



Challenging the dominant assumptions about peasants' responses to land grabbing

'Politics from below' in Ukraine

Natalia Mamonova

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Challenging the dominant assumptions about peasants' responses to land grabbing: 'Politics from below' in Ukraine*

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Abstract

The assumption that globally, peasants are against land grabbing is dominant among many rural social movements, NGOs, and scholars empathetic with them. However, this is not always the case. Land grabs affect different rural groups in different ways, which creates a variety of reactions to it: from reckless enthusiasm, cautious acceptance, to outright resistance. This paper aims to rethink contemporary assumptions about rural resistance to large-scale land acquisitions. Analysing the context of Ukraine, the author argues that the politics of dispossessed groups depend on terms of inclusion in land deals; adaptive response strategies dominate over resistance; and peasants are more concerned with personal gains from land grabs than with benefits for the whole community.

About the author

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1 Introduction

The idea that globally, peasants are against land grabbing is dominant among many rural social movements, NGOs, and scholars empathetic with them (GRAIN 2011, FREE 2012, La Via Campesina 2012, etc.). 'In all our countries, peasants and family farmers organize themselves under different forms to defend their right to land and to their means of subsistence' – was declared at the 'Stop the land grab'¹ International Conference in 2011 in Mali. The impact of land grabs on local communities, and reactive politics from below caused a new wave of academic debates on the agrarian question. The peasant society has been viewed by some authors from a moral economy perspective which 'places the subsistence ethic at the centre of the analysis of peasant politics' (Scott 1976, 3). Advocates of this school argue that land grabbing violates the peasants' 'moral economy', evoking hidden forms of rural resistance (Neimark 2013, McAllister 2012, Schneider 2011). Others are convinced that recent processes of land accumulation reinforce class struggle in the countryside, generating politics of peasant resistance (Adnan 2011, Baird 2011, Bernstein 2006).

In the meantime, the assertion that resistance is an indispensable rural response to land grabbing suffers from simplification. Land grabs affect different rural groups in different ways, which creates a variety of reactions to it: from reckless enthusiasm, cautious acceptance, to outright resistance. In this paper I rethink the contemporary assumptions about rural resistance to large-scale land acquisitions. Analysing the context of Ukraine, I argue that (i) the politics of dispossessed groups depend on terms of inclusion in land deals; (ii) adaptive response strategies dominate over resistance; and (iii) peasants are more concerned with personal gains from land grabs than with benefits for the whole community.

Ukraine is an ideal case for such an analysis. The country was recently included by the World Bank on the list of resource-rich and finance-poor countries that became the targets for land grabbing. Ukraine possesses more than 25 percent of the world's richest and most fertile soil, so called Black Earth, and played the role of the Bread Basket of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Ukraine launched a land reform aimed at the distribution of collective farmlands to rural dwellers for private farming development. However, because of economic instability of the transition period and inconsistency of the land reform implementation, individual farming did not succeed in Ukraine. Instead, land became concentrated, first, in the hands of rural elites, and later accumulated by a few domestic and foreign agroholdings (Visser and Spoor 2011, Plank 2013). To date, 60 percent of Ukrainian farmland is controlled by large agricultural enterprises (Visser and Mamonova 2011). Similar to many other countries affected by land grabs, the land accumulation in Ukraine is often carried out in fraudulent schemes with dispossession of the local population (Visser and Spoor 2011).

The distinguishing feature of Ukraine lies in the near-absent overt protests among rural dwellers to large-scale land acquisitions (Visser and Mamonova 2011). The lack of open resistance among post-Soviet peasants can be explained by 70 years of socialism (a time when expression of disagreement was prosecuted), depopulation of rural areas, traditional dependency of villagers on large-scale farming, and a culture of repression that limits the political consciousness of the rural population (see Mamonova and Visser, forthcoming). However, these reasons do not preclude the anti-land grab rural social movement in Russia. Mamonova and Visser (forthcoming) found that Russian rural civil society organisations are able to mobilise peasants against land grabs, although on a more limited scale than in various other regions of the world.

¹ The conference was organized by the national confederation of peasant organizations (CNOP) in Mali, and by La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement. More than 250 farmers, from 30 countries, launched an international alliance against land grabbing on November 19 in Sélingué, Mali. This alliance will be led by peasants, in collaboration with a wide range of social movements and organizations.

Ukrainian civil society organisations and NGOs do not prioritize land grab-related issues and, therefore, do not mobilise the peasantry against it (Visser and Mamonova 2011). Taking into account that the positions of civil society organisations do not always coincide with the concerns of ordinary villagers (Pye 2010, White *et al.* 2012), I consider the relatively peaceful acceptance of land grabbing in Ukraine as a natural response of peasants who are not encouraged and inspired by anti-grab social movements and other pro-poor civil society groups. Therefore, Ukraine is an example of peasants' politics toward land grabbing in a social setting free from interventions by outsiders (in this case, social organisations²).

This research is largely based on fieldwork conducted by the author during the summer of 2012 in two regions of Ukraine: the Letichevsk district (the Khmel'nitsk region, Western Ukraine) and the Pereyaslav-Khmel'nitskiy district (the Kiev region, Central Ukraine). These two regions are characterised by high soil fertility and a large amount of agrohholdings operating there. The analysis of peasant responses to land grabbing is drawn from 52 semi-structured in-depth interviews with inhabitants from the analysed districts (37 peasants and rural workers, 7 private farmers, 3 chief managers of large-scale agricultural enterprises, and 5 representatives of local authorities were involved in this research). The same group of respondents participated in a household survey, developed and conducted by the author, in order to define stratification within rural communities and how it is linked to different response strategies to land grabbing. The survey findings are complemented with the all-Ukrainian surveys: 'Socio-Economic Situation in the Contemporary Ukrainian Village' conducted by the Gorshenin Institute in 2011, 'Land Relations in Ukraine: Sociological Portrait of the Situation', conducted by the Centre of Social Expertise of the Institute of Sociology of NAS of Ukraine in 2013, and FAO Farm Survey 2005.³ Furthermore, various sources of academic literature, mass media publications, and statistical sources such as the State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics, the Ukrainian Academy of Science, the FAO and World Bank reports are embedded in this research.

Although this paper engages in the debates on the peasant question,⁴ these are not central to this research. The term 'peasantry' is used in this analysis largely because it is the best translation of the Ukrainian world '*selianin*', and due to the subsistence nature of rural household production in Ukraine, which is the main characteristic of the peasant moral economy. Land grabbing is considered

² I consider social organizations as outsiders due to their detachment from the rural population and top-down organization. Our analysis of the rural social organizations in Russia and Ukraine can be founded in Mamonova and Visser (forthcoming) and Visser and Mamonova (2011).

³ The results of the Gorshenin survey are available (in Ukrainian only): http://institute.gorshenin.ua/researches/81_Sotsialnoekonomichne_stanovishche_.html; the results of the NAS survey are available (in Ukrainian only): http://www.dazru.gov.ua/terra/control/uk/publish/article;jsessionid=4A3099EDFB03CBDA0B75C604240F01B2?art_id=144665&cat_id=130839; FAO Farm survey available in Lerman et al. (2006) (in English).

⁴ The peasant (or agrarian) question deals with prospects for the peasantry under the development of capitalism. Class-based theorists argued that peasants would disappear as a class and become a rural proletariat or petty commodity producers (Marx 1867, Lenin 1967, Bernstein 2004), while the populists' perspective sees peasants as great survivors of capitalism, arguing that family agricultural production, of which the peasantry is the main type, has an internal logic that enables it to withstand the pressure of capitalist production relations and reproduce itself indefinitely (Chayanov 1925, Scott 1976, Ellis 1996). Among the reasons for the peasantry's survival are: 'moral economy', community support, self-exploitation, etc. Moral economy represents the social norms of peasant communities focusing on reciprocity rather than on the individual maximization of profits. Therefore, the orientation of Ukrainian rural dwellers on subsistence farming (self-sufficiency farming in which the farmers focus on growing enough food to feed themselves and their families, not on profit maximisation) formed my argument in favour of application of the term 'peasantry' in the Ukrainian case. This argument will be developed further in the paper.

here as obtaining control over land and land-related resources by domestic or foreign investors for the purposes of resource extraction geared towards external consumers.⁵

This research consciously overlooks covert forms of rural politics toward land grabbing. According to Scott (1985), in social settings where open rural protest is restricted by political and economic factors, acts of peasants' resistance often remain hidden. There is an on-going debate on classifying gossiping, stealing, and foot-dragging as: a covert resistance of the post-soviet peasants, 'parasitic symbiosis' between large farm enterprises and households, or just hooliganism (see e.g. Mamonova and Visser, forthcoming). No matter what name they have, hidden politics do not represent a significant force to change the current situation in the post-Soviet countryside (Spoor and Visser 2004).

The main goal of the present research is to reveal the overt peasants' response strategies toward large-scale land accumulations, and understand how implications of the distinguished household strategies impact socio-economic differentiation within rural communities. This research challenges dominant assumptions about rural resistance to land grabbing, and calls for rethinking the nature of the contemporary peasants' politics worldwide.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section highlights the main assumptions about contemporary peasants' reactions to land deals, which will be questioned in this paper. The third section presents the historical analysis of the Ukrainian peasantry in order to define the pattern of agrarian evolution that prevails in Ukraine at the moment land grabbing occurred. Different processes of exclusion and inclusion of peasants in modern agricultural development are analysed in the fourth section. This helps to explain the various attitudes of rural dwellers to land grabbing. The fifth section provides the analysis of several response strategies of Ukrainian villagers to large-scale agribusinesses and consequential socio-economic diversification within rural communities. In the sixth section I analyse the peasants' attitude to land grabbing by using the attitude to land sales as an indicator. This shows the peasants' choices between personal gains and village development. I conclude with a discussion about the generalizability of the findings and their application for wider rural communities.

2 Three main assumptions about peasants' reaction to land deals

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

Meanwhile, according to the World Bank Group, large-scale land accumulations can be, to some extent, beneficial to the local population. Indeed, there are many people being included or incorporated into the emerging enclaves of land-based investments, through a variety of schemes (contract farming, plantation workers, etc.) (Borras 2011). The critics of this 'win-win' scenario argue that this inclusion of rural dwellers is an 'adverse incorporation', i.e. exploitation and subordination of incorporated groups in highly unequal power relations, what, according to Hickey and du Toit (2007, 21), leads to marginalisation of subordinated groups and their chronic poverty.

⁵ This is a slightly rephrased definition of White et al. (2012).

Meanwhile, different academic studies show that even under adverse incorporation, rural dwellers manage to find advantages. Thus, peasants benefit from the recent large-scale agricultural development in Kazakhstan by taking the jobs it creates. Rural Kazakhs, according to Petrick *et al.* (2011, 1), 'due to the socialist tradition of industrialized farming operations [...] regard themselves primarily as workers and not as land owners', therefore, do not struggle for the 'peasant way'⁶ and autonomy, and accept work at the new latifundia. Smalley and Corbera (2012, 1050) found that the attitude to land investments varies across different rural groups in Kenya. Their interviews with farmers indicated the 'vision of development through jobs' and the 'desire for agricultural development projects' as the reasons behind the support of land deals, while the majority of pastoralists opposed land acquisitions, referring to 'fear of eviction or lost access' and antipathy towards large-scale production. Consequently, for some rural groups and sectors, land grabbing does not necessarily bring negative changes.

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

Another popular assumption is that **peasants are unable to adapt and coexist with large-scale industrial agriculture**. This revitalises the long-standing debate on the persistence and disappearance of the peasantry (see Araghi 1995, Boltvinik 2012). Populist social movements redefine the 'peasant way' in opposition to a globalized neo-liberal corporate-driven model of agricultural production in order to mobilise peasants against land grabbing (McMichael 2006, Desmarais 2002), while class-based theorists observe how the peasantry disappears under the competitive pressures of modern corporate agriculture, and see the ongoing rural unrest as a class conflict (Bernstein 2004, Mishra 2011, Adnan 2011).

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

The analysis of market niches, where peasants and large-scale agribusiness operate, as well as structural changes in peasants' modes of production, are highly important in understanding rural response strategies to land grabbing.

The last assumption, which will be challenged in this paper, is the belief that **peasants are concerned with the 'peasant way', food and land sovereignty, and economic and ecological justice, when they**

⁶ The concept of 'peasant way' is often used by populist rural social movements as an alternative to the neoliberal agricultural development. It is characterised as 'involving a subsistence family economy, stem family arrangements and a highly localised cultural and co-operative system' (Síocháin 2003,1).

adopt strategies to respond to land grabbing. This position dominates in works of many academics (Kay 2012, Rosset *et al.* 2011), and grounds the programmes of rural social movements defending peasants' rights for food and land sovereignty (McMichael 2006).

Meanwhile, Pye (2010) identifies the frequent mismatch between the global campaigns of civil society and the rural social movements, and local concerns of villagers in the context of Indonesia. For example, while biofuel debates are globally framed in terms of biodiversity conservation and climate justice, local concerns focus on land rights and employment conditions. As Pye argues, the complaints of palm oil smallholders and plantation workers are conspicuously absent at the international level of civil society and social movement campaigns (Borras *et al.* 2010). Mamonova (2013) analysed the divergence between demands of the social movement 'Defenders' in the Moscow region, who clamoured against grabbing of the historical land in Radonezh, while the local rural population was rather concerned about the access to the forest and river, which were blocked by the land grabbers.

The romanticizing of peasants' motives in land grab resistance might bring us to the wrong conclusions, and, consequently, to the development of wrong policies and programmes for the protection of peasants' rights.

These assumptions about peasants' responses to land grabbing are challenged in the next sections, based on the analysis of contemporary rural politics in Ukraine.

3 The starting point of the analysis: peasants or rural workers in Ukraine?

In order to understand the nature of rural responses to land grabbing and transformations in rural communities we need to define the pattern of agrarian evolution that prevails in Ukraine at the moment land grabbing occurred.

The agrarian question played an important role in the development of socialism in rural Ukraine during the Soviet period. Leninist ideologies saw the peasantry as a dying class, destined either to become a rural proletariat or petty commodity producers (Zemstov 1991). Therefore, the Soviet goal was to create a class of rural labourers who would share socialist values of common ownership of property and the equality of people. The forced collectivization of agriculture (1929-1933) was aimed to eliminate private property and increase agricultural productivity in order to produce grain reserves for the industrialization of the country.

Although the increase of agricultural productivity was rather unfeasible and accomplished predominantly by violent measures of harvest expropriation and dekulakisation⁷ (leading to famines in 1931-32 in Ukraine), the relative equalisation of rural dwellers, was, indeed, achieved by the collectivization (Humphrey 2002). Throughout the Soviet period the state exercised total control over stratification of rural communities by regulating household incomes and equalising the size of household plots (Wegren 2005).

The 'Soviet peasant'⁸ lost the peasant-like features of 'autonomous, property-conscious economising', but retained 'corporatism' and 'egalitarianism' (Koznova 1997, Humphrey 2002, 141). Despite the proclaimed proletarianisation of the society, Soviet villagers did not completely become rural labourers. Even though nearly all Ukrainian peasants had official jobs at kolkhozy and sovkhozy

⁷ Dekulakisation was the Soviet campaign of political repression, including arrests, deportations, and executions of millions of the better-off peasants and their families in 1929-1932. The richer peasants were labeled kulaks and considered class enemies.

⁸ The terminology 'Soviet peasant' was used as an official name of social category, evolving through the 1930s-40s, the 1950s-60s, and flowering in the Breznev period of the 1970s-80s (Humphrey 2002).

(collective and state farm enterprises), they also conducted subsistence farming on their household plots, which was 'outside the state planning and procurement system' (Wegren 2005, 8). Therefore, Soviet peasants preserved an important element of a peasant mode of production, i.e. family-based subsistence agriculture.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine launched a land reform aimed at revitalising peasant agriculture. During the first stage of land reform (1990-1999) former collective lands were distributed to rural dwellers by means of land-share certificates for private farming. Consequently, in addition to household plots (average 0.4 ha), rural dwellers gained the right to use land plots (average 4 ha), which were located usually at a distance from villages. Ownership of the distributed lands could occur if the certificate-holder underwent the process of land registration and privatisation, or devoted his or her share into the authorised capital of the reorganised collective farm. Contrary to expectations of the reform developers, land recipients did not show much interest in leaving the collectives to establish individual farms. Only 3 percent of certificates-holders registered their land rights by 1995 (Lerman *et al.* 2007).

A common explanation for the failure of this stage of the land reform has been that exit costs for individual workers were too high (in terms of finance and equipment), and emerging markets were still largely geared to large collective successor farms (Mathijs and Swinnen 1998). Additionally, some authors refer to the peasant moral economy. Petrick and Carter (2007) argue that the sense of collective security and egalitarian wealth distribution prevented rural dwellers from starting individual commercial farming. Wegren (2005, 19), although denying the moral economy explanation, still refers to another characteristic of it – the traditional peasants' demand for land is just enough for subsistence of their households: 'at the onset of market reforms some 97 percent of rural households already had land plots [household plots], and most households had limited human capital. Therefore, the expansion of landholdings through privatization would be attractive or feasible to a relatively small percentage of rural households'.

The hierarchical authority structures in post-Soviet rural areas are another fact of the reform failure, frequently mentioned in the literature. Lerman *et al.* (2004, 149) argues that farm managers, who were seen as 'omniscient community leaders', were interested in the preservation of large-scale organization as a way to keep their power and perquisites, and, therefore, used their authority in order to manipulate information over the land reform. A 1997 World Bank survey shows that just a few Ukrainian peasants knew about the possibilities of establishing private farming on the distributed lands, while the majority of the rural population (80 percent) was informed that they could "invest" their land shares back to farm enterprises, as it was propagated by farm managers (Csaki and Lerman 1997). This led to the concentration of the collective lands in the hands of rural elites, who 'gained de facto ownership of land and with it, the autonomy and economic incentive to persist in their new roles as leaders in a quasi-feudal system' (Allina-Pisano 2002, 314).

The first stage of the land reform was accompanied by a sharp reduction of state subsidies in agriculture and price liberalisation for agricultural products, leading to bankruptcy of many collective farms and abandonment of collective farmlands (Visser and Spoor 2011). This induced a rapid growth of rural unemployment, a drastic decline in the livelihood conditions and living standards of many peasant families, lack of social security, and rising psycho-social tension caused by lack of hope for the future (Borodina 2002). In order to guarantee their subsistence many Ukrainian villagers became largely dependent on subsistence farming on their household plots. Von Braun and Lohlein (2003) observed a significant increase in the share of agricultural land devoted to subsistence production and the number of rural dwellers engaged in subsistence farming during the period of 1990-99. Then, in-kind income from subsidiary plots accounted for 44.4 percent of the total rural household income, while wages and social transfers contributed to 16.3 and 13.4 percent (respectively). Furthermore,

9.4 percent of income came from sales of self-produced agricultural products at local markets (Moroz 2010).

Therefore, the first stage of the land reform, indeed, caused re-peasantisation in Ukraine; however, it created a large group of traditional subsistence cultivators, not individual family farmers. On the eve of massive land grabbing in Ukraine the stratification within rural communities was minimal: there was a very small group of rural elites (5 percent of the population, according to Wegren 2005) who maintained their ruling positions since the Soviet Union, while the main rural population was represented by impoverished peasants, who, although having small incomes from wage work, were largely dependent on subsistence farming at their household plots.

4 The 'terms of inclusion' and their effect on peasants' attitudes to land grabbing

Massive land grabbing started in Ukraine with the beginning of the second stage of the land reform (1999 to present) (Borodina 2012, Plank 2013). The 1999 Presidential Decree forced the collective agricultural enterprises to distribute the land shares in kind to rural dwellers. Since then nearly 7 million rural residents became official owners of physical land plots (not just paper-based certificates) and about 65 percent of arable land was physically owned by rural individuals (Lerman *et al.* 2006). In 2001, the Land Code came into force, which legally guaranteed land titles, and imposed a moratorium on land sales, which was extended already several times (until 2005, 2008, 2012, 2013, and 2016). In practice, the moratorium, which was aimed at protecting the peasants' ownership, serves only as a formal prevention of land deals (Plank 2013).

The global land rush triggered large-scale land acquisitions in Ukraine. Many domestic and foreign investors gained control over Ukrainian farmlands through various leasing schemes, and in some cases through fraudulent purchases despite the land sale moratorium (Visser and Mamonova 2011, Strubenhoff 2011). As a result, mega-large-scale export-oriented agroholdings emerged in Ukraine. Thus, Plank (2013) in her analysis of land grabs in Ukraine refers to the 10 biggest agroholdings who control about 2.8 million ha in Ukraine. The rapid development of large-scale industrial soil-intensive agriculture brought Ukraine to the list of the major agricultural exporters in the world. In 2008–2009 Ukraine was the third largest exporter of grain worldwide. In 2010 it ranked second among exporters of barley, third for rapeseed, fifth for sunflower seed, sixth for corn (maize) and eighth for wheat (FAOSTAT 2012).

But what has happened to Ukrainian peasants? One could expect the rise of rural resistance to large-scale agricultural development as it occurred in African countries (Peters 2004, Neimark 2013), Latin America (Welch 2012), or Asia (Schneider 2011, McAllister 2012). Instead, Visser and Mamonova (2011) reported incredibly weak rural opposition to land grabs in Ukraine.

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

Below I distinguish three main types of inclusion of the Ukrainian peasantry in land deals, which define the rural attitudes to land grabbing.

4.1 Illusive inclusion

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

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

This is, in fact, the continuation of the former kolkhozy’s and sovkhozy’s support of households. In the Soviet time ‘households were allowed to use a whole array of collective facilities, from obtaining young livestock from the collective to letting private cattle graze on collective pastures, using kolkhoz machinery, and selling their produce through the sales networks of the collectives’ (Visser 2010, 289). Furthermore, collective farms regularly supplied their production to their workers as a compensation for meager wages. The difference is that previously this support was informal, and now the support has shrunk to crop sharing only and became formalized through contractual transfers. The support formalization made rural dwellers feel included in the distribution of benefits from land use. Moreover, this perception is strengthened by the fact that in the 1990s many agricultural enterprises were bankrupt, and the ‘symbiosis’ between large farms and households was broken. For more than 10 years peasants were left to fend for themselves. In contrast to no support, the *pai*, even underestimated, is considered by aged villagers as a good deal. Raisa (67) an inhabitant of the village Rusanivtsy said:

*...There were weeds growing here, taller than me. And these new guys came, brought order, cultivated our lands. Before that, we did not receive any pai. And now we do! We receive 1.5 tons of grain every year. Of course, this is much better.*⁹

Based on fieldwork data, it appears that the majority of the elderly rural population welcomes large-scale land investments in Ukraine. First, the emerged agroholdings are seen as successors of Soviet collective farms (people remain calling them ‘kolkhozy’ and ‘sovkhozy’). Second, these land shareholders feel included in the distribution of benefits from the cultivation of their lands. Third, the elderly population does not have sufficient labour resources to cultivate the distributed lands, which creates no competition for lands between these peasants and agroholdings.

⁹ The interview was conducted village Rusanivtsy, the Letichevsk district, the Khmelnytsk region, Ukraine; 29 July 2012.

4.2 Subordinate inclusion

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

The post-Soviet legacy of industrial farming largely defines the rural demand for wage work (Petrick *et al.* 2011). However, the peasants prefer the work at agroholdings to employment at individual farms or kolkhoz-style agricultural enterprises. This might be explained by peasants' calculations of costs and benefits from subordinate inclusion in land grabbing. Agroholdings, as a rule, provide decent wages to their employees and offer higher labour standards (Lapa *et al.* 2008). To date, the average monthly salary in agriculture is about 1960 UAH (equal to 187 Euros) (State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 2013). The field research for this paper indicates that the workers of agroholdings receive 2-3 times more.

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

Nevertheless, the last decade of agroholdings' development in the Ukrainian countryside is characterised by the reduction of overall rural poverty. The share of rural households with average per capita monthly expenses below the living wage decreased from 82.6 percent in 2000 to 63.9 percent in 2006¹⁰ (Moroz 2010). Furthermore, there is an increase in the wage-work share in household income: from 16.3 percent in 1999 to 23 percent in 2012 (State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 2013, NAS survey 2013).

At the same time, the rise of salaries in agriculture is accompanied by declining employment rates. The emergent agroholdings strive to achieve economies of scale and apply labour-saving technologies. This caused the decrease in the rural labour force from 8.9 million people in 1999 to 8.3 million people in 2005, or by 6.7 percent (Moroz 2010).

4.3 Competitive exclusion

A negative attitude to land grabs is inherent among a small group of private family farmers. Many of these farmers are the former Soviet rural *intelligentsia* (such as agronomists and accountants of reorganized collective farms), who managed to detach their land plots during the land reform, and accumulate additional lands by leasing them from neighbours. The average size of lands cultivated by farmers is 175 ha (NAS survey 2013). Currently these farmers account for 5 percent of the gross agricultural product of the country (State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 2013).

¹⁰ In rural areas near cities, rising income might partly be caused by increased employment of rural dwellers in the cities, or by engagement in non-agricultural activities.

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

Furthermore, agroholdings conduct virtual land grabs, where 'behind a façade of land acquisition for a stated purpose, there lies an agenda to appropriate subsidies, obtain bank loans using land permits as collateral, or to speculate on future increases in land values' (McCarthy *et al.* 2012, 523). Agroholdings are also horizontally and vertically integrated in order to control the value chain (Plank 2013). These factors create competitive exclusion (i.e. exclusion through competition) of farmers from agribusiness and consequently from land markets in Ukraine.

Private farmer Nikolay Arapin described the unequal competition with agriholdings:

Agroholdings! Who are they? They are bandits! They evade taxes. They do not pay taxes at all! [...] Moreover, they receive millions in state subsidies. No farmer, no odnoosibnik [independent peasant] has received any kopeyka [cent] from the state. Furthermore, they export the grain. They have access to foreign markets. They export it at a good price. Meanwhile, the resellers grab my grain at the lowest price...¹¹

Due to such unfair competition, many private farmers go bankrupt. The State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics declared a slight reduction in the number of private farmers: from 43 thousand in 2006 to 41 thousand in 2011. The Committee explains this by farm consolidations and the global financial crisis (Kropivko 2012). However, in reality, this reduction was much larger. According to the Vice President of the Association of Farmers and Landowners of Ukraine Mikola Strizhak,¹² the real decrease was by 93 percent; there are only 3,000 active farmers who are currently operating in Ukraine. The fieldwork for this research identified that the bankrupted farmers and those who are on the brink of bankruptcy, even though registered in the State Register of Legal Entities, are often degraded to the positions of subsistence farmers, or wage workers being hired by large agroholdings to work the field with their private machinery.

The three above-mentioned 'terms of inclusion' of rural dwellers in land deals refute the argument of the universal peasants' resistance to land grabbing. The land tenure system in Ukraine allows the large group of elderly landowners to benefit from the emergence of large-scale enterprises by leasing their lands to them. The absence of smallholder development schemes in Ukrainian villages, and the absence of entrepreneurial features among many working-age peasants prevent them from establishing individual family farms, which leads to their desire for wage-work at agroholdings. Only when the peasants and agroholdings operate on the same markets and compete for the same land (as in the case of private farmers), will the rural resistance to land grabbing be unavoidable.

5 Household response strategies to land grab related changes and socio-economic differentiation of the peasantry

In this section I analyse different peasants' response strategies to changes brought by land grabbing and the development of agroholdings in Ukraine and examine how these responses influence socio-economic repositioning within rural communities. As it was shown in the third section, the stratification of the peasantry on the eve of land grabbing was minimal. Therefore, I accept the relative homogeneity of the peasant society as the starting point of analysis, and do not disaggregate different rural strata in advance. However, I do agree that demographical characteristics, occupation,

¹¹ The interview was conducted in village Hreblya, the Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky district, the Kiev region, Ukraine; 1 August 2012.

¹² The interview was conducted in Kiev; 27 May 2011.

and slightly different access to production resources in Ukrainian villages in the late 1990s influenced the peasants’ choice for one or another response strategy.

Table 1 summarises the arguments presented in the paper about attitudes to land grabbing, terms of inclusion, different response strategies, and consequential stratification within rural communities.

Table 1. Household response strategies to land grabs and their outcomes in Ukraine.

| N | Share of rural population | Household response strategies | Terms of inclusion | Outcome | Rural strata | Attitude to land sales |
|----|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|---|------------------------|
| S1 | 0.4% | Competition with agro-holdings | Competitive exclusion | Bankruptcy | Farmers (often subsistence farmers), peasantry | Negative |
| S2 | 30% | Taking a free market niche | Illusive inclusion | Coexistence, semi-independence | <i>Odnosibniks</i> (relatively independent subsistence farmers) | Negative |
| S3 | 20% | Employment | Subordinate inclusion | Semi-proletarianisation | Peasantry | Positive |
| S4 | 11% | Migration to urban areas | Illusive inclusion | Surplus labour | Jobless, peasantry | Positive |
| S5 | 25% | No changes | Illusive inclusion | Largely dependent on social transfers and pension | Pensioners-subsistence farmers | Negative |
| | | | | Poverty, alcoholism | Marginals | Positive |

This table is largely based on the household survey, developed and conducted for purposes of this analysis. Questionnaires were completed in the presence of the researcher, which yields a high response rate and minimal amounts of missing data. In total 43 questionnaires were used for this analysis. The findings are largely supported by the all-Ukrainian surveys (Gorshenin survey 2011, NAS survey 2013, FAO Farm survey 2005), which reflects the high representativeness of the sample.

The household response strategies were distinguished by analyzing the daily activities and the main income source of households. The table presents a share of the rural population that has chosen one or another strategy. However, it is just an approximate calculation of the percentage based on the author’s assessment and secondary data from the all-Ukrainian surveys. The share of ‘competition with agroholdings’ (S1), ‘employment’ (S3), and ‘migration’ (S4) strategies were computed from statistics on family farmers, employment, and rural-urban annual migration rates. The main difficulty was to distinguish the households who ‘took a free market niche’ (S2) from those who underwent ‘no changes’ (S5). Both groups are dependent on subsistence farming. However S2 derives the largest income share from subsistence farming and sells its products on local markets, while S5 continues the (post)-Soviet legacy of household cultivation and is largely dependent on social transfers.

The various ‘terms of inclusion’ were distinguished from the author’s survey data on how the rural dwellers managed the distributed land shares and gain access to the products of their own labour. The category ‘outcomes’ was derived based on the analysis of changes in income, occupation, and relations to means of production (land, labour, and capital). The last column presents rural attitudes to the moratorium on land sales and will be discussed in section six.

5.1 S1: Competition with agroholdings

The strategy ‘competition with agroholding’ conducted by Ukrainian farmers was partly discussed earlier in the subsection on ‘competitive exclusion’. Here, I focus on the farmers’ motives, and their repositioning in rural communities as a consequence of this competition.

A small rural stratum of private farmers (less than one percent of the rural population) emerged before the appearance of agroholdings. The core business of Ukrainian farmers was (and is) grain production, which is threatened by agroholdings that became dominant on this market segment (Kobuta *et al.* 2012). In comparison with large-scale agribusiness, small farmers in the fieldwork area have lower yields per hectare. Thus, farmers from the Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi district harvest 20 centners¹³ of wheat per ha, while the Ukrainian-British agroholding ‘Niva Pereyaslavschiny’ operating in the same region collects twice as much. The board chairman of this holding Olexander Yaroschuk said about the farmers’ choice for competition with large-scale agriculture:

*I do not understand what they [private farmers] are doing in this business! They do not know how to be efficient; they do not know the technologies. They cannot compete with us. I do not understand why they keep on growing wheat and reject the idea of planting... strawberries, for example, which is much more labour-intensive and does not require the economy of scale!*¹⁴

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

The unequal competition and farmers’ resistance (and inability) to adapt to land grab related changes, as well the absence of state support programmes for private farming development, lead to degradation of individual commercial farming in Ukraine. Many bankrupted farmers use their machinery to work for agroholdings, or become subsistence farmers, producing just enough to feed themselves and their family without having any more to sell for profit.

5.2 S2: Taking a free market niche

While many class-based theorists predicted the disappearance of peasant subsistence farming under capitalist development (Marx 1867, Lenin 1967, Bernstein 2004), neo-populist Shanin (1971) argued that market relations and commercialisation of agriculture might reinforce peasant structures if rural community mechanisms work. Here I advocate that land grab related changes lead to re-peasantisation of the rural groups who have chosen the adaptive strategy ‘taking a free market niche’.

Agroholdings in Ukraine specialize in export-oriented intensive monocrop production that brings quick profits. Meanwhile, less profitable and time- and labour-consuming farming, such as production of potatoes, vegetables, fruits, and milk, was left outside the focus of large agribusiness (Prokopa and Borodina 2012). The adaptation strategy of the majority of Ukrainian households consisted of the abandonment of the grain production sector (where they expanded rapidly before 2000), and fully specialised on labour-intensive farming.

¹³ 1 centner = 0.1 ton (centner is a unit of weight often used in Ukraine)

¹⁴ The interview was conducted in village Pereyaslavskoye, the Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi district, the Kiev region; 1 August 2012.

Table 2 demonstrates the changes in production of three major farm products: wheat, potatoes, and milk, which characterise the division of market niches between the peasantry and large agribusiness. The period before 2000 is characterised by a drastic decline in the production and share of agricultural enterprise in total agricultural output, and a rise of peasant farming. With the emergence of large agroholdings after 2000, the market division occurred.

The large agroenterprises became specialised in wheat production, producing more than 80 percent of the total wheat harvested. The share of households has not changed. Peasants continue producing wheat for personal consumption, not for sales, and do not compete with agroholdings, who are largely export-oriented. A similar trend is observed in buckwheat, rapeseed, soya, and other cash crops.

The reverse situation is observed in the milk production sector. The share of dairy farm enterprises has been decreasing by 30 percent from 2000 until now, while peasants continue increasing milk production and became dominant in this market segment. Currently, peasant households contribute up to 81 percent of the milk produced and up to 67 percent of the milk marketed in Ukraine (Tarasseych 2005). Potato production is less indicative, as households were always the major potato producers, and since the collapse of the Soviet Union their share in potato yields has increased. The corporate agribusinesses are not interested in potato production, eventhough domestic demand for this farm product is high. This demand is met by potatoes from peasant households. Peasants contribute up to 98 percent of the total harvest of potatoes in the country. Furthermore, they produce 86 percent of the vegetables and 85 percent of fruits and berries. In total, 52.7 percent of gross agricultural output is produced by rural households (State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 2013).

Table 2. Production (and share in total production) of wheat, potatoes, and milk per agricultural producer (mil ton).

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

¹⁵ The category ‘agricultural enterprises’ includes ‘individual farmers’. The Ukrainian statistics started disaggregating these two categories beginning in 2005. In order to preserve coherency and taking into account that the production share of individual commercial farmers is less than 5 percent, the category of ‘individual farming’ was not segregated for purposes of this analysis.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) | (100%) |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|

Source: State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 1990-2013.

In their study of adaptation of the post-soviet peasantry, O'Brien *et al.* (2004, 474) argued that 'those household that have made a more successful adaptation to a developing market economy by growing and selling more food would also receive a higher proportion of income from that source'. Indeed, the Ukrainian peasants who took the free market niches became relatively independent (the largest income share comes from subsistence farming and selling their products at local markets). These rural dwellers are called 'odnoosibniks' (independent peasants).

Oдноосибніки are largely reminiscent of the middle peasants, who have a self-controlled resource base, derive their income wholly or mainly from their own labour, and exhibit a degree of self-sufficiency (Deere and de Janvry 1979).

According to the fieldwork observations, every small village of 40 households has at least 1-3 одноосибнік families. The southern regions of Ukraine possess even larger concentrations of these independent peasants. Typical одноосибніки are middle-aged and older married couples, who hold livestock, cultivate household plots, engage in local market relations, but produce just enough to meet the pressures of simple reproduction. Although this rural stratum accounts for only 10 percent of the total rural population, I observed larger numbers of subsistence farmers who apply the 'taking a free market niche' strategy, but are not called 'одноосибніки' by their fellow villagers due to retirement age or death of one of the spouses. Одноосибніки and subsistence farmers out-compete commercial farmers due to their capacity for 'self-exploitation'¹⁶ (increasing labour imputes at the expense of leisure) that allows them to produce at lower costs and adjust to market changes.

The low density of the rural population and availability of still abandoned farmlands, as well as the labour intensive type of niche farming with small land plots prevent land competition between peasants and large agribusiness at this stage of agricultural development. Peasants' occupation of market niches free from agroholdings guarantees their subsistence, and makes the coexistence scenario possible. However, for how long? Olivier de Schutter (2011, 261) argued: 'the coexistence scenario will likely be short-lived: it will simply be a slow motion path to the transition towards a rural economy dominated by large production units, in which small-scale farming will be marginalized and subordinated to the large production units and in which further rural migration will be encouraged'.

5.3 S3: Looking for employment opportunities

The struggle for incorporation into large-scale agriculture on terms of employment was already mentioned as one of the rural strategies. The estimated 20 percent share of searchers for employment opportunities includes employed rural dwellers by agroholdings (4.6 percent) and active jobseekers. However it would be wrong to argue that this is the class of rural labour. Although wage-work accounted for 41 percent of the rural family income, with at least one family member employed by an agroenterprise (FAO Farm survey 2005), subsistence farming on household plots remains the second source of subsistence for such families.

The combination of wage work with subsistence farming creates the basis for labels of 'worker-farmer' (Cooper 1980) or 'peasantariat' (Parson 1981, Leys 1986). This rural stratum of semi-peasants, semi-workers is not unique. In the American colonies, slaves were forced to grow some part of their own subsistence (Mintz and Price 1973), in Zanzibar rural dwellers received small food plots in exchange for a rent in labour (Cooper 1980), and in colonial Sumatra plantation coolies were assigned unused estate fields to cultivate consumption crops in their 'spare time' (Stoler 1986).

¹⁶ The concept of 'self-exploitation' was developed by Chayanov in *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (1925).

The Ukrainian case might be seen differently, as the peasants are often landholders who lease their lands to agricultural companies. Farmer Olexander Skiba¹⁷ calls this situation ‘the Ukrainian land paradox’, under which ‘the bourgeoisie leases lands from its proletariat’. Indeed, many farm workers are owners of land shares cultivated by enterprises at which they are working. However, the shareholders’ engagement in corporate decision making is minimal, and these relations remain characterized as ‘illusive inclusion’ in land deals.

According to class-based theory, the ‘peasant’ is a temporary formation: the capitalist class will tend to subordinate small landowners by reducing them to dependent labourers (Paige 1975). On the contrary, Stoler (1986, 43) argued that the combination of wage-work and subsistence farming is a stable mode, and represents ‘a state of “flux equilibrium” advantageous to management and labour alike’. Large agrohholdings in Ukraine do not struggle for having the lands in ownership and are satisfied with a long-term lease, as it does not require huge capital investments. For rural dwellers the employment at agrohholdings increases the family monetary income, while allowing land ownership and a peasant mode of production. This mode of production has the lowest poverty risk, according to estimations of Vlasenko (2008).

5.4 S4: Rural-urban migration

The rural-urban migration was insignificant after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the economic recession hit urban and rural areas equally, but the countryside was more resistant to social and economic shocks because of subsistence farming possibilities (Kopoteva 2004, Skryzhevskaya and Karacsonyi 2012). The significant rural out-migration occurred in 2002 and peaked in 2005 (State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 2013), which can be seen as the peasants’ response to land grabbing. On the one side, people protested to the agrohholdings invasion. On the other side, there was a short possibility to sell the land shares (through various exchange schemes that were not forbidden by the moratorium¹⁸), which gave peasants the money to move to cities.

However, since 2005 out-migration has decreased (State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics 2013). This was primarily caused by the return of those rural residents who migrated to the cities, but were forced to come back to the rural areas due to limited employment opportunities in urban settlements (Skryzhevskaya and Karacsonyi 2012).

Upon returning from cities, many rural dwellers were not able to find work in villages because of lost access to social networks. The absence of household- and land plots bounded these people to a miserable living condition. The fieldwork data shows that many of the returning peasants experience social exclusion, and later find employment in a (non-)agricultural sector or join their parents (or relatives) in household farming.

5.5 S5: No changes

The rural residents who showed no changes in response to land grabbing were elderly widows and a small group of working-age villagers who were not able/willing to adapt to social and economic changes. While the indifference of elderly widows can be explained by income dependency on social transfers (pensions) and lack of labour resources for taking free market niches, the second group

¹⁷ The interview was conducted in village Yerkivtsi, the Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky district, the Kiev region, Ukraine; 1 August 2012.

¹⁸ During 2002-2004 there were possibilities to exchange land plots for other properties, which did not contradict the moratorium on land sales. In such a way many rural dwellers “sold” their lands. Later, these exchange operations were forbidden by the new version of the moratorium (Yurchenko and Miroshnichenko 2006).

represents the inability of a few people to adapt to market conditions, which often leads to their marginalization.

The elderly widows represent about 12 percent of the rural population (NAS survey 2013). Their subsistence is guaranteed by pensions (55 percent) and by traditional subsistence farming. It is difficult to distinguish this group from those who have chosen 'taking a free niche' strategy, because elderly widows also produce labour-intensive farm products, which is included in the total agricultural output of peasant households in statistics. However, their income is much lower than that of *odnoosibniks*, and the ratio of poverty risk is high for this rural stratum (Shyshkin 2008).

The above-mentioned rural household strategies demonstrate that the least adaptive strategies (i.e. competition, migration, and neglecting) are less popular among Ukrainian villagers, and often lead to the increase of poverty risk, socio-economic dependency, and degradation to lower rural social strata. The dominant rural responses to the agrohholdings invasion are adaptive strategies (i.e. taking a free market niche, and search for employment), which demonstrates peasants' ability to adapt to and coexist with the development of capitalist agriculture. This coexistence links to stratification in rural communities. Contrary to prediction of many analysts and class-based theorists, land grabbing in Ukraine did not lead to the proletarianisation of rural labour, but the creation of self-sufficient middle peasants and peasantriats, who remain dependent on subsistence farming.

6. Peasants' personal gains from land grabbing vs. community benefits

The peasants' choice between pursuits of self-interests and interests of the whole community, and their concerns over material rather than immaterial benefits from land deals, became demonstrable in peasants' talks about land sales on the eve of land sale moratorium cancellation.¹⁹ Although, the opening of land markets will just formally legalise the ownership of agrohholdings, which are already *de facto* landholders in Ukraine, peasants express a negative attitude toward land sales. According to the 2011 Gorshenin survey, 70 percent of villagers are convinced that farmland should not be sold as a commodity. Petro (76) from the village Trebukhovtsy forecasts negative consequences for rural communities from land sales:

*As soon the moratorium is eliminated, bandits will grab all the lands. People will not get the *pai* anymore, nobody would care about villagers, nobody would need them. The Ukrainian village will disappear, it will die...*²⁰

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

The fieldwork data indicates a very low life satisfaction in rural areas. Villagers call their living as 'slavery' or 'peonage' and express their desire to move to urban areas. This argument is often used by land investors for justification of large-scale land acquisitions. Thus, Alex Lissitsa, president of the Ukrainian Agrarian Business Club, assured that 90 percent of the villagers do not want to live in rural areas, and land sales will be their pathway to better life in cities.²¹

¹⁹ The fieldwork interviews were conducted at the moment when the extension of moratorium on land sales until 2016 was not announced yet. In the summer 2012 people expected the moratorium cancellation in January 2013, and discussed the pros and cons of the coming changes.

²⁰ The interview was conducted in village Trebukhovtsy, the Letichevsk district, the Khmel'nitsk region, Ukraine; 28 July 2012.

²¹ From the speech of Lissitsa at IAMO Forum 2012 'Land Use in Transition: Potentials and Solutions between Abandonment and Land Grabbing', Hulle Germany.

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

*I will sell my land plot. Why do I need it? I am already an old woman. I will not farm it. If they give me at least a kopeyka [cent] for this land... I need to help my children. One of my sons is in poverty. I will sell my land and give the money to him. Maybe, he will get out of his troubles...*²²

The peasants' preferences for personal benefits despite the negative consequences for the whole community are observed in their reaction to the problems of soil degradation that is caused by large-scale agricultural development. In the in-depth interviews for this research peasants criticized monocrop agriculture and usage of fertilizers by large agrocompanies; however, no one is intended to withdraw his or her shares from the tenant, who violates environmental standards. The rent price is considered as a point of difference, while environmental sustainability plays a minor role. Only 5 percent of rural dwellers are concerned about ecological problems in their villages (Gorshenin survey 2011). Large agroholdings often entice peasants from more eco-friendly private farmers by offering larger *pai* for leasing their lands.

In making the choice between possible tenants for their land plots, peasants are also guided by prospects for social support from agrocompanies. Apart from the formalised support (*pai* payments), large farms frequently pursue corporate citizenship programmes, which allow them to gain sympathies of the local population, which, in turn, ensures their control over farmlands. Viktor Prikazhnuk, director of 'Obry' agrocompany, a subsidiary of a large American agroholding, describes his conception of corporate social responsibility:

*Formerly, kolkhozy helped rural dwellers a lot. People expect the same from us. We have to help, otherwise they could lease their lands to someone else [...] People ask us to buy equipment for the local hospital, or to repair the roads. We allocate money for this... There was a case of fire in one rural house. The inhabitant asked us to help. We gave him some money and cipher to repair the roof.*²³

Furthermore, peasants get some assistance with household plot cultivation and seeds from agrocompanies (FAO Farm survey 2005). This support, but not concerns over land sovereignty or land ownership, is the major peasants' argument against land sales. Tamara (55) from Hreblya village is convinced:

*If we will sell our lands, the new owners will do nothing for rural dwellers. The leasing gives us a possibility to control them, to ask for assistance...*²⁴

²² The interview was conducted in village Rusanivtsy, the Letichevsk district, the Khmelnytsk region, Ukraine; 29 July 2012.

²³ The interview was conducted in village Trebukhotsy, the Letichevsk district, the Khmelnytsk region, Ukraine. 28 July 2012.

²⁴ The interview was conducted in village Hreblya, the Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky district, the Kiev region, Ukraine, 2 August 2012.

These arguments contradict the common assumption of many rural social organisations who believe that peasants go up against unsustainability of large-scale industrial agriculture, destruction of the 'peasant way' of life, and deprivation of rural community interests, in their resistance to land sales. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that the rural attitude to land deals and large-scale agriculture largely depend on personal gains peasants receive from land leases vs. sales (that outmatch the community interests), and material benefits (such as social support and *pai* size) dominate over more ideological concerns (i.e. about environmental sustainability and land belongings to local and indigenous population).

7 Discussion over the generalisability of the research findings

The purpose of this research was to question the dominant assumptions of peasants' responses to the land grabbing. Indeed, many rural dwellers oppose large-scale land acquisitions and development of industrial agriculture in the countryside. However, this is not the only reaction of peasants toward land grabs. This research provides an empirical confirmation to the statement by McCarthy (2010), who argued that the peasants' attitude to land grabbing critically depends on the terms of inclusion of local population in land deals. The example of Ukraine demonstrates how the 'illusive inclusion' of the rural population in land deals is done through formalisation of agrocompany-household symbioses (*pai* payments and corporate social responsibility programmes), which creates a positive attitude among many original landholders. The sympathy of some peasants toward land grabbing is achieved by a possibility of 'subordinate inclusion' through employment with the emerging agroholdings, which provide albeit less, but better-paid jobs. In the context of high rural unemployment, low salaries in agriculture, and lack of material and cultural stimuli for creation of independent family farming, subordinate inclusion is seen as a desired option and leads to the peasants' struggle for incorporation in large-scale agriculture. Only when the peasants and large agrocompanies operate on the same markets and compete for the same land is the rural resistance to land grabbing unavoidable.

This research has shown that peasants' response strategies to land grab related changes influence socio-economic stratification of rural dwellers. The more adaptive peasants' responses lead to more advantageous positions of households in rural communities, while the least adaptive strategies cause peasants' degradation to lower social strata and increase the risk of poverty. The adaptation to land grabbing is the example of the famed survival strategy and coping mechanisms of rural dwellers.

Furthermore, this research denies the romanticisation of the peasantry. The empirical data demonstrates that Ukrainian peasants respond to land sales based on their calculation of possible material benefits derived from lease, sale, or cultivation of their lands, while the concerns with land sovereignty, the 'peasant way' of life, and climate justice are largely absent in the countryside. Moreover, despite the peasants' collectivist features, their self-interests in land deals often outmatch the community importance.

However, how generalizable are these findings?

Because of high land availability and low rural population density in Ukraine, land grabbing is pursued without physical displacement of the local population. This factor might be seen as a point of difference in comparison with many "typical" cases of land grabbing when peasants are left without their lands. However, recent scholars noted a shift from land grabbing to land control grabbing, which is not always accompanied by land purchases and peasants' dislocations (Borras *et al.* 2012). The various forms of acquiring control over land and related resources include purchase, lease, contract farming, forest conservation, and so on. Alonso-Fradejas (2012) in his analysis of expansion of sugarcane and oil palm plantations in Guatemala, gives an example of lease schemes

and contract farming agreements, which resulted in the disenfranchisement and impoverishment of the local population. Wilkinson *et al.* (2012, 431) analyse land grabs for soy cultivation in Brazil when some agricompanies apply models that are based on land leases and complete responsibility for the management of agricultural production, turning the landowner into a mere "rentier". Thus, the Ukrainian example does not seem to be an exceptional case.

In the introduction to this paper I argued that Ukraine provides an example of responses toward land grabbing by peasants who are not encouraged and inspired by anti-grab social movements and other pro-poor civil society groups. In this case, the generalizability of the findings depends on the reasons for the absence of these civil society organizations. On the one hand, the post-Soviet peasantry is seen as a politically unconscious group that is not adjusted to open forms of protest due to the Soviet legacy and limited opportunity structures for contentious politics (Mamonova and Visser, forthcoming). Consequently, the silent acceptance of and adaptation to land grabbing is a feature of the population in post-socialist countries. This contradicts the example of rightful resistance in the Chinese countryside when peasants use laws, policies, or rhetoric in framing their protest (O'Brien 1996). A form of land grab resistance with some similarities to rightful resistance is observed among rural Russians (Mamonova and Visser, forthcoming). Another explanation of the Ukrainian preferences for adaptation to land deals might be in the absence of peasants' interests in resistance and mobilisation. The existing power relations in Ukraine leave little space for peasants' contestations, while single examples of rural resistance demonstrate the worsening of socio-economic positions of resistive rural groups. At the same time, adaptation to land grabbing is less risky and might be, to some extent, beneficial to peasants.

Another fact, which could influence the general application of the findings, is the Ukrainian peasants' exclusion from the distributive land reform in its early stages. The land distribution process did not make the official landowners dependent on their lands and, therefore, the loss of control over their property does not endanger the peasants' subsistence. However, the voluntary transfers of land ownership are common even in countries where peasants had a chance to farm their lands before land grabbing. Thus, in Chile, lack of access to loans for land reform beneficiaries and the existence of agrarian debts prevented them from investing in the emerging fruits and vegetable activities. As a consequence, most peasants had (as a better option) to sell their lands to entrepreneurs, who could invest in these profitable activities (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2002).

The moratorium on land sales and the preservation of the peasants' official ownership of farmland is not a common practice in the countries affected by land grabbing. However, the prohibition of open land sales is just a formal ban for agrohholdings, who are *de facto* land holders in Ukraine (Spoor and Visser 2011, Visser and Mamonova 2011, Plank 2013). The existing land sale moratorium decreases the amount of short-term land speculations that are usually the cause of error in the estimation of the land grab magnitude on a global scale (Borras and Franco 2010). Therefore, Ukraine is an example of land deals resulting in an actual shift in land use, and development of large-scale industrial agriculture on the accumulated lands.

Certainly, there are a lot of country-specific factors that influence rural responses to land grabbing. The level of population aging is very high in Ukraine and is significantly higher than in other countries in the world. Thus, the proportion of the population in the oldest age group (60 years and above) was 24.1 percent in rural areas in Ukraine in 2007 (Skryzhevskaya and Karacsonyi 2012). For comparison, the amount of rural inhabitants in this age group constitutes 7 percent of the total rural population in Ghana (which is among the highest in Africa), and 7.5 in rural India (Chuks 2004, CensusIndia 2010). Among the other country-specific factors are: the Soviet history of collective agriculture, erosion of peasant-like features of 'individualism' and 'property consciousness economizing', and the abandonment of farmlands previous to land grabs in Ukraine. However, how significant is the influence of these factors on rural responses to large-scale land acquisitions?

With this paper I argue that the common assumptions of peasant politics in large-scale agricultural development should be reconsidered. The rural propensity to adapt and find the benefits even under land grabbing can play an important role in shaping policies of rural social movements and developing recommendations to governments and investors in regard to large-scale land acquisitions. Moreover, taking into account the specificity of the Ukrainian case, the new insights on peasants' motives and response strategies to land grabbing should be integrated in the land grab academic debates. This work indicates the need for further research on rural communities' responses and differentiation in the context of large-scale land acquisitions.

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A convergence of factors has been driving a revaluation of land by powerful economic and political actors. This is occurring across the world, but especially in the global South. As a result, we see unfolding worldwide a dramatic rise in the extent of cross-border, transnational corporation-driven and, in some cases, foreign government-driven, large-scale land deals. The phrase 'global land grab' has become a catch-all phrase to describe this explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions revolving around the production and sale of food and biofuels, conservation and mining activities.

The Land Deal Politics Initiative launched in 2010 as an 'engaged research' initiative, taking the side of the rural poor, but based on solid evidence and detailed, field-based research. The LDPI promotes in-depth and systematic enquiry to inform deeper, meaningful and productive debates about the global trends and local manifestations. The LDPI aims for a broad framework encompassing the political economy, political ecology and political sociology of land deals centred on food, biofuels, minerals and conservation. Working within the broad analytical lenses of these three fields, the LDPI uses as a general framework the four key questions in agrarian political economy: (i) who owns what? (ii) who does what? (iii) who gets what? and (iv) what do they do with the surplus wealth created? Two additional key questions highlight political dynamics between groups and social classes: 'what do they do to each other?', and 'how do changes in politics get shaped by dynamic ecologies, and vice versa?' The LDPI network explores a range of big picture questions through detailed in-depth case studies in several sites globally, focusing on the politics of land deals.

Challenging the dominant assumptions about peasants' responses to land grabbing: 'Politics from below' in Ukraine

The assumption that globally, peasants are against land grabbing is dominant among many rural social movements, NGOs, and scholars empathetic with them. However, this is not always the case. Land grabs affect different rural groups in different ways, which creates a variety of reactions to it: from reckless enthusiasm, cautious acceptance, to outright resistance. This paper aims to rethink contemporary assumptions about rural resistance to large-scale land acquisitions. Analysing the context of Ukraine, the author argues that the politics of dispossessed groups depend on terms of inclusion in land deals; adaptive response strategies dominate over resistance; and peasants are more concerned with personal gains from land grabs than with benefits for the whole community.



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