causes and significance of radicalisation of Central Asian individuals has recently been highly debated (see The Diplomat 2017; ICG 2016), in which I agree

with Central Asian scholars who warn against unjustified and superficial conclusions (see The Diplomat 2017).

Beside expressions of "exit" and "voice," a large part of the population does not protest powerful and greedy elites; many people express "loyalty," in Hirschman's (1970) terms. Many rural dwellers appear fatalistic and passive. I contend that passivism results first of all from the fact that the Tajik Civil War is still very much alive in people's memory, and the war's legacy definitely plays a role in limiting overt protest. This fear is one important reason why public protest remains limited. Second, people fear the authoritarian regime that has deepened in the past two decades (see also Marat 2016). Hence today's peace is a typical "peace of repression rather than a peace of contentment" (cf. Scott 1976, 228, stated in reference to Southeast Asia). A third factor that may suppress rural (public) protest is the fact that local elites aim to suppress local conflicts. Boboyorov (2013) observed that local (indigenous) ways of conflict resettlement are prominent in rural Tajikistan, where local elites stress the importance of village honour and local peace (*tinji*), with which they limit expressions of discontent to local arenas. In this way, discontent and conflict is settled locally before it can erupt or become politicised at the national level. At the same time, people depend on elites in accessing land, with which such patron-client relationships also limit collective/peasant protest. What is more, as Boboyorov (2013) clearly described, collective identities are strong in rural Tajikistan, and are important for rural wellbeing and survival. Islam plays an important role in these collective identities, which are used to mobilise people to work in the cotton fields. At the same time, collective identities prevent people from protesting suppression and deprivation. In his analysis of the importance of collective identities Boboyorov (2013) disagreed with Giehler (2017), who described an "atomisation" of rural society in Tajikistan. According to Giehler, social cohesion was strong and local bonds were tight in the Soviet period, because of communal working days and cooperation on the large-scale Soviet farm, but nowadays everyone individually seeks to make ends meet. I agree with Boboyorov, because, in my own fieldwork, I clearly noticed that collective identities continue to play an important role in the countryside, and that the exchange of labour, assets, and mutual help, are still very important.

Fourth and equally important in understanding "loyalty" is that the (Tajik) state has an important role in "the reproduction of key ideological discourses" (cf. Das 2007, 351). It is said that cotton is crucial for the Tajik state, as the saying, stated in the introductory chapter of this thesis and in several of the other chapters, goes: "*Pakhta boigarii davlat ast*" (cotton is the state's wealth). This saying has been one element with which agents of the state have sought to retain the monoculture of cotton. In Tajikistan applies what Zanca (2010, 65) noticed about Uzbekistan: "As long as the [rural dwellers] are willing to endure the demands fostered by [the] current system [of cotton production through exploitation], the state will continue to mete them out." It is also held by many rural dwellers that cotton belongs to Tajikistan's rural life, and is the best crop to be grown on farmers' fields. This dogma has permeated everyday discourses. During their *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* careers, farm workers were indoctrinated that cotton must be planted, it has been "hammered into the brains of the Soviet people" (to cite Miller and Heady 2003, 266 who wrote about the Soviet legacy in Russia). A transformation towards more diversified (polyculture) agriculture would thus (also) require a change in farmers' self-perception.

Hence it is not only outright pressure by authorities which makes farmers grow cotton. Agrarian change and rural development are not only instigated from without. Farmers' mind-set also needs to transform. Even though entrepreneurship was not alien to Soviet *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* workers, as they fervently marketed the products from their household plots, and Soviet modernisation changed rural life, over 60 years of Soviet rule and present-day authoritarianism have shaped farmers' self-perception. As Akiner (1998, 14) said about Soviet modernisation: "[T]he relationship between the individual and his work was altered; in particular, the sense of personal initiative and responsibility was eroded, replaced by routine obedience to orders from above." As a result there is a certain habitus (cf. Bourdieu 1977, 78), "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations".

While I explicitly want to refrain from generalising and portraying the typical Tajik farmer as unskilled or unprofessional, the fact is that many farmers have difficulties adapting to a market-driven economy, even though this market is still underdeveloped. During their Soviet careers, *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* workers relied on the patriarchal state that always secured a basic income, maintained the rural infrastructure, and catered for farm needs. Nowadays, as I have frequently observed, farmers are unwilling to cooperate with each other as they do not want to go back to collective times, even though nostalgic feelings characterise their memories and stories of the past.

A last factor that may explain "loyalty" with regard to cotton production, and why people acquiesce to the pressure to grow cotton, is that, as often described before, adequate institutions for food crop production remain underdeveloped. What is more, as I have also mentioned in preceding chapters, rural households depend on cotton stalks. Without access to gas and not having enough money for alternatives, people need cotton stalks as a source of fuel. Furthermore, cotton harvesting is the most important time in which rural dwellers can earn money.

6.3.2.2. The gendered nature of agrarian transformation and exploitation

In the preceding section I described current socio-economic structures as being fairly exploitative. Yet the situation does not result in rebellion and protest. Rural households intensify and diversify livelihood practices to make ends meet. Importantly migration reconfigures entire local communities. In particular, there is an important gender dimension to the process of post-socialist agrarian change, something which I have thus far left largely unexplored. Agrarian transformation in Tajikistan has pushed many people, predominantly men, abroad. As a result the majority of the working population, and in particular young men, are absent most of the time. Many households have become female-headed in the past two decades, and a feminisation of farming has taken place (Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2018). *De jure* only around 10 per cent of the *dehqon* farms are run by women (TajStat 2015b), but *de facto* (I argue based on my fieldwork observations) this percentage is much higher. Notably, the absence of men may also empower women and enable them to take up management roles in the agrarian economy (as observed by Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2018). Yet overall exploitation in the cotton economy specifically concerns the female labour force. Given that women are relatively isolated from the public sphere in the patriarchal domestic setting, though they do work on the cotton fields,[23] it is not surprising that rural protests remain absent. The Tajik women left behind face double burdens; they are responsible for family

reproductive work as well as farm work. In many instances women work for (cotton-growing) *dehqon* farmers and/or for their parents-in-law (see also Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2018). In this regard, today's post-socialist exploitation of the rural population is highly gendered.[24] While the cotton economy has become highly feminised with the massive migration of men, these men, in turn, are severely exploited abroad, where they tend to be engaged in semi-legal, risky jobs, in which they are often entangled in complex patron-client relationships. Not less, they face hardship in the increasingly xenophobic setting of urban Russia.

6.4. Relevance and discussion

6.4.1. "How far do analyses of postsocialism travel?"[25]

Table 1.1 (page 7) in the introductory chapter of this thesis compared the different Central Asian republics in terms of resource endowments. Throughout the subsequent chapters, and in this concluding chapter, I have frequently referred to pathways of agrarian change and production relations in Tajikistan's neighbouring Central Asian republics. In this section, I want to discuss my findings and embed them in the larger post-Soviet realm.

First of all, I wonder: How long can we continue talking of "post-socialism" or "post-Sovietivism"? Humphrey (2002b) and Verdery (2002) rightly questioned the longevity of the notion of post-socialism. It is definitely true that we should not regard the Central Asian states as static and ever-tied to their Soviet past, as Utomo (2018) recently argued. Yet I favour the use of post-socialism for matters of comparison particularly regarding pathways of agrarian change, and also because a better notion has yet to be articulated (see also Latham (2002) for a relevant discussion). Moreover, as the labels of "transition" and "transformation" have been used to characterise Central Asian states for over 25 years, one could raise the valid question: Where are these economies heading towards; i.e.: transition into what? As I noted earlier in this concluding chapter: We may wonder whether the Tajik rural economy will remain a blend of capitalist, socialist, and semi-feudal relations of production, or whether transformation could eventually result in a "pure" capitalist farm sector. Time can only tell.

Secondly: What is unique about post-socialist Tajikistan and which part of the story applies to other settings, also outside of the post-socialist sphere? Humphrey (2002b, 13) raised important points regarding the comparative use of "post-socialisms," as she noted: "It's not much good describing two different situations and then totting up, 'There is X here, but not there; there's Y here, but not there and so on.'"

It is argued that Central Asia features a distinct "post-socialism" different from other parts of the former Soviet Union (Kandiyoti 2002a). This is indeed true if we look at the level of production: Industrialisation of the Central Asian republics remained largely absent in Soviet years (Kalinovsky 2018). The characteristics of the Soviet and later post-Soviet economies were quite different, for instance the differences between Central Asian economies and those in Eastern and Central Europe (Kandiyoti 2002a). As was discussed in the introductory chapter, in order to understand the Central Asian state reference has been made to post-colonial theory (Kandiyoti 2002a; 2002b;

Heathershaw 2010; Collins 2006). In particular, concepts of post-colonial studies can "provide a lens through which the failure of 'transition' can be outlined" (Heathershaw 2010, 100). Yet as argued by historians (Giehler 2017; Abashin 2015) the majority of the contemporary Central Asian population does not look to the Soviet Union as a colonial empire, and does not perceive itself as being post-colonial. Most of the people I met compare the present with the past and regard the contemporary period as being worse than the time in which the region was under Soviet rule, which may explain their nostalgic feelings about the Soviet Union. I concur with others that "the Soviet Union was not a typical colonial empire" (Collins 2006, 66). Soviet leadership invested in lowermost peripheries and at the level of the farm, there was significant investment. In the social sphere, the state erected a whole welfare system (see also Kalinovsky 2018). The Soviet large-scale farms were "total social institutions" (Humphrey 1983), that provided rural dwellers with employment, as well as supplying healthcare, education and large-scale rural infrastructure. Yet the environmental costs of intensive Soviet cotton farming, that appeared later, were severe.[26]

Regarding the wider process of post-socialist agrarian change, Tajikistan has long been assumed to be a liberalised (though instable, post-conflict) neighbour of totalitarian Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan where a state-controlled agrarian economy exists until today, in which cotton production figures prominently. Notably the situation seems to be changing in Uzbekistan since the recent appointment of president Mirziyoyev, and it will be interesting to follow how recent agrarian changes in Uzbekistan, instigated by this new president since his appointment, will unfold.

Yet Tajikistan is unique in Central Asia in terms of its resource endowments and the structure of the economy. The Tajik economy is centred on the export of aluminium, labour migrants, and cotton, and this mix has had important ramifications for the trajectories of agrarian change. Unlike Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan is relatively resource poor in terms of mineral resources. However, despite this lack of resources Tajikistan differs from neighbouring resource-poor Kyrgyzstan, as the Kyrgyz economy misses a principal *agricultural* commodity, such as cotton. Moreover, in Kyrgyzstan there was a relatively "egalitarian distribution of wealth between the hands of competing elites" (Laruelle 2012, 311; on the differences in rural economic power in Central Asia see also Markowitz 2016). Following the demise of the Soviet Union, it was particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which required international financial assistance to keep the economy somewhat afloat. While the Kyrgyz state quickly accepted aid and adopted policy reforms to comply with aid's conditionalities, the Tajik elites obstructed the state's implementation of reforms: They did not want to loosen their control over cotton as the principal agricultural commodity. As a result, the state cosmetically complied with demands set by the international donor community. Meanwhile *de facto* change remained largely absent. Whereas the Uzbek and Turkmen states could continue to uphold their control over the agrarian economy in the absence of any foreign demands or pressure, in Tajikistan the state could uphold control only in a more disguised way. While receiving donor aid, the policy changes in (particularly in) the cotton economy, such as the formal privatisation of the cotton sector and withdrawal of state support, triggered crony capitalism, seen in the few elites who capitalised on the futures system. In fact, in this context, the state was an arena in which international societal actors competed with domestic societal actors (elites) over policy outcomes. Apparently, elites' power was decisive: The

Tajik state has privatised the cotton economy, but not completely. This has resulted in private oligopolies with a few actors in control. Hence, the Tajik cotton sector is reminiscent of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, with regard to the way in which control is monopolised in the cotton economy. In these two latter countries, it has been the state who has upheld principal control; in Tajikistan it has been a group of domestic elites. As was noted in Chapter 2, the monopolies characterising cotton production in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, have all endowed actors in control with the ability to suppress farm gate prices (see also Shamsiev 2005). The monopsonistic power of the Central Asian states and elites in the cotton economy has much in common with market economies where large agri-businesses hold corporate control, i.e. oligopolistic power; a difference though is that Central Asian elites and regime-insiders also hold political might.

The characteristics of cotton production predominantly regard the Tajik lowlands. At the same time, the reform patterns in the Tajik highlands, as explained in Chapter 2, seem to echo the trajectory of reform as happened in the Caucasian highland areas and Kyrgyzstan (as also observed by Robinson *et al.* 2008). In these upland localities, agriculture is much more subsistence oriented, and with "state repelling crops" (cf. Scott 2009), surplus extraction by elites hardly takes place.

The high reliance on cotton revenues, labour migration and aluminium, and Tajikistan's highly diverse geography, make the Tajik context unique. Yet I concur with Kandiyoti (2002a, 240), who challenged the idea that "central insights gained from analyses of state socialism and postsocialist transformations in Eastern and Central Europe have little or nothing to offer to the study of Central Asian societies."

As Kandiyoti argued (2002a, 252),

> [o]nce we avert our gaze from states and elites […] and engage with societal transformations that impinge upon daily struggles for survival, we find that there is much to be learned from ethnographic approaches to postsocialism. These struggles involve changing forms of livelihood, informal networks, alternative safety nets, new forms of consumerism and the incursions of international development agencies at the local level.

And indeed, the previous chapters have been contextualised in wider scholarship on post-Soviet agrarian and social change, in which frequent reference has been made to dynamics elsewhere in the post-socialist realm. The processes of decollectivisation in Tajikistan echo those earlier described in the Russian/Ukrainian black earth (Allina-Pisano 2008) and Romania (Verdery 2003; 2004). Struggles over land that I observed, in which elites, often capitalising on their Soviet status and their "bureaucratic capital" (cf. Trevisani 2010, 204), gained primary seats, were also analysed with reference to insights from Russia (Allina-Pisano 2008; Miller and Heady 2003; Nikulin 2003), Romania (Verdery 2003) and Uzbekistan (Trevisani 2007; 2010). Particularly the local political economy and aspects of geography have been important in shaping post-Soviet agrarian transformation, as there was, also in the Soviet Union, diversity in personal rule. This gave variation in time and space, as it depended "on the visions, tactics and interests of officials throughout the Soviet Union" (Kassymbekova 2016, 12).

Within the wider post-Soviet realm, the current stage of agrarian transformation in Tajikistan seems reminiscent of Russia's early transition years (as for instance described by Spoor and Visser 2004; Wegren 2005). At the moment, institutions are (still) immature, and for a long time the state has given incoherent signs of its vision of agrarian reform. This was also the case in Russia, where the state initially stimulated fragmentation of farming based on Western donors' advice, and later changed its orientation towards larger scale farming (Spoor and Visser 2004; Wegren 2005). Such incoherence was also observed in Uzbekistan, where fragmentation of farming was followed up by state-enforced reconsolidation of farmland (Djanibekov *et al.* 2012; Trevisani 2010).

The cases studied in this dissertation have provided insights into the "microprocesses of appropriation and resistance" (cf. Kandiyoti 2002a, 238) over land. Ideally this would have been a study with more comparative depth within Tajikistan, particularly given the highly diverse geography within Tajikistan's borders. Other cases within Tajikistan may showcase different patterns, in which the roles of the state and local actors result in different dynamics on the ground. As I noted earlier, and argued by Byres, among others, (1996), and also Chayanov (1966[1925]), a myriad of agrarian questions may exist within nation state boundaries. The highly diverse geography of Tajikistan unfolds in specific agrarian reform patterns. Hence, research is to be done to understand the frequency of the pathways described in this dissertation, and to locate other (less or more dominant) trajectories of agrarian transformation.

6.4.2. The narrowness of international donors' perspective on agrarian reform

In this research I have tended to take a critical stance towards international cooperation and international donor aid. The purpose was not to "bash" NGO and international donor aid, but rather to address the difficult boundary between aid and politics. Following Ferguson's (1994) work on the "anti-politics machine," Bichsel (2011) argued that international donors (in Central Asia's Ferghana Valley) have had the tendency to look for ethnic conflicts and to "seeing like a project." While I have not conducted an ethnography of donor aid in Tajikistan, I do recognise the simplification and generalisation which donors actually apply (and may need) to implement their projects. Yet my main critique would focus more on the way in which donors have (had to) work(ed) with "the system," that is, to cooperate with a regime that continues to deprive the Tajik population of wellbeing and freedom. While farms were nominally restructured, profound alteration of production relations remained absent. Meanwhile, many donors stayed away from the politically sensitive cotton sector.

The continuity in disguise in production relations in the cotton economy has not been addressed by higher level authorities or international consultancies and policy advisors, who have mainly focused on the distribution of land parcels. International donors as "architects of property redefinition" intervened with the purpose to pressure the state to transfer land to the rural population. Donors have insisted on the parcelisation of former *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes*. They perceived the dismantling of large farms necessary as an intermediate step to developing an agrarian sector of (larger) private capitalist farms, if "the market" operated according to design. This teleological (wishful) thinking has been strong.

My research has shown that Western style family farming has not widely emerged, and reforms have taken place much slower than donors initially anticipated (also acknowledged by the World Bank (2008; 2012b)). Indeed the World Bank (2012b, 1) noted in earlier years that

> [a] cursory study of Tajikistan's legislation would lead the observer to the conclusion that farming in the country has been liberalised and land distributed with tenure based on long term use rights. […] *In theory*, therefore, Tajikistan is toward the front of agricultural sector reform in the Central Asian Republics […] However, a study of the actualities of the situation uncovers a picture far different from that [conclusion] (emphasis mine).

This World Bank report reflected findings obtained in earlier years, allegedly until 2005. In this dissertation I have argued that true reform remains questionable. Genuine individual farming is unlikely to emerge if it is not accompanied by changes in the wider production environment (though, for instance the case of Georgia proves the exception to the rule, as smallholder farming emerged there without much policy/institutional support). Donors have thus long tended to focus on property rights in very narrow terms, and apparently failed to realise "the fallacy of the assumption that if institutions are created properly, they will function as planned" (Verdery 2003, 28). Yet in Tajikistan, even institutions were not created well, and donors' and transnational institutions' blind eye to the persistent debt and continuity in production relations in the cotton economy seems to be related to two reasons**.** For one, statistics seem to display reform progress and conceal the reality of production relations on the ground. Second, the pressure to grow cotton is mainly exerted informally. Analyses of cases that only constitute a kind of "Potemkin villages" (cf. Allina-Pisano 2008) or monitoring changes at the national level fail to give insights into such local level power constellations. We will only see more viable farm holdings and rural development when rural households can make effective use of land and of their produce, when perverse production politics and control really come to an end. Rural livelihoods cannot flourish in a countryside where development is forestalled and where rural wealth is extracted rather than reinvested, under a pseudo-feudalist post-socialist political economy. This might come as a truism but one that has to be mentioned.

Significant pressure and rigid production politics have forced farmers to privilege cotton at the expense of the production of other (consumable, and more profitable) crops, and more importantly: at the expense of rural well-being and food security. As such, these production politics have stifled the emergence of a rural middle class and have restricted social mobility. To conclude: The cotton boom in 19th-century Central Asia tied many peasants to the soil. From that time onwards, many became enslaved (O'Neill 2003). Under Bolshevik rule cotton production continued under force. We could wonder to what extent the post-socialist transformation in Tajikistan has rather been a retention of, or return to, a semi-feudal structure, in which rural deprivation is severe. While *de jure* the Tajik agrarian economy is made up of over 130,000 individual, i.e. independent smallholder farmers, *de facto* "cotton, control, and continuity in disguise" characterise the Tajik countryside.

Notes

[1] Reference to post-Soviet feudalist production relations have also been made in the context of Uzbekistan (Trevisani 2010) and Russia (Nikulin 2003). Nikulin (2003) analysed the contradictions of a Russian post-Soviet former *kolkhoz* being "between a holding and a hacienda." Earlier, Clarke (1992, 7) equalled the (Russian) Soviet enterprise with a feudal system, and noted that "like the feudal estate, the soviet enterprise is not simply an economic institution but is the primary unit of soviet society, and the ultimate base of social and political power. The basis of the soviet enterprise was not capital, but the productive activity of the labour collective."

[2] As Verdery (1996, 227) noted: "The feudal metaphor […] contains a reminder about variation: as the Roman Empire collapsed, feudalism developed in only some of its domains, while in others there arose a variety of prebendal and tributary forms." I will not further engage the debate on feudalism (for a discussion see for instance Sweezy 1978 and Dobb 1978; see also Brass 2008). Note that I do not mean that the structure reflects an ideal type of feudalism.

[3] The term "debt bondage" tends to be associated with the South Asian context, but as Kara (2017) described, there are conditions elsewhere around the world which give rise to debt bondage.

[4] According to the presentation given by the director of the Asian Development Bank, private sector investment in Moldova; Georgia; Armenia; and, Kyrgyzstan was 91 percent; 78 per cent; 89 per cent; and, 73 per cent respectively (Yu 2015).

[5] While the (instable) political climate plays a role in triggering (or repelling) private (sector) investment, note however that in Georgia, Armenia and Moldova a relatively quick and thorough process of individualisation has taken place, where farms focused predominantly on labour-intensive crops, such as vegetables and fruits. Such an agrarian structure may relatively easily attract (smaller) private sector investment focused on urban markets, exports and processing. This is different for large-scale production systems focused on staple crops.

[6] As Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009a, 15) explained, "the emergence of agrarian capital […] gave rise to different types of debt; one was a sign of weakness [when 'small peasants' lacked cash to meet needs] while the other was a sign of strength [when 'big peasants' took credit for large investments]."

[7] Brass (2008) engaged in a lengthy debate in which he argued why unfree and bonded labour are not contradictory to capitalist relations of production. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in this debate.

[8] As I noted before, while this World Bank report was published in 2012, it is evidently based on data and observations obtained in earlier years, seemingly up to 2005.

[9] As van der Ploeg *et al.* (2015, 153) noted, "[t]he term 'extra-economic' coercion includes special conditions offered by state apparatuses (at national, regional or local level), good political connections, the full support of governors, practices of skirting the law […] and 'pocket contracts.'"

[10] This was different under socialism, where "risk was centralised in the state" (Verdery 2004, 141).

[11] The World Bank 2012c report, just like the World Bank 2012a; 2012b; 2012d; and, 2012e reports, was published in 2012, but seems to be based on data up to 2005.

[12] Globally cotton has been subject to political debate, given that smallholder farmers in the Global South have to compete with highly subsidised large scale American cotton farmers (see Minot and Daniels 2005; Sneyd 2015).

[13] Interesting are also other analogies that can be drawn between sugar cane and cotton production. In the sugar sector, like in Tajikistan's cotton sector, oligopolies tend to set prices, in which the logic of companies' capital accumulation depends on domestic production conditions and linkages to the international economy (on sugar see Dubb 2017).

[14] Hence the agrarian economy has not become a "labour sink," what was observed by Lerman and Schreinemachers (2005) in post-socialist Poland and Russia, where in the latter, there is even a trend of negative urbanisation, i.e. urban outmigration to the countryside.

[15] As was explained in Chapter 2, in late 2013 a policy was promulgated that stipulated the split up of land holdings to a size below 10 hectares. The number of small *dehqon* farms has steadily increased. This happened initially only in northern Tajikistan (the Sughd region). The consequences of this policy remain to be seen.

[16] Cf. Hirschman 1970.

[17] Interestingly, "protest migrations" were an important way in which people in colonial Africa expressed their resentment toward French, Belgian and Portuguese colonial rulers (Asiwaju 1976). Isaacman (1996) has also described the frequent flight of Mozambican peasants, who wanted to escape from forced cotton labour under colonial rule.

[18] According to TajStat (2015c, 19) the total number of employed people comprised just over 2.3 million persons (in 2014). In 2014, the *official* unemployment rate was 2.4 per cent (TajStat 2015c), which is remarkably low.

[19] Tajikistan has a relatively young population: 45 per cent of the population is younger than 20 years (TajStat 2016a, 32).

[20] The situation seems different in Kyrgyzstan, where over 60 per cent of the people live in the countryside but only around 30 per cent of the people depends on agriculture as a source of employment (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan 2016, 59).

[21] Notably the rate of urbanisation was also relatively low in Soviet Tajikistan (and Central Asia at large) (Kalinovsky 2018; Khan and Ghai 1979).

[22] According to Kalinovsky (2018) and Pomfret (2002) mechanical cotton harvesters were introduced by the Soviet regime but have never been picked up in Central Asia (see also Gleason 1990). In this regard, these authors seem to disagree with Khan and Ghai (1979) who wrote about the significant "tractorisation" in Soviet Central Asia (as noted earlier in the introductory chapter of this thesis).

[23] Work on the cotton fields, including cotton picking, is manual labour.

[24] As Zanca (2010, 61) described, the exploitation specifically of women started in fact under Soviet rule, when "Soviet power demanded such work of women both as part of the effort to make them equal to men […] and because the intensification of cotton necessitated it."

[25] (cf. Kandiyoti 2002a)

[26] Yet severe environmental implications of intensive agriculture were not only experienced in Central Asia, as also the virgin lands of Russia were greatly affected.

Appendix: Photographs

Above: A statue of Lenin in the former *kolkhoz* office garden. The Jaloliddini Balkhi district, July 2012. Some people in the village used to say: "Lenin *bobo* is still watching over us at night."
Below: Sunflower harvesting in the Jaloliddini Balkhi district, August 2013. Sunflower cultivation is popular among farmers in this district. Seeds (*semechki*) are sold to traders from Afghanistan. The crop residues can be used as animal fodder, and also as a source of household fuel.

Above: Vast wheat fields owned by a prominent, large landowner in the Yovon district, July 2013.
Below: Workers with the combine harvester donated by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in the Yovon district, July 2013.

Above: Obsolete machinery in the district of Yovon, July 2013.
Below: A female farm member cleans and packs onions for transport and sale at the market. The Yovon district, June 2013.

Above and below: In the fields with my host family in the village in the Yovon district, June 2013. I experienced the harsh work carried out by women in the cotton fields.
‘

Above: Jotting field notes during an interview, the Jaloliddini Balkhi district, August 2012.
Below: Building rapport: teaching English during the summer holidays (2013) at the local school in the Yovon district.

Above: The daughter-in-law of my host father (the "*kelin*," by other family members often called "*yanga*") in the Yovon district sprays chemicals in the wheat fields. She does not know what kind of substance she is using, and does not wear any protection. The Yovon district, April 2016.
Below: My host father working in the fields. The Yovon district, June 2013.

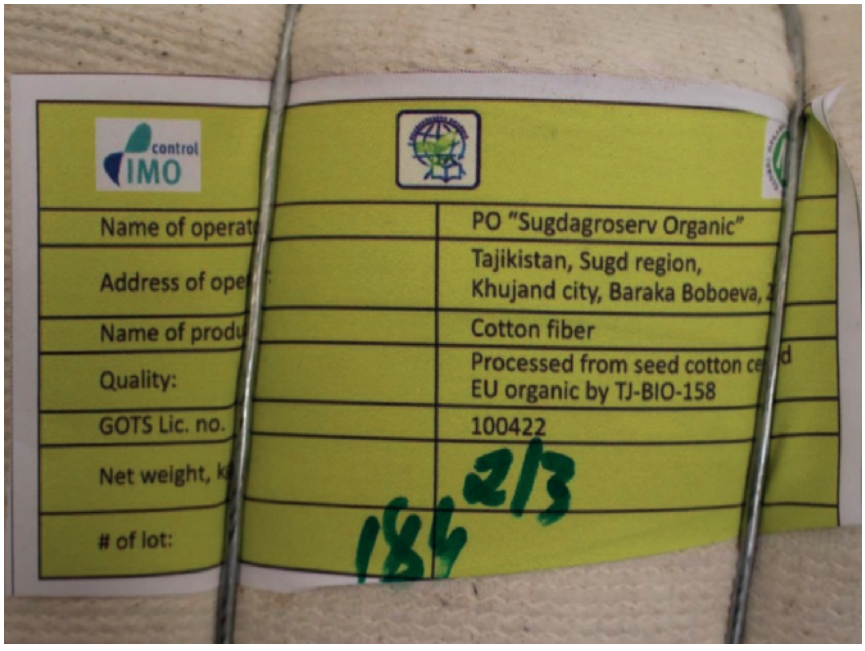
Above: Watermelon sale at the side of the road. Some farmers prefer direct sales to bazaar sales to avoid paying taxes. The Yovon district, June 2013.
Below left: Two retired villagers proudly show their tomato harvest, produced on their household plots. The Jaloliddini Balkhi district, August 2013.
Below right: A land use rights certificate.

Above: A *dastarkhon* (table cloth) with different kinds of food is a typical way in which one is welcomed in a Tajik household. This *dastarkhon* was prepared when I visited the *raisi jamoat* (the head of the municipality) in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, August 2013.
Below: Rice fields in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, July 2013.

Cotton oil for sale at the bazaar in Khujand, the Sughd region, January 2015. Cotton oil is an important residue of the cotton production. It is widely used as cooking oil in rural and urban Tajikistan.

Above: Weighing the cotton is an important moment during cotton harvesting, since labourers are paid per unit of weight. The Yovon district, September 2013.
Below: In the cotton fields with young female labourers. The Yovon district, September 2013.

Above: Labourers at the cotton ginnery, the Sughd region, January 2015.
Below: A bale of organically certified cotton at a ginnery in the Sughd region, January 2015. In this region, one of the international aid agencies (the Swiss NGO Helvetas) has set up a project for organic cotton production. I visited several farmers and a few ginneries in the Sughd region in January 2015 to hear about farmers' experiences and reasons for engaging in organic production.



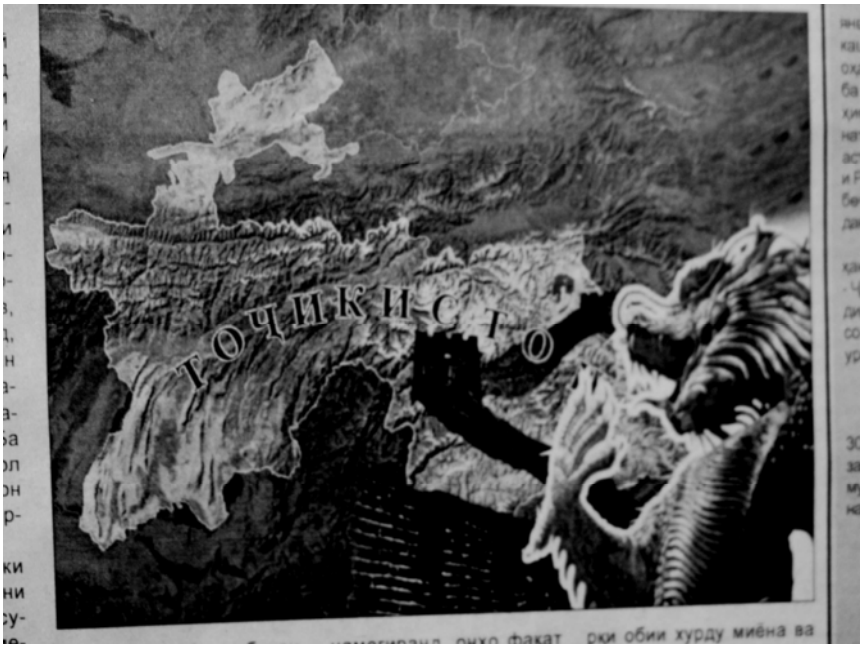
Above: Focus group discussion with a group of farmers in the Konibodom district (the Sughd region), January 2015.
Below: Cotton stalks gathered in the village streets in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, December 2014. Cotton stalks are essential sources of fuel in rural Tajikistan, particularly because people do not have access to gas. Animal dung is also widely used as a source of fuel.

Above: A father and his daughter prepare for winter: Pomegranate trees are (partially) torn down to cover them with a layer of sand to protect against the (expected) cold. The Jaloliddini Balkhi district, December 2014.
Below: Sales of cabbage at the side of the road in the district of Jaloliddini Balkhi, December 2014. Cabbage is a prominent winter crop in Tajikistan.

Above: Billboard of Jing Yin Yin Hai, a Chinese company at the field sites in the Yovon district, January 2015.
Below: The greenhouses of Jing Yin Yin Hai Seeds in the Yovon district, January 2015.

Above: A young Tajik woman places a thick plastic layer on the top of a greenhouse of the Chinese company Jing Yin Yin Hai Seeds. The Chinese enterprises hire local labourers and use advanced technology. The Yovon district, January 2015.
Below: Local Tajik labourers after their working day for the Chinese farm enterprise. A few of them know Chinese and help translating. The Yovon district, January 2015. (Courtesy of Qi Tian).

Above: The increasing presence of "China" in Tajikistan has sparked some unrest in the country in recent years. In 2013 a Tajik member of parliament warned women not to marry Chinese men (see Umarzoda 2013). This is a photo from an article in the Tajik newspaper *Nigoh.* Source: Ilhom 2012. Below: A painting in the newspaper *Nigoh.* The article dealt with Chinese farmland investments in Tajikistan and was titled: "Tajiks to Russia, Chinese to Tajikistan?" Source: Faromarzi 2012.



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Curriculum Vitae

Irna Hofman was born on 10 January 1983 in Groningen, The Netherlands. She received a B.Sc. degree from Wageningen University (and Research) (2005) with a major in Environmental Sciences (specialisation Environmental Policy and Management) and a minor in Rural Development Sociology. She went on to obtain her M.Sc. (2007) in Environmental Sciences (specialisation Environmental Policy and Management) also at Wageningen University with a minor in Rural Sociology. During her M.Sc. her interests in the post-socialist realm really expanded, resulting in a M.Sc. thesis that examined the relationship between sustainable land use and agrarian transformation in Uzbekistan. Directly after her M.Sc. studies she embarked on a research position in Germany. Between 2007 and 2009 she was a junior researcher at the Center for Development Research (Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung (ZEF)), an institute of the University of Bonn. In that position she examined the political economy of rural transformation in Khorezm, a province in western Uzbekistan. She was also affiliated with the Rural Sociology group at Wageningen University during this period.

In 2009 Hofman returned to the Netherlands and, intrigued by the developments related to "land grabbing," she started looking at Chinese foreign agricultural land investments. In 2011 she was appointed as research assistant by the Chair of Chinese Economy and Development at Leiden University. In 2012 she initiated her Ph.D. research focused on the political economy of agrarian change in Tajikistan. Over the course of the years she has combined her Ph.D. duties with a part-time position as research assistant and lecturer within the BA and MA International Studies at Leiden University. In 2014, she was a temporary research fellow at IAMO, the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies in Halle, Germany.

Hofman published a few (single-authored and one co-authored) articles in leading international academic journals and a few book chapters. She is a member of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS), the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS), and Nedworc Association, a professional network of development cooperation experts. Hofman actively engages in political and societal debates focused on sustainable agriculture, developments in the post-socialist realm, cotton production, and the politics of agrarian labour, by publishing short articles in popular media and sharing her opinion and insights in social media.

What constitutes the political economy of agrarian transformation in post-socialist Tajikistan? How and to what extent does capital accumulation in the agrarian economy occur?

These are the principal questions of this thesis, which is inspired by neo-Marxist theories on rural capital accumulation and extraction.

The focus is on southwest lowland Tajikistan. Theoretically this thesis addresses property rights, the anthropology of debt, and the logic of cotton production in order to understand the continuity in agrarian production relations. The study contends that we cannot understand actual, effective control over land if we do not unpack ownership as a bundle of rights, and untangle formal property from access and ability to exploit a resource. Innovative in terms of its analyses, this thesis firstly not only focuses on domestic state-society relations, but also on the way in which foreign actors interact with the state. Secondly, unlike most studies informed by agrarian political economy that tend to pay little attention to nature and geography, this thesis explicitly looks at the way in which altitude, remoteness and crop specificities interact with the political economy.

Among other conclusions, the study contends that sheer access to arable land in Tajikistan alone is no guarantee for rural well-being. Furthermore, this thesis maintains that Tajikistan's pathway of agrarian change is characterised by a strong continuation in terms of relations of production. Agrarian production relations carry a stamp of serfdom, as rural dwellers continue to be tied to the land and are unable to build up an independent rural livelihood.

Irna Hofman (1983) is a rural sociologist specialising in agrarian change in Central Asia.

She majored in Environmental Sciences (B.Sc. and M.Sc.) at Wageningen University and Research, and conducted this study at Leiden University, both in the Netherlands.