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Granted to privatise, but failed to capitalise:  
The role of agrarian production politics in emerging farm  
typologies in post-Soviet Tajikistan

*Irna Hofman*

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## **Granted to privatise, but failed to capitalise: The role of agrarian production politics in emerging farm typologies in post-Soviet Tajikistan**

*Irna Hofman*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Post-Soviet Tajikistan has experienced a surge in donor aid since the 1990s. Numerous projects and grants have aimed to transform the former planned agrarian economy into an entrepreneurial and competitive rural environment. This paper analyses post-socialist agrarian change in one locality in southwest Tajikistan. While building on and contributing to studies on agrarian politics of production and the political economy of rural transformation, I identify a five-partite agrarian structure that has emerged as a result of a synergy of dynamics. The competition largely plays out in and over markets, rather than over land. I demonstrate that patterns of capital accumulation in agriculture 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.*

**Keywords:** agrarian change, post-Soviet, Tajikistan, farm typology, social differentiation, production politics

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## 1 Introduction

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, ‘doing development’ by ‘rule of experts’ (cf. Mitchell 2002), following 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 purposed 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 break up of farms. 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 industrialised modes of 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*. This paper analyses the subsequent unfolding process 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. Many of those who were granted to privatise, failed to capitalise. This paper then argues against any teleological thinking of post-socialist transformation and also questions the longevity of the rubric of ‘transition’ that has been used to characterise Tajikistan’s pathway of agrarian change for over 25 years.<sup>2</sup>

This paper has a threefold objective. First, the paper aims to discuss production politics and agrarian change through a political economic lens, and the ways in which people’s access to the means of production have been reshaped. I show that farms’ relative autonomy and control over specific crop value chains play an important role in bringing about patterns of farm individualisation and farm viability. Second, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of farm differentiation in the little explored context of Central Asia. Related studies on farm typologies in the post-socialist setting offer valuable insight into this area (see for instance Sutherland 2010, Allina Pisano 2004, Zhang 2015), as opposed to those that only assess ‘winners and losers’ (cf. Wegren *et al.* 2002). As a third aim, this paper attempts to illustrate the emerging class formation in post-Soviet rural *lowland*<sup>3</sup> Tajikistan. Up until now there has been no conceptual analysis, as is offered here, on Central Asian agrarian class dynamics.

I go beyond the classifications in official state statistics<sup>4</sup> and identify an emerging typology of farms comprised of five different farm types: first, the capitalist, post-Soviet large farm enterprise; second, the ‘farmer by default’; third, the incoming tenant; fourth, the specialising and diversifying smallholder; and fifth, the rural household. A close examination of this diversity of farms points to the fact that legal classifications of farms, as well as farm size, are misleading as an indicator of farm viability, relative wealth and social status. Instead of farm size, farms’ market engagement, reliance on

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<sup>2</sup> Burawoy and Verdery (1999) similarly opposed the notion of transition and argued for ‘transformation’ as a more fitting term. Indeed ‘transformation’ better captures the more diverse pathways that have formed over time, but after more than 25 years one may (also) question the longevity of ‘transformation’.

<sup>3</sup> There are important differences in farm restructuring and farming characteristics between highlands and lowlands in Tajikistan (see for instance Hofman and Visser forthcoming). This paper engages only lowland farming.

<sup>4</sup> The term *dehqon* farm denotes the farm type that emerged with the restructuring of the former Soviet *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (collective and state owned farms). According to the Tajik law, there are different types of farms: public farms (collective farms and production cooperatives) and private farms (family farms and shareholder farms) (Boboyorov 2016). Farmers do not always have a choice when applying for a land use certificate; authorities may decide which kind of farm is registered.

(external) capital, farmers' autonomy and cropping patterns are more important indicators in understanding agrarian change. The farm household differentiation analysed here is a result of two synergetic processes, namely the entrance of outside capital happening alongside a differentiation within the category of former Soviet farm workers. Importantly, as noted by Zhang (2015, 339) in the context of China, rural differentiation processes do not occur in a vacuum; they 'are unleashed by broader processes of agrarian change that also include rural industrialisation and rural-to-urban migration.'

The findings presented in this paper derive from longitudinal, qualitative research undertaken in three periods between 2012 and 2015, in one lowland locality in Southwest Tajikistan. In these periods numerous semi-structured interviews and informal conversations were held with over 20 villagers (rural households), as well as interviews with 50 farmers who represent the detected farm types: four farmers were diversifying smallholders, three were incoming tenants, five were representatives of large farm enterprises and the remaining farmers were so-called farmers by default. In addition, several semi-structured interviews were held with governmental officials at the local, district, regional and national level, as well as with international consultants working in the agricultural sector. These interviews have been analysed using qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti). Use of national and district statistics (TajStat 2014, TajStat 2009, World Bank 2009, Government of Tajikistan 2007) further informed the analysis.

This paper is structured as follows. In the following second section I provide the theoretical underpinning of this paper: agrarian change, rural differentiation and production politics. It also includes a short section on Soviet and post-Soviet farm symbiosis. In the third and fourth sections that follow I provide insights into the unfolding farm typology, which is an illustration of the dynamics of agrarian change in a lowland locality in Southwest Tajikistan. The fifth section is the conclusion.

## **2 Production politics and the political economy of agrarian change**

### ***2.1 Post-socialist agrarian change***

With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the agrarian question and studies on the class dynamics of agrarian change regained attention, as did the study of post-Soviet agrarian transformation. While the agrarian question was hotly debated by Soviet leaders, in order to envision the ideal Soviet society (see for instance Lenin 1897/1977), in the post-Soviet context it centered on questions regarding how the post-Soviet countryside would transform with the entrance of private capital and the implications for rural differentiation, and the fate of the former Soviet farm worker (see for instance Wegren 2005, Small 2007, Kitching 1998) as a result of the (re) distribution of former socialist/collective property.

Building on Marxist political economy, 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 to the process of capitalism 'from below' (Lenin 1897/1977, Byres 1996, Bernstein 2010, Yan and Chen 2015). Reference is frequently made to two distinct models. 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. This process in North America occurred through differentiation among the peasantry (Lenin 1897/1977, Byres 1996, see also Bernstein 2010, Byres 2016). Byres (1996) pointed out that models of specific agrarian change pathways may be highly diverse and, also within countries, one may observe more than one trajectory of agrarian transformation. This was earlier recognised by Lenin (1897/1977, 33), who noted that 'of 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). Kay (1980) analysed agrarian change in Latin America and suggested that two pathways of a landlord road and a subordinate peasant road respectively co-occurred. More recently, Yan and Chen (2015) analysed the variety of trajectories of capitalist transformation in China. Their analysis showcased that capitalism ‘from above’ may conjoin capitalism ‘from below’.

As a result we need to attend to diverse pathways of agrarian change, as (agrarian) capitalism may grow in distinct ways. Full-fledged capitalism by design, as aimed for by many Western policy advisors after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, did not develop in many post-socialist countries. Western style family farming did not become the dominant mode of farming everywhere, and to date we see a blend of different modes of production and farming structures.<sup>5</sup> In order to understand whether or not rural dwellers have responded to openings offered to start farming, Wegren’s (2005) analysis is illuminating. Rather than juxtaposing (peasant) resistance to adaptation of reforms, we need to look at the wider (institutional, political economy) context in which transformation occurs, to understand specific responses to agrarian transformation. Here the role of the state, agricultural structures and institutions, and that of the productive forces (cf. Byres 1996) play important roles.

## ***2.2 The political economy of agrarian transformation***

Agrarian transformation generates a process of the emergence of new and the reshaping of existing forms of production. Through a political economy lens, by asking Bernstein’s (2010, 22) questions regarding agrarian political economy, i.e. ‘who owns what’; ‘who does what’; ‘who gets what’; and, ‘what do they do with it?’ we may 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 land use and ownership; it concerns a more extensive bundle of the means of production. Equally important are aspects such as (tacit) knowledge and farm technology. In this regard, a dominant production regime may hamper or facilitate the adoption of technology, which would impact a possible change in production relations and so inflict social differentiation.

The importance of farm technologies’ social and political economic embeddedness has been observed in various studies. Stone and Flachs (2017) explain how the lock-in of ox drawn ploughs in India has long hampered the adoption of new inputs, longed for by foreign agribusinesses. Bhaduri (1973) described that landlords in West Bengal refused the introduction of technology in the fear that it would weaken patronage relationships, and with it landlords’ power over sharecroppers. This, as the author contended, could explain the persistent ‘backwardness’ (or involution) of agriculture in that region, as a clear example of technology ‘lock-in’.<sup>6</sup> In the context of Soviet agriculture, Pomfret (2002) and Kalinovsky (2015) explained why mechanical cotton harvesters in Central Asia were not widely adopted. These authors explained that local socio-economic and demographic conditions (high population density, i.e. a large rural labour force) favoured manual harvesting over mechanised practices, which was not taken into account by central leaders as diffusers of the technology. As such, for both social and natural factors, ‘the Soviet Union’s environments posed enormous challenges to modernisation that were difficult for outside bureaucrats to plan for, or effectively address’ (Leigh Smith 2014, 23).

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<sup>5</sup> Note that also in Europe and the U.S. one can observe a co-existence of different farming structures, i.e. family farms co-existing with large scale corporate businesses engaged in farming.

<sup>6</sup> Byres (1996, 29), in his study of the Prussian pathway of agrarian change (in which landlords gradually transformed into capitalist farmers), also noted that mechanisation of agriculture was slow in contexts with a ‘retention of the landlord economy [which] inevitably means the retention of the bonded peasant.’ Semi-feudal relations of production were kept intact.



### ***2.3 Production relations and farm symbiosis***

In Soviet agriculture there was a clear partition between state, collective and private (and personal) property (Verdery 2003). Yet there were essential interdependencies between the units of the collective or state farm and households (ibid., Visser 2009). One could not thrive without the other. Household members contributed their labour to the farm, and they received money and (most often) payments in kind in return. These payments in kind were most often used for household plot production, which was essential in Soviet years to top up the income from the work on the large scale farm. In some instances the boundaries between the collective farm and household plots were 'murky' (Verdery 2003, 266). Animals of individual households grazed collective fields, and inputs from the large scale farms could (sometimes secretly) be transferred and used on the household plots. As a result, the contours of (definitions of) illegal and legal use (between theft and an acknowledged right to take) were blurred. Property of the collective farm was regarded as collective good that could be taken.

This symbiosis that featured in Soviet agriculture, did not directly disappear with the dismantling of Soviet large scale farms. As noted by Verdery (2003, 267) the symbiosis was broken and recreated in post-socialist agriculture. Workers on restructured larger farms may receive a strip of land for private use, and those who work on cotton farms may harvest the cotton stalks as a source of household fuel. In this regard symbiosis still exists, as will be pointed out later. At the same time local governments have taken over particular functions of the former state and collective farms, such as agricultural advice. In Tajikistan every local government (*jamoat*) employs an agronomist who advises local farmers about their crop cultivation and seeks to enforce a particular cropping pattern.

### **3 Rural change induced from 'outside'**

Starting in 1992, the Tajik state has, with varying success, embarked on rural transformation, and capitalism has clearly entered the countryside. As Zhang (2015) explains, 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. Only rural household plot production is exercised on privately-owned land.

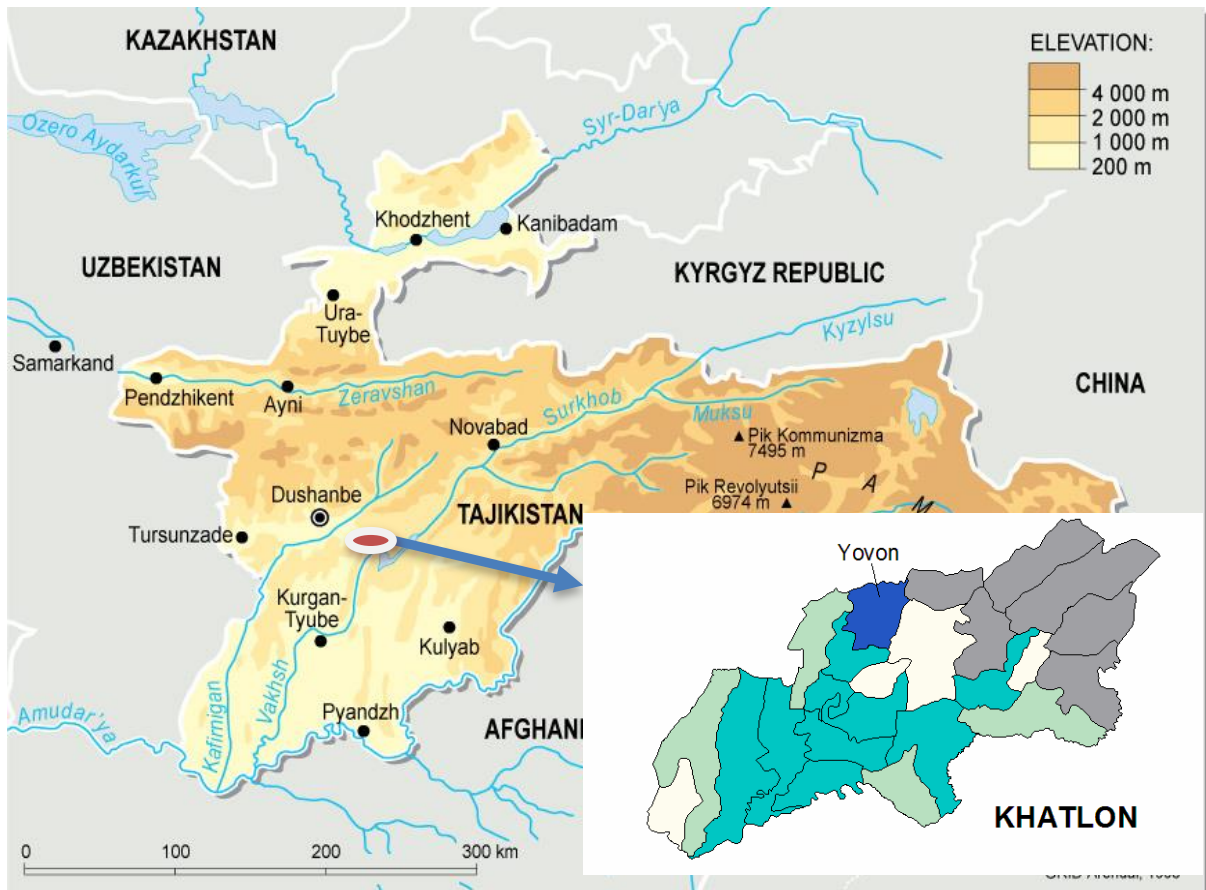
However, the process of capitalist transformation has been cumbersome and it seems as if 'transition' is not yet complete. Particularly in the 1990s, international donors saw little progress in agrarian change, particularly given that the state showed reluctance to relinquish control over particular segments of the rural economy. In order to speed up the process of farm reform, the World Bank initiated a Farm Privatisation Support Program (FPSP) in the late 1990s. With showcases of successful restructuring in ten areas in the country (selected by Tajik authorities), the Bank sought to convince authorities of the need for and potential success of restructuring farms (see also World Bank 2008).

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 – primarily waterways and the establishment of water use associations. Less attention was paid to changes in the production environment, i.e. attention to the external relations of production that are as crucial to the farm as the other factors of production.

Grantees received training from World Bank staff, but concrete supervision on the fields rested with the brigade head. With part of the rural infrastructure 'indivisible' or hard to change, the decision-making power over farming was rarely fully transferred to the newly established *dehqon* farmers. Cropping patterns and production relations remained unchanged and farmers were dependent on the brigade for production technologies and water. The one-time capital injection was in fact negligible,

relative to what would have been needed to set in motion more profound change. Production practices did not change: there were vested interests that hampered changes in production relations.

One area in which the World Bank initiated a pilot project was the Yovon district. This district is located relatively close to the capital Dushanbe (around 45 kilometres). The Yovon district stands out in the amount of irrigated land (over 21,000 hectares), and also in terms of average yields (above 2 tons/hectare of cotton) (Government of Tajikistan 2007). In recent years (2007-2013) over 40 per cent of total agricultural land has been planted with cotton.<sup>7</sup>



Author's compilation based on sources:

[http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map\\_ea9b](http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map_ea9b) (large map)

Government of Tajikistan 2007, 21 (small map)

Yet despite seemingly attractive farm conditions and the presence of off-farm employment opportunities,<sup>8</sup> migration to Russia as a source of livelihood seems to be no less important here than

<sup>7</sup> According to a government report (Government of Tajikistan 2007) over 70 per cent of land was still allocated to cotton in 2007 in this district, while calculations based on national statistics displaying total agricultural land gives a sum of 45 percent in 2007 and just over 40 per cent in 2013 (TajStat 2014).

<sup>8</sup> The district had a large industrial complex in Soviet times, but many facilities have become obsolete. Recently industrial complexes in the Yovon district received attention from foreign (Chinese) investors.



elsewhere in Tajikistan (World Bank 2009). Almost 70 per cent of rural households in the entire district has at least one household member who has migrated (ibid.).<sup>9</sup> Besides farm earnings, wages in service sectors and industries also remain extremely low: overall monthly incomes of *dehqon* farms are three times lower than the national average monthly income (FAO 2014).

### ***3.1 Tajikistan's agrarian change: the political economy of cotton***

A short elaboration on Tajikistan's wider pathway of agrarian reform is essential here as backdrop, to understand the privileged way forward in the post-Soviet years, and how responsibilities and the state's intervention have shifted over time.

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. State regulation of farming and direct state support was formally abolished in Tajikistan in the late 1990s under pressure from the International Finance Institutions (IFIs) (Hofman and Visser forthcoming). However, the market for the previously state mandated crops was only partially liberalised. Wary of the demise of cotton production,<sup>10</sup> and the fear of weakening or challenging the elites' control over cotton revenues, the state procurement system of cotton was replaced by a nominally private procurement system in 1996, the so-called futures system.

The change to the futures system in fact merely meant that the responsibility and power over the cotton value chain was transferred to cronies of the state, who held the so-called futures companies (Hofman 2017). These companies came to dominate the cotton economy and rural infrastructure, and their hegemony included the terms of farm contract entry, exit, and crop conversion (ibid.). What then happened was an interlocked exploitation of farms (cf. Byres 1996 (noted in the context of post-bellum America)): those who operated as creditors also controlled the cotton output channels and input markets of seeds and fertilisers.

For ordinary farmers, the politics of production meant that starting a farm implied using the majority of land for the cultivation of cotton. Individual farmers were given economic autonomy, meaning that they individually faced risk and possible bankruptcy, but no production autonomy. There were a number of factors that forced farms to produce cotton. First of all, there was explicit pressure by local authorities to cultivate 70 per cent of farmland with cotton. This compulsion lasted until the late 2000s. Local authorities' held the responsibility to distribute quota to individual farm enterprises, and district authorities could revoke land use rights when 'inappropriate use' was observed. As I have noted elsewhere (Hofman 2017), the state's discourse and belief of '*Pakhta boigarii davlat ast*' (cotton is the state's wealth) legitimised the continued pressure of cotton production. This argument strengthened the pressure by (local) authorities to cultivate cotton. As one farmer (slightly ironically) put it: 'The government asks us to plant at least 50 per cent of our fields with cotton. Who will grow cotton otherwise?' (interview 4 July 2013). A second factor that made farms grow cotton was that

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<sup>9</sup> Note that animal husbandry is prominent in the Yovon district, more than in most other lowland areas (World Bank 2009). Nowadays, nearly 30 per cent of households regards keeping livestock as an important farm activity (ibid., 110/114; also clearly observed in field work). Households holding livestock are better able to face external shocks. Livestock is predominantly held in small numbers by rural households, and is important capital when sold in times of need. 'The proceeds from selling a single cow might easily exceed proceeds from cotton field labor' (World Bank 2009, 11).

<sup>10</sup> State institutions controlled export prices and the state's budget benefitted substantially from taxation on cotton throughout the production complex (cumulatively to over 30 per cent of total national tax revenues, up until the present) (World Bank 2012; see also Hofman 2017). As noted by Hofman (2017, 6), 'Cotton has been the principal agricultural export commodity, in 2014 (...) equalling 13.5 per cent of total exports.'

farm inputs and credits were restricted to cotton-related advances, and capital markets were thin or in fact non-existent: conventional banks did not supply farm credit. Yet even if farmers had capital, input markets for other crops (like vegetables) were underdeveloped, implying lack of quality seeds and fertilisers. A third factor was that initially only cotton production meant access to water through irrigation networks (see also Sehring 2009 on this observation elsewhere in the country).<sup>11</sup> It exemplifies how physical objects – as artefacts (mediated by political decisions) – constrained a change in production relations: without water, farm production in the continental climate would be impossible. Fourth, outlets such as urban food markets were saturated with supply from household plot production, and farmers lacked (individual) transport facilities to bring larger amounts of (perishable) vegetable produce to local markets. All these factors 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. There was skilled labour on Soviet farms (Leigh Smith 2014), but the highly specified organisation of labour on Soviet farms had resulted in compartmentalised agricultural knowledge of specific tasks, domains or crops (see Toleubayev *et al.* 2010 on similar observations in Kazakhstan). In cotton-growing areas this implied that (new) post-Soviet individual farmers mostly knew only how to grow cotton on their fields. Not less important is that knowledge of cotton production was monopolised (by seed-producing farms and local agronomists), which rendered farmers dependent. As a result the prescriptive administrative task environment, ‘[that] tend[s] to form a tightly knit interweaving of material and moral interests and power structures’ as Benvenuti (1989, 94) describes in the European context), was being dominated by the post-Soviet regime through manifold state institutions. Cotton was at the core in the interaction and interrelatedness of institutions, technology, knowledge, perceptions and belief.

This political economy 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 2012). As well as that, because the futures system was defunct, farms incurred growing debts (cf. Hofman 2017).

Up until the late 2000s, control over the agrarian sector in the Tajik lowlands rested with regime insiders. Whereas in the Tajik highlands, particularly in the eastern part, farm restructuring took place in the form of splitting up of large farms, pilot projects in the cotton-producing lowlands remained pockets of individual farms, in a wider setting of very limited farm individualisation. Household plot production outpaced *dehqon* farm production and its contribution to gross agricultural output (GAO) ‘increased by 1.6 times from 1999-2003, (...) [and accounted for] 44% of gross crop output (World Bank 2012, 3). The contribution of *dehqon* farms to GAO also rose, from 10 to 24 per cent between 1999 and 2003 (ibid.).

### **3.2 Lessening control: policies towards farm autonomy and breaking the cotton regime**

In the course of the 2000s, under donor pressure, the state adopted a number of agrarian policies. While these policies did not initially bring meaningful change, a grand momentum was the conjuncture of political and environmental crises happening between 2007 and 2009, after which the state granted more autonomy to individual farm enterprises (Hofman and Visser forthcoming). It meant a break in the interlinkage described earlier, which in fact had maximised exploitation of cotton

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<sup>11</sup> Two thirds of the country’s agricultural production depends on irrigation (UNDP 2012). In a World Bank (2009) survey in this locality, water shortage was indicated as the primary factor constraining agricultural production.

growing farmers. Yet this development was primarily the result of top-down pressure: changes instigated from below remained absent as farmers lacked the ability to pressure the state to change the production environment. As a result, diversification in cropping patterns has been taking place since the late 2000s. This happens alongside farmland fragmentation.<sup>12</sup>

The shift from cotton to other crops has the potential to change production relations, and may in fact also spur (further) differentiation among *dehqon* farmers. Yet cotton production also fulfils important socio-economic roles for rural households, for instance in terms of rural employment given its manual labour requirements. As such, it continues to be of importance for rural dwellers, as it provides rural households with paid labour (most importantly cotton picking) and it provides them with cotton stalks, which are an essential source of household fuel (for heating and cooking). 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. The importance of cotton in this regard can explain a seemingly 'backwardness' or involution, as a typical technology 'lock in'.

Yet a change towards more diversified cropping patterns, e.g. in production orientation, can bring significant change in farm profits and food security. The gross margins of cotton are nine times lower than that of watermelons and almost ten times less than that of onions (FAO 2014, 32). 'A more substantial turn to horticulture would contribute to farm households' subsistence needs' (Lerman and Sedik 2009, 317).

The time dimension is thus of importance to understand agricultural production relations. Not less important in understanding the current generation of farmers is that rural actors' social origins played an important role in determining post-socialist processes of property redistribution and possibilities for upward economic mobility (Pallot and Nefedova 2003, 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 not only in accessing land, but even more in making effective use of that land, i.e. the ability to exploit the potential of farming.

#### 4 Emerging farm typology

In this section, I locate differences among agrarian producers by presenting a five-partite typology that has emerged in this setting, as shown in table 1 below: a) the large farm enterprise; b) the 'farmer by default'; c) the incoming tenant; d) the diversified smallholder and e) the rural household.<sup>13</sup> Note that the typology presented here should only be taken as a heuristic device used to shed light on the local pathway of transformation and the role of the politics of production. Ideal types can help to locate differences between research subjects, rather than to offer a perfect portrayal of reality (on typologies see also Whatmore *et al.* 1987, Sutherland 2010, Zhang 2015).

Based on qualitative interviews (detailed in the introduction), and as shown in Table 1 below, this typology is formed on observed qualitative characteristics: farming capital, crop mix, labour organisation, farm outlet and lastly farmers' social origin. My main decision to rest on these indicators is to assess farms' effective control over land and farm produce, and to understand who governs what, and how.

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<sup>12</sup> More recently state policies have prescribed downsizing of farms below ten hectares. Where elites have captured the local state, this policy of fragmentation – and also diversification – has been compromised. Furthermore, many farmers have also strategically responded by splitting up their farm along family or kinship-lines, which enables them to uphold control over larger parts of land.

<sup>13</sup> In a district further south (the Shahrityus district) Boboyorov (2016) (less explicitly) presented a comparable stratification of farm households and labelled the farmers by default as 'less privileged' farmers, compared to elite-run farms.

**Table 1. Farm typology in southwest Tajikistan<sup>14</sup>**

	Origin of capital	Size (ha.)	Crops	Technology	Outlets	Social origin
<b>LFE</b>	Industrial/urban	> 50	Cotton, wheat, animal feed,	Owned large scale, heavy machinery	Agri-business/urban markets	Nomenclature / bureaucrats/politicians
<b>Farmer by default</b>	Rural with off/on farm income sources	5-20	Cotton, wheat, vegetables	Rented/owned large scale	Cotton outlet; surplus food crops	Former <i>sovkhos</i> worker
<b>Incoming tenant</b>	Urban/migrant	<5	Food cash crops (vegetables, melons)	Manual	Small urban outlets	Urbanite, (re-migrants), merchants/urban labourer
<b>Diversifying Smallholder</b>	Farming	<5	Cotton, wheat, vegetables	Manual/Owned small scale	Small customer networks	Rural intelligentsia
<b>Rural household</b>	Wage labour at ( <i>dehqon</i> ) farm/Off-farm	≤ 0.10	Vegetables fruits, herbs	Manual	Subsistence oriented	Former <i>sovkhos</i> worker

#### **4.1 Large farm enterprises (LFE)**

The proximity of the capital, relatively high soil fertility and donor investments have triggered outside capital into agriculture in this area in the Yovon district, representing a development of ‘capital going

<sup>14</sup> Macro statistical data do not capture the differentiation at the local level, and the differences among *dehqon* farmers. Moreover, the emergence and continuation of larger holdings are not separately reflected in national data.

to the countryside' (cf. Yan and Chen 2015, 371 in the context of China). The emergence of large farm enterprises by domestic elites and foreigners in this area 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. They hold 'office based property' (as noted by Migdal 1974 regarding African political insiders in agriculture), which endows them with access to the state bureaucracy, with which they can exert influence in the procedures of land allocation. For these elites the state has become a 'source of accumulation' (Das 2007, 357). Political ties are also evident, due to the fact that these enterprises are larger in size than recent legislation prescribes. The LFEs' appearance in this area exemplifies the interwoven political and economic power of Tajikistan's neo-patrimonial regime.

The LFEs primarily cultivate cotton, grains and animal feed. These farms can profit from their cotton production (as opposed to the farmers by default, described later on) because (some of) the persons who own these enterprises are (or have been) engaged in cotton processing and export as well. For instance, in this locality a former prime minister, who was endowed with the responsibility of overseeing the national process of agrarian reform from 2008 to 2015, owns a large farm enterprise. Besides his engagement in the cotton production complex, he owns dairy processing facilities and orchards throughout the country. The fact that his enterprise is part of a larger conglomerate means that it has rather easy access to agrarian inputs (most importantly in time delivery of seeds and fertilisers), farm machinery, processing facilities and markets, and also access to agricultural knowledge.

For LFEs extensive state ties can compensate for the otherwise imperfect or weak and underperforming in- and output markets. This also means that they can be at the forefront of international donor schemes and design. It is like Benvenuti (1989, 95) noted in another context, where 'technological syntaxes become - in Giddens' terminology - structuring principles upon which certain actors are, historically speaking, in a position to exert greater authorization and/or allocation of power than others.' In other words, specific technologies (and machinery) prescribe particular usage, with which some actors (in this case the large farms) are advantaged over others. Here, for instance, the combines donated by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) were given to large enterprises, who consequently lent them out to the local wheat growing farmers. In this way the donor project benefited the already prosperous farmers and allowed them to further fortify their influence. It reinforced large farms' role as local patrons.

The actors owning the domestic-controlled LFEs are different actors than the ones who were earlier involved in farming, and these post-Soviet large farms are not successors of the Soviet *sovkhoz* as the Soviet state and collective farms were dismantled in the late 1990s. Most of the LFEs in this area have stakes in the wider agrarian economy, and it is primarily through these farm types that substantial capital and investment enters the agrarian economy. They gradually accumulate land, as a villager explained (interview 31 August 2013):

F: In the early 2000s everyone who had the conditions [in terms of labour] could take land, but prices 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?

F: 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, then they have to stop again due to financial problems. These people search for work elsewhere or become employed by the large farms.

In another interview (1 September 2013)

IH: Why are local people not farming these fields? I noticed that there are many outsiders farming in this locality.



F: Who, how? [farmer repeats several times]. What could these fields give them? They [local villagers] do not have an uncle [connections to authority].

As one other farmer clearly stated ‘ordinary people cannot farm those large fields’ (interview 14 December 2014). The larger farms start up with external capital and accumulate landed wealth over time. Besides these farms’ engagement in staples, the large-scale production of animal feed production is also lucrative. The production requires little labour and the demand for animal feed is high, because nearly all rural households (here and in many other localities in lowland Tajikistan) hold livestock but lack access to pastureland nearby and cannot produce sufficient fodder for the year round.

The large enterprises are typical large capitalist farms based on hired wage labour. In times of peaks in labour demands, larger farms mobilise additional labour. The labour force working on these farms is local: manual work (weeding) is mostly done by landless villagers, while people with a *dehqon* farm (like the so-called farmers by default, explained later on) may work for the LFE for instance as a tractor driver.

In the category of large farm enterprises that feature the mode of capitalism ‘from above,’ one may include foreign investors. In 2012 Chinese agribusinesses established farms in the area, with which another form of capital from outside has entered. While there is officially one enterprise involved, in practice it is an umbrella of enterprises that engages in both large scale production of cotton and wheat, and production of vegetables (Hofman 2016). In this regard, the Chinese enterprise exhibits both the characteristics of domestic LFEs and that of diversifying smallholders, discussed later. Particularly with regard to their larger scale engagement in the vegetable sector, the Chinese enterprise distorts ‘the relativities between the large and small sector’ (noted in the Russian context on large enterprises by Pallot and Nefedova 2003, 348), since it was always smaller farms that supplied these (perishable) vegetables.

It is thanks to market relations and comparative advantage that Chinese farms can prosper from farming in this locality. They can access and supply urban markets with their independent transport and storage facilities, with which they have control over essential parts of the agrarian infrastructure. 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 noted by Hofman (2016, 459), ‘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.’

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. Owing to connections these large farms have become successful, which distinguishes them from most actors engaged in the rural economy.

#### **4.2 The farmer by default**

Larger in number than all other farm types is the ‘farmer by default’ (see also Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2017 on this term). I use this notion ‘by default’ to point to the rural dwellers who applied for farmland in the late 1990s, because of a lack of alternative and when people assumed farming could prove profitable in later years. Land was regarded as insurance for the future, in the absence of other meaningful livelihood sources. Many of the ordinary Soviet *sovkhos* workers without essential social, political and human capital were eligible to apply for land and became a farmer, by default.

The type of farmer by default cultivates cotton on the majority of his land: in this locality, in 2014, nearly 70 per cent was cultivated with this crop, and over 80 per cent of farmers were cotton



producing farmers.<sup>15</sup> The cultivation of cotton, as described before, took place under pressure from the state up until the late 2000s, and farmers are still asked to plant at least 50 per cent of their field with cotton (interview 27 June 2013). As a result, cropping patterns are negotiated on an individual basis, in which farmers' political and social capital is essential. The production relations in cotton have long resembled sharecropping arrangements, in which the futures companies (until the late 2000s) supplied credit and farm inputs, and cotton served as a collateral.<sup>16</sup>

The cotton producing farmers depend on the cotton infrastructure that includes machinery for field preparation, the irrigation system and the cotton outlets. As opposed to the large farm enterprises described above, farmers by default hardly profit from cotton production. The cotton is procured and traded in distant markets, out of the farmers' sight. As noted above, large cotton procurers, often linked to the elite run LFEs, have long dominated in input and output relations, directly and indirectly. As Boboyorov (2016, 310) also observed: 'the less privileged farmers have access only to low-quality resources, limited financial means and poor technical facilities.' Farmers' production autonomy has been limited, even until recently. One important fact is that farmers receive the payments for cotton late, or not at all over (more) consecutive years. The result is financial problems, which greatly affects the liquidity of the farm enterprise. The following conversation is exemplary (interview 27 June 2013)

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

The dependencies in the cotton economy mark a great difference with the input markets and outlets of other crops, which are only grown on smaller parts of land. Cotton production is capital (and labour) intensive.<sup>17</sup> The marginal returns for cotton come only once a year. There is little capital accumulated over time, as revenues primarily act to offset expenses of cotton production. Because of the long maturation of cotton, delayed production or crop failure can have significant repercussions.

Connections, i.e. social and political capital, are essential to thrive on farming. This is especially important to access farm inputs in time, such as machinery and seeds, and also advice by local agronomists on weather and soil conditions.<sup>18</sup> For production of crops in which timing matters, a delay may imply a later financial loss. In this regard, farmers who also work for the larger LFEs have a great advantage: they can secure farm machinery using the LFE infrastructure. This is a clear example of the symbiosis that still features in post-socialist agriculture in Tajikistan. The necessity to access

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<sup>15</sup> Data was taken from the field site. The average size of a *dehqon* farm was 17 hectares. Nationwide the average size of farms has considerably decreased over the past few years, from 18 hectares in 2009 to nearly five hectares in 2015 (Hofman and Visser forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Such contracts are in fact still concluded, particularly when farmers are short of capital at the start of the season. Other farmers purchase inputs by themselves and decide where to sell their cotton later in the growing season near harvest time.

<sup>17</sup> According to the FAO (2014, 29), '28 % of all costs are spent on different types of fertilisers, 19 % for seeds and 15 % for land cultivation (ploughing, harrowing, sowing and furrowing). Labour and associated costs represent only 7% of total costs.'

<sup>18</sup> Another study pointed out that there is on average (countrywide) one tractor per 14 farmers (TajStat 2009, 36).

machinery keeps intact the interdependencies between different farm units and enterprises. Over 30 per cent of farmers in this locality rent machines from larger farms or leasing companies (World Bank 2009, 111).

The food crops grown on remaining fields are grown for subsistence needs and sales.<sup>19</sup> Yet this is actually not a completely autonomous decision: farmers are pressured to cultivate the fields twice a year (most often winter wheat first, followed by a vegetable). Several farmers show reluctance to grow a second crop after wheat, even though it may be a food crop, because of the additional labour and inputs required. Yet leaving such lands fallow is strongly discouraged, and farmers sometimes receive written demands by the district government. This is a more informal element of the regulatory framework and land use is regularly monitored by the district authorities, as one farmer told (interview 4 July 2013):

F: We plant 10 hectares of our fields with cotton. The government asks us to do so. [The farmer starts to empty his pockets and shows a letter]. And here, they [the district and local authorities] compel us to grow a second harvest after our winter wheat. We have to grow two crops per season on the fields not cultivated with cotton. They check it.

IH: So what will you cultivate?

F: I don't know yet. Perhaps we'll cultivate 2 or 3 hectares with some crops. We have water problems at our fields, 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.

According to a recent World Bank survey (2009, x), water was still allocated to farms according to the number of hectares cultivated with cotton. This resulted in a lock 'into existing cotton production arrangements.'

Diversifying livelihoods is unsurprisingly essential: labour migration by other family members tends to be common practice. The farmers by default' accumulate little capital over time. Earnings from cotton tend to remain insufficient,<sup>20</sup> and for many only the reliance on migrant remittances can explain their resilience.<sup>21</sup> An indication is that the value of remittances transferred by individual migrants may amount to net income of 150 US Dollars per month (World Bank 2009, 6), whilst profits from cotton tend to be below 200 US Dollars per hectare (FAO 2014, 32) – that is cultivated over one growing season. Many farmers by default work outside of the farm, which may provide additional safety nets and may broaden farmers' social and political capital.

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. These farmers are endowed with land, but do not have the full decision-making power over their own labour practices. In a World Bank survey (2009, 35), 28 per cent of farms in this district indicated that they could not 'farm the fields according to their

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<sup>19</sup> Local wheat is generally low in quality and is not popular among (urban) consumers, who prefer imported Kazakh flour. The low quality of domestic wheat is related to the impoverishment of local seed varieties and lack of proper harvesting and milling practices.

<sup>20</sup> The little money earned with cotton growing often stays with the head of the farm. Concerning collective *dehqon* farms, it is the head of the farm who controls the distribution of farm income to the workers.

<sup>21</sup> According to a countrywide report by DFID, USAID and World Bank (2012, 67), 'remittances constitute the second-most important source of income for rural households.' Throughout rural Tajikistan, remittances play a crucial role in farm household reproduction and provide households with cash to purchase important assets (*ibid.*). Nationwide remittances equalled over 50 per cent of the GDP in 2013, with which Tajikistan was ranked highest worldwide (World Bank 2016).

wish. This was (...) more or less comparable to other cotton growing districts.’ As a result of farmers’ subordinated position, they cannot ‘play the market’: they cannot speculate with their harvests and 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 at the market 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).

Besides barriers in terms of infrastructure deficits, farmers’ understanding of and insights into (urban) market dynamics is sometimes limited, as is their ability to negotiate with middlemen. ‘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: these farmers remain unprofitable under the current regime.

#### **4.3 Incoming tenants**

A different kind of ‘outside capital’ entering agriculture in this area is seen in the investments of urban dwellers in agriculture. For these incoming tenants, entering and exiting farming does not require major efforts related to administrative requirements, or capital investments. The tenants lease part of the farmland of farmers by default against a cash payment without production obligations. They are commercially oriented and focus on labour-intensive production of food crops that are highly remunerative on urban markets.

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 and less than an hour’s drive from the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe. Where many local farmers are unable support themselves from the farm produce, outsiders are able to profit from farming. Here applies what Verdery (2004, 154) noted in the context of Romania: ‘leasing enables shucking off liabilities that owners are forced to bear.’<sup>22</sup> Boboyorov (2016, 322) observed elsewhere in the country that (cotton) farmers rented out (non-cotton) land to people with more expertise on non-cotton crops.

Yet there are more aspects 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 and 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 failure of sowing does not directly bring 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. They can thus grow less risky and more lucrative crops. As also addressed above, the differences in the gross margins of cotton, wheat, tomatoes and stone fruits respectively are remarkable. The gross margins of tomatoes are around eight times that of cotton (Shamsiev 2012, see also FAO 2014). A second advantage is that the relative small scale of their production is not capital intensive in terms of technological requirements: most work is done manually, which means that these tenants do not compete locally for scarce agricultural machinery. They do not need heavy machinery. Third, with their base in the city, incoming tenants can select from a wider variety of input markets in the capital of the country. A fourth advantage is that the urban base provides them with daily insights into market dynamics, where they can follow price trends and product varieties. Lastly, they can market their small production quantities timely, by transporting it to specific urban outlets. As a result, these tenant

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<sup>22</sup> In post-communist Romania, Verdery (2003) also observed that land was increasingly leased to ‘supertenants’ because landowners faced economic difficulties to cultivate their fields. For tenants, ‘leasing has the advantage that tenants can leave with the owners any liabilities associated with the asset’ (Verdery 2003, 93).

farmers can accumulate capital over one season, which they most often do not reinvest in the farm business. In fact, they then extract revenues rather than that they bring capital to the countryside.

#### ***4.4 Specialising and diversifying smallholders***

The fourth type of farmer that has emerged in this setting is the specialising and diversifying smallholder farmer. Note that I cluster these two subtypes because they overlap in terms of their highly skilled farm practices and in their relation to the means of production, and also for matters of simplification, as the two subtypes do not appear very frequently.

The cropping pattern of the diversifying smallholder is larger in variety than that of the large farm enterprises and the farmers by default. If cotton is grown it is only on a small part of land, in order to have cotton stalks for household fuel. At the same time there are specialising smallholders who focus on one or two niche markets, such as animal feed.

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), who are partially subsistence oriented and who strive for autonomy and distantiation, employ craftsmanship and cultivate local networks (on Ukrainian smallholders see Kuns 2016, Mamonova 2015). The Tajik smallholders belonged to the rural intelligentsia in Soviet times (see Mamonova 2015 on similar observations in Ukraine – though the size of farms differs considerably from Ukrainian private famers).

One farm household in the locality (with the man being a former Soviet bureaucrat and the woman a retired school teacher), for instance, cultivates chickpeas, cabbage, tomatoes, melons and strawberries. In 2014 the family planted nearly 0.5 hectares with cabbage and were able to harvest approximately 30 tons. Local women buy 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 can earn 30,000 TJS from only 0.5 hectares. This equals approximately 5,000 USD and illustrates a great difference with the gross margins of cotton. Thanks to farm revenues and their small shop the couple was able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Most small farms reinvest their accumulated capital in the farm enterprise, as for instance one farmer who bought a small Chinese-branded tractor. Farmers express regret and sometimes frustration that they are not allowed to build processing facilities on the field site, which would have allowed them to engage in value-added practices. By prohibiting these activities the state withholds the development of the agrarian economy. One farmer expressed his difficulties and annoyance and stated (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 process our products. 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 did not allow me.

As is the case with all other farm types, social and political capital are essential for these smallholders. Boboyorov (2016, 322) even argued that ‘the specialisation of farmers in such crops depends less on their expertise but rather on their personal relations with the elites.’ With their orientation on specific crops and outlets these farms engage in a niche market, a development which is not hampered ‘from above’ because the incoming tenants and the specialising and diversifying smallholders engage in entirely different markets than the large farm enterprises and the farmers by default. As such, they do

not pose a threat to elite interests. As a result farmers differ in the political economic space that they experience, defined by Kuns (2016, 4) in the context of Ukrainian agriculture as: ‘that taxes are not 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 another important role in networking with customers. Particularly in niche markets, in which these farmers control the crop value chain to an important extent, 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. Some of the diversifying farmers have created customer networks to exploit the potential of ‘just in time’ marketing, such as Kuns (2016, 16) also observed in southern Ukraine, where ‘non-local traders descend on the village around harvest time.’ The ‘just-in-time’ strategy relieves the farmer from the need to transport goods to the market and from negotiating with middlemen. It only occurs for 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 have an outspoken commercial orientation and have professionalised their business. They 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’. That ‘renders value added’ (cf. van der Ploeg 2014). Farmers of this type know their right to select their crops and know how to play the market. All in all they are able to take risks and are less exposed to external factors. 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.

Yet this type of farmer encounters the deficiencies in the private supplies of agricultural inputs. For crop seeds that are not reproduced, seeds have to be purchased. Problems encountered in 2013 exemplify how the current institutional set-up drives farmers to grow cotton, and how the poorly developed private input markets of non-cotton crops hamper farmers. This quote by a female farmer shows how, under market imperfections, farmers may eventually prefer cotton to other crops (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 Rural households**

Besides the different farm enterprises described below, there is a large number of rural households that do not own a *dehqon* farm but only have access to a household plot. These rural households could equally well be termed peasants, as they are primarily subsistence oriented regarding the household plot production. Rural households combine non-farm employment with (intensive) cultivation of the household plot for self-consumption, most often vegetables and a few herbs, and a few households hold more remote ‘presidential land’ (*zamini presidenti*) to cultivate food crops or grains.<sup>23</sup> As noted

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<sup>23</sup> In 1995 and 1997 the state allocated additional land to rural households to provide an additional safety net. These specially allocated plots became known as ‘presidential land’ (*zamini presidenti*). Presidential lands are usually used for grains cultivation. Not all rural households have access to presidential land and not all use their presidential land, given that the plots are located at further



by Hofman and Visser (forthcoming) ‘According to the Land Code, households have the right to 0.12 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.’ In this locality, household plots are around 0.09 hectares (World Bank 2009, 9); the average size of the presidential land is around 0.11 hectares and, according to a World Bank (2009) survey in this district, 88 percent of the people cultivated household plots; 77 per cent of the people cultivated presidential land.

Food production on household plots has been prominent throughout Soviet and post-Soviet years (Rowe 2009). Especially in the 1990s, in the period of war and economic collapse, household plots functioned as social safety nets, triggering the commodification of private production to make a living (see also Pallot and Nefedova 2007 on similar observations in post-Soviet Russia, Kuns 2016 in Ukraine).

Nationwide contribution of this kind of production to gross agricultural output was over 60 percent in 2014 (Hofman and Visser forthcoming). In this district, for almost 40 per cent of households, work on the household plot is the second most important source of employment (World Bank 2009).<sup>24</sup> Some seek to meet subsistence requirements through small scale cash crop production. Earnings remain limited, however, and ‘household plots and presidential lands only act to reproduce labour for the large farms, rather than release the households from the poverty trap’ (World Bank 2009, 35).

For many rural households individual farming has not been an option in recent years, as one female villager once said: ‘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 just graduated former pupils, interview 19 June 2012).<sup>25</sup>

The proximity of the district centre and capital provides employment opportunities. Yet even if non-farm employment may downplay the need to engage in farming, many rural households attempt to access farmland. There are a few incentives to work on (cotton producing) farms. First, besides (occasional) cash earnings, 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 small pasture area for households’ cattle. Second, as noted before, work on cotton fields entails provision of cotton stalks, which are essential for rural households as a source of fuel. Even though the monthly wage may be marginal, such benefits are important incentives to engage in farm work. It is here where the symbiotic relationship as seen in Soviet agriculture, between the Soviet farm and the rural household, still surfaces.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper I have analysed the emergence and differentiation of farm enterprises. This process was placed in the context of donor intervention. The World Bank FPSP was not a once off transfer of technology, as it came with a package that included rehabilitation of waterways, training and supervision. Problems that inhibit agrarian development and well-being of rural livelihoods tend to be

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distance from the household. Moreover, in some villages rural households lost their presidential lands as land was needed for village expansion.

<sup>24</sup> For almost no (less than 1 per cent) household was the private plot production the most important (full time) source of employment (World Bank 2009, 94).

<sup>25</sup> The reference to small money and cigarettes is more often made in Central Asia, as Kandiyoti (1999, 513) also noted in the context of Uzbekistan that ‘The wages women (and children) receive for the cotton harvest are considered too small and are sometimes referred to by men as “cigarette money” although they often represent the only source of cash income since all other agricultural wages are paid in kind.’



defined by the state and donors in technical and practical deficiencies. This has rarely been conceptualised in more concrete political terms.

Farm restructuring changed people's access to the means of production, and many of those who were granted to privatise failed to capitalise. Ownership of land did not necessarily translate into control over farm production. Through state institutions and donor assistance, elites steered the local trajectory of agrarian change. The dynamics in agrarian change in the past decades have propelled social differentiation and inequality within the class of former *sovkhoz* workers.

While agrarian reform has been ongoing, I have identified a five-partite typology of rural actors. The typology illustrates the key patterns of transformation that have been set in motion. 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. Besides the large farm enterprises (LFEs) controlled by elites, expansion or success of particular farms has been thwarted. Elites have been lenient to 'successful' farms as long as they have remained small and have focused on other markets. In other words; the dominance of elite actors in the rural economy forestalls the emergence of a viable middle class of farmers. In fact, it seems to resemble Roy's (2002) expectations on farm reform in Central Asia, who argued that 'whatever the scope of the legislation, which can range from full privatisation of the land (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) to state ownership of the land while conceding exploitation rights to private farmers (Uzbekistan), the results tend to be similar. Large estates are created in favour of former *kolkhoz* apparatchiks (usually chairmen and their families) under two alternative forms. One is that of a "model farm" which involves the best land and agricultural machinery for specialising in lucrative crops, while hiring former *kolkhozi*ans as waged labourers. The other is a kind of *latifundia* where most of the *kolkhozi*ans, though working independently on their own tenured land, have a crop-sharing agreement (*ijara*) with the leadership of the *kolkhoz*; this makes them more like tenants than private farmers' (Roy 2002, 137-8, emphasis in original).

I have shown that there is a substantial diversity subsumed within legal and statistical terms. While the post-Soviet, capitalist large farm enterprise; the partially integrated 'farmer by default'; and the autonomous diversified smallholder may all 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.

Within the typology I have shed light on the polar extremes of capital accumulation. The entrance of outsiders and the commodification of the agrarian sector propel differentiation in two ways: capitalism grows with the entrance of industrial and merchant capital, something which happens alongside a differentiation within the category of rural dwellers (the former *sovkhoz* workers). The latter represents capitalism 'from below'.

The politically assisted regime, – capitalism 'from above' – embodied in the capitalist large farm enterprises, has wider economic bases beyond only farming. The hegemony over the local agrarian economy (through politics and ownership of 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 of production.

This type co-exists with the more endogenous, locally grounded pattern of capitalism 'from below', reflected in diversified smallholder farming. This example of capitalism 'from below' shows that land is only valuable when it has market access and autonomy over farm practices and labour.

The earlier essential symbiosis with the large farm enterprise has disappeared, but interrelations still exist and, above all, social and political capital are key to farming. Connections can compensate for lack of financial capital or lack of other resources. As a result, under changing political and economic circumstances, a stratification emerges which still contains structures of severe inequality and exploitation.

I have demonstrated in this paper that land is not the limiting factor for rural well-being. 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 paper. Although there are serious drawbacks to 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. Furthermore, this research didn't address the issue of actors' resistance. This does not mean that farmers are passive rule-followers, but the post-conflict authoritarian context of Tajikistan limits open forms of resistance and protest. Forms of contention are rather seen in covert and silent forms of defiance, such as voting with feet (migration), petition writing and secret diversification of cropping patterns.

However, the case presented in this paper indicates a dynamic of farm individualisation and shows that geography and external factors are very important in agrarian change. This specific local political economy is enmeshed in the global political economy both at regime and household level (see also Hofman and Visser forthcoming). 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.

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**About the Author(s)**

**Irna Hofman** is a Ph.D. candidate and part-time lecturer at Leiden University Institute for Area Studies. Her doctoral research focuses on post-Soviet agrarian transformation in Tajikistan, Central Asia, and also includes the study of Chinese farm investments in Central Asian agriculture. She is a rural sociologist by training and her work and interests are focused on rural livelihoods, agrarian and social change and transition economies. She has earlier also conducted research on agrarian change in Uzbekistan and was a temporary research fellow (2014) at the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO, Halle/S in Germany).

**Contact:** [i.hofman@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:i.hofman@hum.leidenuniv.nl)



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